LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE ONE

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

In this message we shall give an introductory word to the book of Ephesians. Although this is an introductory word, we shall cover some crucial and weighty matters.

I. THE SUBJECT--THE CHURCH

A. The Body

The subject of the book of Ephesians is the church. Ephesians covers seven aspects of the church, the first of which is the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. In order for a living person to be complete, he must have a body as his expression. The Body of Christ is the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The term "fullness" has been misused, misunderstood, and misapplied by today's Christians. Most Christian teachers confuse fullness with riches. Thus, when Christians speak of the fullness of Christ, they think it means the riches of Christ. (However, although many Christians speak of the fullness of the Holy Spirit or the fullness of God, not many speak of the fullness of Christ.) According to the book of Ephesians, the word fullness does not mean riches; it means expression. The term the "riches of Christ" is found in 3:8, and the term "fullness" is found both in 1:23 and 4:13. Chapter one mentions the fullness of Him who fills all in all, and chapter four, the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. According to 4:13, the fullness has a stature, and the stature has a measure. Because we have a body, we all have a stature. If we were a head without a body, we would not have a stature. The

fullness of Christ is the Body, for 4:13 says that this fullness has a stature with a measure. Thus, we have the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This fullness is different from the riches. The riches have no stature. But the fullness as the Body has a stature, and with this stature there is a measure. Thus, this strongly proves that the fullness of Christ is not the riches of Christ, but the Body of Christ.

It is important to know why the Body of Christ is called the fullness. This is very significant. The body of a person is simply the fullness of that person, and this fullness is his expression. As I speak, I move with my body. In this way, my being is expressed through my body. Likewise, the church is the Body of Christ, and this Body is the fullness of Him who fills all in all. How profound this is! The whole universe is filled with Christ. As the One who fills all in all, Christ is exceedingly great. Such a great Person needs a great Body. This Body is the church. Hence, the church is the Body of Christ, His fullness.

The riches of Christ may be likened to all the rich foodstuffs produced in America. These riches are not for exhibition; they are for eating. As we eat of the rich American foodstuffs, these riches seem to disappear into us. When these riches are digested and assimilated by us, they become part of us. As a result, they are no longer the riches, but the fullness. Thus, the husky young American men, who assimilate so much of the rich American foodstuffs, are the fullness of America. By means of this illustration we can differentiate between the riches and the fullness. The riches are the food which has not yet been taken into us. But when the food is eaten, digested, and assimilated, it becomes the fullness. The riches of Christ are all the items of what Christ is. When we digest and assimilate into our being the riches of Christ, these riches become part of us, and we become the fullness of Christ. Thus, the church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the universally great Person who fills all in all. This is the first item or aspect of what the church is.

B. The New Man

Secondly, the church is the new man (2:15). In the universe there is just one new man; hence, the church is *the* new man. There is a significant difference between the Body and the new man. The Body requires only life, but the new man requires both the life and the person. My body has life, but my being as a man has a person. The church is not only the Body of Christ having the life of Christ; it is also the new man having Christ as the person. No doubt, this new man is corporate, for 2:15 says that Christ created two peoples, the Jews and the Gentiles, into one new man. This means that two collective peoples have been created into the one new man. If we see that the church today is not only the Body, but a man with a person, our realization of the church life will be uplifted.

C. The Kingdom

In 2:19 we see that the church is the kingdom of God. This verse says, "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow-citizens of the saints." The term fellow-citizens indicates a kingdom, for being a fellow-citizen refers to being one with certain civil rights, and civil rights are always related to a nation or kingdom. Thus, this verse reveals that the church is the kingdom of God and that we are the citizens of this kingdom possessing certain civil rights. As we enjoy these rights, we must also share the responsibilities. Hence, the church is the kingdom of God with both rights and responsibilities. If we want the rights, we must also bear the responsibilities. Sometimes, however, we may want to enjoy the rights without bearing the responsibilities. But we must participate in both, sharing the rights and bearing the responsibilities. This is the church as the kingdom of God.

D. The Household of God

Fourthly, the church is the household of God (2:19). The household is not a matter of civil rights, but a matter

of life and enjoyment. At home you do not speak much about rights, for there you have the father's life and the enjoyment of his life. Thus, the church as the household or family of God refers to life and enjoyment.

Many saints like the family-type church life, but not the kingdom church life. This means that they always want to have a good time, a marvelous enjoyment. But we cannot always stay home; we need to spend several hours a day away from home to earn a living. We should have not only the enjoyment of the family, but also the responsibility of the kingdom. The church cannot always be a family; it must also be the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, I am happy that in the church as the family of God we have life and enjoyment.

E. The Dwelling Place of God

In 2:21 and 22 we see that the church is also the dwelling place of God. Verse 21 says that all the building is growing into a holy temple in the Lord. This refers to the universal building. Verse 22 says that the saints in Ephesus are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit. This is the local building. Universally the church is the temple in the Lord, and locally the church is the dwelling place of God in our spirit.

F. The Bride, the Wife, of Christ

In chapter five we see the church as the bride, the wife, of Christ. A bride is for the satisfaction of the husband. In speaking of when Adam was alone, the Bible says, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). This word indicates that when Adam was alone, he had no happiness or satisfaction; Adam needed a wife. When Adam was given a wife, he had rest and satisfaction. Therefore, according to the Bible, the bride, the wife, is for rest and satisfaction. How could we be satisfied without rest? Being fully satisfied implies enjoying a full rest. A man's wedding day is a day of satisfaction and rest.

Because Christ loves the church, the church is His rest and satisfaction.

Christ's love for the church is different from His love for sinners. Christians often speak about Christ loving sinners, but very few talk about Christ loving His wife. We used to be sinners, but today we are the wife of Christ. Whether we are male or female, we are His wife. The church is a wife for the satisfaction of Christ.

G. The Warrior

Finally, Ephesians 6 reveals that the church is the warrior, a corporate fighter. An army is composed of many soldiers, but a warrior is simply one person. The church is the new man, and this new man is a warrior. The whole armor of God spoken of in chapter six is not for the individual Christian, but for the whole church as the new man. As the warrior, the church deals with God's enemy and defeats him.

If we put together all these seven aspects of the church, we see a wonderful picture of the church as the Body to express Christ, as the new man taking Christ as the person, as the kingdom with rights and responsibilities, as the family with life and enjoyment, as God's dwelling place for God to live in, as the bride for Christ's satisfaction, and as the warrior for fighting the battle and defeating the enemy so that God can accomplish His eternal purpose. This is the church.

What the church does is not as important as what the church is. The church is the Body, the new man, the kingdom, the family, the dwelling place, the wife, and the warrior. What we do does not mean very much, but what we are means a great deal. In such a church as described in Ephesians Christ is expressed. Through such a church Christ, the Person, is lived out. In such a church there is the kingdom of God with rights and responsibilities and the family of God with life and enjoyment. This church is also God's dwelling place, Christ's satisfaction, and God's

warrior fighting the battle for His eternal purpose. What a church this is!

If we see this vision of the church, we shall realize how poor is the situation in religion today. In religion we cannot find the Body or the new man. Furthermore, we cannot find the kingdom, the household of God, the dwelling place of God, the bride of Christ, or the warrior of God. As the church, we need to be all these seven items. Especially those who bear responsibility in the churches need to see the vision of the church presented in Ephesians. The church is not a school, a society, or an organization. It is the Body, the new man, the kingdom, the family, the dwelling place, the bride, and the warrior. This is the church, and this is also the subject of the book of Ephesians. Because Ephesians has such a subject, this book is inexhaustible.

Still more aspects of the church, however, are found in the last book of the Bible. In Revelation we see four additional aspects of the church: the church as the lampstand, the manchild, the firstfruit, and the holy city. Only one aspect of the church found in Revelation, the bride, corresponds to the aspects seen in Ephesians.

II. THE CONTENT

A. The Blessings Received by the Church in Christ

Now we come to the contents of the book of Ephesians. The first item of the contents is the blessings received by the church in Christ (1:3-14). Not many know the real meaning of the word "blessing." It is not such things as a new car or modern home. The Apostle Paul prayed that the church would have a revelation to see all the blessings it has received. Material blessings such as cars and houses do not require revelation to be seen. But all the blessings received by the church need revelation. Many Christians simply have not seen the blessings with which the church has been blessed.

B. The Apostle's Prayer for Revelation to the Church

After the revealing of the blessings to the church, the Apostle Paul prayed that the saints may have a spirit of

wisdom and revelation to know the issue of all these blessings and the power to carry them out, so that the church may become the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (1:15-23).

C. The Producing, Nature, Position, Building, and Function of the Church

Following the mention of the church at the end of chapter one, chapter two shows us the producing, nature, position, building, and function of the church.

D. The Revelation of the Mystery and the Ministry of the Stewardship concerning the Church

In 3:1-13 we have the revelation of the mystery and the ministry of the stewardship concerning the church. Not many Christians know what the ministry of the stewardship is. There is such a thing that is called the stewardship, and this stewardship has a ministry. The ministry of this stewardship is related to the church. Thus, not only the mystery concerns the church, but also the stewardship. In order to know the church, we must know the revelation of the mystery and the ministry of the stewardship. We shall cover these matters in detail when we come to chapter three.

E. The Apostle's Prayer for the Church to Experience Christ

Realizing that the matters of the mystery and the ministry of the stewardship are so profound, the Apostle immediately prayed that the church would have the practical experience of Christ (3:14-21). The church as

revealed in the mystery and as ministered by the stewardship needs the experience of Christ. The Apostle Paul prayed for this.

F. The Walk and Responsibility of the Church in the Spirit

In chapters four through six we have the walk and responsibility of the church in the Spirit.

If we have a clear view of the contents of the book of Ephesians, the entire book will be set before us. We shall see the blessings: God's selection, predestination, sonship, holiness, redemption, sealing, pledging, and much more. Then we shall see the prayer of the Apostle for a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know the hope of God's calling, to see the glory of God's inheritance among His saints, and to realize the greatness of the power that has been wrought in Christ to produce the Body. Then in chapter two we shall see the production of the church, the nature of the church, the vision of the church, the building of the church, and the function of the church. In chapter three we shall see the revelation of the mystery and the ministry of the stewardship concerning the church. Following this, we shall see Paul's prayer for the strengthening of our inner man so that Christ may make His home in our heart, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God. This causes us to have the practical experience of Christ. Then, as revealed in the last three chapters, we shall know how to walk on earth, to bear responsibility, and to fight the battle for God's purpose. This is the content of the book of Ephesians.

III. THE CHARACTERISTIC

The book of Ephesians has a special characteristic. Unlike Romans, which speaks from the sinners' condition, Ephesians speaks from God's eternal purpose. In the opening chapters of Romans, we see the sinners' condition. In Romans 1 all kinds of sins are listed. But no such list is found in chapter one of Ephesians. This is because Ephesians speaks, not from the sinners' condition, but

from God's eternal purpose. Moreover, Ephesians speaks from eternity, not from time, and from the heavenlies, not from the earth. The book of Ephesians brings us into eternity. Do not stay in time--get into eternity. Because Ephesians brings us into the heavenlies, we should not remain in our condition; instead, we should be in eternity and in the heavenlies. We are in God's eternal purpose, and we need not look at our condition. Rather, let us look at God's eternal purpose. Because we are so bound to our condition and enveloped in it, we need to be rescued. Ephesians does not care for our condition so much as it cares for God's purpose. It speaks to us from the heart of God's purpose. When we come to this book, we need to pray, "Lord, take me out of my condition, away from the earth, and outside of time. Lord, rescue me from my condition and bring me into eternity and into the heavenlies. I want to enter into the heart of God and into His eternal purpose."

Many years ago I read the book of Ephesians as if I were a frog in a narrow well. From my position in the well, I tried to understand this book. But I could not understand it. To understand this book, we need to be delivered from our condition and brought into God's eternal purpose and into the heavenlies. If we read Ephesians from such a position, our reading will be different. The specific and particular characteristic of this book is that it is written from eternity, from the heavenlies, from God's heart, and from God's eternal purpose.

IV. THE POSITION

Ephesians has a specific position in the order of the books of the New Testament. It would be very awkward if Ephesians were the first book of the New Testament. Praise the Lord that it has been placed in the right position, immediately after the revelation concerning Christ versus religion (Galatians), followed by the practical experience of Christ (Philippians), and leading to the Head (Colossians)!

A. After the Revelation concerning Christ versus Religion

In Galatians we see the matter of Christ versus religion. We should not replace Christ with anything. This means that it should not be our emotion versus religion or our practice versus religion. It must be Christ versus religion. Ephesians comes after this revelation of Christ versus religion. The matter of Christ versus religion leads us to the church. Christ is not versus religion merely for our experience. That is the improper emphasis of the so-called inner life people who seek Christ, not for the church, but for their experience. Christ is versus religion for the church. The very Christ who is versus religion is not primarily for our experience, but for the church. Galatians 2:20 says that we have been crucified with Christ and that Christ lives in us. This experience must be for the church life.

B. Followed by the Practical Experience of Christ

It is wrong to care so much for the personal experience of Christ that we neglect the church. However, if we care so much for the church that we neglect the practical experience of Christ, we are also wrong. To someone who cares only for personal experience, not for the church, I would say, "You must go on from Galatians to Ephesians." But to someone who cares so much for the church that he neglects the experience of Christ, I would say, "Remember, following Ephesians is the book of Philippians." We need the practical experience of Christ so that we shall be able to say that whether in death or in life Christ shall be magnified in us (Phil. 1:20). We should also be able to say that for us to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21) and that we count all things but dung on account of the excellency of Christ (Phil. 3:8). We all need to experience Christ. Before someone comes into the church, he must have some experience of Christ, and after he comes into the church, he needs even more experience of Him.

C. Leading to the Head

The experience of Christ leads us to the Head. Therefore, after Philippians we have Colossians. I am very fond of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. I have spent more time studying these books than any other books in the Bible. We all need to spend more time on these four books. Galatians is the revelation of Christ versus religion, Ephesians covers the church in seven aspects, Philippians deals with the practical experience of Christ, and Colossians leads us to the Head. If we get into these four books, we shall see that Christ is here, that Christ leads us to the church, that the church life leads us to experience Christ daily, and that all this brings us to the Head. This is the position of the book of Ephesians in the New Testament.

V. THE WRITER

Now we need to consider the writer of this book. As we all know, the writer is the Apostle Paul. Ephesians 1:1 says, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God." Paul was made an apostle of Christ, not by man, but through the will of God, according to God's economy. Because Paul was not a self-appointed apostle, but an apostle through the will of God, he had the authority that comes through God's will. This standing gave him authority to put forth the revelation in this Epistle of God's eternal purpose concerning the church. The church is built upon this revelation (2:20). Paul's being an apostle of Christ refers to his position, and his being an apostle through the will of God refers to his authority. As such an apostle, Paul was the writer of this book.

VI. THE RECEIVERS

A. The Saints in Ephesus

The last part of 1:1 and 2 say, "To the saints who are in Ephesus, and the faithful in Christ Jesus: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

The receivers of this book were the saints in Ephesus. This refers to their position. The saints are those who are made holy, sanctified, separated unto God from everything that is common.

B. The Faithful in Christ Jesus

The receivers were also the faithful in Christ Jesus. The faithful are those who are faithful in the faith, as mentioned in 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:7; and Jude 3. The receivers, the faithful in Christ Jesus, have not only a sanctified position, but also a faithful living. They live faithfully in their faith. In order to be qualified and positioned to receive this book, we need to be this kind of people. We must be the saints, and we must be the faithful in Christ Jesus. We must have a sanctified position with a faithful living.

C. Grace and Peace

Between the writer and the receivers, there was the communication of grace and peace (1:2). Grace and peace went out from the writer to the receivers. There was no gossip, criticism, accusation, or condemnation; instead, there was grace and peace.

1. Grace Being God as Our Enjoyment

Grace is God as our enjoyment (John 1:17; 1 Cor. 15:10). When God becomes our portion for us to enjoy, that is grace. Do not consider grace as something less than God. Grace is nothing less than God enjoyed by us in a practical way as our portion.

2. Peace Being a Condition Issuing from Grace

Peace is a condition that results from grace, that issues from the enjoyment of God our Father. When we enjoy God as grace, we are in a condition that is full of rest, satisfaction, and joy. This is peace. Grace is a substance, whereas peace is a condition. The substance of grace is God

Himself, and the condition of peace is that which issues out of our enjoyment of God as grace. We all can testify of the peace we have when we enjoy God as grace. The first line of hymn 499 in our hymnal says, "Oh, what a life! Oh, what a peace!" Life is grace. When we truly enjoy Christ as our life, we participate in grace. Then we have peace. What a life! What a peace! Now we can also say: What a substance! What a condition! We have the divine substance as our enjoyment, and we have the heavenly condition. This is the peace which we enjoy.

3. God Being the Creator to Us, His Creatures, and Our Father Being the Father to Us, His Sons

This grace and peace come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are both God's creatures and God's sons. To us as God's creatures God is our God, and to us as God's sons He is our Father. On the one hand, we are God's creatures; on the other hand, we are the Father's sons.

The Lord Jesus Christ Being the Redeemer to Us, God's Redeemed Ones

Grace and peace also come to us from the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Redeemer, and we are His redeemed ones. As the Lord's redeemed ones, we have Him as our Lord.

Grace and peace thus come to us from God our Creator, from our Father, and from the Lord our Redeemer. As His created ones, regenerated ones, and redeemed ones, we are positioned to receive grace and peace from Him. We have a threefold status: we have been created, regenerated, and redeemed. We have God as our Creator, we have the Father as our Father, and we have Jesus Christ as our Redeemer. Therefore, we are fully qualified to receive grace and peace from the Triune God. This is the introductory word to this book.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWO

THREE ASPECTS OF WELL-SPEAKING

In this message we shall consider three aspects of well-speaking concerning God. Such a subject may be considered very unusual. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." The words "blessed" and "blessing" have the same root in Greek. The Greek word for blessed means well spoken of, praised with adoration; and the Greek word for blessing means good speech, good utterance, fine speaking, fine speech, implying bounty and benefit. Used with respect to God, this blessing is a laudation, a genuine praise, even a praise to God on the highest level. The Greek word with the basic meaning of well-speaking is the word used by the Apostle Paul in 1:3 for the praise of God. Paul uses this word to speak well concerning God, to utter fine praise, even beautiful praise, to Him. He uses it to praise, extol, and exalt God. Thus, to praise God means to speak well concerning God.

I. BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

In this high praise of God, Paul did not say, "Blessed be God whose mercy endureth forever." Many of the young people like to sing the Psalms, especially the Psalm that says, "His mercy endureth forever." Such a praise to God is not nearly as high as that uttered by Paul in 1:3. Although we find it difficult to understand such a verse as 1:3, we can easily understand what it means for God's mercy to endure forever because this fits in with our natural concept.

In Christianity today there are two main sources of

mixture. The first is the mixture created by the Catholic Church, which has blended the New Testament economy with the Old Testament rituals. The second mixture is that made by the Pentecostal movement. The Pentecostals bring Christians back to the Old Testament praises in the Psalms. I do not, of course, condemn the Psalms, but I condemn the way of singing them that is according to the natural concept. For example, not one verse in the New Testament says that God's mercy endures forever. Nevertheless, the Pentecostals continue to sing the Psalms according to the natural concept. I have never heard Pentecostals singing on the book of Ephesians, for to those in Pentecostalism this book is closed. In their praises there is no sense of the incarnation, no indication that God has become one with man. In order to praise God for His mercy which endures forever, there is no need of revelation. Anyone who cares for God knows that His mercy endures forever. However, it takes revelation to praise God according to Paul's utterance in 1:3.

In 1:3 Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Since Jesus Christ is God, why does Paul speak of the God of Jesus Christ? How can God be His God? Furthermore, Paul mentions the Father of Jesus Christ. How can God have a Father? God is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of Man, and God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God. According to His humanity, God is His God; and according to His divinity, God is His Father.

In verse 3 Paul also speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since the Lord Jesus Christ is ours, whatever God is to Him is also ours. Our Lord refers to the lordship of our Savior (Acts 2:36), Jesus to the man as our Savior (1 Tim. 2:5), and Christ to God's anointed One (John 20:31).

It is absolutely correct to say that God is full of mercy and that His mercy endures forever. This is to speak well and beautifully concerning God. However, such speaking is according to the natural concept. Today we are in the heavenlies, in eternity, in God's heart, and in God's purpose. Thus, we should speak well of God, not according

to our natural concept, but according to His revelation concerning Himself. The praise that speaks well of God's mercy and greatness is elementary, whereas the praise in 1:3 is the praise in graduate school. In the meetings we need more of the praises that are on a higher level.

The praise in 1:3 is deep and profound, encompassing the entire New Testament economy. Here we have not only creation, indicated by the title "God," but also incarnation, indicated by the title "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ." The first revelation of God in the Bible is in creation, for the Bible opens with the words, "In the beginning God created...." Following creation is the incarnation. One day God the Creator became incarnated as a man. The Word that was with God and was God became flesh (John 1:1, 14). When God Himself became a man, the God who created all things became His God. This is incarnation, not merely the greatness or mercy of God. Thus, in Ephesians 1:3 the God of our Lord Jesus Christ refers to incarnation.

God not only created, but one day He became incarnated. In the incarnation He is the Father to impart His life to all His sons. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ indicates that the Lord Jesus was a man. If He were only God, God could never be His God. In order for God to be His God, He had to be a man. The God whom the Jews worship is only the God of creation, not the God of incarnation. We today worship not only the God of creation, but also the God of incarnation and the Father of the impartation of life. The highest praise to God says that our God the Creator became a man and that our God is also the life-imparting Father. In incarnation, the God of creation became the very God of Jesus. At the same time, God is the Father of Christ as the Son of God. In Christ's humanity, God is His God; but in His divinity, God is His Father. Before His crucifixion and resurrection, He was the only begotten Son of God, but after His resurrection He became the firstborn Son of God to produce the many sons of God. Therefore, the inspired praise of God spoken by Paul in 1:3 implies creation, incarnation, and impartation of life.

But to praise God that His mercy endures forever does not imply anything of incarnation or the impartation of life. It simply says that God is very merciful. Such praise has nothing to do with God becoming a man or with the impartation of His life. It is not related at all to the Father's imparting His life into His creatures to make them the sons of God. For this reason, I say that the high praise in 1:3, unlike the praise of God for His enduring mercy, is on the level of graduate school.

Because Paul's well-speaking in 1:3 is difficult to understand, he prayed elsewhere in Ephesians 1 for a spirit of wisdom and revelation. We certainly need such a spirit today. We need revelation to see, and we need wisdom to understand, realize, and comprehend. But instead of revelation and wisdom, many of us have only our natural concept. Hence, we praise God that His mercy endures forever. Instead of such elementary praise, we need to praise God according to the well-speaking in 1:3. We need to bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praising Him for creation, incarnation, and the impartation of life.

Whatever God is to Christ is transmitted to us. God is His, and He is ours. God is His God and Father, and He is our Lord. In 1:22 God gave Christ to be Head over all things to the church. The little word "to" implies a transmission, indicating that whatever Christ has attained and obtained is transmitted to the church.

The title "Our Lord Jesus Christ" is rich in meaning. "Lord" signifies Christ's lordship, "Jesus" signifies His humanity to be our Redeemer and Savior, and "Christ" signifies that He is God's anointed One. This is a further indication that 1:3 is the top praise, the highest well-speaking of God. We all need to speak well concerning God in this way: in the way of creation, incarnation, impartation of life, and transmission, with redemption, the Redeemer, the Savior, and the anointed One to accomplish God's eternal purpose.

When the Father in the heavens heard Paul's high

praise, He must have been very happy. He might have said, "Paul, before you spoke these words, I had never heard anyone speak well of Me in such a way. I had heard the Jews praising Me and saying that My mercy endures forever. I had also heard them praising Me for My greatness. But I have become weary with this kind of praise. But, Paul, your praise has touched My heart." God the Father certainly understood the meaning of Paul's well-speaking. We all need to praise God according to the high praise in 1:3.

If we know to praise God only for His mercy, we are still in a pitiful condition. This type of praise does not indicate that something of Him has come into us. Thus, we need to see that the very Creator, the God of Jesus Christ, has been incarnated as a man. He is also the life-imparting Father who imparts Himself as life into us that we may become His sons. According to John 20:17, the Lord Jesus told Mary Magdalene after His resurrection, "Go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God." Because Christ has become ours, whatever God is to Him has been transmitted into us. This is something far greater than mercy. God is no longer merely merciful to us. He is our God and our Father; and we are His sons, not only His creatures. We are not only God's creatures who have been created, fallen, and redeemed. We are also His sons having His life and nature within us. Thus, we are one with Him. Oh, may the Lord open our eyes to see this! We need to speak well concerning God according to the New Testament economy. In our well-speaking we need to have the thought of incarnation, the impartation of life, and the heavenly, spiritual transmission. We also need to include the thought of Christ as the Lord and the Head and of Jesus being Jehovah our Savior to accomplish redemption and salvation for us. We also need to think of Christ as God's anointed One who fully accomplishes God's purpose. Our well-speaking, our high praise concerning God, should not be natural, but filled with the revelation of all the wonderful aspects of God's New Testament economy.

II. WHO HAS BLESSED US

The God whom we bless has blessed us. God's well-speaking concerning us encompasses the entire New Testament. In the New Testament God speaks well regarding us. The twenty-seven books of the New Testament are filled with God's beautiful speech concerning us. Revelation 22:14 is an example of God's well-speaking: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city." The words, "Grace to you and peace" (1:2), are also part of God's well-speaking. If you want to hear God's well-speaking, you need to read the New Testament and say amen to every aspect of it. He chose us before the foundation of the world. Amen. He chose us to be holy and without blemish. Amen.

We bless God, because God has blessed us. Because He has spoken so well concerning us, we return the well-speaking to Him. For example, when we read about the redemption of our body, we should say, "God, how I thank You that You have come into me, that You are saturating me with Yourself, and that one day this saturation will be expressed through my body. That will be the day of the redemption of my body. God, how I thank You for this!" To speak like this is to return the well-speaking to Him. Thus, He blesses you, and you bless Him. Learn to speak well concerning God according to His New Testament economy. After listening to God's well-speaking concerning us, we are qualified to speak well of Him.

We are qualified because we are His creatures, His redeemed ones, and His regenerated ones. All the blessings, benefits, and bounties in the universe are of three categories. The first category is God's creation, the second is God's redemption, and the third is God's regeneration. In God's creation we enjoy so many good things: air, sunshine, minerals, animal life, vegetable life. All these are good things of God's creation, and we are qualified to par-take of them because we are God's

creatures. Further-more, as the redeemed ones, we enjoy forgiveness of sins, justification by faith, reconciliation in God's grace, and sanctification. Because we are redeemed, all the benefits in God's redemption are ours. Moreover, because we have been regenerated, we enjoy God's life, His nature, and His Person. By these three qualifications--being created, redeemed, and regenerated--we are fully and thoroughly qualified to enjoy all the blessings in the universe, the blessings in God's creation, redemption, and regeneration. The angels may be sinless, but they are not qualified to enjoy all these blessings. But through the blood of Christ, we enjoy forgiveness of sins, the washing of the blood, justification by faith, and peace with God. We enjoy all the blessings of Christ's redemption. Furthermore, we daily enjoy all the benefits and bounties of God's regeneration. We have the divine life, the divine nature, and the divine Person. What could be higher than this? Today we enjoy the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Father. This is the second aspect of well-speaking.

III. WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING IN THE HEAVENLIES IN CHRIST

The third aspect of well-speaking is that God "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." God has blessed us with His good, fine, and fair speakings. Every such speaking is a blessing to us. Verses 4 through 14 are an account of such speakings, such blessings. All these blessings are spiritual, in the heavenlies, and in Christ.

A. Every

The word "every" indicates the all-inclusiveness of God's blessings. It includes all, with no exception.

B. Spiritual

All these blessings are spiritual. This indicates the relationship of God's blessings to the Holy Spirit. Being spiritual, all the blessings with which God has blessed us are related to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is not only

the channel, but also the reality, of God's blessings. In this verse, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are all related to the blessings bestowed upon us. This is actually God's dispensation of Himself into us. God's blessing is mainly the dispensation of the Triune God into us.

C. In the Heavenlies

Furthermore, these spiritual blessings are in the heavenlies. "Heavenlies" here indicates not only the heavenly place, but also the heavenly nature, state, characteristic, and atmosphere of the spiritual blessings with which God has blessed us. They are from the heavens with a heavenly nature, heavenly state, heavenly characteristic, and heavenly atmosphere. The believers in Christ are enjoying on earth these heavenly blessings. They are heavenly as well as spiritual. They are different from the blessings with which God blessed Israel. Those were physical and earthly. The blessings bestowed upon us are of God the Father, in God the Son, through God the Spirit, and in the heavenlies.

D. In Christ

Finally, all these spiritual blessings are in Christ. Christ is the virtue, the instrument, and the sphere in which God has blessed us. Outside of Christ, without Christ, God has nothing to do with us. But in Christ He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies.

We are not in ourselves, but in Christ. If we are in ourselves, we are through with God's blessing. Hallelujah, we are in Christ, who is the sphere, the channel, the instrument, and the virtue in which we have been blessed!

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THREE

CHOSEN TO BE HOLY

In this message we come to God's selection (1:4), to the matter of our being chosen to be holy.

I. THE FIRST ITEM OF GOD'S BLESSING

Ephesians 1:4 says, "According as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before Him, in love." Following verse 3, verses 4 through 14 present a list of all the spiritual blessings with which God has blessed us. God's choosing is His first blessing bestowed upon us; it is the first item of God's well-speaking concerning the church. God's choosing is His selection. From among numberless people, He has selected us.

II. IN HIM

God chose us "in Him," that is, in Christ. Christ was the sphere in which we were selected by God. Outside of Christ we are not God's choice.

III. BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD

Verse 4 says that God chose us before the foundation of the world. This was in eternity past. God chose us according to His infinite foresight before He created us. The book of Romans begins with fallen men on earth, whereas Ephesians begins with God's chosen ones in the heavenlies.

God's selection was not made in time, but in eternity. Before the foundation of the world, God chose us. Among millions of people, He foresaw us before we were even born and selected us before the foundation of the world. The expression, before the foundation of the world, implies the

entire universe, not only the earth. This indicates that the universe was founded for man's existence to fulfill God's eternal purpose. Without such a universe, it would be impossible for man to exist. Man's existence is for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. Thus, man is the focal point of God's eternal purpose. The universe was founded so that man could exist to fulfill God's eternal purpose.

IV. THAT WE SHOULD BE HOLY

God chose us that we should be holy. The words "holy" and "holiness" have been spoiled by today's Christian teachings. Your understanding of holiness is probably influenced by these teachings. In the Bible the word "holy" should not be understood according to our natural concept. Many think that holiness is sinlessness. According to this concept, someone is holy if he does not sin. This thought is absolutely mistaken. Holiness is neither sinlessness nor perfection. Holy not only means sanctified, separated unto God, but also different, distinct, from everything that is common. Only God is different, distinct, from all things. Hence, He is holy; holiness is His nature.

The way God makes us holy is to impart Himself, the Holy One, into us so that our whole being may be permeated and saturated with His holy nature. For us, God's chosen ones, to be holy is to partake of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and to have our whole being permeated with God Himself. This is different from mere sinless perfection or sinless purity. This makes our being holy, like God Himself in His nature and in His character.

A. God Being Holy

To be holy is to be separated from everything other than God. It also means to be different, distinct, from all that is not God. Thus, we should not be common, but different. In the universe God alone is holy. He is different from everything else and is distinct. Therefore, to be holy means to be one with God. To be sinless or perfect is not

the same as being holy. To be holy we need to be one with God because only God is holy (Lev. 11:44; 1 Sam. 2:2).

B. Wherever God Is Being Holy

The word "holy" is not found in the book of Genesis. The first time this word is used is in Exodus. In a sense, man in Genesis was still not brought into God. It was in the book of Exodus, not in the book of Genesis, that God began to have a dwelling place on earth, and to bring man into the Holy of Holies. No matter how high were the spiritual experiences of those in Genesis, there was not on earth the Holy of Holies for man to enter. But in Exodus something extraordinary took place: on earth among men there was a place called the Holy of Holies, and God was there. Men could go to that place and meet God. There in the Holy of Holies, God spoke and administrated. Because such a place is not to be found in Genesis, the word "holy" is not used in that book. When God came in to charge His people to build the tabernacle with the Holy of Holies, the word "holy" began to be used.

The first mention of this word is in the calling of Moses in Exodus 3. As Moses was shepherding the flock, he saw a bush burning in the wilderness. When he turned aside to see why the bush was not consumed, God spoke to him out of the bush, saying, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exo. 3:5). This indicates that wherever God is, that place is holy. Remember, only God is holy. If you have nothing to do with God, then you are not holy, no matter how sinless or perfect you may be. You may be sinless and altogether perfect, but if you are not related to God, you are not holy. But once you are related to God, you immediately become holy.

C. Whatever Is of and for God Being Holy

Any place, any thing, any matter, and any person that is related to God is holy, for whatever is both of God and for God is holy (Lev. 20:26; Num. 16:5; Neh. 8:9; Exo. 30:37).

D. The Spirit of God Reaching People Being Holy

Furthermore, when the Spirit of God reaches us, He is holy (Luke 1:35; Matt. 1:20; 28:19; see Rom. 1:4). This is the reason that the term "Holy Spirit" is not used in the Old Testament. (The occurrences of this term in Psalm 51:11 and Isaiah 63:10 and 11 should be rendered "the spirit of holiness.") This term was first used when the Lord Jesus was about to be conceived in Mary (Luke 1:35). This signifies that holiness brings God to man and man to God. To go further, it also means to bring God into man and man into God. When God gets into us, we are holy. When we get into God, we are more holy. But when we are mingled with God, we are most holy. Thus, we become holy by having God in us, we become more holy by being in God, and we become the holiest by being mingled, soaked, and saturated with God.

The book of Ephesians calls the believers saints (1:1). Everyone who has believed in the Lord Jesus is a saint. But some saints are holy, some are holier, and some are the holiest. There is no doubt that we all are holy, but it is open to question whether or not we are holier or the holiest. For example, during your time with the Lord in the morning, you may be under the process of being soaked and saturated with Him. But then your wife may say something to offend you and you lose your temper. Thus, after breakfast you go back to your room and pray, "O Lord, forgive me. I was being saturated with You, but one word from my wife caused me to be apart from You. Lord, bring me back to the soaking. Lord, how I praise You for the cleansing blood!" The purpose of this illustration is to point out that when we are in touch with God, we are holy, for then we are under His saturation. But when we are away from God, we are not holy. I repeat, to be holy is not to be perfect or sinless; it is to be one with God. When we are saturated and soaked with God, we shall be the holiest.

We have seen that holiness is God Himself. The first

time the word "holy" was used was when God began to have a people on earth among whom He might dwell and who might come into His presence in the Holy of Holies. From that time onward, this word is used again and again in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. So many things found in these books are called holy because in these books God has come among man and man has been brought to God; thus everything related to the tabernacle and the priesthood was holy. Everything related to God's ordination in the Old Testament was holy because it involved the meeting together of God and man.

We have pointed out that the term "Holy Spirit" was used the first time when the Lord Jesus was conceived in the virgin Mary. This was something far greater than God's dwelling in a tabernacle among men. The tabernacle was God's dwelling place. But Christ's incarnation was God's tabernacling among men. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." This began when Christ was conceived within the womb of Mary. His conception was not only a matter of holiness, but also a matter of the Holy Spirit. Although many things in the Old Testament were holy, there was not anything that was of the Holy Spirit. Only in the New Testament time, when God came into man and became man, do we have something that is of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20).

In the Greek text of the New Testament many times the expression "the Spirit, the holy" is used (1 Thes. 4:8; Heb. 3:7). I have not yet found an adequate explanation of such an expression in Greek. Some explain it as merely being a Greek idiom, but I doubt that this explanation is adequate. According to my spirit, I believe that the reason for this is that in the New Testament the emphasis is not only on the Spirit, but also on holiness. The Spirit is holiness. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is sometimes called the Spirit, the holy. Where the Spirit is, there holiness is also.

Today, the Spirit is not only in us; He is making Himself one with us and us one with Him. First Corinthians 6:17 says, "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."

Therefore, holiness actually means to be saturated with God, to cause a common person to be fully saturated with the Spirit. When God came to dwell among men, the word "holy" was used the first time. When God came as man, the term "Holy Spirit" was first mentioned. In order for an article of furniture in the tabernacle to be holy, there was no need of the Spirit. Once the furniture was placed into the tabernacle for God, it immediately became holy. We are not like furniture that is for God; we are living people with the Spirit of God in us to make us one with Him. This is not merely to be holy, but to be saturated with the Holy Spirit. To be holy is firstly to be separated to God; secondly, to be taken over by God; thirdly, to be possessed by God; and fourthly, to be saturated with God and one with God. Eventually, the issue of this in the Bible is the New Jerusalem, which is called the holy city, a city that not only belongs to God and is for God, but a city possessed by God, saturated with God, and one with God. The New Jerusalem is a holy entity belonging to God, possessed by God, saturated with God, and one with God. This is holiness.

E. To Be Separated unto God Positionally

In order for us to be holy, we first need to be separated unto God positionally. With respect to our family, neighbors, colleagues, and friends, we need to be separated. Many Christians, however, are saved, but not separated. Normally, once a person is saved, he should also be separated. This is the reason a believer is called a saint. Consider the majority of Christians today. They are virtually the same as the worldly people. With them, there is no separation. Many of their relatives and friends do not even know that they are Christians. But to be holy is to be separated unto God. This, of course, is a matter of position.

1. By the Redeeming Blood of Christ

We have been separated unto God by the redeeming blood of Christ (Heb. 9:14). But we cannot see the power of

the blood of Christ in many Christians today. All Christians believe that they have been redeemed, but in some there is no sign of the redeeming blood. The sign of the blood is a sign of separation. If you have been redeemed by the blood, then you should bear the sign of separation. Others may be free to say or do certain things, but you are not. Even if you can do those things, you refrain from doing them because you have been redeemed by the blood. With you there is a sign that you are different, separated. Other people may utter certain words, go certain places, or buy certain things, but we cannot because we are separated and bear the sign of the redeeming blood. The blood has sanctified and separated us.

2. By the Holy Spirit

We also are separated unto God by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rom. 15:16). Because the power of the Spirit overshadows us, we cannot use certain words, go to certain places, or do certain things. But this does not mean that we are under regulations. No, it simply means that we are under the redeeming blood and in the Holy Spirit.

3. In the Name of the Lord Jesus

We have a sanctified position, not only by the blood and by the Spirit, but also in the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 6:11). Because we bear the name of the Lord Jesus, we should not shame His name by being common. Others may go to sporting events or to the movies, but we would not go because we do not want to shame the Lord's name. His name must keep us separate. Do not ask whether a certain thing is sinful or not sinful. Separation is not related to whether or not something is sinful; it is a matter of whether we are common or separated. We must bear some sign that we are under the blood, in the Spirit, and in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Admittedly, separation is not a very deep matter; it is merely positional. But do not think that position is unimportant. It means a great deal. We have a position as saints, as separated ones, and we need to keep it.

4. Before Justification

According to doctrine, this aspect of sanctification comes before justification (1 Cor. 6:11). Positional sanctification precedes justification, but dispositional sanctification follows justification. Before we are justified, we are sanctified by the blood, by the Holy Spirit, and in the name of the Lord Jesus.

F. Saturated with God Dispositionally

1. After Justification

Now we come to dispositional sanctification, which comes after justification (Rom. 6:19, 22). This is sanctification not merely in our position, but also in our disposition. Hence, it is deeper and more subjective than positional sanctification.

In subjective sanctification we are saturated with God dispositionally. Separation can take place rather easily and in a very short time. But to be saturated dispositionally takes a long time. If we are faithful to the Lord, we shall be saturated with the nature of God day after day. God intends to saturate us with Himself, and we need to soak up God in our being. This requires time. This is the process of being made holy.

God has chosen us for the purpose of saturating us with Himself; He wants to work Himself into our being. Then we shall be holy, just as He is. At present, we are all in the process of saturation. I have been in this process more than fifty years, and I am still in it, still soaking up God day by day. Sometimes my wife or the brothers and sisters help me to soak Him up. They help me to be willing for this, even when in myself I am not willing. Thus, whether I am willing or unwilling, the Lord causes me to be saturated

with Him and to soak Him up. Many of us who were in Christianity for years can testify that while we were there we did not undergo very much of this saturation. But since we came into the church life, we have been more and more soaked with God. The church life is a life of soaking up God. Whether we are willing or unwilling, we are being soaked with the divine element.

I do not care for outward correction; it means nothing. Being saturated with God and being soaked with Him, however, mean a great deal. In the church life, have you been corrected or saturated? Many of us in the church life have been saturated with God. I do not appreciate self-correction. Suppose someone is proud and adjusts himself to be humble. This means nothing. The only thing that matters is that we are saturated with God. What a joy it is for me to see that many brothers and sisters have been saturated with God, that they have soaked up so much of Him into their being! This is the holiness, the sanctification, revealed in the Bible.

We all have been chosen to be holy in this way. Firstly, we are separated unto God; secondly, we are saturated with God; eventually we become one with God. One day, we shall be just like Him. That will mark the completion of our sanctification, the process that begins with separation, continues with saturation, and is completed with the full redemption of our body. At that time, from within to without, we shall be the same as He is. We shall be holy. It is for this purpose that we were chosen by God before the foundation of the world.

2. By Transformation of the Soul

Dispositional sanctification firstly transforms our soul by saturating every part of our inward being with the holy element of God (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2).

3. By Transfiguration of the Body

Eventually, dispositional sanctification will transfigure

our body into one as glorious as Christ's (Phil. 3:21). This means that God's holy element will saturate our body so that our body may be redeemed (Rom. 8:23).

4. Consummately to Be the Holy City

Through dispositional sanctification, all the saints will consummately be the holy city, permeated with the holy God (Rev. 21:2, 10).

V. WITHOUT BLEMISH

Verse 4 also says that we were chosen in Him to be without blemish. A blemish is like a foreign particle in a precious gem. God's chosen ones should be saturated only with God Himself and have no foreign particles, such as the fallen natural human element, the flesh, the self, or worldly things. This is to be without blemish, to be without any mixture, to have no element other than God's holy nature. After being thoroughly washed by the water in the Word, the church will be sanctified in this way (5:26-27).

Today, we still have a great deal of mixture. Many foreign particles, such as the flesh, the self, and the natural life, are still in us. But we are gradually being transformed. Therefore, eventually we shall be so holy and so pure that we shall be without blemish, without any foreign particles, having only the divine element.

VI. BEFORE HIM

We shall be holy and without blemish before Him. "Before Him" means to be holy and without blemish in the eyes of God according to His divine standard. This qualifies us to remain in and enjoy His presence. We shall be holy and without blemish, not according to our standard or in our eyes, but according to His standard and in His eyes.

VII. IN LOVE

Finally, we shall be holy and without blemish before Him in love. Love here refers to the love with which God

loves His chosen ones and with which His chosen ones love Him. It is in this love, in such a love, that God's chosen ones become holy and without blemish before Him. Firstly, God loved us. Then this divine love inspires us to love Him in return. In such a condition and atmosphere of love, we are saturated with God to be holy and without blemish as He is. In this love, a mutual love, God loves us, and we return this love to Him. It is in this kind of condition that we are being transformed. Under such a condition we are being saturated with God.

I hope that we can see that the holiness revealed in the Bible is absolutely different from that found in today's teachings concerning self-correction and improvement of behavior. Firstly, we are separated unto God and then we are continually saturated with God until all the mixture in us is swallowed up by the divine nature. When this takes place in full, we shall be wholly sanctified, transformed, and conformed to the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Then we shall be completely holy.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FOUR

PREDESTINATED UNTO SONSHIP

In this message we come to the matter that we have been predestinated unto sonship. Ephesians 1:5 says, "Having predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." In the grammatical construction of verses 4 and 5, the subject and the main predicate are not in verse 5, but in verse 4. Verse 4 says, "According as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before Him, in love." The subject is "He," and the main predicate is "chose." These verses can be written like this: "According as He, having predestinated us, chose us." God's choosing cannot be separated from His predestinating. They are two aspects of one thing. God's choosing goes with His predestinating, and His predestinating is one with His choosing. It is very difficult to say which comes first.

I. THE SECOND ITEM OF GOD'S BLESSING

Being predestinated unto sonship is the second item of God's blessing. As we pointed out in the previous message, the first item of God's blessing is being chosen to be holy.

II. MARKING OUT A DESTINY FOR HIS CHOSEN ONES IN ETERNITY PAST

In eternity past, God predestinated us unto sonship, marking out a destiny for His chosen ones before the foundation of the world. The goal of God's predestination is sonship. We were predestinated to be sons of God even before we were created. Hence, as God's creatures, we need to be regenerated by Him so that we may participate in His

life to be His sons. Sonship implies not only the life, but also the position of the son. God's marked-out ones have the life to be His sons and the position to inherit Him.

III. MARKING HIS CHOSEN ONES OUT BEFOREHAND

The Greek word translated "predestinated" can also be rendered "marked out beforehand." Marking out beforehand is the process, whereas predestination is the purpose to determine a destiny beforehand. God firstly selected us and then marked us out beforehand, that is, before the foundation of the world, unto a certain destiny.

IV. ACCORDING TO HIS FORESIGHT

God chose and predestinated us according to His foresight (1 Pet. 1:2). This indicates that our relationship with God was initiated by God according to His foreknowledge.

V. THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

God has predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ. "Through Jesus Christ" means through the Redeemer who is the Son of God. Through Him we were redeemed to be the sons of God with the life and position of God's sons.

VI. ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF HIS WILL

God predestinated us unto sonship according to the good pleasure of His will, which is His purpose. This reveals that God has a will in which is His good pleasure. God predestinated us to be His sons according to this pleasure, according to the desire of His heart. The book of Ephesians speaks not from the standpoint of man's sinful condition, as does the book of Romans, but from the standpoint of the good pleasure of God's heart. Hence, it is deeper and higher.

VII. UNTO SONSHIP

In verse 4 we see that God has chosen us to be holy. However, to be holy is the procedure, not the goal. The goal is sonship. We have been predestinated unto sonship. In other words, God has chosen us to be holy so that we might be His sons. Thus, to be holy is the process, the procedure, whereas to be sons of God is the goal. God does not merely want a group of holy people; He desires many sons. It may seem to us that it is adequate for God to choose us to be holy. We may be fully satisfied with this. Nevertheless, God has chosen us to be holy for a purpose, and this purpose is that we might be the sons of God.

Let us take baking a cake as an example. When a sister bakes a cake, she firstly prepares the dough by mixing various ingredients together with flour. As the ingredients are mixed in with the dough, we may say that the dough is a picture of sanctification. First the dough is separated; then it is sanctified through having various ingredients added to it. After the sister mixes the dough, she shapes it into a certain form. Likewise, God first separates us, and then puts Himself, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, into us. Then follows the process of mixing. To say that God mixes us means that He disturbs us. We may like to have a tranquil church life, but often God intervenes to turn things upside down. Nevertheless, this is the normal Christian church life.

To be holy is to be mingled with God. God sanctifies us by putting Himself into us and then mingling us with His nature. This is a matter of nature, of having our nature transformed with His. We were born human, natural, but God wants us to be divine. The only way this can take place is through having the divine nature put into our being and mingled with it. In this way, God makes us holy. Thus, sanctification is a procedure to transform our nature. This, however, is not the goal. The goal is related to being formed or shaped. This is the reason that along with God's choosing us to be holy, there is the need of His

predestinating us to be sons. To be holy is a matter of nature, but to be sons is a matter of being formed. God's sons are people conformed to a particular form or shape.

The golden lampstand in Revelation 1 illustrates this. In nature, the lampstand is golden, but in form it is a lampstand. In order for a golden lampstand to be produced, the material must first be pure gold. This refers to the procedure. But the goal of this procedure is the producing of the lampstand with a definite form. In like manner, to be made holy is the procedure for us to become sons of God.

When I saw that holiness was for sonship, I said to myself, "How could you ever have been satisfied with holiness as an end in itself? You can only be satisfied with being a son of God." Thus, we are not only holy, but also the sons of God. We have not only God's holy nature, but also the Person of His Son. Therefore, we are not merely holy lumps, but also sons of God.

All Christians know that the genuine believers in Christ are the church. But the church is not merely a group of saved ones. The church is a collective people who have been made holy in nature to be the sons of God. This collective people must be sanctified, saturated, and mingled with God's nature. Then they will be the sons of God. Such a people is the church.

The situation of today's Christianity is far removed from this. In Christianity we see groups of people who are saved, but who are still common and worldly, not having any holiness whatever. Furthermore, they do not live like sons of God. Rather, many of them live like sons of sinners. Although so many believe in the Lord Jesus, have been washed in the blood, and have been regenerated by the Spirit, they are still worldly and common, with no mark of holiness in their living. They are absolutely the same as their neighbors, friends, and relatives. Nevertheless, they talk about being the church. What a shame to God, and what a shame to the church! The church is constituted as a collective people who have been separated unto God and

who are saturated with the nature of God and fully sanctified to live like sons of God. The church certainly should not be a group of worldly Christians living like the sons of sinners. It is a shame to say that such a group is the church.

If we claim to be the church, we must ask whether we are a separated and sanctified people. Are we separated unto God and saturated with God? Are we sanctified both positionally and dispositionally with God's nature to live like the sons of God? Oh, may our eyes be opened to see what the church is! The church is not a group of Christians who are zealous, yet who are common and worldly without any separation or saturation. The church is constituted with those who have been sanctified by God to live like sons of God.

Remember, the book of Ephesians is concerned with the church. In the opening word of this book, we are told that the church is a people under God's well-speaking (1:3). The first item of God's well-speaking is that we have been chosen to be holy. This is God's blessing, His well-speaking, concerning us. However, many Christians reject this blessing. God says that He has chosen us to be holy, but they say that they do not want to be different from others. Some say, "We don't want to be holy. We like to be common." God says, "You have been chosen to be different." But they say, "We don't want to be different. We want to be the same as others." This rejection of God's well-speaking is rebellion. Oh, may the Lord have mercy on us! How we need His mercy because today's situation is so pitiful! We need to see that we have been chosen to be holy so that we may live the life of the sons of God.

A. By the Spirit of the Son of God

Now we need to consider three things concerning sonship, concerning being sons of God. The first is that God has predestinated us unto sonship by putting the Spirit of His Son into us. At the time we believed in the Lord Jesus

and were regenerated, the Spirit of God came into us as the Spirit of the Son of God. This is the reason that after regeneration we can easily and sweetly call, "Abba, Father." Before we were regenerated, we could say at most, "O, God, help me." But after we were saved, we spontaneously began to cry, with tender, intimate feeling, "O, Abba, Father."

Both Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 speak of this. Galatians 4:6 says that the Spirit of the Son cries, "Abba, Father," but Romans 8:15 says that it is we who cry out in this way. This indicates that our cry is His cry and that His cry is ours. Together, we and He cry, "Abba, Father." Without the Spirit, we cannot cry, "Abba, Father," so sweetly and intimately. But what a pleasant, sweet, and comfortable feeling we have when we say this! This is a strong proof that the Spirit of God is within us. We have the Spirit of sonship.

A number of times young people have come to me with questions about sports. Some have tried to argue that there is nothing wrong with sports. I replied, "I don't say that there is anything wrong with sports. I would simply like to ask whether or not you can call, 'Abba, Father,' as you are about to take part in a certain sport." They answered, "Brother Lee, you are too clever. You know that if we call, 'Abba, Father,' we will not be able to take part in sports because we know that our Father doesn't approve of them." I am not against sports; I am against the Devil. There is no need to ask me about sports. Instead, simply call, "Abba, Father." If you do this, He may tell you to pray or to read the Bible instead of taking part in sports. I can testify that I have been dealt with by the Father in this way. This is the life of the sons of God. Do you live the life of the sons of God or the life of the sons of sinners, of the sons of disobedience?

Living like a son of God, however, is not a matter of outward regulations. It is altogether a matter of the Spirit of the Son of God within us. If you call, "Abba, Father," you will know what to do. A number of times my children have

come to me and said, "Daddy, can we go to a certain place?" I answered, "You don't need to ask me. As long as you call me daddy, you know what I will say." Likewise, when we go to our Father and call, "Abba, Father," we shall know what kind of life we should live, because we have the Spirit of the Son of God within us.

B. In the Life of the Son of God

We have been predestinated unto sonship, not only by the Spirit of the Son of God, but also in the life of the Son of God. This is very subjective. We actually have the life of the Son of God. As 1 John 5:12 says, "He that hath the Son hath life." Therefore, we are not God's sons-in-law; we are God's sons in life. At times, we may be able to reject the Spirit of the Son of God, but we cannot reject the life of the Son of God because it has become our very being. We have two beings: the first is the natural being that was born of our parents, and the second is the spiritual being that is born of God. In this second being we have the life of the Son of God. According to our second being, we have not only the Spirit moving and working within us, but also the life that has become our self, not the natural self, but the spiritual self. Sometimes we not only rebel against the Spirit, but also against ourselves, against our being.

I do not agree that there should be any regulations in the churches. Nevertheless, I know that in every son of God there is both the Spirit of the Son of God and the life of the Son of God. Because of this, there is no need for regulations. For example, there is no need to post a regulation in your home saying that your children should not eat anything bitter, but eat only things that are sweet. If a child takes something bitter into his mouth, he will spontaneously spit it out, even if he does not know the meaning of the word bitter. Because the life within every child rejects bitter things, there is no need to have regulations about bitterness. In addition to having the Spirit of the Son of God, we have the life of the Son of God. If we taste something that is bitter to the Son's life, we cannot pretend to

be happy with it. Although we may pretend to be happy, we are not happy in the depths of our being, for we know that we are acting against the life of the Son of God. If we call, "Abba, Father," and live according to the life of the Son of God, we shall have joy in the depths of our being. In fact, our whole being will be filled with joy.

C. In the Position of the Son of God

Not only do we have the Spirit of the Son of God and the life of the Son of God, but we are also in the position of the Son of God (John 20:17). Actually, sonship is more specifically related to position than it is to life. You may be a son born of your father, but for certain legal reasons, you may not have the position of a son. If you do not have the position of a son, you do not have the sonship. Thus, sonship is a legal matter. For example, a certain person may not actually have been born the son of a rich man. But if, legally speaking, he has the position of being that man's son, he will be entitled to his inheritance. The inheritance belongs to him, not according to life, but according to position. Some genuine sons, however, may have the life of the father, but have lost the position of sonship. This illustrates the fact that the life of the son of God is related only to life but that the position of the son of God is a matter of legality. Hallelujah, we have the Spirit of the Son of God, the life of the Son of God, and also the position of the Son of God.

All this is for our inheritance. Because we are God's sons with the sonship, we shall inherit all that God is and all that He has. We have the legal position to inherit all the riches of the Father. In the church life we enjoy the Father day by day. Today this may simply be a matter of life, but in the future it will also be a matter of position. Revelation 21:7 says, "He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he shall be a son to Me." In this verse being a son and inheriting all these things is not merely a matter of life, but also a matter of position. Although we are sons of God in life today, the universe

cannot yet see that we are sons of God in position. But when the New Jerusalem comes, the universe will know that we are the sons of God in position as well as in life. If I walk into a restaurant and proclaim to the people sitting there that I am a son of God, they will think that I have a mental problem. But when the New Jerusalem comes, there will be no need for us to say anything. Everyone will be able to see that we are the sons of God in position. All the angels will say, "Look at those people--they are the sons of God. They are enjoying God and inheriting all that God is in the New Jerusalem."

The church today is a miniature of the New Jerusalem. Here in the church we are sons of God both in life and in position. There is no need for us to tell one another that we are sons of God, for we all recognize one another as God's sons. Because we have the Spirit, the life, and the position, we understand one another and recognize one another. We confess that we all are sons of God. Although we have the Spirit, the life, and the position to be the sons of God, we are not yet holy as far as our disposition is concerned. Hence, in the church life God is constantly mixing us so that we might be sanctified by being mingled with His nature.

Many Christian teachers have pointed out that the book of Ephesians covers the subject of the church, but they themselves are not in the practical church life. We are not content with mere talk about the church; we want to have the church life in a practical way. The practical church life is in God's choosing us to be holy and in God's predestinating us to sonship with the Spirit, the life, and the position. Because we have these three things, the Father often puts us into the "blender" so that we may be dispositionally sanctified. Sometimes the Father seems to say, "My child, you have the Spirit, the life, and the position, but you still need to be blended. You need to be mingled with My holy nature. I have chosen you to be holy. Now I shall work on you to make you My holy son." This is the church life.

We all expect the church life to be calm, tranquil, and peaceful. But no kitchen can be like this when a cook is preparing a meal. Rather, everything is in a mess. If the kitchen were not in such a state during the preparation of the meal, it would not be possible to have a feast. The church life today is like a kitchen with things scattered all over. On the one hand, the church life is wonderful and glorious; on the other hand, it is truly messed up so that we might be mingled with God and made holy. The more mixing we undergo, the more holy we shall become. When the New Jerusalem comes, it will be a holy, corporate sonship with the Spirit, the life, and the position. At that time, the mixing will be over, for we all shall have been saturated, sanctified, and transformed. That will be the full sonship.

VIII. TO HIMSELF

Sonship brings us to God, that is, into God Himself that we may be one with Him in life and in nature.

IX. TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON

As the Father brings us to full sonship, we are being conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). This means that God intends to "sonize" our whole being. This "sonizing" process is going on today in the church life. Perhaps you have been offended by someone in the church, or perhaps you have offended others. Both being offended and being a cause of offense can help the process of "sonizing." I do not encourage you to be offended by others or to offend others. But the truth is that offenses cannot be avoided. Either you will offend someone, or someone will offend you. But we are all being "sonized" by these offenses. The more we are offended, the more "sonized" we become. If you have never been offended in the church life, you probably have not been "sonized" very much. Blessed are you if you have been offended by the brothers, the sisters, and the elders, for you have been "sonized" a great deal. Certain ones, however, cannot bear the offenses. As

soon as they are offended, they want to leave the church life. Instead of leaving the church life at such a time, we should cherish it all the more and even kiss the offense because it "sonizes" us. Whenever you want to run away from the church life, the life of the Son of God within you will say, "Don't run away. Stay and bear the offense and even embrace it." Whenever you embrace an offense, it becomes a joy. This is the "sonizing" in the church life.

We all are in the process of being "sonized." We have the Spirit of the Son of God, the life of the Son of God, and the position of the Son of God, but we still need to be conformed to the image of the Son of God. Hence, we need more "sonizing." The Lord intends to conform us to His image, to the very image of the Son of God. The only place this can happen is in the church life. Outside the church, we cannot be conformed to the image of the Son of God. Thus, I encourage you to be happy in the messed-up church life. Do not kick against the pricks, but gladly accept the "sonizing" process.

X. TO BE COMPLETED IN SONSHIP

Eventually, we shall be completed in sonship. The completion of sonship, the full sonship, is the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23). This means that our body will be transfigured, that is, it will also be "sonized." Our spirit has been "sonized," our soul is in the process of being "sonized," and when the Lord comes, our body also will be "sonized." That will be the completion of sonship.

XI. CONSUMMATELY, TO INHERIT ALL THAT GOD IS

Consummately, the meaning of sonship is that we shall inherit all that God is for eternity (Rev. 21:7).

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIVE

THE PRAISE OF THE GLORY OF GOD'S GRACE

In this message we shall consider the praise of the glory of God's grace (1:6). This may appear to be a very simple subject, but actually it is very difficult. We may think that we are familiar with the words praise, glory, and grace, but if we are honest, we shall admit that we do not adequately know what they mean.

Ephesians 1:6 says, "To the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He graced us in the Beloved." This verse does not stand by itself. Rather, it is the issue of predestination unto sonship mentioned in the preceding verse. This means that the praise of the glory of God's grace is the result, the issue, of the sonship. Therefore, in order to understand the praise in verse 6, we must know the sonship in verse 5. If we do not know the content of the sonship, we may merely understand verse 6 in a natural way.

I. GOD'S GRACE BEING WHAT HE IS TO US FOR OUR ENJOYMENT

What is God's grace? It is very difficult to define grace. I have been puzzled by this for many years, and even today I am still studying it. According to the New Testament, grace is what God is to us for our enjoyment (John 1:16-17; 2 Cor. 12:9; 1 Cor. 15:10). John 1:17 says that the law was given through Moses, but that grace and reality came through Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul says that he labored more than the other apostles, yet not he, but the grace of God which was with him. Galatians 2:20 is parallel to 1 Corinthians 15:10. Galatians 2:20 says, "Not I, but Christ," and 1 Corinthians 15:10 says, "Not I, but the

grace of God." This indicates that grace is Christ Himself. Other portions of the New Testament emphasize grace. For example, 2 Corinthians 13:14 says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." Furthermore, Paul opens all his Epistles with a reference to grace; he also ends them all with a word about grace. Galatians 6:18 says, "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." Second Timothy 4:22 says, "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you." In this verse Christ and grace are parallel. For the Lord Jesus Christ to be with our spirit is equal to grace being with our spirit. This indicates that grace is virtually equal to Christ. When we have Christ, we have grace. When Christ came, grace came. This is the reason John 1:17 says that grace came through Jesus Christ, indicating that grace is somewhat like a person. It is personified. This personification of grace is God Himself.

Although this may sound strange to some ears, it is nevertheless a fact. If you get into the spirit of the New Testament concerning grace, you will realize that grace is somewhat personified. When Paul said, "Not I, but the grace of God which was with me," grace was a living person to him. In Paul, a Person became the very grace to labor. Therefore, grace is actually God Himself; it is what God is to us for our enjoyment. When God is enjoyed by us, that is grace. Grace is the very God in His Son Jesus Christ to be our portion so that we may enjoy all that He is.

God is love. If we do not enjoy Him as love, we do not have grace. But if we enjoy God as love, we have grace. Again I say, grace is what God is to us as our portion for our enjoyment. We should sing not only of God's mercy enduring forever, but also of God's grace. We need to compose some songs about God being grace to us, songs to express what God is for our enjoyment. If we praise God only for His mercy, we remain on an elementary level. We need to go on from God's mercy to God's grace. Grace issues from mercy, just as high school is the continuation of

elementary school. After elementary school, we need to go on to high school. We need to go on and not remain in elementary school so long. Many of today's Christians, however, remain in the elementary grades, even though they may have been Christians for many years. Let us go on to the higher grades and praise God for His grace.

II. THE GLORY OF GOD'S GRACE BEING GOD EXPRESSED IN HIS GRACE

Now we need to consider what the glory of God's grace is. Perhaps you have read the book of Ephesians many times without noticing the phrase "the glory of His grace." Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ, the Son of God, is the effulgence of God's glory. God has a glory, and the effulgence, the shining out, of this glory is His Son. If you carefully study the subject of glory in the Bible, you will find that glory is God expressed. Whenever God is manifested, that is glory. We may use electricity as an illustration. Electricity is hidden, but when it is expressed as light, that light is the glory of electricity. Likewise, when God is hidden, we cannot see His glory. But when He is expressed, His glory is made visible. Hence, glory is God expressed. As soon as the tabernacle was erected, it was filled with the glory of God (Exo. 40:34). That glory was the expression of God. In the same principle, the Son of God came as the effulgence of the glory of God, which means that He is the expression of God. No man has ever seen God, but we have seen the glory of the only begotten Son.

The glory of God's grace is that His grace, which is Himself as our enjoyment, expresses Him. God is expressed in His grace, and His predestination is for the praise of this expression. As we receive grace and enjoy God, we have the sense of glory, although we may not have the words to express this sense. Sometimes after an excellent meeting we are full of grace and say, "That was glorious!" This is God expressed in His grace.

When we realize that we have been chosen to be holy

and predestinated to sonship; that we have the Spirit of the Son, the life of the Son, and the position of the Son; and that we shall be conformed to the image of the Son, have the completion of sonship, the redemption of our body, and inherit the full sonship, we shall say, "What a glory!" We need to consider six items prayerfully: the Spirit of the Son, the life of the Son, the position of the Son, the image of the Son, the completion of sonship, and the inheritance of sonship. If you do this, you will be in glory and praise God for the sonship.

III. THE PRAISE OF THE GLORY OF GOD'S GRACE BEING THE HIGH PRAISE OF GOD EXPRESSED IN HIS GRACE

We have seen that grace is God Himself as our enjoyment, that glory is God manifested, and that the glory of God's grace is God expressed in our enjoyment of Him. Now we must come to the most difficult aspect of this message: the meaning of praise in verse 6. What is the *praise* of the glory of God's grace? Have you ever praised God for the sonship? We, the sons of God, do not praise God very much. Usually we simply thank Him. When we say, "Praise the Lord," we often mean, "Thank the Lord." To thank God means that we have received a certain benefit and thank God for it. But when we praise God, we praise Him primarily for what He is or what He does, no matter whether or not we have received any benefits from Him. In praising God you need to forget yourself and get outside of yourself. When you are truly praising God, it seems that you do not exist. You see only God, what He is, and what He does. Therefore, you praise Him and speak well concerning Him. To use an extreme illustration, could you praise God if He sent you to hell? If you truly knew God, you would be able to say, "O God, even if You send me to hell, I will still praise You because You are God." Oh, how we need to learn to praise Him!

IV. GOD'S PREDESTINATION OF US TO SONSHIP BEING FOR THE PRAISE OF GOD'S EXPRESSION IN HIS GRACE

God's predestinating us to sonship is for the praise of His expression in His grace. Probably the angels will be the first to praise God for this. As the angels are praising

God for our sonship, the demons may be shocked and say, "Those sinners who were usurped by us have become the sons of God." Not only will the angels praise God for our sonship, but also every positive thing in the universe will praise Him. This will take place at the time of the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19). Presently the creation is groaning under bondage, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. When that takes place, the entire universe will praise God. Thus, Ephesians 1:6 will be fulfilled at the time of Romans 8:19. At that time all the positive things in the universe will praise God because the glory of God's grace will be seen in the revelation of the sons of God. We, the sons of God, may be surprised by the praises offered to God by the angels, for they will be praising God because of our sonship. This is the praise of the glory of God's grace.

Sonship means a great deal. According to Romans 8, the whole creation is waiting for the revelation of the sons of God. The liberation of creation from the bondage of corruption depends upon our revelation. To repeat, at the time of that revelation, Ephesians 1:6 will be fulfilled.

V. FOR GOD TO GRACE US BEING TO PUT US INTO THE POSITION OF GRACE AND MAKE US THE OBJECT OF HIS FAVOR

Ephesians 1:6 says that God has "graced us." The word "graced" is a very unusual expression. For God to grace us means that He has put us into the position of grace that we may be the object of His grace and favor, that is, to enjoy all God is to us. In order to receive anything, we need to be in the proper position. Thus, God has positioned us in His

grace. Having positioned us in grace, He makes us the object of grace. Here in the position of grace and as the object of grace we are fully accepted by God. Because we are in the position of grace and are the object of grace, God is pleased with us. His delight is in us, and we are happy with Him. Eventually, there is a mutual enjoyment: we enjoy Him, and He enjoys us. Here, in grace, He is our joy and satisfaction, and we are His joy and satisfaction. All this is implied in the term "graced us."

Today we are not merely under God's mercy, but we are the object of His grace in the position of grace. We are enjoying Him and becoming His enjoyment. Hence, there is a mutual delight, mutual enjoyment, and mutual satisfaction. We should no longer consider ourselves sinners, for we are no longer bound to earth or to time. Rather, we are in the heavenlies and in eternity. We are not in our condition--we are in the desire of God's heart. This is what it means to say that God has graced us. Therefore, we should no longer look at ourselves, but lift up our eyes to the heavenlies and to eternity. Instead of talking so much about ourselves and thinking about ourselves, we should speak of God's grace and think of how He has graced us.

VI. GRACED IN THE BELOVED

Finally, 1:6 says that God has graced us in the Beloved. Here Paul does not say "in Christ" or "in Him"; he says "in the Beloved." The Beloved is God's beloved Son in whom He delights (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). We have seen that for God to grace us is to make us an object in whom He delights. This is altogether a pleasure to God. In Christ we have been blessed by God with every blessing. In the Beloved we were graced, made the object of God's favor and pleasure. As such an object we enjoy God, and God enjoys us in His grace in His Beloved, who is His delight. In His Beloved we also become His delight.

God delights in the Beloved, and He delights also in us. The phrase "in the Beloved" conveys the full delight, satisfaction, and enjoyment God the Father has in us

because we have been made the object of His grace and delight. In this sense we should all appreciate ourselves and ever esteem ourselves highly because we are the object of God's delight. You should say, "Because God delights in me, I appreciate myself. I even esteem myself highly because I have been positioned in grace and made the object of God's grace." We should have such a view about ourselves, not according to our natural state, but according to the fact that we have been chosen, predestinated, regenerated, and graced. God delights in us, not in ourselves, but in His Beloved.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIX

REDEMPTION IN THE SON

In 1:3-14 there are three sections: verses 3 through 6, the Father's selection and predestination, speaking forth God's eternal purpose; verses 7 through 12, the Son's redemption, speaking forth the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose; and verses 13 and 14, the Spirit's sealing and pledging, speaking forth the application of God's accomplished purpose. First we have the Father's eternal purpose, then the Son's accomplishment of the Father's purpose, and finally the Spirit's application of what the Son has accomplished according to the Father's purpose. By this we see that the Triune God is expressed in His blessings. Through the Father's purpose, the Son's accomplishment, and the Spirit's application we become the church. In the previous messages we have covered the Father's selection and predestination. In this message we shall consider the Son's redemption, that is, redemption in the Son (1:7).

We have seen that the book of Ephesians does not speak from our condition, from the earth, or from time, but speaks from God's eternal purpose, from the heavenlies, and from eternity. Since this is the case, you may wonder why redemption is mentioned here. It is because we, God's chosen ones, became fallen. According to God's eternal purpose, we were chosen, but after creation we became fallen. Hence, there is the need of redemption. By redeeming us, the Son accomplished the Father's purpose.

Although chapter one speaks of redemption, it does not record our pitiful situation. This is fully unveiled in

chapter two. When we come to that chapter, we shall see how pitiful our situation was and how much we were in need of God's mercy. Although chapter one is altogether glorious, it nevertheless refers to our need for redemption due to the fall.

Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of His grace." Verse 7 is the continuation of verse 6. As we saw in the last message, verse 6 reveals that we have become the object of God's favor, for we have been graced in the Beloved. The phrase "in Whom" in verse 7 refers to "the Beloved" in verse 6. This means that we have been redeemed in the Beloved, in the One in whom God delights. Thus, in the eyes of God, redemption is not a pitiful matter; it is a thing to be delighted in. Although it is accurate to say that we are redeemed in Christ, it is not as delightful as saying that we are redeemed in the Beloved. The words "in the Beloved" mean in God's delight. In God's delight, the Beloved, we have redemption. This is a further indication that in chapter one there is no thought of our pitiful condition; rather, this chapter is filled with delight. We have been redeemed through the blood of God's Beloved shed on the cross for us.

According to verse 7, this redemption is the forgiveness of offenses, not the forgiveness of sins. There is a difference between offenses and sins. Because the record of chapter one is so sweet, it does not speak of sins, but of offenses. In the eyes of the Father, His chosen ones have committed some offenses which need to be forgiven. Chapter two, on the contrary, speaks of wrath and sins. In chapter one God the Father takes care of our offenses. However, even these offenses made redemption necessary, and the blood of the beloved Son of God was shed on the cross for our forgiveness. Apart from the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). Hence, there was the need of the blood. This forgiveness was according to the riches of God's grace, which He caused to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence (v. 8).

I. THE THIRD ITEM OF GOD'S BLESSING

Verses 4 and 5 reveal that we were chosen and predestinated. But after creation we became fallen. Hence, we need redemption, which God has accomplished for us in Christ through His blood. This is another item of God's blessing bestowed upon us. The first blessing is selection to be holy, the second is predestination unto sonship, and the third is redemption in the Son.

II. REDEMPTION IN GOD'S BELOVED TO FULFILL GOD'S RIGHTEOUS REQUIREMENT AND TO PLEASE GOD

Although God delights in us and has made us the objects of His grace, we still need redemption because He is the righteous God. Our Father who delights in us is righteous and cannot tolerate unrighteousness, wrongdoings, or offenses. Such things insult His righteousness. Therefore, His righteousness makes the accomplishment of redemption necessary. Redemption fulfills God's righteous requirements and pleases God. God is not only a God of love; He is also righteous, and anything unrighteous displeases Him. Everything related to Him must satisfy the requirements of His righteousness. This is the reason that, in order to please God, the beloved Son had to go to the cross to accomplish full redemption for God's chosen ones.

III. THROUGH HIS BLOOD SHED ON THE CROSS FOR OUR SINS

The Son's redemption is through His blood shed on the cross for our sins (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Because the Son's death in the flesh on the cross has fulfilled God's righteous requirement, His blood becomes the very instrument for our redemption.

IV. REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD BEING THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR OFFENSES

The Son's redemption through His blood is the

forgiveness of our offenses (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:22). Redemption is what Christ has accomplished for our offenses; forgiveness is what Christ accomplished applied to our offenses. Redemption was accomplished on the cross, whereas forgiveness is applied the moment we believe in Christ. Redemption and forgiveness are actually two ends of one thing. We have seen that the forgiveness of offenses is the redemption accomplished through the blood of Christ. However, two terms are used because this one thing has two ends: the end of the accomplishment on the cross and the end of the application to us at the time we believed. Although redemption was accomplished on the cross when Christ shed His blood, it was not applied to us at that time. The application did not take place until we believed in Christ and made confession to the righteous God. At that very moment, the Spirit of God applied to us the redemption Christ had accomplished on the cross. Hence, redemption is the accomplishment, and forgiveness is the application.

V. ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE

Verse 7 says that redemption is according to the riches of God's grace. According to our concept, it would be easy for God to forgive us because He is sovereign and almighty. However, it was not that easy. The accomplishment of redemption was a very weighty and serious matter. Because of its seriousness, it required the riches of God's grace.

Now we need to consider why redemption required the riches of God's grace. The Bible says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Therefore, in order for us to be forgiven, blood had to be shed. But in this matter the blood of animals could not avail (Heb. 10:4). The blood of the animal sacrifices was simply a shadow. For the actual accomplishment of redemption, there had to be the blood of a higher life, a blood altogether sinless. Where could God find this kind of blood among the human race? It was impossible because all men are sinful.

Among the fallen human race there is no sinless blood. Moreover, God's chosen ones number in the millions. If a sin offering were to be offered for each one, millions of sin offerings would be required. Therefore, in addition to a perfect, sinless blood, there was the need of a sin offering that could include millions. This indicates that the blood through which redemption was to be accomplished had to be not only sinless, but also all-inclusive, able to redeem the millions of God's chosen ones. Only Jesus Christ could be the sin offering with a sinless blood shed for these millions of chosen ones. By the shedding of His blood once upon the cross, the eternal redemption of God's chosen ones was accomplished once for all (Heb. 9:28; 10:10, 12).

Now we need to see how it was possible for God to obtain such a sinless and all-inclusive blood. Obtaining such a blood was vastly more difficult than creating the universe. In order to create the universe, God simply had to speak. For example, He said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Gen. 1:3). But redemption could not take place in this way. God could not simply say, "Let redemption be accomplished." In order for God to create the universe there was no need of grace. But for Him to accomplish redemption, there was the need of the riches of His grace.

Consider how the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus, was conceived. In order for the Lord Jesus to be conceived, there was the need for the Holy Spirit to contact the virgin Mary. We cannot say how the Holy Spirit conceived the Redeemer within the womb of the virgin. For this, the riches of God's grace were required. According to Luke 1:35, the child conceived in Mary of the Holy Spirit was called the "holy thing." This indicates that the conception of the Lord Jesus was absolutely a holy matter. (Holiness refers to something conceived of the Holy Spirit.) For nine months this "holy thing" remained in Mary's womb. Who can tell how much grace this called for? What grace was needed for Jesus, Jehovah the Savior, to remain there in the womb for nine months!

Until the age of thirty, the Lord Jesus worked as a carpenter. Great grace was required for the One called Emmanuel, God with us, to work as a carpenter for so many years. Eventually, He came forth to begin His ministry, which lasted three and a half years. Although He was concerned for sinners, they opposed Him, persecuted Him, and plotted to kill Him. Betrayed by one of His Apostles, He was arrested. Actually, He was not arrested, but handed Himself over to those who came for Him. He could have asked the Father to send twelve legions of angels to rescue Him, but He refrained from doing so (Matt. 26:53). After He was arrested, He was tried before the high priest, before Pilate, and before Herod. Then He was nailed to the cross and hung there for six hours, from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. What great grace was needed for all this! On the cross the Lord Jesus died for our sins. Then He was buried, resurrected, and ascended into heaven to receive repentance and forgiveness (Acts 5:31). Because of the riches of God's grace, we are able to repent and receive forgiveness of sins. Do not think that your repentance originated with you. No, God the Father gave repentance to the Son, the Redeemer, and He gave it to you through the Spirit. Along with repentance, we have received forgiveness. All this is according to the riches of His grace. How limitless and immeasurable is God's grace!

A. God's Abundant Grace Having Accomplished Redemption for Us and Applied Forgiveness to Us

God's abundant grace has accomplished redemption for us and has applied forgiveness to us. Through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ, redemption has been accomplished. After ascending into the heavens and receiving repentance and forgiveness, He now applies forgiveness to us. This is according to the riches of God's grace.

B. Redemption and Forgiveness Being according to God's Righteousness, but Accomplished and Applied by God's Rich Grace

Both redemption and forgiveness are according to God's righteousness, but they are accomplished and applied by God's rich grace. This means that both God's righteousness, which is God's way of doing things, and grace, which is God Himself dispensed into His chosen people, have been exercised to the uttermost.

VI. GOD'S GRACE BEING MADE TO ABOUND TO US

Ephesians 1:8 says that God's grace has been "caused to abound to us." God's grace is not only rich, but also abounding. Many Christians know about "amazing grace," but not about abounding grace. It takes revelation to know God's abounding grace. His abounding grace has made us an inheritance to God (v. 11) and has qualified us to inherit all that God is (v. 14). In other words, this abounding grace makes us God's inheritance on the one hand and makes God our inheritance on the other hand. This is something far greater than sinners merely being saved and going to heaven. This concept, the concept of being saved for heaven, is rather natural. We need to see the abounding grace that makes us an inheritance to God and qualifies us to inherit all that God is.

VII. IN ALL WISDOM AND PRUDENCE

Verse 8 says that the riches of God's grace have been caused to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence. Wisdom is what is within God to plan and purpose a will concerning us; prudence is the application of God's wisdom. God firstly planned and purposed in His wisdom, and then He applied what He had planned and purposed for us with prudence. Wisdom was mainly related to God's plan in eternity, and prudence is mainly related to God's execution of His plan in time. What God planned in eternity in His wisdom, He is now executing in time in His prudence.

In God's prudence He has brought us to Himself and into His recovery. Now, through the exercise of His prudence, He is applying to us all that He planned in eternity regarding us.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVEN

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

Verses 3 through 14 of Ephesians chapter one are actually one long sentence. Therefore, we should not isolate any verse, clause, or phrase from the whole sentence. Verse 5 says that God has predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. The praise of the glory of God's grace spoken of in verse 6 is the issue of the sonship in verse 5. Sonship is altogether a matter of grace. God's grace makes us sons of God. The Spirit of the Son, the life of the Son, the position of the Son, the image of the Son, the completion of sonship, and the inheritance of all that God is in the sonship are all matters of grace. As we have pointed out, grace is God Himself. God Himself has come to accomplish everything for us that we may be His sons with the full sonship. With this grace God has graced us in the Beloved (v. 6).

Verse 7 reveals that God's grace has accomplished redemption for us and has applied forgiveness to us. The accomplishment of redemption began with Christ's incarnation and continued through His ascension. When He ascended to the heavens, redemption was fully accomplished. In His ascension God gave Him repentance and forgiveness to pour out through the coming of the Spirit (Acts 5:31). The coming of the Spirit refers to Christ's descension. Beginning at the time of His descension, repentance and forgiveness were brought down to earth and poured out upon God's chosen ones. As a result, we have repentance; repentance has been poured into our heart. After repentance came forgiveness. Through the accomplishment of redemption and the application of forgiveness, we have been regenerated to

become sons of God. All this is according to the riches of God's grace.

Even more of God's grace is revealed in verse 8, which says that God has caused His grace to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence. Then verse 9 says, "Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself." Verse 10 speaks of the heading up of all things in Christ, and verse 11, of the fact that we have been made an inheritance, "having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One Who operates all things according to the counsel of His will." God's abounding grace has made us God's inheritance, God's possession. Verse 14 indicates that we also shall have an inheritance. By God's grace we are made His inheritance, and by His grace He is made our inheritance. What abounding grace! Verses 3 through 14 are filled with God's well-speaking concerning us. These verses also need to be our well-speaking concerning Him.

The phrase "the praise of His glory" is found three times in this portion of the Word, in verses 6, 12, and 14. Each time it is used as a conclusion to the well-speaking of the Triune God. In verse 6 it is a conclusion of the well-speaking of God the Father; in verse 12, of the well-speaking of God the Son; and in verse 14, of the well-speaking of God the Spirit. The three uses of this phrase point to the Three of the Godhead in His well-speaking.

I. THE MYSTERY HAVING BEEN HIDDEN THROUGH THE AGES

In this message we come to the mystery of God's will. God's will has a mystery, a mystery that has been hidden through the ages (3:5; Col. 1:26). The universe is a mystery. Why is there a heaven, and why does the earth exist? Why are there so many millions of items in the universe? Why is man here on earth? All these questions are mysteries and have given rise to many different philosophies. The mystery, which is the will of God, has been made known to the church through the apostles. A will is an intention, and the will of God is God's intention. God's intention is intimately related to the desire of His

heart. Thus, the mystery of the universe is a matter of God's

will, which is related to the desire of God's heart. We need to know the mystery, the will of God, and the desire of God's heart.

Some may say that God's will and intention is to have the church and that the church is the desire of His heart. This is correct, but we need to ask what the church is. Many Christians, including Christian teachers, do not have a clear understanding concerning the church. The church is not simply a group of people. In ourselves we are not the church; we are pitiful sinners. The only way we can become the church is for God in His Son to work Himself into our being. Most Christians today do not see the crucial and vital matter that God in His Son is working Himself into His chosen and redeemed ones. They may know about God's selection and redemption, and they may realize that they are the chosen and redeemed ones. But they do not see that the very God who has chosen and redeemed them desires, in the Person of the Son, to work Himself into them. Neither selection nor redemption is the goal. Both are steps toward the goal. God's goal is to work Himself into our being.

I realize that such a word may sound strange to many. For years I was in various branches of Christianity: fundamental Christianity, the Brethren Assemblies, the inner life practices, and the Pentecostal movement. But I was never told that in the Person of the Son, God is working Himself into His redeemed ones. Nevertheless, this is the mystery of the universe.

The New Testament proves that God is working Himself into us. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in us (Eph. 4:6; 2 Cor. 13:5; John 14:17). According to 1 John, we are in God, and God is in us (4:15). Furthermore, we abide in Him, and He abides in us (John 15:4). In Philippians 1:21 the Apostle Paul could even say, "To me to live is Christ." In Galatians 2:20 he said that he lived no longer, but that Christ lived in him. All these verses indicate that God in the Son is working Himself into us.

A proper understanding of the church also reveals the same truth. The Bible says that the church is the Body of

Christ. Some Christians, however, take this not as a fact, or reality, but merely as an illustration. How terrible! The church *is* the Body of Christ, the Head of which is Christ Himself (Col. 1:18). Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 12:12 reveals that the Body is Christ. Thus, Christ is not only the Head, but also the Body. This indicates that God is being wrought into us who are the members of the Body. This is also proved by the illustration of the vine in John 15. In John 15:5 the Lord Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." Is not the vine in the branches? Certainly it is! This is the reason the Lord says, "Abide in Me and I in you" (John 15:4). Whatever the vine is, is in the branches. As branches of the vine and as members of the Body of Christ, whatever Christ is, is in us. This means that we have been made parts of Christ. Are not the branches of the vine parts of the vine? Yes, they are. Therefore, we must have the boldness to say, "I am a part of Christ." Because the believers are parts of Christ, Paul could say that to him to live was Christ.

The mystery of the universe is the church, and the church is a group of people into whom God is working Himself. Eventually, the church will be fully saturated with God and will consummately become the holy city, the New Jerusalem. The church will not only be saturated with God, but also mingled with Him. This does not mean, however, that we shall become the Godhead. No, this is neither what we say nor what we mean. Nevertheless, as those who are being saturated with God and mingled with Him, we shall become the very expression of God. The New Jerusalem will be the corporate expression of God. As we have pointed out a number of times, both God on the throne (Rev. 4:3) and the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:11) have the appearance of jasper. This means that the entire city has the appearance of God and is the expression of God. This is the mystery of the universe.

What a deliverance it would be for Christians if they could only see this! Many know only about being saved, being regenerated, becoming the children of God, and going to heaven some day. But the concept of being saved

for the goal of going to heaven is much lower than the mystery of God's will. The mystery of God's will is to have a church constituted with those who have been saturated and mingled with God.

When some of you hear this definition of the church, you may say, "I have been in the church for many years, but I have never seen a church that matches this description." The reason for this is that we are still "cooking" in the "kitchen" of the messed-up church life. During this time of "cooking" we need to be patient. Actually, the "cooking" is the abounding grace.

Many have come to me saddened about the condition of the church in their locality. They have told me that they can no longer tolerate this particular situation. Whether we feel that we can bear the situation or not, we must bear it. This is the "cooking" and the "baking" in the church life. The church life today is a "cooking" church life. Do not be disappointed about the situation, and do not look at the church only from the angle of the problems. Everyone in the church has a portion of Christ, for Christ has been wrought into us. Whether you are happy or unhappy, I am certain that some amount of Christ has been wrought into you since you came into the church life. No matter what you do, that portion of Christ remains in you because it has been wrought into you. I am comforted by seeing the portion of Christ that has been wrought into all the saints. I rejoice to see that the saints have more of Christ today than they did some years ago. Although we may not always be happy with the church life, Christ is nevertheless being wrought into us. What a mystery!

The mystery of the universe is that God is working Himself into us. Everything is working together for this purpose (Rom. 8:28). All things serve this goal. Everything is for God's working of Himself into our being. This is much different from merely having a happy life. You may be very happy today, but not tomorrow. You may be happy in a meeting, but when you return home, your wife or husband may give you a difficult time. The mystery of God's will is not that we are becoming happy people. Today is not

the time for us to be fully happy, because the time is not yet ripe. Because many do not have the adequate vision or revelation, they do not know what is actually taking place in the church life. They think that we are simply here to have a good time. But this is not the mystery of God's will. This mystery is that God is dispensing Himself into us to produce the church for Himself. This is a mystery hidden through the ages.

II. GOD'S WILL BEING GOD'S INTENTION TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT HE DESIRES FOR HIMSELF

God's will is God's intention to accomplish what He has purposed in eternity past and what He desires for Himself for eternity future. He purposed and He desires to have the church. This is His will and intention.

III. THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL HAVING BEEN MADE KNOWN TO US BY REVELATION

Ephesians 1:9 says that God has made known to us the mystery of His will. To make known to us the mystery of His will is one item of God's wisdom and prudence. In eternity God planned a will. This will has been hidden in Him; hence, it was a mystery. In His wisdom and prudence He has made this hidden mystery known to us through His revelation in Christ, that is, through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. It was the pleasure of God's heart to reveal to us the mystery of His will.

IV. ACCORDING TO GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE

God's good pleasure is the desire of His heart, that is, to have the church, and God's revelation of His hidden will is according to this desire of His heart. This is according to His good pleasure.

V. GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE HAVING BEEN PURPOSED BY GOD

A. In Himself

God's good pleasure has been purposed by God in Himself. This means that God Himself is the initiation,

origination, and sphere of His eternal purpose. God has a plan, a desire, and according to His plan, He has a purpose. The existence of the universe is according to God's purpose. Heaven, earth, millions of items, and the human race are all according to God's purposed desire. Eventually, all these things will issue in God's desire. In the universe there is a desire, God's desire. Because this desire has been purposed by God, no one and nothing can overthrow it. Everything that takes place on earth is for this purpose. We, the sons of God, in whom God's grace abounds, are the focal point of His purpose, and everything is working for us. God has purposed this desire in Himself. He did not take counsel with anyone else regarding it.

B. For an Administration

God's good pleasure is what He has purposed in Himself for an administration (v. 10). The entire universe will eventually be under one administration. The Greek word rendered "administration" is *oikonomia*, from which we get the English word economy. God has purposed to have an economy. All the kingdoms in the universe--the angelic kingdom, the demonic kingdom, the human kingdom, the animal kingdom, and the plant kingdom--are for this economy, this administration, and are moving toward it. For example, today's world situation, the center of which is the Middle East, is according to the Bible. Since the reformation of the nation of Israel in 1948 and especially since the return of Jerusalem to Israel in 1967, the Middle East has become the center of international relations. This is altogether according to the Bible, and it is a sign that the universe is moving toward God's administration. Such an administration is what God has planned and purposed according to His desire. All the kingdoms will be under this unique administration, which is to head up all things in Christ.

At present, the universe is in a state of collapse. Instead of being headed up, it is a heap. The collapse was brought about through two rebellions, Satan's rebellion and Adam's rebellion. Before the creation of the human race,

God made an archangel, who later became Satan, the head of all creatures. But that archangel rebelled against God. Then God created the human race and made Adam the head of all created things. According to Genesis 1, God put all things created by Him under Adam. This indicates that Adam was the head. Adam, however, was seduced to rebel against God. Thus, by the angelic rebellion and the human rebellion, the universe collapsed into a heap. This is the reason that today's human society and creation itself are such a mess. Everywhere there is nothing but rebellion. Even the mosquitoes are rebellious against man. This illustrates the fact that the universe is filled with the fighting caused by rebellion. Nevertheless, God has purposed to bring in His administration to head up all things in Christ.

At this point, we need to ask a question. Does the body support the head or does the head uphold the body? The answer is that the head upholds the body. This is proved by the fact that if a person's head is cut off, the body falls to the ground. Hence, the body is upheld by the head. In like manner, the church life is a life of being headed up. If we truly want to have a glorious church, we must be willing to be headed up. All around us, at school, at work, and in the government, we see nothing but a state of collapse; nothing is headed up. But in the proper church life we are being headed up. This heading up in the church life is the beginning of God's heading up of all things. Under Christ and through the church, God will head up all things in the universe. This is the mystery of God's will. Ultimately, the mystery of God's will in the universe is to head up all things in Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHT

TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

(1)

In this message we come to the heading up of all things in Christ. To many of us, this may be an altogether new thought. Ephesians 1:10 says, "Unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him." Instead of "to head up all things in Christ," the King James Version says, "He might gather together in one all things in Christ." This translation is inadequate. In Greek, the word translated "to head up" is a verbal form of the noun "head." The proper translation of this verse is, "To head up all things in Christ."

GOD'S ABOUNDING GRACE WORKING TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS

Verses 9 and 10 should not be isolated from the preceding verses, for verses 3 through 14 are actually one long sentence. Because verses 9 and 10 are not independent sentences, we need to refer to verses 7 and 8, which speak of the riches of God's grace and of the grace which He has caused to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence. If you read these four verses together, you will see that everything in them is related to the abounding grace. The abounding grace does so much for us. For instance, it makes us God's inheritance, and it makes God our inheritance. In a family the children are the father's inheritance. A man may be very wealthy, but if he has no children, he is actually poor and may think of himself as having nothing. This indicates that a father's inheritance is

his children. According to the Bible, the more children we have, the richer we are. Nothing can compare with them. As the sons of God, we are God's inheritance. The abounding grace makes us the sons of God and His inheritance. It will also make God our inheritance. In a family, not only are the children the inheritance of the father, but also the father is the inheritance of the children. Many children would testify that they would rather lose anything else than lose their father. The living father is the best inheritance. We are in the process of becoming God's inheritance, and He is in the process of becoming our inheritance. This is made possible by God's abounding grace.

The matter of the mutual inheritance, however, is not the end, for as verses 9 and 10 indicate, the abounding grace will accomplish the heading up of all things in Christ. By the abounding grace certain things are taking place in the universe to bring about the heading up of all things in Christ. We need to see how the abounding grace is working this out.

Before we consider this, we need to say a word about the church people in the Lord's recovery. Although we are small in number, we are the most important people on earth, more important than government leaders, military leaders, or leaders in industry. Most Christians, however, have not seen the vision that the grace that has accomplished redemption, applied forgiveness, and regenerated us and that now is operating in us to make us God's inheritance and to make Him ours is also working to head up all things in Christ. Christian preachers and teachers do not speak of this, and Christian books do not mention it. They do not cover the crucial point that the abounding grace is working on the church people so that all things might be headed up in Christ.

THE ISSUE OF MANY ITEMS

We have seen that the heading up of all things is mentioned in verse 10. But this verse does not stand alone;

it is the continuation of verses 3 through 9. This indicates that the heading up of all things is the issue of all the items covered in verses 3 through 9: selection, predestination, the praise of the glory of God's grace, being graced in the Beloved, having redemption and forgiveness, and having God's grace abound to us in all wisdom and prudence. Verse 9 speaks of the mystery of God's will according to the good pleasure which He purposed in Himself. Then we have verse 10, which speaks of the heading up of all things in Christ. The infinitive "to head up" in verse 10 is related to all the preceding things in the foregoing verses. This means that God chose us that He may head up all things in Christ. He predestinated us unto sonship that He may head up all things in Christ. He accomplished redemption for us through the blood of Christ in order to head up all things in Christ. God has graced us and caused grace to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence that He may head up all things in Christ. The heading up of all things in Christ is the issue of all these things.

THE CONSUMMATE GOAL

Many Christians have never realized that God has chosen us, predestinated us, redeemed us, forgiven us, and graced us for the purpose of heading up all things in Christ. Have you ever realized that you were chosen and predestinated so that God might head up all things? Have you ever considered that God redeemed you and forgave you of your sins in order to head up all things? Christians may know a great deal about God's selection and predestination without knowing how these are related to the heading up of all things in Christ. We ourselves may not even be clear about this. We are accustomed to saying that God's goal is neither holiness nor spirituality, but the church. But the ultimate goal is not even the church; it is the heading up of all things in Christ. Yes, the church is the goal, but not the consummate goal, the goal in the last stage. Rather, it is the goal in the first stage. The consummate goal is the heading up of all things in Christ.

This concept is found only in Ephesians 1:10, not in any other verse in the Bible.

God has made Christ the Head over all things (v. 22). Through all the dispensations of God in all the ages, all things will be headed up in Christ in the new heaven and new earth. This will be God's eternal administration and economy.

THE CHURCH SHARING THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

In order to head up all things in Christ, God firstly heads up His chosen ones. Therefore, the church life is a life of being headed up. Ephesians 1:22 and 23 say, "And He subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things *to* the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One Who fills all in all." Verse 22 says that God gave Christ to be the Head over all things. This indicates that He is not merely the Head of the church, but over all things. God gave Christ to be the Head over all things to the church. The little word "to" implies transmission. It indicates that Christ's headship is being transmitted to the church. This means that, in a sense, we can share the headship of Christ over all things. Although we are not the head, we can share the headship. To put it another way, we are not the king, but we can share the kingship.

The church can share the headship of Christ because the church is the Body of Christ. The King is not just the Head, but the Head with the Body. Christ is not only the Head, but also the Body (1 Cor. 12:12). Because the church is the Body and because Christ is both the Head and the Body, we may say that, in a sense, we, the Body, are also Christ. Although we are not the Head, we can share Christ's headship. We are the Body of the Head, and the Head is the head over all things. We are not only head over insects, cats, and dogs, but also over presidents, kings, generals, and industrial leaders. We are over them all. Is the President of the United States under us, or are we under him? In a very real sense, he is under us. In saying

this, I am not promoting revolution; I am simply relating the spiritual fact that we, the members of the Body of Christ, are above all things. The church is under nothing but Christ Himself; we are above everything else because we are the Body of the One who is over all things. Do you have the confidence to say that you are above the President of the United States and the Queen of England? Probably you do not have this confidence. However, I can say honestly that if I were brought into the presence of the President of the United States, I would have the sense that I am above him. In saying this I am not proud; rather, I simply am conscious of the spiritual fact.

THE HEAP OF COLLAPSE

The reason you may not have the confidence concerning this is that you yourself are not headed up. You have been saved and you have come into the church, but you have not yet been headed up. On the contrary, you are still in the universal heap of collapse, the collapse in the universe caused by rebellion. Due to the two rebellions, the angelic rebellion and the human rebellion, the whole universe is in a state of collapse. In God's eyes there is no order on earth; instead, there is a heap caused by the collapse. Suppose a tall building suddenly collapses into a heap. In this heap some parts are higher than others. Likewise, in the collapse caused by rebellion certain people, such as the President or other heads of government, are above others. In the collapse the President of the United States is, of course, higher than we are. Nevertheless, all the world leaders are still in the collapse.

I can testify that by the Lord's grace I am no longer in the collapse; I have been rescued from it. To be rescued from the collapse is to be headed up. Hallelujah, I have been headed up! Because I have been headed up in Christ, I have been brought out of the heap caused by the universal collapse. Hence, I am higher than all those who remain in the collapse. Have you been headed up in Christ? Have you been rescued from the heap of rebellion? We all

need to be delivered from the collapse and headed up in Christ.

The entire universe is a heap of collapse caused by rebellion. God created the universe in an excellent order, but an archangel, the head of the age before Adam, rebelled and became Satan. (See Isaiah 14.) Satan's rebellion caused the first collapse in the universe. In Genesis 1 God came in to restore the creation that had been ruined by this rebellion. Actually, chapter one of Genesis is not primarily a record of creation, but of restoration. In the restored universe God created man and made him the head of creation. But this man, Adam, fell. This was the second rebellion that led to the second collapse. As a result of these two rebellions, the whole universe has become a heap of collapse. Again I say, in this heap some people are higher than others, but all remain in the collapse.

GOD'S ETERNAL INTENTION

God's eternal intention is to head up all things in Christ, who has been appointed to be the universal Head. The first step God takes to accomplish this is to head up His chosen ones in Him. One by one, God rescues His people from the heap caused by the universal collapse. Most Christians, however, do not realize that this is what God is doing and do not pray about it. Instead, they have the natural concept that man is fallen and needs to be rescued from hell. According to the Bible, God's salvation is not primarily to save us from hell; it is to save us from the heap of collapse. God has brought us out of the universal collapse and has placed us under the unique Head, Christ. Because of the angelic rebellion and the human rebellion, none of the created beings is under any head. There is simply no headship in the universe. But Ephesians 1:10 says that all things are to be headed up in Christ. Most of today's government leaders do not care for Christ; they are not under the headship of Christ. Since this is the situation, how can Christ be the Head over all things? God is endeavoring to head up all things in Christ. He is

working to bring every item in the universal collapse back to the headship of Christ.

THE CHURCH TAKING THE LEAD TO BE HEADED UP

As we have seen, the first step is for God to bring His chosen ones, His sons, out of the collapse and to place them under the headship of Christ. Here, under the headship of Christ, we are outside of the heap of the universal collapse, and we are over all things. Thus, the church life must be a life of being headed up. In the church life it is God's chosen ones, not the world leaders, the unbelievers, or the animals, that are being headed up. God is heading up all His chosen ones to be the Body of Christ with Christ as the Head. Eventually, this Body with Christ as the Head will be the universal Head over all things. Today we in the church are taking the lead to be headed up in Christ. If we are not willing to be headed up in the church life, we shall delay the heading up of all things. In fact, God will not have a way to accomplish the heading up of all things in Christ if we, the chosen ones, are not willing to be headed up. But if we are willing for this, God will say with joy, "These are the pioneers who are taking the lead to be headed up. They are pioneering the way for Me to head up all things in Christ." When the church takes the lead to be headed up in Christ, God has a way to head up all other things.

THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS

We have seen that because of the two rebellions, everything in God's creation is in a heap of collapse. There is no proper headship. For example, there is no headship in the animal kingdom. Instead, the animals fight against one another. There is not even harmony in the plant kingdom. The same is true of the human life: nations fight against nations, people against people, and race against race. But the Bible clearly reveals that when the millennium comes, all nations will cease fighting. Today there is a great deal of negotiation about the limitation of weapons, but in the

millennium there will be no weapons at all. Speaking of the millennium, Isaiah 2:4 says, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Regarding the situation in the animal kingdom during the millennium, Isaiah 11:6 says, "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together." This indicates that all the animals will be headed up and live together peaceably. Furthermore, Isaiah 55:12 says, "All the trees of the field shall clap their hands," singing together in harmony in praise to God. Psalm 96:12 and 13 declare, "Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord." This is a description of the situation when everything is headed up in Christ. When this takes place, there will be absolute peace and harmony in the human kingdom, the animal kingdom, and the plant kingdom because everything will have been fully rescued out of the heap of collapse. This rescue out of the collapse is called "the restoration of all things" (Acts 3:21, Gk.). This restoration begins with our being headed up in the church life.

THE SO-CALLED CHURCH BEING A HEAP

However, even in the so-called church there is no heading up. Not only the universe and human society are in a state of collapse, but even the so-called church is in the same condition. By God's grace, we all must say, "Lord, we are here to take the lead to be headed up. Lord, head us up in Christ. We don't want to remain in the heap of collapse. We have to be rescued from the collapse by being headed up in You." After you have been brought out of the collapse, you will be above all things. Until this happens, you will not have the confidence to say that you are above the President. It is possible to be saved, but still remain in the heap because you are not headed up. Oh, may our eyes be opened to see the revelation here in the book of Ephesians!

Many Christians are talking about the church, but in their talk the word "church" has become meaningless. In the book of Ephesians, however, the church means a great deal. But if you do not know what it is to be headed up in Christ, you cannot know what the church is. The church is not a heap of fallen people who are still in the collapse. The church is the heading up of God's chosen ones under the headship of Christ. In contrast to the genuine church, today's Christianity is a heap. Wherever you go in Christianity, you see one heap after another. The reason there are so many heaps in the denominations or in the independent Christian groups is that, just as in human society, there is no heading up. But in the proper church life we are being headed up in Christ.

A MATTER OF GROWING IN LIFE

It is important to see that the heading up in the church is a matter in life. If we try to be headed up without growing in life, we shall fall into organization. To head up all things in the church without the growth in life is simply to have an organization. The proper heading up is the growing of life. The more you grow in life, the more life you will have, the more heading up there will be, and the more you will be rescued from the heap of collapse. No human hand or organization can accomplish this. No human effort can help the heading up in the church life. I cannot help you, and you cannot help me. The only thing that avails is the growth in life. Oh, we need to grow and help others to grow! We need to minister the supply of life to one another to help one another grow. The heading up in the church life is altogether dependent upon the growth in life.

I would impress you again with the fact that the entire universe is in a state of collapse. We have been saved not only from the fallen, sinful condition, but also from the heap of collapse. Now in order to be delivered from the collapse in a practical way, we need to grow in life. The more we grow, the more we come out of the collapse.

BY LIGHT

The heading up in the church life also takes place by light (Rev. 21:23-25). This light, of course, is not the light of knowledge, but the light of life. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." The light here shines out from the life in which we grow. When we grow in life, we have the light of life. Under this light, everything is kept in order. If instead of life and light we have death and darkness, we are still in the collapse. Wherever death and darkness are, there is the collapse. All of human society, including today's Christianity, is nothing but death and darkness and, hence, a heap of collapse. But because we are full of life and are under light, we are not a heap. Because we are in life and because all our movements are in light, there is no confusion. Although today's Christianity is a heap of collapse in death and darkness, we in the church life are in life and under light. With life and light we are being headed up.

We have seen that the church takes the lead to be headed up in Christ. Eventually, the millennium will come and, following that, the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem. In the new heaven and new earth all things will be headed up in Christ. In the New Jerusalem there will be no death and no night; instead, everything will be saturated with life and be under light. With the New Jerusalem as the center, all things in the new heaven and the new earth will be headed up. At that time Ephesians 1:10 will be completely fulfilled. Then we shall realize that Christ is the Head over all things to the church, His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. Today we in the church life are taking the lead to be headed up in Christ. For this we need to grow in life and have the light of life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE NINE

TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

(2)

In this message we shall give a further word on the heading up of all things in Christ. Ephesians 1:9 and 10 say, "Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him." The Greek word rendered "unto" at the beginning of verse 10 can also be rendered "in order to have." Thus, that portion can be translated, "according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself in order to have a dispensation of the fullness of the times."

The dispensation which God purposed in Himself is to head up all things in Christ at the fullness of the times. The times refer to the ages. When the new heaven and the new earth come after all the dispensations of God in all the ages have been completed, that will be the fullness of the times. The word "dispensation" is also found in 3:2, "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward." The dispensation of the grace of God means the administration of the grace of God.

GOD'S ETERNAL PLAN

In order to understand what the dispensation of the grace of God is, we need to see that in eternity past God purposed a plan. According to this plan, He created the universe with the heavens, the earth, and billions of items. He then created mankind as the center of the universe to

be a vessel to contain God for God's expression. This word is brief, but it covers the whole Bible. Man was created not to be an instrument, but a vessel to contain God so that God may be expressed from within man. This is God's eternal plan, His eternal purpose.

SATAN BRINGING DEATH TO GOD'S CREATION

In His wisdom God allowed an archangel to rebel. Without God's permission, no rebellion could ever take place. Not even the rebellion among the angels could happen without God's permission. God allowed one of His angels to rebel against Him. This was according to God's wisdom. Satan's rebellion serves in the same way as the black background of a painting that makes the main object all the more outstanding.

The book of Genesis reveals that Satan came to inject himself into man, who was the center of the universe. When Satan injected himself into man, Satan became death and darkness to man. Whenever Satan comes to us or into our home, there is death and darkness. The result of this death and darkness is a collapse. A person who is full of life can stand upright. But when the power of death has been injected into him, he falls down; he collapses. Instead of being headed up, he collapses into a heap. As we pointed out in the foregoing message, the entire universe, including mankind, is a heap of collapse caused by Satan injecting himself as the factor of death into God's creation. Satan has brought death to the entire creation of God. All of creation has been infected by the death factor of Satan. This is the reason that Romans 8:20 and 21 say that the creation has been subjected to vanity and is under the slavery of corruption.

In order to inject a substance into a person's body, there is no need to inject it into every part. Instead, the injection is made at a certain spot, and then the substance spreads throughout the body. Likewise, Satan injected himself into man, the center of the universe, and from man

Satan's poison has spread everywhere. Therefore, not only is man subject to death, but also every living thing is subject to it. Whenever any living thing dies, it collapses. The element of death has spread into every part of God's creation, causing the creation to collapse into a heap.

The collapse of the universe gives God an excellent opportunity to manifest His wisdom. Without such a situation of death and collapse, God's wisdom could not be fully manifested. Through the church God's manifold wisdom will be expressed. The collapse caused by Satan's injection of the factor of death into man serves as the black background to make God's wisdom all the more glorious.

Satan's way is always to act ahead of God. This is a principle in the Bible. Whenever God wants to do something, Satan acts first. For example, the Bible reveals that God's intention is to build a city, the New Jerusalem. But the first city was a counterfeit one built by Satan. Likewise, God's intention is to impart Himself into man and to work Himself into man. But before God did this, His enemy, Satan, came in to do a counterfeit work by injecting himself into man. After God created man, He placed him in front of the tree of life. This indicates that God desired man to take Him in. God is never in a hurry; He is always willing to wait. Satan, on the contrary, is always in a rush. We need to learn from this that anything that we do hurriedly is probably not of God, but of Satan. Before God dispensed Himself into man, Satan injected himself into man, the center of God's creation, and thereby caused the entire creation to collapse. Now instead of life, there is death everywhere: in the offices, factories, businesses, schools, and even in the so-called churches. Because death is everywhere and in everything, everything is in a state of collapse. This is the background of God's working Himself into man.

MAN BEING A BATTLEFIELD

God has come to work Himself into man, not into man as originally created by Him, but into the man whom

Satan has injected with himself. Because both Satan and God are in man, man has become a battlefield between God and Satan. Originally, God and Satan were fighting in the universe, but now they are fighting within man. Do you realize that you are a battlefield and that a war is raging within between God and Satan? As Christians, we have a war raging within us. The factor of death is fighting against the factor of life, and the factor of life is conquering, subduing, and swallowing up the factor of death.

The use of antibiotics illustrates this. When an antibiotic gets into our bodies, it fights against the germs. Jesus Christ is the best antibiotic. From the day we received Him, a war has been raging within us. Day after day Christ, the heavenly antibiotic, kills the germs. Because the poison of death had been injected into us, we collapsed into a heap. But when Christ came in, the factor of life came in with Him, and gradually we began to rise up, not by being taught, but by taking the factor of life into our being. The more life we receive, the more we rise up. However, even after we have received Christ, the enemy may inject still more of the factor of death into us and cause us to collapse once again. At such a time, we need a further injection of the heavenly antibiotic.

RISING UP AND BECOMING ATTACHED

The collapse comes from the factor of death, and the rising up comes from the factor of life. When the factor of death causes a collapse, all the parts of our being become detached from one another. This is illustrated by the dry bones in Ezekiel 37. When those bones were dead and dry, they were detached. But when the breath entered into them, they became living, they rose up, and they were attached (Ezek. 37:4-10). This rising up and attaching is actually the heading up. Formerly, the bones were piled in a heap, each of them detached from the body. But when the breath of life entered into these dead bones, they firstly rose up and then became attached to one another. After

this they became a body, and even an army. This is what it means to be headed up.

We should not take this merely as a doctrine, but consider it in the light of our experience. Many of us can testify that we used to be detached and in the heap caused by the universal collapse. But one day the factor of life came into us, and we rose up and became attached. After coming into the church life, we had the deep sense that we were more and more upright and that we were becoming more attached. This is the heading up in Christ. A number of times, however, the power of death has worked even in the church to inject the factor of death into the members of the church. When the factor of death gets into certain members, they are poisoned and spread the poison of death to others. Once again these dear ones collapse into a heap and are thus far removed from being headed up. But, praise the Lord, the factor of life eventually reaches them again! When the breath of life is breathed into them and the factor of life enters into them, they rise up once more, become reattached, and experience being headed up.

A STEWARDSHIP AND A HOUSEHOLD ARRANGEMENT

With Satan's injection there is no administration because his injection is illegal. Nothing that is illegal or rebellious has an administration. However, a legally constituted government has an administration. Although Satan's injection has no administration, God's working of Himself into us does have an administration. But this administration is not according to our natural concept. The Greek word which can be rendered "administration" in 1:10, *oikonomia*, is difficult to translate. It can also be rendered "stewardship" or "household arrangement." The anglicized form of this word is economy. I like dispensation, stewardship, and household arrangement better than administration, although administration can be used in 1:10 because eventually the dispensation, the stewardship, the household arrangement will become an eternal administration.

The government in Washington, D. C., is an administration, but it is not a dispensation, a stewardship, or a household arrangement. A household arrangement is sweet, and a stewardship is intimate. According to ancient custom, there was a steward in the royal family, and his ministry was called a stewardship. Hence, the stewardship is simply the service of a steward. A steward was not a mere slave, but a person intimately related to the family, one who took care of the household arrangement. Such a stewardship, such a household arrangement, was the best administration. But today's concept of administration does not have this thought of intimacy or sweetness. Nevertheless, God's administration as a household arrangement is sweet and as a stewardship is intimate.

THE DISPENSING OF GOD AS GRACE

The stewardship, moreover, involves a dispensation. Dispensation here refers not to an age, but to a dispensing. For example, a mother dispenses food to her children every morning at breakfast. As the children sit down at the table, the mother dispenses nourishing food for them to eat. In such a dispensation a proper control is always exercised. If a child misbehaves, the mother may say, "If you don't behave, there will be no breakfast for you." Thus, the dispensation of food is the best control. I have observed this with my own grandchildren, who obey their grandmother better than they obey me, because she is the one who dispenses treats to them. Because she does the dispensing, she can very easily and pleasantly control them. She controls them by means of a sweet dispensation, a dispensation that is also a kind of administration and intimate service. The heading up of all things in Christ does not take place by a governmental administration. On the contrary, it comes about by a sweet stewardship, by an intimate household arrangement, by a pleasant dispensation. It takes place through the dispensing of the abundant life supply of the Triune God into us. The Apostle

Paul calls this a "dispensation of the grace of God" (3:2), a stewardship of the grace of God.

We have seen that Satan's injection has no administration or stewardship because he subtly injects himself into us. But God is working Himself into His chosen ones by a sweet, intimate stewardship. Paul's ministry was such a stewardship. It was a model of the dispensation of grace, of the dispensing of God as grace into His chosen ones. By this dispensation of grace, the dispensing of God Himself as our enjoyment, the factor of life is ministered into the chosen ones. As the life factor gets into them, they are raised up and attached to Christ in the Body. This is the dispensation that heads up all things in Christ.

After the fall of man, God's dispensation came in, beginning on a very small scale. With Abel we cannot see much of the dispensation of God as the life supply to His chosen people. With Enoch, however, there is a slight implication of such a dispensation, but it is not very clear. When we come to Noah, we can see the dispensation of God as the life supply on a very small scale. Then in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob we see a certain amount of God's dispensation. Furthermore, with Moses and the tabernacle there was an administration, a household arrangement, an intimate stewardship. This is clearly seen with Moses, Aaron, and the priests with the Levitical service. Coming to the New Testament, we have the dispensation of life with the Lord Jesus. What a sweet, intimate stewardship there was with Him! Throughout His ministry, He was dispensing God as the life supply to His chosen ones. This intimate stewardship is continued with the Apostles, especially with the Apostle Paul, who had the stewardship of the grace of God. In his ministry Paul was constantly dispensing Christ as life into the believers. Paul's ministry was a sweet and intimate stewardship, a pleasant household arrangement. Paul even taught Timothy how to behave in the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15). The way to behave in God's house is to have the household arrangement, an intimate stewardship, and to dispense

Christ to all the members of God's household. It is not by controlling or even by a governmental administration; it is by a sweet dispensation, an intimate stewardship, a very dear household arrangement.

By such a ministry the factor of life is imparted into the church people. By such a sweet, intimate stewardship the life supply is dispensed into the members of the Body of Christ. The more the factor of life is ministered to us, the more we rise up and become attached. Every time you receive the life supply you spontaneously rise up. There is no need for anyone to tell you to have fellowship with others, for you automatically long to be attached.

God's way to head us up is to work Himself as the factor of life into us that we may rise up and be attached to one another. It is not by a governmental administration, but by a sweet dispensation, an intimate stewardship, a comfortable household arrangement. Through this dispensation, the life factor is ministered to all the members of the church that they may rise up and be attached in the Body. This is the heading up in Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TEN

TO HEAD UP ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

(3)

This message is a further continuation of the heading up of all things in Christ (1:10). First we need to see what is the fullness of the times. Ephesians 1:10 says, "Unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him." The word "unto" means "resulting in" or "in order to have." The dispensation in this verse is that of the fullness of the times. The times here no doubt refer to the ages. Hence, the fullness of the times is the fullness of the ages.

THE FOUR AGES

In the Bible there are four different ages. John 1:17 says, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ." Here we see that the law is related to Moses and grace to Jesus Christ. Two ages are implied here: the age of the law and the age of grace. When Moses was raised up, that was the beginning of the age of the law. When Christ came, that was the beginning of the age of grace. Romans 5 mentions Adam and Moses (v. 14). Sin is related to Adam, and, as we have seen, the law is related to Moses. Therefore, we have three persons--Adam, Moses, and Christ--and three things--sin, law, and grace. Adam is related to sin, Moses is related to the law, and Christ is related to grace. This indicates that from Adam to the second coming of Christ there are three ages: the age of sin, the age of the law, and the age of grace.

Many of you are familiar with the theological teaching of the seven dispensations, the dispensations of innocence,

conscience, human government, promise, law, grace, and the kingdom. It is not incorrect to say that there are seven such dispensations. But according to the record of the Bible, we may say that prior to the millennium there are just three ages, the ages of Adam, Moses, and Christ. After the age of grace, the age of the kingdom will come. This will be the thousand years of the heavenly reign on earth. Therefore, altogether there are four ages: the age of sin, the age of the law, the age of grace, and the age of the kingdom.

These four ages are the times. Before the first of these ages began, there was not time, but eternity past. And after these four ages there will no longer be time; instead, there will be eternity future. Between the two ends of eternity, eternity past and future, there are four ages, four times. The time of Adam was of sin, the time of Moses was of the law, the time of Christ is of grace, and the time of the millennium will be of the kingdom. When these four times have been fulfilled, that will be the fullness of the times, the completion of the ages. The ages of Adam and Moses have been completed, the age of grace is being completed, and the age of the millennium has not yet begun. After the completion of the fourth age, there will be a dispensation called by Paul the fullness of the times.

When Paul was on earth, there was a dispensation which he called a stewardship of grace (3:2). Not only at the time of Paul was there a dispensation, but there has been one in every age, in the age of Adam, in the age of the law, and in the age of grace, and there will certainly be one in the coming age of the kingdom. At the fullness of the ages, there will be the consummate, the ultimate, dispensation.

THE MEANING OF DISPENSATION

Now we need to understand what a dispensation is. According to one teaching, a dispensation refers to an age. However, this understanding is not accurate. Another teaching is that a dispensation refers to the way God deals with people during a particular period of time. For example, in the dispensation of innocence God dealt with

man in one way, and in the dispensation of conscience He dealt with man in another way. Likewise, God deals with people in different ways in the ages of human government, promise, law, grace, and the kingdom. This understanding of dispensation is not incorrect, but it falls short. A dispensation is the act or instance of dispensing. It refers to God's dispensing of Himself into His chosen people. Although I have studied this matter of the dispensations for many years and have studied a number of diagrams, I have never been told that God's dispensation is the dispensing of Himself into His people. We need to forget all the diagrams and remember one basic point: God is now dispensing Himself into us.

THE DISPENSING OF LIFE

As we have pointed out, when Satan, the power of death, injected himself into man, Satan became death and darkness to man. Death brings in corruption, and darkness brings in confusion. Satan's goal is to corrupt God's creation and to cause confusion. But praise the Lord that where death abounds, life abounds all the more! After Satan came in to deaden, God came in to enliven, to impart life. Where there is life, there is light also. Death ruins, but life heals; darkness brings in confusion, but light brings in the proper order. We need to keep in mind that Satan came in to deaden God's creation and that death ruins and darkness confuses. God, however, has come in to enliven the deadened creation and to bring in order. In this order all things are headed up in Christ.

God's dispensation is the dispensing of life into people who have been deadened. Although Adam had become deadened, God came in to dispense something of Himself into Abel. He did the same with Enosh and Enoch. Do not think that in himself, a deadened person, Enoch was able to walk with God for three hundred years (Gen. 5:22). This was possible only through God's dispensing of Himself into him. The same was true of Noah. Noah walked with God and had strong faith because God was dispensing Himself into him. God's dispensing of Himself began with Abel and

has increased with each generation. Thus, the dispensation with Enoch was greater than with Enosh and greater with Noah than with Enoch. With Abraham it was still greater. Acts 7:2 says that the God of glory appeared to Abraham. That appearing certainly was a dispensing. Abraham could have faith in God because God had been dispensed into him.

The same thing happened to us when we heard the gospel and repented. As we were repenting and confessing our sins to God, God was dispensing Himself into us, although we might not have been conscious of God's dispensing at the time. As we recall our experience, however, we realize that this was the case. On the day I repented and made confession to God of my sinfulness, something was dispensed into my being. I wept, but inwardly I was on fire. This was God's inspiration and also His dispensation. When God comes to inspire us, He dispenses Himself into us. Nothing can change us like God's dispensation. It can transform a robber into a saint, because it dispenses the holy nature of God into him. I encourage you all to go to the Lord for thirty minutes for His dispensation. During that time, forget your problems and your environment. Simply open to Him and confess your shortcomings and wrongdoings. The more you confess to Him, the more the way will be open for Him to dispense Himself into you.

No matter what term we use--dispensing, inspiring, transfusing, or infusing--the experience is the same. I do not care for terminology; I care for the divine element being imparted into you. We need God to get into us. We need the element of God to be wrought into our being. This is the meaning of dispensation.

There is a shortage of this dispensation of God into man among most Christians today. Many teach about the seven dispensations, but never tell people that a dispensation denotes God's dispensing of His life and nature into His chosen people. Our burden today is not to teach doctrine; it is to dispense God's life and nature into His people. Please do not bring to this ministry your opinions or concepts. If you do, you will be wasting your

time. We are not interested in arguing doctrinal points or concepts. Our burden is to transfuse God into you. You may know a great deal of doctrine, but be very short of the divine element. What you need is the dispensing of the element of God into your being. I was with the Brethren for years and eventually became bored with their disputes over doctrine. We may not be short of doctrine, but we are short of the divine element. God's dispensation is to impart His very element into us.

THE ULTIMATE DISPENSATION

We have seen that God dispensed Himself into Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. He had an even greater dispensation with Moses and, of course, with the Lord Jesus. The dispensing continues in the New Testament Epistles. It may surprise you to know that God's dispensation at the present time is even greater than it was at the time of the Apostle Paul. I doubt that when Paul was on earth there was a congregation who had the privilege of hearing the things that you are hearing today. Today there is a deeper, higher, and wider dispensation of the grace of God. This dispensation will continue through the millennium until the fullness of the times. The dispensation of the fullness of the times will be the highest and the broadest. This dispensation will be in eternity, as revealed in Revelation 21 and 22.

In these chapters we have a new environment, the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21:1 says, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more." In the Bible the sea signifies death. For there to be no more sea means that there will be no trace of death. By that time death will have been swallowed up. At the end of the millennium, death, the last enemy, will be abolished and cast into the lake of fire. In place of death, there will be a new environment, a new sphere, a new circumference, in the center of which will be the New Jerusalem.

If you read the book of Revelation carefully, you will see

that the New Jerusalem is actually a great mountain with a height of twelve thousand stadia, more than thirteen hundred miles. At the top of the mountain there is the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1). Out of the throne flows the river of water of life; it flows down the mountain and reaches the twelve gates of the city. The water of life is for drinking, for the life supply, not for bathing nor for baptizing. In the water of life grows the tree of life (Rev. 22:2). This indicates that when you drink the water of life, you eat the tree of life. Therefore, when you drink the water, you receive the life supply. Here we see the ultimate, the consummate, dispensation: the dispensing of the Triune God into the whole city of New Jerusalem. This will cause the city to be filled, saturated, permeated, and soaked with the water of life. This is the highest dispensation purposed by God for the fullness of the times.

THE MINIATURE IN THE CHURCH LIFE

We enjoy a miniature of this consummate dispensation in the church life today. In the church we have the flow of life, we drink the water of life, and we eat the tree of life. This is God's dispensation in the church life. However, it is not the highest dispensation, the dispensation of the fullness of times. As I enjoy the living water in the church, I am awaiting the ultimate dispensation. We shall all be in this consummate dispensation, and we shall be fully saturated with the Triune God.

God on the throne refers to the Father, the Lamb refers to the Son, and the river of water of life refers to the Spirit. John 7 reveals clearly that the river of life denotes the Spirit. Thus, in Revelation 22 we have God the Father, God the Son as the redeeming One, and God the Spirit flowing with God the Son as the tree of life to be our life supply. This is the dispensation of the Triune God, the top dispensation, the dispensation of the fullness of the times.

This dispensation began with Abel and has been increasing throughout the ages until it eventually will reach the dispensation of the fullness of times. We are getting close to that dispensation. If we realize this, we

shall be beside ourselves with joy. Not even the Apostle Paul was as close to the ultimate dispensation as we are. Hallelujah, we all shall share in the consummate dispensation! In the Lord's recovery we have in the church life a miniature of that coming dispensation. How wonderful! This is why we enjoy singing these lines from a hymn in the supplement:

> Drink! A river pure and clear that's flowing
> from the Throne;
> Eat! The Tree of Life with fruits abundant,
> richly grown;
> Look! No need of lamp nor sun nor moon
> to keep it bright, for
> Here there is no night!

Oh, in the church life we drink the water of life and eat of the tree of life! By eating and drinking we become saturated with God's very life through His dispensation. The more life that is dispensed into us, the higher we rise up. This is the heading up in Christ.

THE LIGHT OF LIFE KEEPING EVERYTHING IN ORDER

Where life is, there is light also. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." This light is the light of life (John 8:12). In Revelation 21 we have both life and light. Because the New Jerusalem is saturated with light, it has no need for the light of the sun. Revelation 21:23 says, "And the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb." In the New Jerusalem we shall have the glory of the Triune God as our shining light. In the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem there will be no night, no death, and no darkness. Instead, there will be life and light. This will cause everything to rise up and be in good order.

Wherever there is light, things are kept in order. Suppose there were no lights in the city of Los Angeles. What darkness and confusion there would be! Life regulates, and light controls. In the church life we do not

have regulations, but we do have the regulating life and the controlling light. When the church is full of life, it is also full of light. Then everyone in the church is regulated by the inward life, not by outward regulations; and everyone is controlled and kept in order by the light of life. Here in life and in light, we are headed up. In Revelation 21 we see the Head, the Body surrounding the Head, and all the nations walking in the light of the city (Rev. 21:24). This will cause the new heaven and the new earth to be a bright sphere. Therefore, in the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem as the center, all things will be headed up in Christ. This will be the fulfillment of the heading up of all things in Christ spoken of in Ephesians 1:10.

In order for this to take place, we need the dispensation of life. The life that is dispensed into us eventually becomes the light of men. In the dispensation of the fullness of the times, all the nations will walk in the light of the city. This means that there will be no death, no darkness, no corruption, and no confusion. Instead, everything will be in good order, headed up under Christ, the unique Head, to express the Triune God in eternity. This heading up of all things will be an eternal expression of the Triune God. Today's church life is a foretaste of this. It is a miniature of the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem. As those in the miniature, we are enjoying the dispensation of life with light, and we are being headed up in Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE ELEVEN

THE NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS TO THE PRAISE OF GOD'S GLORY

Now we come to the matter of the New Testament believers being to the praise of God's glory (1:11-12). Ephesians 1:12 says, "That we should be to the praise of His glory who have before hoped in Christ." This verse does not mean that we shall praise God. It means that so much will be worked out for us and in us by God's abounding grace that all the angels and positive things in the universe will praise God. They will praise God because we, the sons of God, will be the center, the focal point, of God's operation in the universe. We shall be like the hub of a wheel. If the hub is taken away, the wheel will collapse because the spokes have no support. The angels and the positive things in the universe are like the spokes, and we, the sons of God, are like the hub. Without such a hub the universe cannot be held together. We on whom, for whom, and in whom the abounding grace is accomplishing so much will become the cause for the praise uttered by the positive things in the universe. This is the right meaning of verse 12.

The little word "that" at the beginning of this verse is very meaningful. It indicates that the many things that have been taking place in the preceding verses have a certain result: that we should be to the praise of God's glory. This praise will mainly be in the millennium and ultimately in the new heaven and the new earth. If we read Revelation 21 and 22 in the light of these verses from Ephesians, we shall see that the New Jerusalem is a constitution of the sons of God; it is the center of the new

universe. The angels, the nations, and all the positive things surrounding us will behold us and spontaneously utter praise to God. Therefore, the sons of God, the constituents of the New Jerusalem, will be the cause of universal praise. The whole universe will praise God for us as those who have been worked upon by God's abounding grace.

However, many, including us, may read Ephesians again and again without seeing this because they do not have the proper concept. We understand the Bible mainly according to our concept. If a third-grader reads Ephesians, he may be able to say all the words, but he cannot grasp the real meaning because he does not have the proper concept. How much we grasp of the divine revelation depends mainly on the concepts we have. We should not trust in our natural concepts; instead, we should drop them. If we are willing to drop our concepts, the spirit of wisdom will replace our natural concepts with something spiritual, heavenly, and eternal. Our knowledge of doctrine will cause us to be veiled when we come to the book of Ephesians. Our concepts become veils over our spirit. But if we drop our concept, our spirit will be open, and we shall also be poor in spirit. In Matthew 5:3 the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Those who are poor in spirit seem to know nothing, for they have been emptied of every concept, doctrine, and teaching. If we come to the pure Word poor in spirit, we shall see something new.

In verses 11 and 12 we see that the New Testament believers will be a cause of universal praise. Praise is the utterance of appreciation. We do not praise clay because we do not appreciate it. On the other hand, we do praise our dear Lord Jesus because we appreciate Him so much. Our appreciation becomes our praise. The day is coming when we, the sons of God, will be appreciated by all the angels. The more they look at us, the more utterance they will have that will flow out as praise to God. Their appreciation of us will become their praise to God. They will realize that what we are is the work of God's abounding grace. The amount of praise depends upon how

much work the

abounding grace has done. If the abounding grace accomplishes more work upon us, the angels will have a greater appreciation of us. The Bible says that even the trees will rejoice (Psa. 96:12) and praise the Lord (Psa. 148:7, 9). If the trees did not see anything in the universe that was wonderful, they would not rejoice. But seeing us, the sons of God, will be the greatest surprise to the trees. Because of us, the trees will rejoice and praise. The fact that we shall be to the praise of God's glory does not mean that we shall praise God. It means that we shall be the cause of the praise uttered by the angels and all the positive things in the universe.

Eventually, we shall become the glory of God. Some may wonder how we could become the glory of God. In 1 Thessalonians Paul says, "Ye are our glory and joy" (2:20). Paul was speaking here as the representative of God. Therefore, if the believers were the glory of Paul, then they were certainly the glory of God, for Paul was God's sent one. If the believers are the glory of the sent one, then they are surely also the glory of the Sender. In the millennium and especially in the new heaven and new earth, God will be able to say, "Angels, nations, and all created things, look at My glory. My sons are My glory." In a human sense, this is even true in a large family. Suppose a certain father has many good children, all of whom love the Lord very much. If all these children would one day sit around their father, he could say, "This is my glory. My children are my glory." One day the Father will gather us all together. At that time, we all shall have been saturated with Him, transformed, and transfigured. Then with joy He will be able to say to the angels and all the positive things in the universe that we are His glory.

Glory is God expressed. At the fullness of the times, all the sons of God will be fully saturated with God and will express God. God will be expressed through us. This expressed God is glory. All the angels and positive things in the universe will praise the expressed God. This is what it means to say that we shall be to the praise of His glory.

I. HAVING BEEN PLACED INTO THE HEADING-UP CHRIST

The first part of verse 11 says, "In Whom also we were made an inheritance." "In Whom" refers to the heading-up Christ. Verse 10, which speaks of heading up all things in Christ, ends with the words "in Him," and verse 11 begins with the words "in Whom." Paul's composition here is rather awkward and repetitious. However, Paul wrote this way purposely in order to emphasize the fact that all things in heaven and on earth are headed up in Christ. In emphasizing this fact, Paul did not care for excellence of composition. The words "in Whom" reveal that we have been placed into the heading-up Christ.

II. HAVING BEEN MADE AN INHERITANCE TO GOD

In the heading-up Christ we also were made an inheritance. The word "also" in verse 11 refers to the heading up of all things in Christ. All things are to be headed up in Christ, and we also have been made an inheritance in Him. In Christ we were made an inheritance. Please pay close attention to the tense here. In the future, all things will be headed up in Christ, but already we were made an inheritance in Him. The Greek words rendered "were made an inheritance" can also be translated "have obtained an inheritance." The Greek verb means to choose or assign by lot. Hence, this clause literally means we were designated as a heritage. We were made an inheritance to inherit God's inheritance. On the one hand, we were made God's inheritance (v. 18) for God's enjoyment; and, on the other hand, we were made to inherit God as our inheritance (v. 14) for our enjoyment.

Which do you think is greater, for us to be made an inheritance or for God to head up all things in Christ? I would say that being made an inheritance is much better than being headed up. Our being made God's inheritance

opens the way for Him to head up all things in the universe.

Although we have been made an inheritance already, we need to ask ourselves whether or not we live as God's inheritance. Do you live as one who is the inheritance of God? Do you look like God's inheritance or like a lump of clay? How can clay be God's inheritance? In ourselves we certainly are not worthy to be God's inheritance, but we have been made an inheritance in the heading-up Christ. According to our natural being, we are not worth anything, but in the heading-up Christ we were made God's inheritance.

It is by having God wrought into us that we are being constituted into an inheritance. God is still working Himself into us today. Most of us are part clay and part gold. The part that is gold is God's inheritance. I thank God that as the process of being made God's inheritance goes on, the gold in us is increasing and the clay is decreasing.

We should not stop with the mere objective teaching about being the inheritance of God. Many years ago I was taught that we are God's inheritance, and I was very happy to hear this. Eventually I discovered that I am nothing but clay. It seemed absurd that clay could be God's inheritance. After much experience and study of the New Testament, I learned that we are still in the process of becoming God's inheritance. In this process the natural life must be eliminated, and the gold, the divine nature, must increase by being wrought into more of our being. When this process has been completed, we shall be fully the inheritance of God not only objectively, but also subjectively.

The process of being made God's inheritance goes along with the heading up of all things in Christ. The more we are willing to be headed up in Christ, the more the gold, the divine element, will increase within us. This is transformation; it is also subjective sanctification. In subjective sanctification our being is saturated with God's substance, God's essence. As God's element is wrought into our being, we become His inheritance. Yes, we have

already been placed in the heading-up Christ, but we are still in the process of being made His inheritance in full.

A. Having Been Predestinated

To make us His inheritance, God the Father has predestinated us to be His sons. The process of making us God's inheritance is based upon and is according to God's eternal predestination. God is now working on us to reach the goal of His predestination.

B. According to the Purpose of God

Verse 11 says that we have been made an inheritance according to the purpose of the One who operates all things. God operates all things according to the counsel of His will. There is a difference between God's will and His counsel: the will refers to His intention, and the counsel, to the consideration. God operates all things according to the consideration of His intention. His operation is mainly concerned with us; His intention regarding us is to make us His inheritance. In His counsel He considers how to accomplish this; He does not do it without careful consideration. For example, a sister may have the intention to bake a very special cake. But before baking it, she takes counsel with herself to consider how she should go about it. Without such consideration, the cake would be ruined in the process of baking. Likewise, God is making us an inheritance to Himself in a very thoughtful, careful way.

God operates all things according to the counsel of His will that we should be to the praise of His glory. This indicates that God is doing the finest work with us. No crude work will bring forth praise or appreciation. It is the finest work that causes the highest appreciation, out of which comes the highest praise. Because God is working on us in the finest way, we shall be the cause of the greatest appreciation.

In the Lord's recovery we do not care only for the ground of unity. We are here for God's finer work. Among all of today's Christian groups, it is hard to find one group

in which God can do a finer work. Probably we are the only group of Christians on earth who give God the opportunity to do a finer work in them. Therefore, in the Lord's recovery we are held responsible to afford the Lord the opportunity to do this finer work upon us. We do not want to be shallow or to have a movement that is temporary. Instead, we want to cooperate with God that He may come in to do a fine work among us to bring forth the highest appreciation in the universe. Then whenever the angels look at us, they will appreciate what God has done and utter praise to the very God expressed by us. God's work upon us is not simply to improve our behavior or to make us more loving and humble. Such a concept is too low. We need to allow God to work Himself into our being, to transform every part of us. This will be the finest product in the universe, a product full of God and full of the divine essence. In this way such a fine work will be highly appreciated by the angels and by all positive things; they will then praise God for the glory of His grace.

The word "to" in verse 12 is a rather insignificant word in English, but it is a strong word in Greek. It may be translated "issuing in." This indicates that some kind of appreciation and praise will be brought forth because of us. We shall be the cause of the angelic praise. When the angels look at us, they will appreciate us. However, we have not yet fully reached this point. We need to go on until we, the New Testament believers, become the cause of the universal angelic praise of the glory of God.

III. HAVING FIRST HOPED IN CHRIST IN THIS AGE

Verse 12 says that we "have before hoped in Christ." The Greek word translated "before" can also be rendered "first." We, the believers of the New Testament, are those who have first hoped in Christ; that is, we have hoped in Him in this age. The Jews will have their hope in Christ in the next age. Today we have hoped in Christ, but the Jews, who have not, are in a pitiful condition.

IV. HAVING HOPED IN CHRIST BEFORE HIS COMING BACK TO SET UP HIS KINGDOM IN THE NEXT AGE

We have hoped in Christ before Christ's coming back to set up His Messianic kingdom. But the Jews will have hope in Christ after His coming back. Because we are full of hope in Christ, we can be made the cause of the universal and angelic praise of God's glory.

V. TO THE PRAISE OF GOD'S GLORY

Finally, we shall be to the praise of God's glory. As we have seen, God is glorified, expressed, in the New Testament believers. This expression is not visible today, but one day it will be visible. At that time God's expression through the New Testament believers will call forth the universal praise. Our God will be fully expressed and glorified through us and among us. Then the entire universe will praise His glory.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWELVE

SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

We have pointed out that 1:3-14 can be divided into three sections: the well-speaking of the Father (vv. 3-6), the well-speaking of the Son (vv. 7-12), and the well-speaking of the Spirit (vv. 13-14). God the Father has purposed, God the Son has accomplished what the Father purposed, and God the Spirit is applying what the Son accomplished according to the Father's purpose. Therefore, the Father purposed, the Son accomplished, and the Spirit applies. In these verses we have a purpose, an accomplishment, and an application. In this message we come to the application.

THE SEAL AND THE PLEDGE

According to 1:13 and 14, the Spirit's application is of two aspects: the seal and the pledge, or, as I like to say, the sealing and the pledging. The Spirit's application is His sealing and His pledging. Actually, the Spirit Himself is both the seal and the pledge. Both the seal of the Spirit and the pledge of the Spirit involve movement within us. Therefore, the seal is actually the sealing, and the pledge, the pledging. Not only is the Spirit a seal upon us, but He is now sealing us. Not only is He a pledge guaranteeing our inheritance, but He is now pledging within us. In this message we shall consider the sealing of the Spirit, and in the next message, the pledging.

THE SEAL SIGNIFYING OWNERSHIP

When I was young, I heard the Brethren teachers speak about the seal of the Holy Spirit. I also read about this matter. But I never heard about the sealing of the Spirit.

The seal is one thing, and the sealing is another. To be sealed with the Holy Spirit means to be marked with the Holy Spirit as a living seal. We have been made God's inheritance (v. 11). At the time we were saved, God put His Holy Spirit into us as a seal to mark us out, indicating that we belong to God. The Holy Spirit, who is God Himself entering into us, causes us to bear God's image signified by the seal, thus making us like God. Suppose a brother puts a seal on his Bible. When he does so, his Bible bears the image of the seal. This seal indicates that the Bible belongs to him. Therefore, the seal signifies ownership. When we believed in the Lord Jesus, the Spirit of God sealed us. This signifies that God is our owner and that we belong to Him.

When I was young, I was told strongly that I belonged to God. I was also taught that no matter how much we grieved the Holy Spirit, He would never leave us. Those from the Arminian school of theology, however, disagree with this. Years ago a German mission in China published a booklet concerning the Spirit. One of the pictures in this booklet showed a dove, signifying the Holy Spirit, flying away from a believer who had grieved Him. The Brethren attacked this teaching, saying that after the Holy Spirit has come into us, He never leaves. Their teaching regarding the seal of the Holy Spirit was very strong. They said, "Once the seal has been put on you, it cannot be taken away, no matter what you do." I agree with the teaching that the Spirit will never leave us. In this matter the Brethren were correct; however, they were too doctrinal.

THE SEAL BEARING THE IMAGE OF GOD

Every seal has an image. If the seal is square, then the image is also square. The Spirit as the seal of God upon us bears the image of God. This implies that the seal of the Holy Spirit is the expression of God. When you bear the Holy Spirit as the seal of God upon you, you bear the image of God and the expression of God.

When I first read about this in a book by Brother Nee, I was very happy. Not only did I have the seal indicating that God was my owner, but along with this seal I had the image of God. That happiness, however, did not last very long. After a short while, I discovered that I did not actually have the image of God. Yes, the seal of the Spirit was upon me, but I did not have the image. The seal was one thing and I was another. I had the seal upon me, but I did not live a life of the seal.

Whenever we come to know a certain truth or doctrine apart from experience, we shall eventually be troubled by our lack of experience. The doctrine may be very good, but we may have very little experience of it. This causes us to be puzzled, for the Bible says one thing and our experience says another. What we are simply does not correspond with what the Bible says. The Bible says that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. This means that we bear the image, the expression, of God. However, according to our experience, it seems that we do not have the seal or the image. I do not want to be deceived. I am troubled whenever the Bible says one thing and my daily life says another. Later I found the secret in the matter of the seal in 1:13 and 14.

SEALED UNTO THE DAY OF REDEMPTION

These verses say, "In Whom you also, hearing the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in Whom also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, Who is the pledge of our inheritance, unto the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of His glory." The word "unto" in verse 14 means a great deal. We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the redemption of the acquired possession. We are God's acquired possession, and the redemption of the acquired possession is the redemption, the transfiguration, of our body. By this we see that the seal of the Holy Spirit is for the redemption of our body. We were sealed with the Holy Spirit with a view to this redemption. One translation says, "You were

sealed with the Holy Spirit given to the redemption." This is an even stronger expression.

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

Many of us can testify from experience that when we believed in the Lord Jesus, we realized that we had been sealed in our spirit. However, in our mind, emotion, and will there was no sealing. At the time we believed in the Lord Jesus, the Spirit came into our spirit and sealed us there. For this reason the Bible says that we were sealed. However, not every part of our being was sealed, but just one part, our spirit. For a long time after we were saved, there continued to be no sealing in our mind, emotion, or will. But Ephesians 1 says that we were sealed unto redemption. We have pointed out that the word "unto" means "resulting in" or "with a view to." Therefore, the sealing in our spirit is with a view to the redemption of our body. This implies that the sealing is spreading within us. It begins in our spirit and it is spreading into our mind, emotion, and will. Because the sealing is spreading into our mind, the New Testament speaks about the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2). The renewing of the mind is the spreading of the sealing of the Spirit into our mind. The sealing of the Spirit must saturate our mind.

A CONTINUING PROCESS

Not many Christians have seen that the sealing is still going on, that it is not once for all. No doubt, the Spirit comes into us once for all, but the sealing of the Spirit is a continuing process. In this matter we should care not merely for doctrine, but also for experience. Check to see whether your experience corresponds with the doctrine.

At the time of regeneration, the seal of the Spirit was

put into our spirit, and the sealing began within us, with a view to the redemption of our body. This indicates that one day even our body will be sealed with the Spirit. Our body will be saturated with the Holy Spirit.

We have seen that the seal of the Spirit bears the image of God. When we repent, confess, and pray in our spirit, we bear the image of God. At such times others can see God's image upon us. But if we begin to argue with others over teachings, it will become apparent that our mind does not bear the image of God. When we pray in the spirit, we bear the image, but when we argue in the mind, we do not. At that time our mind does not bear anything of the Spirit. Furthermore, in arguing over doctrine you may become angry, but there is nothing of the image of God in your emotion. This indicates that the sealing of the Spirit has not yet spread into your emotion. Eventually, you may become so angry with a brother over doctrine that you decide to no longer fellowship with him. You cut him off because, in your opinion, the doctrine he teaches is wrong. You exercise your strong will to terminate the fellowship with this brother. But in your will there is no evidence of the sealing of the Spirit. Therefore, in your whole soul--mind, emotion, and will--there is no trace of God's image. Although you have the sealing of the Spirit in your spirit, you do not have the sealing in your soul.

It is difficult for the sealing of the Holy Spirit to spread into our troublesome mind. It is even more difficult for it to spread into our stubborn will. With many believers, the struggle of the sealing of the Spirit to get into the mind, emotion, and will lasts a long time. If you consider your experience, you will see that for years there has been a struggle over this matter. The sealing of the Holy Spirit has been struggling to get into your mind, emotion, and will. Even today we must admit that probably our soul still has not been thoroughly saturated. Even if our soul has been saturated, our body has not yet been sealed, for on it there is no sign of God's appearance, nor any expression of His image. Nevertheless, the sealing of the Holy Spirit is

still going on and it will continue to go on until the redemption of our body.

SATURATING, SANCTIFYING, TRANSFORMING

The sealing of the Holy Spirit is the saturating, and the saturating is the sanctifying. Wherever the sealing saturates, there the sanctifying is. Furthermore, the sanctifying is the transforming. Thus, wherever the sealing of the Holy Spirit reaches, there is sanctification and transformation. For example, when our mind is sealed with the Spirit, it is sanctified and transformed. All the different terms--sealing, sanctifying, and transforming--denote the same thing. When our soul is thoroughly and fully sealed by the Holy Spirit, it will be sanctified and transformed. One day even our body will be sealed with the Spirit. At that time our body will also be sanctified. Our body has not yet been sanctified; that is, it has not yet been transfigured. But on the day of redemption, our body will have been thoroughly sealed with the Holy Spirit. It will be sanctified and transfigured.

THE SPREADING OF THE SEALING

Many Christians think that, as long as we are saved, we shall be raptured when the Lord Jesus comes back. This is a very superficial understanding of the Bible. Rapture denotes maturity. No farmer reaps a crop until it reaches maturity. If a crop is still green, the farmer will not reap it. We are God's crop. Therefore, the time of reaping depends upon maturity. We have seen from 1:13 and 14 that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the redemption of the acquired possession. The sealing of the Holy Spirit in our spirit is with a view to the redemption of our body. The redemption of our body depends upon the spreading of the sealing of the Holy Spirit into our whole being. When this has taken place, a decision can be made concerning the time of the redemption of our body.

The sealing of the Spirit should not be considered something that is once for all. No, it continues to go on in

us, spreading throughout our being. The Holy Spirit is moving within us, and His moving is His sealing, sanctifying, and transforming. When will our body be transfigured? This depends upon how much sealing of the Holy Spirit has been taking place within us. The sealing of the Holy Spirit has a great deal to do with the redemption of the body. This implies that the sealing of the Holy Spirit is still taking place, that it is daily saturating our mind, emotion, and will. After a child graduates from elementary school, he is not ready for college. Before he can go to college, he must go to junior high school and then to high school. Likewise, after we are sealed with the Holy Spirit in our spirit, we are not yet ready for the redemption of our body. On the contrary, we need to be sealed in our mind, emotion, and will. In so many things, we still need to be sealed by the Spirit.

We have pointed out that the sealing of the Spirit is the moving of the Spirit within us. We have a living seal in us; it is constantly moving. After the Spirit seals one part of us, He desires to seal another part and then another. He wants to seal every part of our being. Until this is completed, the spreading of the sealing will continue.

I am quite certain that you have never heard that the sealing of the Spirit is still going on. But this fact is implied by the word "unto" in 1:14. We have been sealed with the Holy Spirit unto the redemption of the acquired possession. This sealing will continue unto the day of redemption. Do not take this merely as a doctrine, but apply it to your situation. Are you under the Spirit's sealing today? Is it still going on within you? We need to have the assurance that the sealing of the Spirit is spreading in our being. When our whole being has been sealed, we shall be ready for the redemption of the body.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

THE PLEDGE OF OUR INHERITANCE

In Ephesians 1:13 and 14 the seal of the Holy Spirit and the pledge of the Holy Spirit are mentioned together. It is difficult to say which comes first, the sealing or the pledging. According to 2 Corinthians 1:21 and 22, the sealing seems to come first. Second Corinthians 1:22 says that God "hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." However, both the sealing and the pledging actually take place at the same time.

I. ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE FOURTH ITEM OF GOD'S BLESSING

The pledging of our inheritance is another aspect of the fourth item of God's well-speaking. The sealing of the Spirit is the first aspect of this item of God's blessing.

II. OUR INHERITANCE

We need both the sealing and the pledging because in God's work on us two kinds of inheritances are involved. Ephesians 1:11 indicates that we were made God's inheritance, and verse 14, that God is our inheritance. Our inheritance is God Himself. In God's economy we are an inheritance to God, and God is an inheritance to us. This is a mutual inheritance. For us to be God's inheritance, we need the sealing. We are God's possession, and as our owner, God has put a seal upon us. Because God is our inheritance, we also need the pledging of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee. We shall inherit all that God is, that is, His Person, and all that God has, that is, His work. For such an inheritance, the Holy Spirit is the pledge, the guarantee.

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT BEING THE PLEDGE OF OUR INHERITANCE

The Holy Spirit is the pledge of our inheritance. The Greek word for "pledge" in verse 14 also means foretaste, guarantee, token payment guaranteeing the full payment, a part payment in advance. Since we are God's inheritance, the Holy Spirit is a seal upon us. Since God is our inheritance, the Holy Spirit is a pledge of this inheritance to us. God gives His Holy Spirit to us, not only as a guarantee of our inheritance, securing our heritage, but also as a foretaste of what we shall inherit of God.

In ancient times, the Greek word for pledge was used in the purchase of land. The seller gave the buyer a sample of the soil from the land being purchased. Hence, a pledge, according to ancient Greek usage, was also a sample. The Holy Spirit is the sample of what we shall inherit of God in full.

The Greek word for "pledge" is somewhat equal to today's down payment, which indicates good faith and is a guarantee of coming payments. Pledge, earnest, and guarantee--all these words are about the same in meaning, all referring to a payment that guarantees the balance. But the Greek word in addition signifies a sample, a foretaste. Some translators prefer the word "foretaste." By enjoying the sample we have a foretaste of what is coming. Suppose someone gives me ten peaches from his peach orchard. These peaches are a sample and a foretaste of the produce of the whole orchard. As those who are to inherit God, we have the Holy Spirit as a pledge, guarantee, earnest, and down payment of our inheritance. At the same time the Holy Spirit is also a sample and a foretaste. The foretaste gives us a taste of God; the full taste is yet to come.

In 2 Corinthians 1 we have the anointing, the sealing, and the pledging. Second Corinthians 1:21 says, "Now he who firmly attaches us with you unto the anointed One, and hath anointed us, is God" (Gk.). The anointing brings the element of God into us. The divine ointment can be compared to paint. When you paint furniture, you apply the element of the paint to the furniture. Likewise, the

anointing puts the divine ointment upon us, and this brings the divine element into us. The more of the anointing we have within, the more of the element of God we receive. We need to be coated with the divine ointment again and again. Many of the older brothers and sisters have received hundreds of coatings, but the younger ones have received just a few. First John 2 says that the anointing abides in us and teaches us. We are taught by being anointed. The Holy Spirit as the compound ointment within us teaches us, not by words, but by painting us. Whether we obey His teaching or not, He still anoints us, putting coat after coat upon us. In this way the anointing brings the very essence of God into our being.

I praise the Lord that there is a greater dispensation of God Himself today than there was in the first century. If you study the writings of the early church fathers, you will find that their writings cannot compare with what the Lord has shown us in His Word. Which of the church fathers ever said that God is dispensing Himself into our being? Even certain things uttered by the young people today are superior to what was written by the church fathers. Day by day we are being anointed, and the divine essence is added to us.

After the anointing, 2 Corinthians 1 mentions the sealing. The sealing of the Holy Spirit brings in the image, the appearance, and the expression, for the seal bears the sign, the form. God is not only anointing us with His essence; He is also sealing us with His appearance, image, and expression. Along with the anointing and the sealing there is the pledging, which is a matter of enjoyment and taste. Mothers realize that in feeding their children they need to make the food tasteful. When food is delicious, the children are eager to come to the table at mealtime. But if the food does not have a pleasant taste, it will be difficult to get the children to eat. The Holy Spirit is within us today as a foretaste. If the Spirit were only the anointing and the sealing, we might become bored with the experience of the Spirit. But we are not tired or bored of the Spirit because the Spirit is also pledging within us.

In the past I was taught that the pledge of the Holy Spirit was a once-for-all, objective matter. But later I learned that the Spirit is not only the pledge, but also the pledging. This pledging is a continual matter. I learned this, not from studying, but from experience. In my experience I came to realize that a pledging was continually taking place within me.

The pledging of the Spirit is given for our enjoyment. Whenever I am disappointed or depressed, the pledging comes in to uplift me. I experience this pledging daily, even hourly. Pledging also means that something is given to us as a guarantee. Through the Spirit's pledging, we are encouraged and stirred up. Whenever we feel that the situation is hopeless, the pledging fills us with hope.

On the day we were saved, God began to pledge Himself to us, and this pledging continues day by day. It is very difficult for a Christian in the spirit to not believe that God is with him. We easily and spontaneously believe this because we daily receive the pledging of the Spirit. God is pledging all the time. When I am weak, He pledges Himself to me and becomes my encouragement. When my expectations are low, He pledges Himself, and I have hope once again. When it seems that my faith has ebbed away, He pledges Himself to me, and immediately my faith revives. When it seems that I have no more love for the brothers and sisters, the Spirit pledges Himself, and more love for the saints flows in. I believe that we have all had experiences like this, although we may not have recognized or understood these experiences.

During the special ten-day trainings, I speak three times a day. Some may wonder how I have the energy to speak so much at my age. Many times I have been exhausted and tired by speaking. But whenever I have this sense of tiredness, God immediately comes in to pledge Himself to me. Because of the Spirit's pledging, I am ready to speak again at the next meeting. When I stand up and begin to speak, I am full of energy because of the pledging of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the more I speak, the more enjoyment I have. When I return home after giving a

message, I am exceedingly happy, much happier than before the meeting. The reason for this is that during my speaking I receive a great deal of the Spirit's pledging.

The pledging gives us more of God. The more of God we receive, the more assurance we have and the more appetite we have for God. When some hear about receiving more of God, they may wonder what we mean by more of God and may even regard such a saying as heretical. Doctrinally speaking, God is God, and there cannot be more of God. But experientially speaking, we can receive more of God. By the pledging of the Holy Spirit, we all are receiving more of God. We know that God is ours by the pledging within us. A small sample, like the box of soil given in the purchase of land in ancient times, is within us as a pledge. This portion within us is increasing.

Many of the older brothers and sisters can testify that throughout the years their appetite for God has been increasing. When I began the ministry in this country in 1962, I was hungry for God. But now, sixteen years later, my hunger for Him has been intensified. I am so hungry for God that I want to swallow Him up. I can say to Him, "O Lord Jesus, I would like to swallow You up." Some may say that it is not only heretical but also crude to talk about swallowing up the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, I do intend to swallow Him up. The more we receive of Him, the more there is to receive and the bigger He seems to become. This enlargement of appetite comes from God's pledging. The more we taste of Him, the bigger is our appetite for Him; and the more appetite we have, the more we taste Him. This is a glorious cycle. Do not think that the older saints are tired of eating God. No, we have a bigger appetite and eat more of Him. Hallelujah for the Spirit's pledging! God is pledging Himself to us. The more He pledges, the more enjoyment we have. This enjoyment enlarges our appetite. Many have a rather small appetite for Christ when they first come into the church life. But after they stay in the church for a period of time, their appetite increases. The more we enjoy the Lord, the bigger is our appetite for Him.

The Spirit today is not only anointing us and sealing us,

but also pledging in us. This means that He adds more of God into us little by little. This takes place not once for all, but daily and hourly. The pledging never stops; it goes on twenty-four hours a day. We eat, and the Spirit pledges. The more we eat, the bigger our appetite becomes. The bigger our appetite becomes, the more we eat. By means of this cycle we daily participate in God. This cycle will continue until we get into eternity. At that time, God will become our full enjoyment, and we shall have the full taste of Him.

Many Christians do not even know that the anointing is in them. Some who know something about the anointing do not know about the sealing. Although some know the sealing, hardly any have the knowledge of the Spirit's pledging. Probably in your whole Christian life you have never heard a message on the pledging of the Spirit. According to my experience, the Holy Spirit is constantly pledging within me, giving me more of God and more of Christ. The more I receive of Christ, the more my appetite for Him increases. Some may admit that they do not have a very large appetite for Christ. The reason for this is that they do not care for the pledging of the Spirit. We need to care not only for the anointing and the sealing, but also for the pledging. We need to say, "O Lord Jesus, You are so sweet. Amen, Lord." If we do this, the sense of the Spirit's pledging will increase within us. What a real experience this is!

Because many Christians care for doctrine but neglect the anointing, the sealing, and the pledging, they miss the experience of the Triune God. They have the Triune God in doctrine, but not in experience. However, the Bible reveals that the Triune God is not for us to learn about as a mere doctrine, but for us to experience. In the Lord's recovery we are not occupied with concepts and doctrinal points. We care mainly for the real experience of the Triune God. Of course, if our experience is sound and healthy, it will correspond with the revelation in the Bible. Many times I receive light firstly from my experience rather than from the Bible. But when I check my experience with the Bible, I find that what I have experienced not only agrees with

what is in the Bible but is strengthened and reinforced by the Word. Everything must be experiential, not merely doctrinal. Many of us can testify that daily we experience the anointing, the sealing, and the pledging. As we experience the Spirit in this way, we receive more of the divine essence into our being, we have more of the expression of God, and we enjoy more of God. Oh, God is so tasty and delicious! Once we have tasted Him, we cannot forget Him. Rather, we desire to taste Him more.

Ephesians 1:14 says that the Holy Spirit is the pledge of our inheritance "unto the redemption of the acquired possession." Redemption here refers to the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23), that is, the transfiguration of our body of humiliation into a glorious one (Phil. 3:21). The Holy Spirit today is a guarantee, a foretaste, and a sample of our divine inheritance until our body is transfigured in glory, at which time we shall inherit God in full. The span of God's blessings bestowed upon us covers all the crucial points from God's selection in eternity past (v. 4) to the redemption of our body for eternity future.

We, God's redeemed ones, the church, are God's possession acquired by His purchase with the precious blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). In God's economy, God becomes our inheritance, and we become God's possession. How marvelous! We give nothing, and we get everything! God acquired us at the greatest cost, but we inherit God at no cost. This is to the praise of God's glory.

IV. TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY

Because verse 14 ends with the words, "to the praise of His glory," we need to consider this matter once again. This is the third time this phrase is repeated, this time as an ending to this section (vv. 3-14) concerning God's blessings to us. Verses 3 through 6 disclose what God the Father purposed for us; that is, He chose us and predestinated us unto sonship to the praise of the glory of His grace. Verses 7 through 12 reveal how God the Son accomplished what God the Father purposed; that is, He redeemed us and made us an inheritance of God to the praise of His glory.

Verses 13 and 14 tell us how God the Spirit applies to us what God the Son has accomplished; that is, He seals us and is the guarantee and foretaste of our eternal, divine inheritance to the praise of God's glory. The glory of the Triune God deserves the threefold praise in the blessings He bestows upon us.

The phrase "to the praise of His glory" is repeated three times because the Trinity is involved in God's blessing. There is a threefold well-speaking concerning us and a threefold praise to the Triune God. The Triune God, the divine Trinity, deserves our threefold praise. He deserves not only our praise, but also the praise of the angels and of all creation. Eventually, the whole universe will praise God for His purpose, for His accomplishment, and for His application. How wonderful that we are under God's well-speaking!

As we have pointed out, verses 3 through 14 are a record of God's well-speaking concerning us. The result of this well-speaking is that all the positive things in the universe will praise God for His blessings bestowed upon us, because we, the sons of God, will be God's inheritance. Although we fell so low, we have been made sons of God, even God's inheritance and enjoyment. God has become our inheritance, and we are inheriting God as our enjoyment. Ultimately, He is in us, and we are in Him. We are in Him to be His inheritance and enjoyment, and He is in us to be our inheritance and enjoyment. Hallelujah for the well-speaking of the Triune God concerning us! Because we have the anointing, the sealing, and the pledging, we are fully satisfied. All we desire now is more of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

A SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION AND THE EYES OF OUR HEART

In this message we shall consider the matters of a spirit of wisdom and revelation, and the eyes of our heart (1:15-18).

I. THE APOSTLE'S FIRST PRAYER

A. For the Saints Who Have Faith in the Lord and Love toward All the Saints

In considering these matters, we come to the first prayer of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians: "Therefore, I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you, and your love to all the saints" (v. 15). Paul prayed for the saints because they had faith in the Lord and love toward the saints. Faith and love are crucial in our Christian life. Toward the Lord we must have faith and toward the saints we must have love.

B. Giving Thanks for Them

Verse 16 continues, "Do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." The Apostle always remembers the good points of the saints and thanks the Lord for them.

C. Praying to the God of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory

In his first prayer Paul prayed to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" (v. 17). In verse 3 Paul spoke of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, putting God and the Father together. But here he mentions them separately, saying, "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the Father of glory." In incarnation, the Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself (Phil. 2:6), became a man. As a man, He is related to God's creation; therefore God the Creator is His God. The incarnation brought God the Creator into man, God's creature. The title "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" implies that God the Creator has come into man. Whenever we speak of God in this way, we imply that God is no longer merely the Creator outside of His creature, man, but that He has been brought into humanity. The Jews do not recognize that the Creator of the universe has come into man. They believe in Jehovah God only as the Creator and refuse to admit that God is the God of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This title implies creation, incarnation, and redemption. God is the Creator; yet He is the God of Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate. Jesus Christ is not only God in creation, but also God in incarnation and redemption. In referring to God as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are saying that we have been created, that the creating God has come into humanity, and that we have been redeemed. Incarnation indicates that we have the enjoyment of God. We enjoy God because He has come into humanity. Divinity becomes our enjoyment in Jesus Christ.

In 1:17 Paul uses the term "the Father of glory." Glory is God expressed. Hence, the Father of glory is God expressed through His many sons. The title "Father" implies regeneration, and the word "glory" implies expression. Therefore, the title "Father of glory" implies regeneration and expression. We have been regenerated by God, and we are His expression.

In this one title, "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory," five important things are implied: creation, incarnation, redemption, regeneration, and expression. We have already been regenerated but in the future we shall be glorified and express God's glory (Rom. 8:30). The regeneration of many sons and the expression of God are the consummation of the divine economy. Before creation there was nothing in existence except God. God had neither generation nor expression. Then God created

the universe and everything in it. By His work of creation He became the Creator. After creation He took the step of incarnation, thereby coming into His creature, man. By incarnation the Creator and the creature became one. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was the uniting of God and man. Through crucifixion the Lord accomplished redemption. As a result, we, the fallen creatures, were redeemed. Then we were regenerated to become sons of God the Father so that we may express Him. On the day we are glorified, God will be fully expressed from within us. In this way we shall become His expression. All these important steps--creation, incarnation, redemption, regeneration, and expression--are implied by the title "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory."

Paul prayed to such a divine Person. The Jews, however, pray only to God the Creator, with no concept of incarnation, regeneration, or expression. But we Christians have God in creation, incarnation, redemption, regeneration and expression. How much more we have than the Jews!

D. For Revelation

Paul's prayer to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, was for revelation. The Greek word rendered "revelation" in verse 17 means the opening of a veil. Hence, revelation is the lifting of a veil.

II. A SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION

A. Our Regenerated Spirit Indwelt by the Spirit of God

In order to have revelation, we need a spirit of wisdom and revelation. The spirit in verse 17 must be our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. Such a spirit is given to us by God that we may have wisdom and revelation to know Him and His economy. Actually, the spirit in this verse is the mingled spirit, the regenerated human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit. However, the emphasis is upon our regenerated spirit, not on the Holy Spirit.

B. Wisdom Being the Ability to Understand in Our Spirit That We May Know the Mystery of God

Paul prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Wisdom is in our spirit that we may know the mystery of God, and revelation is of God's Spirit to show us the vision by opening the veil. We firstly have wisdom, the ability to understand spiritual things; then the Spirit of God reveals the spiritual things to our spiritual understanding.

Wisdom is different from cleverness and deeper than cleverness. It is possible to be very clever, yet not be wise. Cleverness is in the mind, but wisdom is mainly in our spirit. Our need is to be wise in our spirit, not to be clever in our mind. The problem with certain saints is that they are very clever in the mind, but lack wisdom in the spirit. There was a brother like this in Shanghai in 1933. He was a good business man, very clever at making money. In his business he sold women's hats, especially to British women. One day a wealthy woman was not interested in a particular hat because she thought the price was too low. The brother went to the back of the shop, changed the ribbon on the hat, and doubled the price. At that price, the woman was happy to buy it. By this we see what a clever merchant this brother was. Although he was clever in business, he was lacking in wisdom and could not understand when we spoke about the Scriptures. His mind was very active, but his spirit was not keen. Nevertheless, this brother had a heart for the Lord, came to the meetings of the church, and trusted in us for everything concerning the Lord. He was an excellent example of the difference between cleverness and wisdom.

Let us also give an example of one who had wisdom, but not much cleverness. In 1938 I visited the countryside in northern China, where most of the people had little education. Among them was a certain elderly sister. Although she was not educated, she was very wise concerning the things of the Lord. Whenever you spoke

with her about the Lord, she was wise in her spirit. In talking about business this sister had no understanding, but in talking about the Lord she knew much more than most saints because she had wisdom in the spirit.

C. Revelation Being the Opening of the Veil by God's Spirit to Show Us the Vision of the Mystery of God

After wisdom comes revelation. As we have pointed out, revelation means unveiling, the opening of the veil. Revelation is of God's Spirit to show us the vision of the mystery of God (3:3-5). Suppose you are studying engineering. Through your years of study you gain knowledge of various machines. This knowledge may be compared to wisdom. One day you visit a factory. As soon as the doors are opened, you see all the machines. The opening of the doors can be compared to revelation. Because of your wisdom, your knowledge of these machines, you spontaneously have an understanding of them. However, someone who does not have this engineering knowledge would not understand anything about these machines, although he would also be able to see them. He would have the revelation, but be short of wisdom. Some may have the wisdom without the opening of the door; others may have the opening of the door without wisdom. Only when we have both wisdom and revelation do we have the understanding of the machines. The same is true regarding spiritual things. We need both wisdom and the opening of the veil. When we have both, we can understand spiritual things.

D. In the Full Knowledge of Him

When we have wisdom and revelation, we have the full knowledge of God. We know God in a full way.

III. THE FACT--THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

In addition to having a spirit of wisdom and revelation, we must also deal with the eyes of our heart. Here the first thing to consider is the fact, which is the mystery of God's will (1:9). In the illustration given above, the factory

represents the fact. In like manner the mystery of God's will is the fact we need to see.

IV. THE REVELATION--THE OPENING OF THE VEIL

Although the fact may exist, there must still be the revelation, the opening of the veil. It is a fact that the factory exists, but the doors must be opened to us. This is the opening of the veil.

V. THE EYES OF OUR HEART-- THE SPIRITUAL FACULTY TO SEE

Although we may have the fact and the opening of the veil, we also need eyes with which to see. We may have the mystery of God's will and the revelation, but we still need eyes, the spiritual faculty to see (Acts 26:18; Rev. 3:18). The eyes we are talking about are, of course, the spiritual eyes, the eyes of the heart. In Revelation 3:18 the Lord Jesus said, "I counsel you to buy from Me...eyesalve to anoint your eyes that you may see." We need eyesalve to restore sight to our eyes. Today there is no problem with the fact, for the Bible is filled with facts. Moreover, there is no problem with revelation, with the opening of the veil. God is gracious to us, and His Word is continually open to us. The main problem is with our eyes.

A. An Open Spirit with a Purified Conscience

In order to have eyes to see, we need an open spirit with a purified conscience (Matt. 5:3; Heb. 9:14; 10:22). Do not close your spirit--keep it open. Furthermore, our conscience must be purified not only by the sprinkling of the redeeming blood of Christ, but also by our confession and dealing with our sins, offenses, mistakes, and errors. We must be clear in our conscience, which is the main part of our spirit. If our conscience is opaque, our spirit will not be able to see.

B. A Pure Heart

We also need a pure heart. The Word says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Many

cannot see God or receive the revelation of spiritual things because their heart is not pure. If we would have a pure heart, we must deal with our whole heart, that is, with all the parts that compose our heart.

1. A Sober Mind

In order to have a pure heart, we need a sober mind (2 Tim. 1:7). Some saints are rather confused in their minds, unable to classify anything. To them the letters "b" and "d" are about the same. As they read the Bible, Galatians and Colossians appear to them the same. They do not have a sober mind.

2. A Loving Emotion

Although our mind should be cold, the colder the better, our emotion should be hot. In order to have seeing eyes, we need a loving emotion (John 14:21). If our mind is hot, it will not be sober. Our problem is that we are either hot in both mind and emotion or cold in both. It is easy for the sisters to be hot and for the brothers to be cold. But we all need to be cold in our mind and hot in our emotion.

3. A Submissive Will

Finally, a pure heart requires a submissive will (John 7:17). If our will is to be submissive, it must be soft.

I have learned from experience that if we have a pure heart with a sober mind, a loving emotion, a submissive will, and an open spirit with a pure conscience, our eyes will be able to see. Our spirit must be open and our conscience void of offense. Along with this our heart must have a cold and sober mind, a hot and loving emotion, and a soft and submissive will. When we have such a spirit and heart, the eyes of our heart will be able to see. Whenever we apply eyesalve to our eyes, the salve opens our spirit, purifies our conscience, cools our hot mind, stirs our cold emotion, and subdues our stubborn will. When all this takes place, our eyes are healed. To be healed is to have these five aspects of our being dealt with. If we do not have an open spirit, a purified conscience, a sober mind, a loving

emotion, and a submissive will, we shall not see anything, although we may sit through many conferences and trainings. We may learn doctrines, but we shall not see anything in the way of a vision.

VI. THE LIGHT--THE ENLIGHTENING BY GOD

We may have the fact, the revelation, and the sight, but still be unable to see because we do not have light. Therefore, we also need to be enlightened by God (1 John 1:5, 7). Not until light comes in addition to the fact, the revelation, and the sight do we have the vision.

VII. THE VISION--THE SEEING

The vision is the sum of four things: the fact, the revelation, the sight, and the light. Many Christians read Ephesians again and again without seeing anything. To them, Ephesians is a closed book. They do not have the inner sight to see anything within the black and white letters of this book. Some may have the sight, but not the light. By experience, we can testify that Ephesians is filled with spiritual facts. It reveals the mystery of the will of God. If, as we read this book, our condition is normal and proper, the veils will be opened, the light will come, and we shall see a vision of God's will. If the divine light does not come, we need to pray more, asking the Lord to grant us light. Eventually, the light will shine and we shall see a vision of what is contained in this book. As we have pointed out, there is no problem with the fact or with the opening of the veil. Also, God is gracious to grant us the light. What we especially need today are the eyes to see.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

THE HOPE OF GOD'S CALLING AND THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF GOD'S INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS

Ephesians 1:18 says, "The eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." According to this verse, we need to know two things: the hope of God's calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. The Apostle Paul's first prayer in the book of Ephesians is that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in order to know certain things, the first of which is the hope of God's calling.

I. NO LONGER ALIENS HAVING NO HOPE

Before we were saved, we had no hope. As 2:12 says, we were "apart from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world." But after being saved, we are no longer aliens having no hope; instead, we are full of hope. However, because many believers do not know what a hope is theirs, Paul prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in order to know the hope of God's calling.

II. GOD'S CALLED PEOPLE FULL OF HOPE

A. Christ Himself

As God's called people, we are full of hope. Firstly, our hope is Christ Himself. Colossians 1:27 says that Christ in us is the hope of glory. Moreover, 1 Timothy 1:1 speaks of Jesus Christ being our hope. Christ is not only our life and

holiness; He is also our hope. Our hope is singly and uniquely Christ. Every aspect of our hope is related to Him.

B. The Rapture, the Transfiguration of Our Body, and Glorification

The second aspect of our hope is the rapturous transfer from the earthly and physical realm to the heavenly spiritual sphere and glorification (Rom. 8:23-25, 30; Phil. 3:21). The word "rapture" means ecstasy, to be beside ourselves with joy. To us Christians the rapture denotes being taken up. Bible teachers use this word to describe the taking up because, according to them, being taken up is a kind of ecstasy. However, I doubt that many Christians truly believe that their being taken up will be an ecstasy. Would you be happy if the Lord came today? Would you be in an ecstasy, or would you weep? Most Christians would either weep or be frightened. Although the rapture is an aspect of the hope of God's calling, this hope depends upon whether or not we live by the Lord. If we live by Him and walk with Him, our being taken up will be ecstasy. But if we do not live by Him and walk with Him, I doubt that it will be ecstasy.

A great many Christians take this matter of the rapture in a loose way. Some hold the concept that no matter what they are doing or where they are, they will be raptured when the Lord comes back. But what if you are in a theater or are arguing with your wife or husband? Would rapture during such circumstances be an ecstasy? Certainly not! I would not want to be quarreling when the Lord Jesus comes back. In 2 Timothy 4:1 Paul said to Timothy, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom." This indicates that Timothy was to live in the light of the appearing of the Lord and in the kingdom. Whatever the kingdom will reject in the future must be rejected in our living today. I do not believe that many, even among us, are living in the appearing of the Lord. If we lived in His appearing, we would certainly refrain from quarreling; we would not

want to be found arguing when the Lord appears. Not many Christians regard the Lord's coming as a warning. If you read the New Testament, especially the Epistles, you will see that the Apostles lived with the appearing of the Lord in view. The Lord's appearing was constantly a warning to them and regulated their living. They did not dare to do certain things because they believed that the Lord could appear at any time. If we take seriously the matters of the Lord's appearing and the kingdom, they will greatly affect our daily living.

Many Christians, however, talk a great deal about the rapture and the Lord's coming; but after their talk they indulge in worldly amusements. What a pitiful situation! Some Christians have been known to use the same table for gambling as for a gathering to study the Bible. Others have a discussion about the Lord's coming, then go to sporting events, to the movies, or dancing. Have you seen that the appearing of Christ must be a basic factor in our daily living? We must live today in the light of the Lord's appearing. If we do, our being taken up will be an ecstasy.

After we are taken up, we shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ and settle our account with Him. At that time we shall have to deal with all our shortcomings, unfaithfulness, failures, and dishonesty. Many Christians have heaped up many such things in the course of their Christian life. When the Lord comes and they appear before the judgment seat, they certainly will not be full of joy. On the contrary, they will be terrified. We all need to reconsider our living. Many make excuses for themselves, especially for their weaknesses. Some say, "The Lord knows how weak we are, and He will be merciful with us. It doesn't matter whether or not we fail or make mistakes. The Lord is merciful." Others excuse themselves by saying that they do not want to be so spiritual or religious. When the Lord comes, however, there will be no excuses. Whether or not His coming will be an ecstasy depends upon our daily living. If we live a life of failure, defeat, dishonesty, unfaithfulness, and rebellion,

the Lord's coming will not be an ecstasy, but a judgment. We need to take heed to the Lord's word to watch and pray (Luke 21:36). If we are watchful, praying seekers of the Lord, His coming will be our ecstasy. This is our hope.

How much hope we have in the days to come depends upon our being built up today. If we are not built up in the Lord, we shall have very little hope. Christ is in us as the hope of glory, but even this hope is dependent upon how much we are built up. When Christ comes back, will He be your Judge or your Bridegroom? He may be a Bridegroom to others, but a Judge to you. If that is the case, as far as you are concerned, He will not be your hope of glory. Whether or not He is your hope in this respect depends upon the kind of Christian life you are living today. This is serious, and it should cause us to reconsider our ways. If our living is normal, Christ is our hope, and rapture will be an ecstasy.

At the time of rapture our body will be transfigured, and we shall be glorified. However, I say these things cautiously because of the deplorable situation among today's Christians. By the Lord's grace, we in the Lord's recovery must come up to His standard and live the life that He requires. We need to be His living witnesses bearing a testimony for Him outside the camp. If we are like this, the returning Christ and our being taken up will be our hope. Furthermore, the transfiguration of our body and our glorification will also be a hope to us.

C. The Coming Salvation of Our Soul

Included in the hope of God's calling is the hope of the coming salvation of our soul (1 Pet. 1:5, 9). If we lose our soul today for the Lord's sake, suffering in our soul for His testimony, we have the hope of receiving the salvation of our soul at the Lord's coming. Today our soul is suffering, but when He comes, He will bring our soul into His enjoyment. This is the salvation of the soul mentioned in 1 Peter. However, if we save our soul today, caring for its enjoyment instead of for the Lord's testimony, the Lord's

coming back will be a loss and a judgment to our soul. But if we are always willing to lose our soul for His testimony, then His coming back will bring salvation to our soul, salvation that will usher our soul into His enjoyment. This hope is determined by how we live today.

D. The Kingly Enjoyment with Christ in the Millennium

Another aspect of our hope is the kingly enjoyment with Christ in the millennium (Rev. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:18; Matt. 25:21, 23). This is also related to how we live today. In the Gospel of Matthew the slothful slaves are put into outer darkness, and the faithful ones are brought into the enjoyment of the Lord. Thus, there will be chastisement for some and a positive reward for others. We all are Christians, but we shall not all be dealt with in the same way at the Lord's coming. The way the Lord deals with us depends on how we live today. If we are faithful, we shall be rewarded with the Lord's enjoyment for a thousand years. But if we are slothful, we shall be punished. Whether or not the millennium will be a hope to us is determined by our attitude today. We need to be normal Christians who are faithful to the Lord. Then the millennium will be our hope.

E. The Consummate Enjoyment with Christ in the New Jerusalem with the Universal and Eternal Blessings in the New Heaven and New Earth

Finally, the hope of God's calling includes the consummate enjoyment of Christ in the New Jerusalem with the universal and eternal blessings in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1-7; 22:1-5). Hallelujah for this hope! We all shall be in the New Jerusalem. But in order to get there, we need to ripen and mature. If we do not mature in this age, we shall have to mature in the next. Everyone enjoying the New Jerusalem in the new heaven

and new earth will be mature. Do not ask me how the Lord will make all of us mature. He knows how to do this and has a way to accomplish it, either in this age or in the next. I realize that the theology popular among Christians today does not recognize this fact. Most Christians say that as long as we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, everything related to us will be all right in the next age. But the day is coming when many will realize that not everything is all right. Yes, we are saved for eternity, but we still need to be dealt with in order to mature. Therefore, I say once again that we need to reconsider our ways. Nevertheless, for all of us the New Jerusalem is our hope. Second Peter 3:13 says, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Without knowing the hope of God's calling, we shall not be willing to drop the distracting things. But if we see that Christ is coming, that we shall be taken up, transfigured, and glorified, and that we can share in the Lord's enjoyment in the millennium, we shall spontaneously drop all other things. Otherwise, not seeing what is coming, we shall be deceived by the things that are present. We need to be rescued by seeing each aspect of our hope. For this reason the Apostle Paul prayed that we here would know the hope of God's calling. God's calling includes not only selection, predestination, redemption, sealing, and pledging, but a splendid future. His calling is related not only to the past, but also to the future. What a marvelous future we have!

III. GOD'S CALLING BEING THE SUM TOTAL OF ALL GOD'S BLESSINGS

God's calling is the sum total of all the blessings listed in verses 3 through 14: God the Father's selection and predestination; God the Son's redemption; and God the Spirit's sealing and pledging. When we were called, we participated in the Father's selection and predestination, in the Son's redemption, and in the Spirit's sealing and pledging.

Have you ever considered that in our calling we have received all the blessings of the Triune God? Few Christians realize this. Nevertheless, these blessings are the contents of God's calling. Therefore, the calling of God means a great deal. God's calling is His selection, predestination, redemption, sealing, and pledging. This means that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are all involved in God's calling. The Triune God is our portion in His calling.

We have pointed out that God's calling includes selection. The Father has also predestinated us; He has made a destiny for us beforehand. This destiny is sonship. What a wonderful destiny! After being selected and predestinated by the Father, we were redeemed by the Son. Then the Spirit came to seal us and to pledge God into us. Since we have all this, what else could we desire? I am fully satisfied and content with what the Triune God is to me.

IV. GOD'S GLORY BEING GOD EXPRESSED

Now we come to the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints. We have pointed out many times that God's glory is God Himself expressed. When God is expressed, that is glory.

V. THE RICHES OF GOD'S GLORY BEING THE MANY DIFFERENT ITEMS OF GOD'S ATTRIBUTES EXPRESSED IN DIFFERENT DEGREES

The riches of God's glory are the many different items of His attributes, such as light, life, power, love, righteousness, and holiness, expressed in different degrees. Since glory is God's expression, the riches of glory are the riches of God's expression. Some examples of the divine attributes are divine love, humility, patience, and holiness. I specifically use the word "divine" because we were made in such a way as to have the form of the divine things. For example, we have human humility. Human humility,

however, is not the real humility; it is simply the form of the genuine humility, which is the divine humility. The same is true of human love. It also is a form of the genuine, divine love. Hence, divine love is the reality of human love. Every human being has love. But this love is not lasting. You may love your parents, but your love for them may last only for a few days. Likewise, a brother may love his wife, but perhaps only for a period of weeks. We all love others, but our love is like a fleeting shadow. One day a brother may love his wife to the uttermost, and the next day he may drag her down to hell. Such love is not a part of the riches of God's glory.

I repeat, the riches of glory are the expression of the divine attributes and divine virtues. There are not only two kinds of love and humility, human and divine, but also two kinds of righteousness and patience, human righteousness and patience and divine righteousness and patience. Many Christians mistake human virtues for divine virtues. In doing this they make a serious error. We do not need to develop human virtues; we are short of the divine virtues. When God in Christ is wrought into us, our love, humility, patience, and righteousness become divine. These divine virtues are the riches of the glory of God. Such virtues are God's inheritance among the saints. It is important to see this.

If we see this matter, our Christian life will be changed. Nearly all who seek the Lord still live in a natural way and condemn only their natural evil, not their natural goodness. The evil is condemned, but the good is appreciated. There is no discernment between the natural and the divine. As long as a certain thing is good, it is justified and accepted. This practice is wrong. We must discern the natural from the divine. Only the divine attributes, not the human virtues, are the riches of God's glory. If we see this, we shall have the proper church life. The proper church life is not filled with natural human virtues; it is filled with the divine virtues as the riches of God's expression in His inheritance among the saints.

VI. GOD'S INHERITANCE IN AND AMONG THE SAINTS

Now we need to see what is God's inheritance in and among the saints. In verse 18 the Greek word translated "in" may also be rendered "among." God's inheritance is in and among the saints. We, the saints, are God's inheritance. What we are by nature, however, cannot be God's inheritance. God does not desire to inherit our nature, our flesh, our natural being. He desires to inherit all that He has wrought into us of Himself. Therefore, whatever God has wrought into us of Himself becomes His inheritance.

VII. GOD'S INHERITANCE TO BE HIS ETERNAL EXPRESSION

God has firstly made us His inheritance (v. 11) as His acquired possession (v. 14) and gave us to participate in all He is, all He has, and all He has accomplished as our inheritance. Consummately, all these become His inheritance in the saints for eternity. This will be His eternal expression, which is His glory with all its riches to express Him to the uttermost universally and eternally (Rev. 21:11).

We have seen that God is in the process of dispensing Himself into us little by little. Whatever God dispenses of Himself into us becomes His inheritance. Eventually, God will inherit us, actually Himself in us. Within us we have a certain amount of God's inheritance. The amount depends upon how much God has wrought Himself into our being. We need to pray and ask the Lord to show us how much of Him is within us. Do not think that doing so is to be introspective. We need to ask the Lord to show us how much in us is God and how much is ourselves. Christians very seldom consider matters in this way. Instead, they weigh themselves according to an ethical scale, according to good and bad, right and wrong, love and hate. However, the scale upon which we must weigh ourselves is God Himself. How much of God is in you, in your family life, and in the church life? If we weigh ourselves in this way, we shall discover that we still do not have very much of

God. Nevertheless, we thank Him for what we have. What we need now is the increase of God within us. It is God Himself within us that constitutes His inheritance among the saints. In this inheritance there are the riches of His glory. Therefore, in 1:18 Paul speaks of the riches of His glory in the saints. The proper church life is not a life of natural virtues, but a life of the divine virtues as God's expression in His inheritance among the saints.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF GOD'S POWER

In 1:18 and 19 Paul prayed that we would know what is the hope of God's calling, what are the riches of God's inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of God's power to us who believe. Related to these three things we need to know three key words: hope, glory, and power. The hope is the hope of God's calling, the glory is the glory of God's inheritance among the saints, and the power is the power toward us according to the operation of the might of God's strength which He wrought in Christ.

Hope, glory, and power are all related to the blessings in verses 3 through 14, where five aspects of God's well-speaking are covered: the Father's selection, the Father's predestination, the Son's redemption, the Spirit's sealing, and the Spirit's pledging. The Father's selection was that we should be holy, and His predestination was that we should become His sons. The Son's redemption was that we may be headed up in Christ. The Spirit's sealing is that we may be transformed into God's image, fully saturated with Him in order to bear His appearance. Furthermore, the Spirit's pledging is God's pledging Himself into us as our enjoyment, taste, and guarantee. These are the contents of the Triune God's well-speaking concerning us.

The result of these blessings is hope. Our calling is the sum total of the spiritual blessings, and our hope is the issue of these blessings. This hope is also a glory. After mentioning the contents of God's well-speaking, the Apostle Paul, out of the depths of his spiritual understanding, prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation and that the eyes of our heart would be enlightened. For this, our entire inner being

must be dealt with. Our spirit must be open, our conscience must be purified, our heart must be pure, our mind must be sober, our emotion must be loving, and our will must be submissive. When every part of our inner being has been dealt with, we can know the hope, the glory, and the power. Since the calling includes all of God's blessings, the hope is the hope of these blessings. This hope is the glory of becoming holy. The glory is also the full sonship. When we arrive at full sonship, our body will be glorified, transfigured. According to Romans 8:21, all creation will enjoy the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. This glory is our hope.

We have seen that this glory has its riches, including all the items of God's attributes and virtues. God is rich in attributes and virtues such as love, life, light, humility, righteousness, holiness, and longsuffering. When these are fully expressed in us, that expression will be the riches of God's glory. Now we can see that hope and glory are the result of the five blessings, of the five items of God's well-speaking concerning us.

The divine power is the unique means to fulfill this hope and to arrive at this glory. Although hope and glory may be somewhat objective, the surpassing greatness of God's power toward us is very subjective and experiential. God's power toward us is surpassingly great. We need to know this power and experience it.

Twenty-five years ago, I conducted a thorough study of the book of Ephesians in Taipei. However, at that time I did not see that hope and glory are the result of God's blessings and that they are accomplished by the divine power. Now I see that after mentioning the blessings of the Triune God related to us, Paul prayed that we would know the hope and glory of God's blessings. Glory is the expression of God's blessings. In His blessings God intends that we become His inheritance. In order to be God's inheritance, we must inherit Him and enjoy Him. Firstly we inherit Him and then we become His inheritance. This is the result of God's working of Himself into us to make us one with Him. Through God's working in us, we become His satisfaction, and He becomes our satisfaction. This

mutual satisfaction is also a mutual inheritance, an inheritance that will have the glory that expresses all God is in His attributes and virtues. This will be the expression of the Triune God for eternity. This glory is our hope.

Now we come to the subjective matter of the fulfillment of this hope and glory by the divine power. Especially in this nuclear age, we are very conscious of the need of power to do everything. For example, it took power for man to land on the moon. Without power we are nothing. The power that fulfills our hope is the power spoken of in 3:20, where Paul says that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think according to the power that works in us. The Greek word translated "works" in 3:20 means operates. The English equivalent is energizes. The power within us not only works and operates; it energizes. Human language is not adequate to describe the surpassing greatness of this power.

I. TOWARD THE BELIEVERS

This power is toward the believers. It is like the electrical power that is continually being transmitted from the power plant to our building for our daily life. In the same principle, the divine power is being transmitted into us continually to make us the inheritance for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

II. ACCORDING TO THE OPERATION OF THE MIGHT OF HIS STRENGTH

Verse 19 also says that the greatness of God's power is "according to the operation of the might of His strength." In writing Ephesians Paul virtually exhausted the Greek language. In this verse he speaks of power, operation, might, and strength. Paul used many different words to convey something of the vastness of God's power to us.

III. WROUGHT IN CHRIST

The surpassingly great power of God toward us is according to the operation of the might of His strength which He wrought in Christ. God's power toward us is the same power that operated in Christ. As the Body we participate in the power that operates in the Head.

A. In Raising Him from among the Dead

The great power that operated in Christ firstly raised Him from among the dead. This power has overcome death, the grave, and Hades, the place where the dead are held. Because of God's resurrection power, death and Hades could not hold Christ (Acts 2:24).

B. In Seating Him at His Right Hand in the Heavenlies

The surpassing greatness of God's power has also seated Christ at God's right hand in the heavenlies, "far above all rule and authority and power and lordship, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is coming" (vv. 20-21). God's right hand, where Christ has been seated by the surpassingly great power of God, is the most honorable place, the place with supreme authority. The heavenlies refers not only to the third heaven, the highest place in the universe, where God dwells, but also to the state and atmosphere of the heavens, in which Christ was seated by God's power.

In verse 21 Paul says that Christ has been seated above all rule, authority, power, and lordship and above every name that is named. Rule refers to the highest office; authority, to every kind of official power (Matt. 8:9); power, to the mere might of authority; and lordship, to the preeminence which power establishes. The authorities here include not only the angelic, heavenly authorities, good or bad, but also the human, earthly ones. The ascended Christ has been seated far above all rule, authority, power, and lordship in the entire universe. Every name that is named refers not only to titles of honor, but also to everything that has a name. Christ has been seated far above everything, both in this age and in the coming age.

C. In Subjecting All Things under His Feet

Verse 22 says, "And He subjected all things under His feet." Thirdly, the great power that operated in Christ has subjected all things under His feet. For Christ to be far

above all is one thing; for all things to be subjected under His feet is another. The former is Christ's transcendency; the latter is the subjection of all things to Him. Here we see the subduing power, the power to subdue all things.

D. In Giving Him to Be Head over All Things

The last part of verse 22 says, "And gave Him to be head over all things to the church." Fourthly, God's great power that operated in Christ gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church. The headship of Christ over all things is a gift from God to Him. It was through God's surpassingly great power that Christ received the headship in the universe. As a man, in His humanity with His divinity, Christ was raised up from the dead, was seated in the heavenlies, had all things subjected to Him, and was given to be the Head over all things.

In these verses we see four aspects of the power that operated in Christ: resurrection power, transcending power, subjecting power, and heading-up power. This fourfold power is to the church. The words "to the church" in verse 22 imply a transmission. Whatever Christ, the Head, has attained and obtained is now being transmitted to the church, His Body. In this transmission the church shares with Christ all His attainments: the resurrection from among the dead, His being transcendent over all, the subjecting of all things under His feet, and the headship over all things.

The church comes out of this power. The little word "to" indicates the source of the church. This power, which is transmitted to the church, will accomplish the glory and fulfill our hope. Both the hope and glory are ahead of us, but the power is with us today.

Both electricity and nuclear power are excellent illustrations of this fourfold power. In the Lord's recovery we have both the divine electricity and the heavenly nuclear power, and we use them. Most Christians have little knowledge of this power. Few who know about the power know about the switch. Suppose you are a guest in

someone's home for a night. Although you may be put in a wonderful room, you will be in darkness unless you know where the light switch is. Day by day we in the Lord's recovery are touching the switch. The Apostle Paul prayed that we would know the surpassing greatness of the divine power. Because the greatness of this heavenly nuclear power surpasses our knowledge, no one can tell how great it is. Nevertheless, we still may know it. How wonderful!

If we knew the surpassing greatness of the divine power that operated in Christ, we would never again use our weakness as an excuse. In relation to such a power, our weakness means nothing. The divine power can raise us up from among the dead, even if, like Lazarus, we are dead, buried, and stinking. Expecting me to sympathize with them, the sisters have often told me that they are weak vessels. Yes, according to 1 Peter 3:7, the sisters are the weaker vessels, but I do not sympathize with their weaknesses because the heavenly nuclear power is available to them. With this power there is no weakness.

The transmission of the fourfold power is to those who believe. What we say is what we believe. If you say you are weak, it means that you believe that you are weak. The sisters need to rise up and proclaim that because they have the divine nuclear power, they are not weak. Paul prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know the hope of God's calling, the riches of His glory, and the surpassing greatness of His power toward us. If you saw that this power toward us is the power that raised Christ from among the dead, would you still say that you are weak? Do not underestimate the significance of your speaking. Whatever God speaks comes to pass. In principle it is the same with us. To have faith is to speak what God speaks. When God says, "You are saved," we should say, "Amen!" Anyone who responds in this way is saved. Likewise, if God says, "The divine power is yours," we need to say, "Amen!" Then this power will be ours. Do not say that there are still weak ones among us, for we all are stronger than David, even as strong as Jesus Christ. Do you have the boldness to say that you are as

powerful as Christ? If we knew the transmission of the heavenly power, we could confidently say this.

In 6:10 Paul said, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Paul's word in chapter six is based upon the word he spoke in chapter one. By means of the divine power we can be strong and stand. Often brothers and sisters say that they are "down." But we are not "down"--we are in the heavenlies far above all. We are in Christ's transcendency, far above all things, including all demons, evil angels, principalities, and powers. If we see this, nothing will be able to drag us down. This is not a dream; this is the power that will accomplish the glory and fulfill our unique hope. Our hope is not in vain. Rather, it has a solid basis in the divine power. Before the astronauts were launched toward the moon, they had the full assurance that they had the power to reach the moon and land there. Likewise, our basis is the surpassing greatness of God's power toward us who believe. I simply do not have the words to express this. All I can do is repeat the words of the Apostle Paul: the surpassing greatness of the power is toward us who believe.

Ephesians 1:22 implies that all things have been subjected under our feet, and we must believe this. If we do not, we rebel against the word of our Father. Our Father cannot lie; whatever He says is true. Hence, we must take His word and believe it. Forget your feelings, your condition, and your situation. Do not say that a certain difficult situation cannot be under your feet. The truth is that we are far above all and that the divine power has subjected all things, including every difficult situation, under our feet. Do not be distracted by your environment, and do not believe your situation. Forget everything and simply take the word, believe the word, and declare the word. Hallelujah for the subduing power!

We thank the Lord also for the heading-up power, the power that gave Christ to be Head over all things to the church. We should not misunderstand Paul's word in 1:22 and think that we are the head. To do this is to make a great mistake. We must always have the consciousness of

being under the Head. However, when we are under the Head, we share in the heading-up power. We are not the Head, but we have a part in the heading up of all things.

Because within us is the transcending power that makes us far above all, we need to rise up from our weakness and believe the word that we are transcendent. We need to see this, believe this, and speak this. We also need to know that all things are subdued beneath our feet. Do not believe your situation, but take the Word and proclaim whatever it says. Furthermore, we must keep ourselves under the headship of Christ. If we do, we shall be in the heading up of all things. The issue of all this is the church life. Every problem in the church life comes from a shortage of the full knowledge of this divine power. If we have the full knowledge of this power and live by it, we shall have a wonderful church life, a church life without any problems.

May we all bring this to the Lord and pray, "Lord, answer in me the prayer of the Apostle Paul that I would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation and that the eyes of my heart would be enlightened to know the power that is toward me according to the operation of the might of Your strength. I want to know the power wrought in Christ to raise Him from the dead, to seat Him in the heavenlies far above all, to subject all things under His feet, and to give Him to be the Head over all things to the church." There is no need to interpret Paul's word in 1:19-22. You should simply pray over it and fellowship about it. Eventually, these verses will become real to you. May we all see this power, know it, believe it, and speak it.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

CHRIST TO BE THE HEAD OVER ALL THINGS TO THE CHURCH

In Ephesians 1 Paul prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of God. According to the context, to have the full knowledge of God means to know the hope of God's calling, the glory of God's inheritance among the saints, and the surpassing greatness of God's power toward us who believe. To know God is to know the hope, the glory, and the power, for God Himself is in the hope, glory, and power. If we claim to know God without knowing these three things, then we know God merely in an objective way, not in an experiential way. But to know God in the hope, the glory, and the power is to know Him experientially and subjectively.

Most Christians today know God objectively, in the way of mere knowledge. To them, God is far away in the heavens. They know God as the object of their belief and worship, but they do not know Him subjectively as their hope, glory, and power. They do not know Him as the One operating within them to make them holy, to constitute them the sons of God, and to cause them to become the inheritance of God.

BECOMING GOD'S INHERITANCE

We have pointed out that God's calling is the sum total of His well-speaking concerning us. In God's well-speaking we are made holy, we are constituted the sons of God, and we become God's inheritance. Therefore, we shall be a treasure worthy of becoming God's inheritance. God is so high, so great, and exceedingly precious. Nevertheless, He

will receive us as His inheritance. However, if we look at our present condition, we shall realize that we are not worthy to be His inheritance. But God will work within us to make us worthy, precious, and valuable, a unique treasure in the universe as an inheritance for Him. God considers us, His chosen people, His peculiar possession. The only way we can become God's treasure, His peculiar possession, is by the divine working in us. God is the treasure, and He is working Himself as the treasure into us that we may become a treasure to Him.

THE NEW JERUSALEM

We have seen that three important aspects of God's well-speaking are that we shall be made holy, that we shall be constituted the sons of God, and that we shall become God's inheritance. These three aspects are seen in the New Jerusalem. According to Revelation 21, the New Jerusalem will be a holy city, a city in which God's holiness is seen. Also, the New Jerusalem will be a composition of the sons of God. Revelation 21:7 says that he who overcomes will inherit all things and be God's son. This indicates that the New Jerusalem is the totality of the divine sonship. Furthermore, the New Jerusalem will be a treasure, an inheritance, both to God and to us. In the New Jerusalem God will enjoy us as His treasure, and we shall enjoy Him as our treasure. Therefore, the New Jerusalem will be a mutual inheritance and a mutual satisfaction for God and man. The New Jerusalem will be the embodiment of holiness, a composition of the sons of God, and a mutual inheritance for God and man. Moreover, the New Jerusalem will have the glory of God, which is the glory of God's inheritance, the riches of the glory of His inheritance among the saints. Today this glory is our hope.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE POWER TOWARD US WHO BELIEVE

This hope is being fulfilled by the surpassingly great power of God. Fundamental Christianity has little power. Neither does Pentecostal Christianity have the proper

power. But Ephesians 1 speaks of the power that is toward us who believe. As those who believe in the Lord Jesus and in the Bible, we can all proclaim, "Hallelujah, I believe! I believe in the Lord Jesus and I believe in the Word of God." We do not need to fast and pray in order to receive the divine power, for this power is toward us who believe. By believing we are positioned and qualified to receive the power of God. Hallelujah, this power is toward us who believe!

Electricity is an excellent illustration of this. When we built our meeting hall in Anaheim, electricity was installed. Now electrical power is toward the building. It is up to us whether or not we use this power, and we use it by turning on the switch. Likewise, the heavenly electricity has been installed in us, and the heavenly power is toward us. The way to receive this power is not to fast and pray for several days; it is simply to use the switch. One way to practice using the switch is to speak Ephesians 1:19-23 again and again. If we speak these verses ten times, we shall be empowered. However, if you repeatedly say that you are weak, you will in fact be weak. But by speaking positively in faith, we exercise our whole being to receive the divine power. When we speak in faith and receive the power, all negative things flee away. Satan is not afraid of our pitiful, begging prayers, but he is afraid of our speaking in faith. We need to say, "I believe, I speak, I have the power, I am strong." This is not superstition; it is our Christian faith.

Regarding faith, there must first be the fact. God comes in to tell us about the fact, and then we believe what God says. Our Christian believing is exactly like this. Although we cannot see it, it is a fact that Christ has resurrected from among the dead and has been seated in the heavens far above all. Furthermore, it is a fact that all things have been subjected under His feet and that He is the Head over all things to the church. These are accomplished facts in the universe. Through His holy Word God comes in to tell us of these facts. Then we believe what God has spoken and

speak whatever God speaks. This is faith. We should not only read and study the Bible, but also speak the Bible. Some condemn us for repeating the verses of the Bible, but we would only repeat them more.

In this universe a transmission is taking place from the Lord in the heavens to the church. Ephesians 1:19 says that this transmission is "toward us who believe." Furthermore, 1:22 says, "And He subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church." The little word "to" indicates a transmission. The power that is toward us is the Triune God. This power is not only the creating power, but the power that has passed through incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. After all these steps, the Triune God comes to us as such a power. Within this power, therefore, there is the power of creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Hence, it is an all-inclusive power. The power toward us who believe is the Triune God, the Creator of the universe, who became incarnated, passed through crucifixion, entered into resurrection and ascension, and has come down to us. This power has been installed in us, just as electricity is installed in a building.

We need to believe that this power is now right within us. Many of us, however, are too natural and too logical and say, "How could such a power be in me? I realize that I have repented, that I have confessed my sins to God, and that I believe in Him and trust Him. I can understand that God has saved me, forgiven me, and cleansed me with the precious blood of Christ. But at the moment I believed I did not feel that divine power was installed in me. Do you mean to say that an all-inclusive power, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit with the creation, incarnation, Crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, has been wrought into me? I simply don't feel that I have such a power. It is not logical to say that I have it. " Logic is always opposed to faith, and faith is opposed to logic. In this matter of the transmission of divine power, do not try to be so logical. Instead, exercise faith.

Let us consider the matter this way. We have been reborn, regenerated. To be reborn is to have God born in us. Do you believe that God has been born into you? The very God who has been born into you is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. By the time this God was born into you, He had already passed through creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Did you feel all this when you were regenerated? Whether you had any feeling regarding it or not means nothing. What is important is that you believe whatever the Bible says. When the Bible tells you that you are sinful, you need to say, "Amen." When the Bible says to repent, you need to repent. At the time you believed, something happened to you and in you, although you might not have understood what it was. What happened was that the power, the Triune God Himself, was installed in you.

THE NEED TO KNOW THIS POWER

Because it is important that believers have the proper knowledge of this power, the Apostle Paul prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of God and know the surpassing greatness of the power that is toward us who believe. Yes, we have the surpassingly great power within us, but our need today is to know this power. Whether you are aware of it or not, there is a transmission taking place from the third heaven, the place where God is, into us. It is this transmission that makes us different from unbelievers. Because of this power within us, it is impossible for us to cast off our Christian faith. Again I say that within us there is the divine power and that this power is the Triune God who has passed through creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension and has been installed in us as the all-inclusive power. Thus, there is a divine connection between us and the third heaven. What we need today is to know the surpassing greatness of this power.

SPEAKING AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE TRANSMISSION

We need to read these verses in Ephesians again and again until we are deeply impressed with them and can speak them forth. Every day we need to speak them to ourselves, to those in our family, to the brothers and sisters, to the angels and demons, and to all the created beings. The more we speak of this power, the more we shall experience it being transmitted into us.

Eventually, through our faith in this transmission and through our speaking it forth, the church will come forth in a practical way. Christ is the Head over all things to the church. We need to believe this and speak it continually. For the sake of a better church life, I would suggest that we all speak 1:19-23 ten times a day. Let us see what the result will be if we all do this. How much better is this kind of speaking than vain talk about the brothers and sisters or the situation in the church! Talking about the saints does not lift us up and strengthen us; on the contrary, it brings us down and weakens us. If all the saints talk this way, the church life will disappear. Therefore, let us speak 1:19-23 and forget about the situation with the churches, the elders, and the brothers and sisters. For a period of ten days, let all of us in the church speak these verses ten times a day. I believe that if we do this, the church life will be uplifted, for as we speak, the transmission will take place. In this way we shall be infused with divine power from the heavenly transmission. From experience I can testify that this will happen.

We are too natural, too logical, and too low. Let us forget about the condition of the churches and the saints and come back to God's speaking. Let us return to the pure word of God. Let us believe God's word and speak it. As we speak, we shall experience the heavenly transmission, and we all shall be infused with the Triune God as the all-inclusive power. This great power is to the church. Here, in the transmission of the divine power, we have a solid church life.

We should not study Ephesians 1 merely for doctrine. Rather, we must believe God's speaking of the universal fact. We not only believe God's speaking, but we ourselves echo it again and again. In this way we experience the transmission of the divine power that is to the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

THE CHURCH BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST

Ephesians 1:22 and 23 say, "And He subjected all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One Who fills all in all." The words "to" in verse 22 and "toward" in verse 19 both indicate a transmission from Christ to the church. Even those of us in the church life do not know fully what is taking place between Christ and the church. Since the day of Pentecost a transmission has been going on.

A CONTINUAL TRANSMISSION

This transmission is not once for all. According to our thinking, we consider that certain things take place once for all. Take, for example, the matter of being crucified with Christ. Those who emphasize the objective teachings of the Bible claim that our crucifixion with Christ took place once for all. In a sense I agree, because Christ died once and does not need to die again. Furthermore, He has been resurrected once for all and does not need to be resurrected again. Whatever He accomplished for us, He accomplished once for all. However, the application of what He has done is not once for all. Rather, it is still continuing. According to Galatians 2:20, it seems that Paul's co-crucifixion with Christ happened once for all. But according to 2 Corinthians 4 he was continually under the death of Christ. Therefore, on the one hand, Christ's death is once for all; but on the other hand, it is a matter that continues throughout our Christian life. In like manner, the power that operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead, in seating Him at the right hand of God in the heavenlies, in

subjecting all things under His feet, and in giving Him to be Head over all things operated once for all. Nevertheless, Christ is Head over all things to the church, and the surpassing greatness of the power that operated in Him is toward us who believe. The divine power is not transmitted to the church once for all; on the contrary, it is transmitted continually.

This transmission began on the day of Pentecost, and it is still continuing today. Even now this transmission is to the church. Electricity was installed in our meeting hall once for all, but now electricity is being transmitted into the building continually. Likewise, all that Christ has accomplished as the Head is continually being transmitted to His Body. The divine power will continue to be transmitted to the church for eternity; it will never cease.

BEING THE BODY IN THE NEW CREATION

Since coming to this country, I have heard Christians talking about the Body and the Body ministry. This talk has troubled me very much, for I realize that people simply do not know what they are talking about. What they mean by Body ministry is having several preachers instead of one. The Body is not an organization; it is an organism constituted of all the regenerated believers for the expression and activities of the Head.

The Body is the issue of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ who has descended to the church. According to our natural life, we are not qualified to be part of the Body. On the contrary, we are qualified only to be terminated and buried so that we can be resurrected. By nature, not even our spirit is qualified to be part of Christ. Before Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, the Body of Christ was not in existence. He had a number of followers, but He did not have the Body. The Body of Christ could not come forth from the incarnated Christ until He had been crucified to terminate the flesh, the natural man, and the entire old creation. After terminating all these things through His crucifixion, Christ

entered into resurrection to germinate something new. Therefore, it was after His resurrection that the Body of Christ came into being. In our natural life and in the old creation, we are not the Body. But we are the Body in the new creation germinated by Christ's resurrection life.

By incarnation God the Creator became a man named Jesus. Although God was living, moving, and acting in Jesus, there was no way to have the Body, for at that time Jesus was not the Head. Only after He had ascended into the heavens did God give Him to be the Head over all things to the church. By Christ's all-inclusive death, the old creation, including our old man, our flesh, and our natural being, was terminated. After crucifixion, Christ brought the old creation with Him into the tomb and buried it there. When He entered into resurrection with the new creation, He left the old creation in the tomb. Then He ascended to the heavens and was given to be the Head over all things.

It took tremendous power to send a spacecraft from the earth to the moon. But how much greater was the power required to cause Christ to ascend from the earth to the third heaven! It was the surpassing greatness of God's power that raised Christ from among the dead, seated Him at God's right hand in the heavenlies, subdued all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church. Now this power is being transmitted to the church.

As we pointed out, on the day of Pentecost, the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, who was given to be Head over all things, began to transmit all that He had accomplished, attained, and obtained to the church. Since that day, this transmission has not ceased. This indicates that this transmission has a beginning but that it has no ending. After all the wonderful steps taken by the Triune God--creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension--He came into the church with all His accomplishments. Thus, the church, the Body, is an entity altogether in resurrection and ascension with both the

natural elements and the old creation terminated. The Body, an organism in resurrection and ascension, is wholly in the new creation and has nothing to do with the old creation. If you still live according to the old man, the natural man, or the flesh, you are not part of the Body. Every part of the Body is of the new creation. Many who talk about the Body and the Body ministry are natural and fleshly; they are not in resurrection. We all need to see that the Body came into existence when Christ ascended. Having ascended to the right hand of God, He continually transmits His attainments into the church. It is in this way that the church comes into existence.

TWO CREATIONS

With us who believe, there are two creations, the old creation and the new creation. We must admit that the old creation still remains with us. How I hate this remainder and desire to strip it off! Some Christians, however, are not troubled by the old creation; instead, they appreciate it. Do you truly hate the old creation, the flesh, and the natural man? I doubt it. If I rebuke you for being natural and fleshly, you will be offended. But if I praise you and tell you how nice and good you are, you will feel flattered. This is a strong proof that you still love the old man. If you hate your flesh and your natural man, it will not trouble you to be rebuked. On the contrary, you will be thankful.

THE TRANSMISSION FROM THE ASCENDED CHRIST PRODUCING THE BODY

We have seen that the Body of Christ did not come into existence before Christ's crucifixion, but after His ascension, when something from the ascended Christ was transfused into the believers. This means that the transmission of the ascended Christ produces the Body. Everything we speak in the church life, in the ministry, or in fellowship must issue from this transmission. If our speaking is of the transmission, then our speaking is of the Body. If it is not of the transmission, it is not of the Body.

In the Body there is nothing natural, nothing of the flesh, and nothing of the old creation. We all need to see this vision. We need to read these verses again and again until light shines on us concerning this. When we see the vision, we shall say, "Surely the Body is nothing of the natural man. The Body comes from the transmission of the ascended Christ." Praise the Lord that in the church life the heavenly transmission is taking place in us all!

EXPERIENCING THE TRANSMISSION

When I was in fundamental Christianity, I did not experience this transmission. During my involvement with Pentecostal Christianity, I saw some strange things, but I did not see this transmission. Through years of experience and by making comparisons, I have come to see that the proper church life is neither fundamental nor Pentecostal; it is entirely a matter of the divine transmission. You may be very fundamental and yet be dead, having little of the ascended Christ transmitted into you. You may neither know about nor care about such a transmission.

In fundamental Christianity I was taught to cut straight the Word of God. The Brethren teachers were constantly pointing out what doctrines were wrong. Eventually I came to realize that the more I cut straight the Word, the more dead I became. After I had been under this influence for more than six years, the Lord showed me that although I had a great deal of knowledge, I was dead. I immediately repented for my deadness. The next morning I climbed to the top of a mountain, and there I wept and even shouted out my confession and repentance. That day I discovered that the Christian life depends not on being fundamental, but on the experience of the transmission. Several years later, I became involved with the Pentecostal movement, which I thought would help me to obtain spiritual power. I was taught by one of the leading Pentecostal preachers how to speak in tongues, and I did so for more than a year. However, the more I spoke in tongues, the less of the transmission I seemed to experience. Therefore, I gave up the Pentecostal movement

and came back to the way of transmission. I have been in this way for more than forty years, and I am receiving more of the transmission every day.

On the day we were saved, heavenly power was installed in our spirit. What we need now is a continual transmission, not another installment. If we open our heart, purify our heart and conscience, and allow our mind to become sober, our emotion to be fervent, and our will to be made submissive, we shall experience the transmission and have the power and the riches. Then instead of being in the natural man, we shall be in resurrection and ascension. When we are enjoying the transmission, we may not know where we are, for we are utterly one with Christ. It may be hard to say whether we are on earth or in the heavens.

When Christ is transmitted into us, the transmission joins us with Christ and makes us one with Him. For example, the lights in the meeting hall are connected to the electrical transmission from the power plant. Furthermore, the divine transmission is inexhaustible. The more we speak, the more we have to say. The more we minister, the more supply we have to draw from. It is in this transmission that we have the church life and the Body functions.

Once again I say, the heavenly transmission is to the church. By means of the transmission, the Body is real, genuine, living, and aggressive.

THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

Verse 23 says that the Body is "the fullness of the One Who fills all in all." The Body of Christ is His fullness. The fullness of Christ issues from the enjoyment of the riches of Christ (3:8). Through the enjoyment of Christ's riches, we become His fullness to express Him.

This is the fullness of the One who fills all in all. Christ, who is the infinite God without limitation, is so great that

He fills all things in all things. Such a great Christ needs the church to be His fullness for His complete expression.

It is in the transmission that the Body of Christ is the fullness of the One who fills all in all, because the Christ who fills all in all is in the transmission. The transmission connects us to the all-filling Christ. In this way the church becomes the fullness of the all-filling Christ.

ENJOYING THE RICHES OF CHRIST AND HAVING THE PROPER CHURCH LIFE

We should not take this as a mere teaching, but put it into practice. If you practice this, you will enjoy the riches of Christ every time you read the Word of God. By means of the transmission, the Bible becomes another book. Oh, how unsearchable are the riches of Christ! In the transmission the unsearchable riches of Christ become our enjoyment. As these riches become our enjoyment, they also become the constituents of our spiritual being. This produces the Body as the fullness of the Christ who fills all in all.

The transmission connects us with the ascended Christ. In this transmission we enjoy Christ according to what is recorded in the Bible. Whatever we read in the Bible becomes real to us through the transmission. In this way the riches of Christ become our enjoyment.

I love two particular phrases found in Ephesians 1: "toward us who believe," and, "to the church." The divine power has been installed into us once for all, but it is continually being transmitted into us. In this transmission we enjoy Christ and have the proper church life.

By enjoying the transmission we have a foretaste of the rapture. Sometimes as I enjoy the divine transmission, I am in such an ecstasy that I want to leap for joy. The enjoyment is so marvelous that it seems I have already been raptured. Sometimes I hardly dare read the Bible because the riches of Christ revealed in it are so vast and immeasurable. I am beside myself with this rich

enjoyment. By means of such a transmission, we are the Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE NINETEEN

THE TRIUNE GOD DISPENSED INTO US AND WROUGHT INTO OUR BEING

Ephesians 1 begins with the well-speaking of God and ends with the Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. This indicates that the Body, the fullness of Christ, is the issue of God's blessing. The words "to the church" in verse 22 mean a great deal. All that the Triune God has passed through, including incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, is transmitted to the church. The church has absolutely nothing to do with the old creation, which was terminated on the cross and buried with Christ in the tomb. What is transmitted to the church is altogether of the new creation. The church is the issue of this transmission.

This message is the concluding word on chapter one. In this chapter there are seven crucial things requiring the same basic factor for their accomplishment: God's selection that we may be made holy and without blemish (v. 4), God's predestination that we may become His sons (v. 5), the sealing of the Holy Spirit that we may be fully redeemed (vv. 13-14), the hope of God's calling, the glory of God's inheritance in the saints (v. 18), the power that causes us to participate in Christ's attainment (vv. 19-22), and the Body that is the fullness of the all-filling Christ (v. 23). All these are accomplished by the Triune God dispensed into us and wrought into our being. The issue of such a divine dispensation into our humanity is the fullness of Him who fills all in all and the praise of His expressed glory. Actually, chapter one is a revelation of God's marvelous and excellent economy beginning from His choosing of us in eternity and reaching to the

producing of the Body of Christ to express Himself for eternity.

When you hear about the Triune God dispensed into us and wrought into our being, you may think that there is neither such a word nor such a thought in chapter one. However, the Triune God certainly is revealed in this chapter. Although we cannot find the word "dispensed," we do have the word "dispensation" (v. 10), which indicates the act of dispensing. Remember, the dispensation of the fullness of the times encompasses all the ages. The fact that we are sons of God shows that God has been dispensed into us. If God the Father has not been dispensed into us, how can we be His sons? We were predestinated by God the Father to become His sons. However, we became fallen and were constituted sinners. How can sinners become sons of God? The only way is to have God born into our being, that is, to be regenerated by God. To have God come into our being is a dispensing of God into us. By regenerating us, God dispensed Himself into us. Furthermore, we have pointed out that God is constituting us a treasure, a valuable and precious inheritance, by working Himself into us. Therefore, the basic concept of this chapter is the Triune God dispensed into us and wrought into our being.

If you do not grasp this thought, you will not be able to get into the depth of Ephesians 1. In reading this chapter we need to have the underlying and governing concept that God is dispensing Himself into us and working Himself into our being. When Paul wrote this portion of the Word, I believe that this thought was deep within him. Paul fully realized that God was dispensing Himself into His chosen ones and working Himself into them to make them holy, to constitute them the sons of God, and to cause them to become His precious inheritance.

I. IN GOD'S SELECTION

Before the foundation of the world God selected us "that we should be holy and without blemish" (v. 4). How can we be holy? Is it by following certain so-called holiness teachings about matters such as clothing, make-up, and

hairstyles? Certainly not! Holiness is the nature of God, and to be holy is to have the divine nature wrought into us. Without God's nature in us, it is impossible for us to be holy. In order to be holy, we need to be saturated with the holy nature of God.

To be holy involves something more than separation. Some Christian teachers say that to be holy is to be separated; they argue against the concept that holiness is sinless perfection. The Lord Jesus said that the gold is sanctified by the temple (Matt. 23:17). Some teachers have used this as an illustration to prove that sanctification is a matter of separation, rather than a matter of sinless perfection. This is correct. But it covers only the positional aspect of sanctification; it does not touch the dispositional aspect revealed in Romans 6. When God is dispensed into us and wrought into our being and we are saturated with Him, our disposition is sanctified. In this way we are made holy. Ultimately, the New Jerusalem will be a holy city. It will not only be separated from everything common, but it will also be thoroughly saturated with God. This is what it means to be holy. The fact that we have been chosen by God the Father to be holy indicates that God intends to come into our being and saturate it with His holy nature. Without His nature wrought into us, we cannot be holy.

II. IN GOD'S PREDESTINATION

Verse 5 says that God the Father predestinated us unto sonship. If the Father's life has not come into us, how can we be His sons? Impossible! Sonship requires that we be saturated with the Father's life. We are neither God's sons-in-law nor His adopted sons; we are sons in God's life and nature. Because we have been born of God and because God has been born into us, we have God in us. This implies that God the Father is working Himself into us. The only way we can be God's sons is for Him to dispense Himself into us and then work Himself into us. Hallelujah, we are God's sons, born of Him!

III. IN THE SEALING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

As believers, we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (v. 13). The Spirit is the Triune God reaching us. God in

the heavens is the Father, but God coming to us is the Spirit. The Spirit is the seal of God. To be sealed with the Holy Spirit means that God has been dispensed into our being. We have pointed out that this seal is living and moving within us; the Spirit is constantly sealing us with God's essence. To be sealed in this way is to be saturated with all that God is. Therefore, the sealing of the Holy Spirit also indicates that God is being wrought into us.

This subjective realization of the Spirit's sealing is neglected by Christians today. Most Christians have objective teachings, but not the subjective experiences. Through the sealing of the Spirit, God is working His essence into our being.

IV. IN THE HOPE OF GOD'S CALLING

Verse 18 speaks of the hope of God's calling. One aspect of our hope is that we shall be transfigured and glorified with Christ. This transfiguration and glorification is the result of our being saturated with the Triune God. Unless God saturates our entire being, including our body, we cannot be glorified. This also refers to the dispensing of God into us. Once again we see that God is dispensing and working Himself into His chosen ones. This is the governing concept of chapter one.

V. IN THE GLORY OF GOD'S INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS

Ephesians 1:18 also speaks of the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints. If God is not wrought into the saints, how can they ever become His inheritance, His peculiar possession? The saints become so precious to Him by being saturated with the divine essence. Only in this way can poor sinners become God's special treasure. In this universe God is the only One who is precious. Now this precious God of matchless worth is working Himself into us to make us His glorious inheritance. When the New

Jerusalem comes, we shall see that it will be altogether a valuable inheritance, shining with God's glory. Therefore, the fact that the saints are becoming God's glorious inheritance, a precious treasure to Him, indicates that He is working Himself into us.

VI. IN THE POWER THAT ENABLES US TO PARTICIPATE IN CHRIST'S ATTAINMENT

The Triune God is dispensed into us and wrought into our being in the transmission of the divine power to enable us to participate in Christ's attainment so that we may be His Body (vv. 19-23). Christ's attainment is the highest attainment in the universe, for He has accomplished creation; passed through incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection; and ascended to the right hand of God in the heavenlies. All this attainment is to the church. As we have pointed out, the words "to the church" in verse 22 imply a transmission, which is an act of dispensing. Whatever Christ has passed through, accomplished, obtained, and attained is now being transmitted into the church.

Christians today do not have this concept. Instead, they are filled with ethical teachings and preoccupied with them. For this reason we need to emphasize the fact that the Triune God is seeking to saturate us with Himself.

Suppose red ink is injected into the center of a ball of cotton. Little by little, the cotton soaks up the ink. In this way, the ink gradually saturates the ball of cotton. We are like the cotton ball. One day the heavenly red ink was deposited into the center of our being. From that time onward, the ink, God Himself, has been saturating us. Our responsibility now is not to imitate the ink or to copy it; on the contrary, it is to soak it up, that is, to be saturated with it. By being thoroughly saturated with the heavenly ink, we become the ink; for the ink is assimilated into our being. This basic concept of the New Testament has been missed in today's Christian teachings. If we grasp this basic concept, our Christian life will be revolutionized and our concepts will be radically changed.

We participate in Christ's attainment that we may

become His Body. Selection, predestination, sealing, hope, glory, power--all are for the Body.

VII. IN THE BODY, THE FULLNESS OF THE ALL-FILLING CHRIST

The Triune God is dispensed and wrought into us in the Body, the fullness of the all-filling Christ, that we may be His full expression (v. 23). The result of the sixth item is the producing of the Body of Christ. This Body, being the fullness of the all-filling Christ, is the expression of the Triune God to the fullest extent. This is the ultimate consummation of God's dispensation according to His divine economy.

Let us review the seven points in chapter one which prove that God is being dispensed and wrought into us. The first point concerns holiness. The only way we can be holy is for God to be wrought into us. When God selected us, His intention was not that we wear a certain style of clothing or comb our hair in a particular way. We need to cast aside that concept of holiness. Holiness is God Himself wrought into us. We need to take care of the dispensing of God into us. The kind of clothes we wear should depend on Him. He is living, real, and sensitive. To be saturated with Him is to be holy.

Likewise, the way to become sons of God is not by improving ourselves nor correcting ourselves. Concerning this, teachings and regulations are of no avail. The only thing that works is having the Son of God dispensed into us and wrought into our being.

The same is true of the redemption of our bodies. Eventually, we shall be fully redeemed by having God saturate us. This redemption is not the redemption by the blood; it is the redemption of our bodies through the saturation of God. Romans 8 says that this redemption is the full sonship, the completion of sonship. This means that the redemption of our bodies is the final step in the process of "sonizing." God is now "sonizing" us by saturating us with Himself. At the time of the redemption of our bodies, this work of "sonizing" will be completed.

The hope of glory is also related to the Triune God dispensed into us and wrought into our being. According to the commonly-accepted Christian teaching, we shall one day suddenly find ourselves transported into a realm of glory. However, the only way we can be glorified is to be saturated with God day by day. The burden of my ministry is for you to be saturated with the Triune God. I long for the Triune God to be dispensed into you and for you to be saturated with Him. This saturation lasts forever; it cannot be eradicated. The glory comes from this saturation. Hence, the Christian life is a life of being saturated with the Triune God. Eventually, through this saturation, we shall be glorified.

The divine power that is transmitted into us saturates us with the Triune God. We have seen that this power is to the church, toward us who believe. The Greek word translated "toward" in verse 19 may also be rendered "into." Thus, the divine power is *into* us who believe. This conveys the idea of saturation. Every part and area of our being is to be saturated with the divine power. This is what the Lord is doing in His recovery today.

On the day we repented, the divine power was installed in us. Now it is no longer merely the power from on high; it is the power within us. When we open ourselves, this power comes into function to saturate us with the divine essence transmitted into us from the heavens. Today this transmission is moving within us like the blood that circulates throughout our body. Because we are not always open or because we may have problems in our conscience, mind, emotion, or will, the transmission may temporarily be restricted. If we would experience a continual transmission, we need to repent, confess, and make a clearance of all hindrances. Then the transmission will be restored and will continue to saturate our being.

It is in the dispensing of the Triune God into us and His working of Himself into our being that we are the church. Now we can understand why the church is mentioned at the end of chapter one. The church is not produced by forming the saints into an organization. On the contrary,

the church is produced by the transmission from the ascended Christ. The church produced in this way is the Body. The so-called churches are not the Body. They are not an organism; rather they are somewhat like an artificial body, an organization. The church is the organism that comes out of the transmission of the all-inclusive Christ. This church, the Body of Christ, is the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

What a great matter it is to see that chapter one of Ephesians issues in the Body! The church as the Body of Christ is produced by God's well-speaking, and the basic factor of this well-speaking is that the divine life is dispensed into us and wrought into our being. The church is the issue of God's well-speaking, the basic factor of which is the Triune God dispensed and wrought into us. God's dispensation began in eternity past; passed through creation, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension; and now reaches His chosen ones to make them His holy people, the sons of God, the sealed ones, and the Body as the fullness of Christ.

The Body comes from the transmission of the all-inclusive Christ. This transmission is the sum total of God's well-speaking. To enjoy the transmission we need a sober mind, a fervent emotion, a submissive will, and a pure conscience. Through the experience of this transmission, we become the Body. What we need today is more of this all-inclusive transmission. Hallelujah, the Triune God is being transmitted into us! Therefore, we do not have mere teachings--we have dispensation, transmission, and saturation. This is the basic concept in Ephesians 1.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY

DEAD IN OFFENSES AND SINS

In this message we come to chapter two of Ephesians. We have seen that there is no mention of God's mercy in chapter one because everything there is excellent. But chapter two describes a miserable situation, a situation that requires the rich mercy of God. In this message we shall be concerned with the first three verses of chapter two.

Actually, Ephesians 2 is not mainly concerned with the pitiful situation of fallen man, but with the producing and building of the church. At the end of chapter one, we see the church as the Body of Christ being produced out of the transmission of the ascended Christ. This is the church seen from the positive view, the view from the top. But we must see not only the view from the top, but also the view from the bottom. In chapter one Paul looks at the church from the viewpoint of the heavenlies. From this perspective, the church is the issue of the transmission of the ascended Christ. But in chapter two Paul looks at the church from the bottom, the church from the viewpoint of the miserable situation of fallen man.

I. A CONTINUATION OF CHAPTER ONE

Ephesians 2:1 says, "And you, being dead in your offenses and sins." According to grammar, "and" indicates that the last sentence of chapter one is not completed. The last verse of chapter one reveals that the church, the Body of Christ, has been produced by Christ through His attainment. Now chapter two unveils the background, the realm of death, from which the church has been brought forth.

In chapter one the Apostle Paul speaks many excellent

things. He says that the church comes into being through the wonderful transmission of the ascended Christ. In chapter one Paul talks about Christ and the power that operated in Christ in raising Him from the dead, in seating Him in the heavenlies far above all, in subjecting all things under His feet, and in giving Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. But as we have pointed out, there is another side to the church. There is the side of Christ, and there is also the side of ourselves. Therefore, in 2:1 Paul says, "And you." The church has not only the aspect of divinity, but also the aspect of humanity. In chapter one we see that the church is the issue of divinity transmitted into us. In chapter two we see that the church comes out of humanity. The conjunction "and" at the beginning of 2:1 is significant in bringing together these two aspects of the church.

II. DEAD IN OFFENSES AND SINS

A. Dead Spiritually

Verse 1 says that we were dead in our offenses and sins. The words "being dead" refer to the dead condition of our spirit, a death that pervades our entire being. We were not only fallen and sinful; we were dead.

As I was preaching the gospel in Shanghai on New Year's Day in 1947, I said to the people, "Friends, we Christian preachers must be honest and tell people what their real situation is. You are not only sinners--all of you are dead. You are all in a coffin and in a tomb. You may regard yourselves as cultured ladies and gentlemen, but actually you are dead and buried in a tomb. I tell you this because now Christ wants to make you alive and raise you up out of your coffin." This is a good way to preach the gospel.

Because the book of Romans deals with sinners, it does not emphasize the fact that fallen people are dead. Instead, the emphasis in Romans is upon sins and sin. But the

emphasis in the book of Ephesians is on death, on dealing with dead people. The salvation revealed in Romans is salvation according to righteousness. According to Romans 1:16 and 17, the gospel of God is powerful unto salvation because God's righteousness is revealed in it. In Romans God saves us by, through, and with His righteousness. In Ephesians, however, God saves the dead with life. Righteousness does not benefit the dead ones. What they need is life. Many Christians are not clear about the difference between salvation through righteousness and salvation through life. For this reason, they use Ephesians to illustrate salvation through righteousness. As sinners and dead people, we needed both righteousness and life, both the salvation in Romans and the salvation in Ephesians.

B. Having Lost the Function That Enables Us to Contact God

By being dead in offenses and sins, we lost the function that enables us to contact God. Spiritual death has annulled the function of our spirit. No matter how active we were in our body and soul, we were deadened in our spirit, unable to contact God.

C. In Offenses and Sins

Verse 1 says that we were dead in our offenses and sins. Offenses are acts that overstep the limit of right, and sins are evil doings. It was from such a background of death in our offenses and sins that we were saved to be the church, the Body. The dead have been made alive to be a living organism to express Christ.

We need to say a further word about offenses. In running a race you must stay within the lines. To go outside the lines is to commit an offense. You have the right to run within the lines, but if you run outside the lines, you overstep your rights.

Years ago, I was helped by a certain brother who had been learning the lessons of life. One day he testified that, after having been enlightened by God, he realized that if he

knocked at someone's door and no one answered, he had no right to enter the room. To do so would be to overstep his rights. I was greatly helped by this testimony. Thereafter, whenever I visited someone's home, I limited myself to the room in which I had been asked to be seated. I did not presume to walk around in other parts of the house. To do that would be to overstep my rights and commit an offense. Others, however, may think nothing of walking through someone's home and even of examining the various things there. Although they may justify their behavior, in the eyes of God they are overstepping their rights.

Suppose after the meeting a brother leaves his hymnal on a chair. Do you think you have the right to handle it? No, you do not have this right, unless you are responsible to clean the hall or to collect lost items for lost and found. Even if you do have the responsibility to pick up items in the meeting hall, this does not mean that you have the right to look through the brother's hymnal.

In the eyes of God, we have overstepped our rights many times. Hence, we were those dead in our offenses. Furthermore, we were also dead in sins, in evil doings such as lying and stealing.

III. WALKING ACCORDING TO THE AGE OF THIS WORLD

Referring to our offenses and sins, verse 2 says, "In which you once walked according to the age of this world." "This world" refers to the satanic system composed of many ages. The word "age" here refers to a part, a section, an aspect, of the system of Satan, particularly the present and modern appearance of that system, which is used by him to usurp and occupy people and keep them away from God and His purpose. When we were dead in offenses and sins, we walked according to the age, the modern appearance, the present course, of the world, the satanic system.

All the time that we were dead in offenses and sins, we were very active in the world, in the realm of the satanic kingdom. The Greek word translated "world," *cosmos*,

means a system. This is neither a divine nor a human system; rather, it is a satanic system. This system, the world, is composed of many ages, each of which is a section of the satanic system. Every age is also a course. For this reason, the King James Version adopts the rendering "the course of this world." Every age has a certain style and appearance. The world appeared to Abraham in one way, to David in another way, and to Paul in still another way. Today the world also has its modern appearance. Furthermore, the age of the world has a tide with a current. Once we walked according to the current of the present age. When people follow the trend of the age, this is a strong sign that they are dead, that they are corpses carried along by the current of the age.

I saw an excellent illustration of this when I was traveling through the interior of China in 1937. One day I passed by a creek which flowed down the slope of a hill. The creek was full of dead leaves that were being swept along with the current. Among the leaves some little fish were swimming upstream against the current. Because the fish were full of life, they could swim against the current; but because the leaves were lifeless, they could only be carried away by the current. They did not have the life to withstand the current and go against it. As long as anyone follows the present current of the world, he is dead. The reason the current of the age can carry so many people along with it is that they all are dead. Throughout the world, in every country, the people are dead. Therefore, whenever the tide of the age comes in, they are swept along by it immediately. Once we also were dead and carried away by the tide of the age, but now that we have been made alive, the current cannot move us.

IV. WALKING ACCORDING TO THE RULER OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE AIR

When we were dead in our offenses and sins, we were not only active in following the age of this world; we also walked "according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of

the spirit who is now operating in the sons of disobedience." The ruler here refers to Satan, the prince of the aerial authority mentioned in 6:12. The spirit, in apposition with "the authority of the air," refers to the aggregate power, a personal aggregate of all the evil angelic authorities, over which Satan is the ruler. This aggregate spirit is now operating in the sons of disobedience. But we, who once were sons of disobedience, have been saved to be the church.

Above us there is the sphere ruled by Satan, the ruler of the authority of the air. Not many Christians have an adequate understanding of this evil power in the air. The entire earth is under the domination of this spirit in the air. This evil spirit, this evil atmosphere, is the cause of crimes, murders, and even suicides. It influences people to do evil things which, as humans, they would not normally do. The source of this evil is in the spirit, the atmosphere, which dominates them. This spirit is now operating in the sons of disobedience, in those who are disobedient to God.

V. BEHAVING IN THE LUSTS OF OUR FLESH

We have considered two of the realms in which we were active when we were dead in our offenses and sins--the realm of the world and the realm of the aerial authority. Now we need to consider the third realm--the realm of the lusts of our flesh. Verse 3 says, "Among whom also we all behaved ourselves once in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." The word "whom" in this verse refers to the sons of disobedience, and the word "we" refers to all believers, both Jewish and Gentile. When we were dead in our offenses and sins, we also behaved according to the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires not only of the flesh but also of the thoughts. Three evil things, the age of this world outside of us, the ruler of the aerial authority above and within us, and the lusts of our flesh in our fallen nature, dominated our life. From these evil

things we have been saved to become the Body of Christ.

Before we were saved, we all behaved ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, doing whatever the flesh and the thoughts liked to do. The word "desires" in verse 3 refers to our likes. In the past, we did certain things simply because we liked to do them. If we liked to go dancing, we went dancing. If we liked to attend sporting events, we attended them. If we liked window shopping, we went window shopping. Today's young generation, probably more than any generation in history, does whatever it likes. If you ask the young people why they do certain things, many of them would answer that they simply like to do them. This is a sure sign of a dead person. In doing whatever they like, many of today's young people are like cars without brakes. How dangerous this is!

The likes of the flesh in verse 3 refer to evil things, and the likes of the thoughts refer to things that may be somewhat better. But both are a sign of being deadened in the spirit, especially in the conscience. When someone is deadened in his spirit, he does whatever his flesh and his thoughts like to do.

VI. BY NATURE CHILDREN OF WRATH

In verse 3 Paul says that we were "by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." We, as the sons of disobedience, were also the children of wrath. In the realm of death we were under God's wrath because of our disobedience. But we have been saved both from our disobedience and from God's wrath.

VII. SAVED TO BE THE BODY OF CHRIST

We have seen three realms in which we once were active: the age of the world, the evil atmosphere around the inhabited earth, and the lusts of our flesh, including the desires of the flesh and of the mind. The world is outside of us, the lusts are within us, and the evil spiritual atmosphere is both above us and within us. It is impossible

for dead people to escape from these three realms. By nature, all men are sons of disobedience and children of wrath, under God's judgment. When we were dead in offenses and sins, this was our condition as well. Praise the Lord that the church has been brought forth from such a realm of death! We have been saved to become the Body of Christ. Now we are no longer in these three realms; instead, we are in Christ, in the Spirit, and in the heavenlies.

Ephesians 2:1-3 gives a clear description of our condition according to our fallen nature. When we were in that condition, we were dead in offenses and sins, yet very active in the age of the world, under the domination of the atmosphere of the air, and in the desires of the flesh and of the thoughts. This is the black background over against which we see the church. The church has been brought forth out of such a miserable source. Hallelujah, although we were dead and in such a deplorable condition, we have been saved to become the Body of Christ! What a salvation!

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

SAVED BY GRACE TO BE THE MASTERPIECE OF GOD

In this message we come to 2:4-10, a portion of Ephesians which reveals that we have been saved by grace to be the masterpiece of God.

I. GOD BEING RICH IN MERCY

Verse 4, which tells us that God is rich in mercy, begins with the words "But God." This was the turning factor in our position. We were in a miserable situation, but God came in with His rich mercy to make us suitable for His love.

II. GOD'S GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US

God is rich in mercy "because of His great love with which He loved us" (v. 4). The object of love should be in a condition deserving love, but the object of mercy is always in a pitiful situation. Hence, God's mercy reaches further than His love. God loves us because we are the object of His selection. But we became pitiful by our fall, even dead in our offenses and sins; therefore, we need God's mercy. Because of His great love, God is rich in mercy to save us from our wretched position to a condition which is suitable for His love.

III. EVEN WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN OFFENSES

God's mercy reached us even when we were dead in offenses (v. 5). We did not deserve anything from God, but God had mercy upon us in our miserable situation.

IV. MAKING US ALIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST

Verse 5 says that we have been made alive together with Christ. The book of Ephesians does not consider us sinners as does the book of Romans; it considers us dead

persons. As sinners we need God's forgiveness and justification, as revealed in the book of Romans. But as dead persons we need to be made alive. Forgiveness and justification bring us back to God's presence to enjoy His grace and participate in His life, whereas making us alive enables us, as the living members of the Body of Christ, to express Him. God made us alive by imparting His eternal life, which is Christ Himself (Col. 3:4), into our deadened spirit through His Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2). He has enlivened us with Christ. God enlivened us together when He enlivened the crucified Jesus. Therefore, He made us alive with Christ.

As a parenthesis in verse 5, Paul says, "By grace you have been saved." Grace is free. Here it denotes not only God freely dispensed into us for our enjoyment, but also God's action in freely saving us. By such grace we have been saved from our wretched position of death into the marvelous realm of life.

V. HAVING RAISED US UP TOGETHER AND SEATED US TOGETHER

Verse 6 says, "And raised us up together and seated us together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." To make us alive is the initial step of God's salvation in life. Following this, God raised us up from the position of death. To be made alive is one thing, and to be raised up is another. Consider the story of the raising of Lazarus as an illustration (John 11). The Lord firstly made him alive and then raised him up out of the tomb. In the same principle, God's mercy firstly made us alive and then raised us up from the dead.

Verse 6 says that we have been raised up together and seated together. From our standpoint we have been raised

up from our position of death one by one. But in God's view we were all raised up together, just as all the Israelites were raised up together from the death waters of the Red Sea (Exo. 14). According to the book of Exodus, the entire congregation of the children of Israel was saved at the same time, for they passed through the Red Sea together. This is a clear type showing that we were all saved together; we were all made alive and raised up at the same time.

Again I wish to point out that the salvation in Ephesians is different from the salvation in Romans. In Romans salvation is by God's righteousness, but in Ephesians salvation is by the divine life. The salvation unfolded in Ephesians is not that which satisfies God's righteous requirements. Rather, it is the salvation that imparts life into us to make us members of the Body of Christ so that God's eternal purpose to have a living Body for the expression of Christ may be fulfilled. This purpose is fulfilled not by righteousness, but by life. Therefore, Ephesians 2 emphasizes that we have been made alive together with Christ.

A. In the Heavenlies

Verse 6 says that we have been seated together in the heavenlies. The third step of God's salvation in life is to seat us together in the heavenlies. He not only raised us up from the position of death, but also seated us in the highest place in the universe.

The heavenlies are the high position into which we have been saved in Christ. In the book of Romans, Christ as our righteousness has brought us into such a state that we may be acceptable to God. In the book of Ephesians, Christ as our life has saved us into such a position that we may be above all God's enemies. The church people today are in the heavenlies.

The word "heavenlies" is rather peculiar. It refers not only to a place, but also to an atmosphere with a certain nature and characteristic. God's salvation by life has brought us into a heavenly place and into a heavenly

atmosphere with a heavenly characteristic. When we meet together, we often have the deep sense that we are not in an earthly atmosphere, but in a heavenly atmosphere. However, if you go to a theater or some other worldly place, you will have the sense that you are immersed in an earthly atmosphere. Because we are in a heavenly atmosphere with a heavenly nature and a heavenly characteristic, we are a heavenly people. God's salvation has transferred us into such a realm and atmosphere.

B. In Christ Jesus

It was in Christ that God seated us all together, once for all, in the heavenlies. This was accomplished when Christ ascended to the heavens, and it was applied to us by the Spirit of Christ when we believed in Him. Today we realize and experience this reality in our spirit through faith in the accomplished fact.

Both Romans and Ephesians indicate that we are in Christ. In Romans, however, to be transferred from Adam into Christ is primarily a matter of being placed into a justified position. However, in Ephesians to be in Christ is not only a matter of a heavenly position, but, even more important, a matter of life. Because we are in Christ, we have the vitality of life. In Romans Christ is the righteousness of God, but in Ephesians Christ is life. Therefore, according to Romans, to be in Christ means to be in a justified position; but according to Ephesians, to be in Christ means to have the vitality of life.

VI. THE SURPASSING RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE

Verse 7 says, "That He might display in the ages which are coming the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." The church is produced in the present age; the ages which are coming are the ages of the millennium and eternity future. To display the riches of God's grace is to exhibit them to the whole universe publicly. The riches of God's grace surpass every limit.

These are the riches of God Himself for our enjoyment. They will be publicly displayed for eternity.

Verse 7 says that the surpassing riches of God's grace are in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Kindness is a benevolent goodness which issues out of mercy and love. It is in such kindness that the grace of God is given to us.

VII. BY GRACE

Verse 8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." The word "for" at the beginning of this verse gives the occasion for God to display His grace (v. 7). Because we have been saved by His grace, God may display it.

In Ephesians grace denotes God dispensed into us. Therefore, to be saved by grace means to be saved by having God dispensed into us. Most Christians regard grace as a thing, not as a person. To them, grace is merely a gift freely given to them. According to this concept of grace, we were sinners who did not deserve God's salvation, but God saved us freely by giving us His unmerited favor. This, however, is a superficial understanding of what it means to be saved by grace.

John 1:17 says that grace came through Jesus Christ. This indicates that grace is somewhat like a person. Ephesians reveals that the saving grace is God Himself in Christ wrought into our being. We have emphasized that the governing concept in Ephesians 1 is the dispensing of the Triune God into our being. Therefore, to be saved by grace means to be saved by the dispensing of the Triune God into us.

Many Christians consider salvation as merely being rescued from a pitiful situation. According to this understanding, to be saved by grace is to have the Savior, who is rich in mercy, reach down to us in our low estate and rescue us. But this is not the salvation revealed in Ephesians. According to Ephesians, salvation is the transmission of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ into us. When this Person comes into us as

grace, we are saved. Once we receive such a divine transmission, we are made alive, raised up, and seated with Christ in the heavenlies. Therefore, in Ephesians grace is the saving Person of Christ Himself. Hallelujah for such a salvation! This is a deeper understanding of salvation by grace.

It was not a simple matter for God to be transmitted into us as grace. He had to be processed through incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. By being processed in this way, He is now able to transmit Himself into us. When the processed God is transmitted into us, He becomes the saving grace. This grace is not only the amazing grace; it is the abounding grace. Grace is the processed God transmitted into our being.

Do not regard this as a mere human interpretation. If you read Ephesians 1 and 2 with much prayer, you will see that God processed and transmitted into our being is the saving grace and the abounding grace. We have been saved by the transmission of this processed God.

As we have indicated, this grace has surpassing riches. It has many aspects, virtues, and attributes, such as life, light, and power. Apart from life, light, and power, God cannot save us. For example, how can you rescue a person who has fallen into a pit if you do not have the strength to lift him out? Furthermore, if you do not have love for him, you will not bother to save him. In order to save us, God needed love and wisdom. These are some of the surpassing riches of God's saving grace. In His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus, God has saved us by His grace. In the ages to come--in the millennium and eternity future--God will display this grace publicly to the whole universe.

VIII. THROUGH FAITH

In verse 8 Paul says that by grace we have been saved through faith. Faith is the substantiating of invisible things. It is by faith that we substantiate all the things Christ has accomplished for us. Through such substantiating ability, we have been saved by grace. The

free action of God's grace saved us through our substantiating faith.

Speaking of faith, verse 8 also says, "This not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Faith is not of our works, nor of our endeavor or strife; it is of God's gift that no one should boast (v. 9). Faith is not of ourselves. Although we believe, the faith with which we believe does not originate with us. In ourselves, we do not have any faith. However, at the time we repented and made confession to God in the name of the Lord Jesus, the believing ability was put into us. Before we were saved, we were utterly unable to believe. But on the day we were saved, faith was imparted to us, and we believed. Others may ask how we can believe in Jesus Christ when we have never seen Him. Although we have not seen Him, we cannot help believing in Him. This faith is not of ourselves; it is part of the grace transmitted into us.

Faith actually is an aspect of Christ. This is the reason the Bible speaks of the faith of Christ (Rom. 3:22). In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." Faith is Christ Himself. When some hear me say this, they may think that for me Christ is everything. That is right. The faith which is given to us is the faith common to believers (Titus 1:4). Faith is given, faith is received, and faith is common. When we put all these facts together, we see that this faith is Christ Himself.

If there is a beautiful diamond in front of you, you will spontaneously appreciate it. This appreciation does not originate with you, but with the diamond. In a sense, your appreciation is the diamond itself. You certainly would not have the same appreciation for a piece of clay. A diamond is worthy of appreciation; clay is not. Likewise, the reason we do not put our faith in Socrates or Confucius is that they are not believable. But because Christ is absolutely believable, we put our faith in Him. Our faith in Christ does not come out of us; rather, it comes out of Him. When we see Christ, faith is imparted to us. Therefore, it is not

unreasonable to say that faith is Christ. This is like saying that holiness, love, righteousness, patience, and endurance are Christ.

Because the unique faith is Christ Himself, we who believe in Him have a common faith. You do not have one kind of faith and I, another kind. When Christ came to you, you believed; and when He came to me, I believed. Whenever Christ comes to a person, that person believes in Him. This is a further indication that faith comes not out of us, but out of Christ.

Because faith is a gift of God and is not of our works, none of us has the right to boast. On the contrary, we all must humbly say, "Lord, if you had not come to me, I would not have any faith. But praise You that You have come, and I have received faith! Lord, You are my faith."

IX. GOD'S WORKMANSHIP

We have been saved by grace through faith to be God's masterpiece. Verse 10 says, "We are His workmanship." This word may also be rendered "masterpiece." The Greek word *poiema* means something which has been made, a handiwork, or something which has been written or composed as a poem. Poetry does not consist only of poetic writing; any work of art that expresses the maker's wisdom and design may be considered a poem. We, the church, the masterpiece of God's work, are the highest poetry, expressing God's infinite wisdom and divine design.

God has made many things, but none of them is as dear, precious, valuable, and desirable as the church. The church is God's masterpiece. Writers, composers, and artists often attempt to achieve a masterpiece, an outstanding work. God created the heavens and the earth, but neither the heavens nor the earth is God's masterpiece. Likewise, God created man, but not even man is God's masterpiece. Only one item of God's work in this universe is His masterpiece, and this masterpiece is the church. As God's masterpiece,

the church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. What could be a greater work than this? Furthermore, the church as God's masterpiece is the corporate and universal new man (2:15). Because we see things from the side of the messed-up "kitchen" of the church life, we may not realize that the church is such a masterpiece. But eventually we shall see that we are both the Body and the new man, God's masterwork.

X. CREATED

A. In Christ Jesus

Verse 10 says that we are God's workmanship "created in Christ Jesus." As the masterpiece of God's work, we, the church, are an absolutely new item in the universe, something newly originated by God. We have been created by God in Christ through regeneration to be His new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

B. By the Mingling of God with Man

God's masterpiece is absolutely new because it is the mingling of God and man. We may also say that the church is a hybrid, the blending together of two lives. Our opposers accuse us of teaching that the church is God. However, we do not say this. But we do say that the church is the mingling of God and man. God's masterpiece, His greatest workmanship, is the working of Himself into man and the constituting of man into oneness with Himself to produce the church.

As we have already pointed out, this masterpiece is a poem, an artistic work that expresses the wisdom, design, and beauty of the maker. The church is God's poem that speaks forth His wisdom. According to 3:10, God's manifold wisdom will be made known through the church. Hymns express the wisdom of the hymn writers. In the ages to come, in the millennium and in eternity, there will be a unique hymn, the church, which will express the wisdom and design of God. When we see the New Jerusalem, we may extol God for the beauty, wisdom, and design

manifested in this marvelous production. The New Jerusalem will be God's poem, His masterpiece. When we behold this masterpiece of God in the midst of the new heaven and new earth, we may say, "This is the best hymn ever written in the universe!" This was Paul's concept in writing Ephesians 2.

C. For Good Works

Finally, we are God's masterpiece created in Christ Jesus "for good works, which God before prepared that we should walk in them" (v. 10). The good works for which God created us are not the good things according to our general concept, but the definite good doings which God pre-planned and previously ordained for us to walk in. These good things must be the doing of His will to live the church life and bear the testimony of Jesus, as revealed in the following chapters of this book. Therefore, we need to do God's will, live the church life, and bear the testimony of Jesus. These are the good works prepared beforehand by God for us, His masterpiece, to walk in. Therefore, 2:4-10 reveals that we have been saved by grace to be God's masterpiece that we may walk in the good works prepared before by God.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

ONCE FAR OFF, BUT NOW NEAR

Ephesians 2:1-3 gives us a picture of our condition by nature. In this message we need to see that verses 11 and 12 portray our position according to our status. Because of our sinful nature, we were in a condition of death; according to our status, we were far off from God, Christ, God's kingdom, God's blessings, God's promise, and everything related to God.

I. THE NATIONS IN THE FLESH

The first point concerning our status is that we were the nations in the flesh (v. 11). The Greek word translated "nations" also means "Gentiles." Hence, according to our status, we were the Gentiles in the flesh.

The man God created to fulfill His purpose was pure, without sin or any kind of negative mixture. However, sin, the evil nature of Satan, entered into man through the fall. When the evil nature of Satan entered into man, it firstly caused man's body to become the flesh, full of lusts, and eventually caused the whole being of man to become the flesh. In a very real sense, God created only the body of man, not the flesh. But when sin came into man's body, the body was changed in nature and became the flesh. The body was the pure vessel created by God; the flesh is the corrupted body. God did not create the lusts in man's body. The lusts came from sin. According to the Bible, eventually fallen man in his entirety became the flesh. Fallen people live according to the flesh, not according to the spirit, the conscience, or reason. Because in the eyes of God fallen man has become flesh, the Bible says, "By the works of law no flesh shall be justified before Him" (Rom. 3:20).

The word "flesh" in this verse denotes a fallen person who lives according to the flesh and has become flesh.

Because his whole being had become the flesh, man was damaged and thus prevented from fulfilling God's purpose. Since mankind as a whole could not fulfill His purpose, God came in to call out of fallen mankind a race--Abraham and his descendants--for the accomplishment of His purpose. God then commanded Abraham and his descendants to be circumcised, that is, to put away the flesh. Thus, circumcision indicates that God's chosen people must put aside their flesh. The fact that the called race was circumcised meant that they were separated from fallen mankind and delivered out of the fallen condition. Circumcision made a tremendous distinction between them and the rest of mankind. They are called the circumcision, those who are separated from the fallen situation. The rest of mankind are called the uncircumcision, those who remain in the fallen condition. Because Abraham and his descendants, the called race, were circumcised, those who remained in the fallen estate became the nations in the flesh, the Gentiles. We were in this category before we were in Christ.

II. UNCIRCUMCISION

Verse 11 says that the nations in the flesh were "called uncircumcision by those who are called circumcision in the flesh made by hand." The words "uncircumcision" and "circumcision" in this verse both apply to people; they do not refer to actions. The circumcision are those who are circumcised, and the uncircumcision are those who are not circumcised.

III. APART FROM CHRIST

Verse 12 says that we "were at that time apart from Christ." Christ, in whom all God's blessings to His chosen people are embodied, came out of Israel, the circumcised people. Since we, the uncircumcised Gentiles, were separated from Israel, we were apart from Christ, having nothing to do with Christ.

IV. ALIENATED FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF ISRAEL

Verse 12 also says that we were "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel." The "commonwealth" here refers to the citizenship, the civil rights, of God's chosen people, including God's ruling, blessing, and presence. Through the fall, mankind lost all the rights which God intended for man in his creation. By calling Abraham, God brought His chosen people back to all these rights through circumcision. But we, as uncircumcised Gentiles, still remained alienated from them.

V. STRANGERS FROM THE COVENANTS OF THE PROMISE

According to verse 12, we were also "strangers from the covenants of the promise." God's covenants are His promises. His promise is His word that He will freely do certain things for His chosen people. Such a word of promise is not a demand, a requirement, or a rebuke. The basic thought regarding God's promise is that it is His word. Apart from the word, there is no promise.

Eventually, God's promise became the binding covenant because it had been legalized by the necessary procedures. Both in the Old Testament and the New Testament God's words of promise have been legalized to become a binding covenant. You may wonder what procedure was necessary to legalize God's promise into a covenant. The best illustration concerns the death of the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. The Lord promised that He would shed His blood on the cross so that we might receive the forgiveness of sins. The promise of forgiveness was legalized by the shedding of His blood. Through this procedure, His promise became a covenant.

No promise binds a person as much as a covenant does. Men can make promises without being bound very much by them. But once we pay the price for that promise to become a covenant, we are bound by the covenant we have made. The price is the procedure necessary to make the promise a covenant.

All the words God spoke to His chosen people, from Abraham to Malachi, are His promises legalized to be His covenants. These words cover all the Old Testament from Genesis 12 to the end of the book of Malachi. Because these words have been legalized to be God's covenant, the Old Testament is called a testament, which is another term for covenant. The whole Bible is a covenant, and the Old Testament is the old covenant.

Before we believed in Christ, we, the Gentiles, were not only alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, but also strangers from these covenants of God's promise. We have seen that the promise is God's word, that the promise has become a binding covenant, and that all the words spoken by God to His people were legalized by Him into a covenant. Before we were saved, we were strangers from the covenant of God's promise.

VI. HAVING NO HOPE

According to our status before we were saved, we had no hope. All God's blessings are contained in Christ; all the civil rights are related to the nation of Israel; and all good things are promised in God's covenants. Since we were apart from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of God's promise, we had no hope whatever.

VII. WITHOUT GOD

As Gentiles in the flesh, we also were without God (v. 12). God is in Christ; He rules and moves in the commonwealth of Israel; and He bestows His blessings according to His covenants. When we were apart from Christ, the commonwealth of Israel, and the covenants of God's promise, we were without God. We did not have God as our enjoyment.

VIII. IN THE WORLD

Verse 12 also points out that we were "in the world." The world, which is the system of Satan, is in contrast to the commonwealth of Israel. The commonwealth of Israel

was the kingdom of God, whereas the world is the kingdom of Satan. Before we were saved, we lived in the world, where we had no hope, no expectation, and no God for our enjoyment. That was the reason we pursued worldly entertainments. The worldly people today hunger after entertainment because they do not have God as their enjoyment. But now that we are in Christ, we have God as our enjoyment. How satisfying this enjoyment is!

A number of years ago some of my unsaved friends asked me why I did not indulge in certain gambling games. I told them that I was busy enjoying the Bible and had no time for nor interest in such games. When I was asked why I did not go to movies, I replied that I had a heavenly movie theater, the church life, where I saw the heavenly vision. Because I have such a full enjoyment of God, there is no room in me for worldly entertainments. Today we are no longer in the world; we are in Christ, in the Spirit, and in the heavenlies.

Now we have a clear picture of our status before we were saved. We were in the position of being the Gentiles in the flesh, the uncircumcision, who were apart from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise. We had no hope, and we were without God in the world. According to our nature, we were in death; and according to our status, we were aliens to God, Christ, God's promise, God's kingdom, and everything related to God. Because we were in such a position, we had no hope, and we did not have God as our enjoyment. In the world we pursued sinful entertainments in the attempt to find satisfaction. Nevertheless, the church has been brought forth out of such a deplorable condition and position. God has saved us out of that condition and has made us members of the Body of Christ. Now we are God's masterpiece, and we have a new condition, a new position, a new nature, and a new status.

Ephesians 2:13 says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near in the blood of Christ." Verse 4 begins with the words "But God," whereas this verse begins with the words "But now."

In Ephesians 2 the Apostle Paul presents two pictures: the picture of our condition according to our nature (vv. 1-3) and the picture of our position according to our status (vv. 11-12).

It was primarily because of our fallen nature that we were in such a low status. According to our nature, we were fallen; according to our status, we are far off from God, Christ, the commonwealth of Israel, and the covenants of promise. Ephesians 2 reveals that we need not only to be saved out of our condition by God's grace, but also to be transferred out of our position by the redemption of Christ. When we are transferred out of our former position, we who once were far off are brought near.

God has saved us by working Himself into us to be our salvation. This is the saving grace that rescues us from the condition caused by our fallen nature. When life entered into us, we were saved from the condition of death. God also transferred us from our former position to a new position, where we have a new status.

IX. ONCE FAR OFF

In order to appreciate verse 13, we need to review the main points in verses 11 and 12. Before we were saved, we were the nations in the flesh, those who were called uncircumcision. The man whom God created to fulfill His purpose was pure, without sin or any negative mixture. However, sin, the evil nature of Satan, entered into man through the fall, firstly causing man's body to become the flesh, full of lusts, and eventually causing man's whole being to become the flesh. Hence, man was damaged and could not fulfill God's purpose. Then God came in to call out of fallen mankind a race--Abraham and his descendants. For the accomplishment of His purpose, God commanded them to be circumcised, that is, to put away their flesh. This separated God's people from fallen mankind and delivered them out of the fallen condition. Circumcision made a tremendous distinction between them and the rest of mankind, who were henceforth regarded as the uncircumcision, those who remain in the

fallen condition. We were in that category before we were brought into Christ.

Because we were separated from Israel, out of which Christ came, we were separated from Christ and had nothing to do with Him. Furthermore, we were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise. Moreover, we had no hope, we were without God, and we were in the satanic system of the world. Because we were far off from Christ, from the commonwealth of Israel, and from the covenants of God's promise, we were far off from God and all His blessings.

X. BUT NOW NEAR

The precious words at the beginning of verse 13--"But now"--indicate that now we have hope and we have God. We are no longer in the world; instead, we are in Christ Jesus. In Christ we have been brought near.

But to what, or to whom, have we been brought near? We have been brought near not only to God, but also to Christ, to Israel, and to God's promise. This equals being near to God and all His blessings. Hence, in the redeeming blood of Christ we have been made near both to God and to Israel.

We have pointed out that once we were far off from Christ, from the commonwealth of Israel, and from the covenants of God's promise. This equals being far off from God and all His blessings. But now in Christ we have been brought near to the very things from which we once were far off. We have been transferred out of our former status into Christ. Because our new position and status are in Christ, we are no longer far off.

Verse 13 specifically says that we have become near in the blood of Christ. This means that we are not only in the Messiah, but also in the redemption accomplished by the Messiah. The Jews are still expecting the Messiah to come; however, they do not realize how much they need Messiah's redemption. The transfer from our former status to our new status in Christ actually was accomplished by

the redemption of Christ. We were in a low status because we had fallen. When Christ shed His blood on the cross for our redemption, His blood brought us out of that low status. Now that we have been transferred by the blood of Christ, we are in Christ and in the heavenlies. Therefore, we are near to God. We are also near to Israel, to God's promise, and to God's blessings. In other words, in this heavenly position we are one with God, one with the proper Israel, one with God's covenants, and one with God's blessings. Because we have been transferred out of the former status and into a new status, we can participate in all that is of God. This is our portion in Christ.

We have been saved from our fallen condition by life, and we have been transferred out of our former status by the redemption of Christ. Now we enjoy salvation and we participate in all that is of God. Hallelujah, we have been saved and transferred! Chapter two presents a clear picture of how we have been saved from our miserable condition to be God's masterpiece and of how we have been transferred from our former position and status to become the new man, the commonwealth of God, the household of God, and the dwelling place of God. This is the revelation in Ephesians 2.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

THE BREAKING DOWN OF THE MIDDLE WALL OF PARTITION

In this message we shall consider the matter of the breaking down of the middle wall of partition (2:14-15).

I. CHRIST BEING OUR PEACE

Speaking of Christ, 2:14 says, "He Himself is our peace." The word "our" refers to both Jewish and Gentile believers. Through the blood of Christ we have been brought near both to God and to God's people. Christ, who has accomplished full redemption for both Jewish and Gentile believers, is Himself our peace, our harmony, in that He made both one. Due to the fall of mankind and the call of the chosen race, there was a separation between Israel and the Gentiles. Through Christ's redemption, this separation has been removed. Now the two are one in the redeeming Christ, who is the bond of oneness.

At present, there is still a separation between Israel and the rest of mankind. But according to God's economy, this separation has already been removed. In the eyes of God, it was taken away by the redemption of Christ on the cross. Now the Christ who has removed this separation is the bond of peace between Israel and the Gentiles.

II. CHRIST HAVING BROKEN DOWN THE MIDDLE WALL OF PARTITION

A. The Middle Wall of Partition Being the Law of the Commandments in Ordinances

Verse 14 speaks of the middle wall of partition. This middle wall of partition is "the law of the commandments

in ordinances" (v. 15), which was given because of man's flesh. The first of these ordinances was circumcision to cut off man's flesh. Circumcision became the middle wall of partition because it made the main distinction between the Jews, the circumcision, and the Gentiles, the uncircumcision. Thus, the middle wall of partition, this distinction, became the enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles.

In the law of Moses there were two kinds of commandments: moral commandments, such as the commandments concerning stealing and the honoring of parents, and ritual commandments, such as the commandment concerning the keeping of the Sabbath. The commandments regarding circumcision and the eating regulations were ritual commandments, not moral commandments. In Leviticus 11 there are a number of commandments dealing with eating. These commandments surely have nothing to do with morality. A person's morality is not affected by whether or not he eats something that is regarded as unclean.

The three main ordinances in Judaism were circumcision, the keeping of the Sabbath, and the dietary regulations. Every Israelite male had to be circumcised on the eighth day. Furthermore, the Jews were required to keep the Sabbath and to observe numerous regulations concerning their diet. These ordinances were the three main columns supporting Judaism. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He broke down the column of Sabbath keeping. During the years of His ministry, He purposely broke the Sabbath by healing people on the Sabbath day. The Jews were very much offended by this. Then Peter took the lead to break the dietary regulations, although he did it in a rather weak way. Because he received the vision in Acts 10, Peter was forced to give up these regulations. However, in Galatians 2, Peter withdrew from eating with the Gentiles when certain men came down from Jerusalem. Nevertheless, through the breaking of the dietary regulations, another supporting column of Judaism was brought down. The Apostle Paul broke down the column of

circumcision. In Philippians 3 he even used a new derogatory term, the "concision," to replace the honorable term, "circumcision." Furthermore, he referred to those of the circumcision as "dogs" and told the Philippians to "beware of dogs." No wonder the Jews tried to kill him! In a sense he was even worse in their eyes than Jesus, for circumcision was the leading ordinance in Judaism; it meant more to them than the Sabbath or the dietary regulations. Therefore, through the work of the Apostle Paul, the remaining structure of Judaism collapsed.

We need to keep in mind the difference between moral laws and ritual laws. The moral laws will never be abolished, not in this age nor in the millennium nor in eternity. The ritual commandments, on the contrary, are not permanent. Whether a person is allowed to eat pork or is required to keep the Sabbath or practice circumcision depends upon the age in which he lives. Any Jewish male born after Abraham and before John the Baptist was obligated to practice circumcision. Likewise, the commandments regarding the Sabbath and diet were in force during a particular time.

By the middle wall of partition Paul meant the law of commandments in ordinances, the ritual commandments related to circumcision, the Sabbath, and diet. The law of ritual commandments was a middle wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles. As we shall see, any ordinance or ritual is a middle wall of partition.

The ritual commandments were given firstly because of man's flesh. Circumcision, for example, was required because man had become fleshly. Therefore, God commanded man to cut off the flesh. The ritual commandments concerning diet were given so that God's chosen people would be careful to keep themselves clean. Animals that did not have cloven hoofs and that did not chew the cud were unclean. The cloven hoof symbolizes discernment in walking; it indicates that we should not walk in any place that is defiled. God's people need to have a keen discernment in their daily walk. Furthermore, they

need to learn to "chew the cud" by taking in God's word and considering it again and again. Because fallen people do not have the necessary discernment and do not consider God's word, these commandments were given to God's chosen people. However, these ordinances became the middle wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles. Moreover, this distinction and separation became the cause of enmity between the circumcision, the Jews, and the uncircumcision, the Gentiles.

Every ordinance creates enmity. In 1963 I was invited to speak at a meeting in Tyler, Texas. During the meeting, I began to say "Amen" in a very quiet way. Immediately someone warned me that the people in this country could not tolerate this. After that warning, I did not dare to utter "Amen." If I insisted on doing so, a partition would have been erected, and enmity would have been created.

It is even possible for the practice of pray-reading to become a middle wall of partition and a source of enmity. Although you may find pray-reading very helpful, you should not insist on it if others do not agree. To do so is to cause separation and to create enmity.

We must be careful not to bring any ordinances into the church life, for all ordinances kill. Some may prefer shouting in the meetings, and others may prefer silence. It is possible to make ordinances about either shouting or being silent. These ordinances cause not only division but enmity. I have witnessed the enmity created by such ordinances.

In 1963 I went with some other brothers to visit a certain group in Los Angeles. In the meeting I simply did whatever the others did. Afterward a brother asked me how I could do this. I replied, "What was wrong with that practice? Was it sinful? Why would you not do it? Why do you insist upon being different from the other saints?" I did not personally care for some of the practices in that meeting, but I participated in them nonetheless in order to remove the middle wall of partition.

I had a similar experience in Manchuria in 1933.

During my visit there, I was a guest one day in the home of some Japanese Christians. Like many young Chinese, I had been taught to dislike the Japanese because of the unfriendly political relationship between China and Japan. However, when I entered this home, I took off my shoes and sat on the tatami, just as everyone else did. Surely there is nothing wrong with sitting on a tatami instead of on a chair. We cannot say that the one is right and that the other is wrong. The same is true with shouting in the meetings or with being silent. In the Bible there are verses that give place for both.

Although we may like certain practices, we should not insist on them. If we insist on a particular practice, we make it an ordinance that separates and creates enmity. Christians have been divided by ordinances, such as the various ordinances concerning baptism. Some insist upon baptizing backwards; others insist on doing it forwards. Some Christians are divided over the use of musical instruments. Some permit a piano, but not an organ; the practice of others, however, is the opposite. As soon as we have ordinances, division comes immediately. Although I appreciate shouting and loud praises in the meetings, I am not for these things. To insist on any practice is to cause division. Hence, we must not have any ordinances. On the cross of Christ all ordinances were abolished.

Because ordinances create enmity and division, we must deal with them very seriously. It is possible for ordinances to become a cause of hatred even among those who have been close to one another. Two brothers may have enjoyed pleasant fellowship for a number of years, but simply because one is for shouting and the other is for being silent, there may be enmity between them. Instead of loving each other, they may come to hate each other. Religious jealousy is a terrible thing. History tells us that many have been slain because of it through the subtlety of Satan, the murderer. Therefore, we must repudiate all ordinances and go along with the practices of the saints, as long as these practices do not involve anything sinful,

immoral, or idolatrous. Although we may not approve of certain practices, we should go along with them in order to give no ground for ordinances.

B. The Breaking Down of the Middle Wall of Partition

1. By Abolishing the Law of the Commandments in Ordinances

Christ broke down the middle wall of partition between the Jews and the Gentiles by abolishing the law of the commandments in ordinances. When He was crucified on the cross, all the ordinances were nailed there. The law spoken of in 2:15 is not the law of the moral commandments, but the law of the ritual commandments, such as the ordinances of circumcision, keeping the Sabbath, and eating certain foods.

Ordinances are the forms or ways of living and worship. Every people has its own way of living. We need to be careful not to make our way of living or worship an ordinance. At the same time, we should not regard what others do as ordinances. If we all practice this, there will be no problems.

The Lord's recovery is spreading worldwide. In the various countries where the recovery is growing--for example, in Japan, Korea, and Indonesia--there are ways of living different from ours. Certainly the Lord's recovery cannot require the Japanese, Koreans, and Indonesians to have the same way of living. Our way of living greatly affects our way of meeting. For example, in Korea it is easy to have morning watch extremely early, even at 5:30. However, if this practice is imposed on Americans, it will cause serious difficulties.

The various ways of living are seen in the instruments used for eating. The Americans and Europeans use a knife and fork, the Chinese use chop sticks, and the Indonesians use their fingers. Who can say which way is best? Because this is a very delicate matter, we need to take care of the

feelings of others. If you visit Indonesia or Taiwan, you should follow the custom of the people there. Likewise those from Indonesia and Taiwan should do the same when they visit the West. If we want to eliminate ordinances, this must be our practice.

Due to the improvements in transportation and communication, the people of the world are becoming intermingled more and more. This is under the sovereignty of the Lord so that He can have the new man, the proper church life which includes all different peoples. Therefore, concerning our way of life, we all must learn not to impose requirements on others and not to have any ordinances.

The differences among the peoples began at Babel. In God's economy in the church life we must overcome Babel. Our very language can become an ordinance. When we stay for a long period of time in another country or even live there, we should, if possible, learn the language of the people there and not insist on our native tongue.

As the redeemed and recovered ones, those who have been transferred into Christ and into the church life, we must learn to hate the differences that divide the peoples. The worldly people regard cultural differences as a mark of prestige. But in Christ we have all lost this prestige. Now our only prestige is Christ and the genuine oneness. We should not have a prestige unique to our locality or meeting hall. We all need to exercise ourselves to go along with others. As long as a certain practice does not involve idolatry or immorality, there is nothing wrong with it. Do not hold on to your prestige. If we are willing to let go of our cultural pride, it will be possible for the Lord to have the proper church life.

The breaking down of the middle wall of partition is for the new man, the commonwealth of God, the household of God, and the building of God's dwelling place. If we keep our differences, it will be impossible to have the church life in these four aspects. Christianity is filled with the divisive differences among the various peoples. For this reason, it is

impossible for Christians outside the recovery to have the church life. For the sake of the church life, all the differences must be under our feet.

2. In the Flesh

Ephesians 2:15 says that Christ abolished "in His flesh" the law of commandments in ordinances. Because mankind became flesh (Gen. 6:3) and was thus kept from God and His purpose, God ordained His chosen people to be circumcised from the flesh. This ordinance was given because of man's flesh. It was in the flesh that Christ was crucified. When he was crucified, His flesh, which was typified by the separating veil in the temple, was rent (Heb. 10:20). By breaking down the middle wall of partition on the cross, Christ has made peace.

We have seen that, according to the Bible, the basic ordinances are those regarding circumcision, the Sabbath, and diet. But even these ordinances, which were ordained by God, have been abolished. If the basic ordinances have been abolished, how much more should the minor ones be abolished also. We should not keep any ordinances, and we should not create new ones. By the Lord's grace, we must learn to be flexible and to drop all differences for the sake of the church life. No matter where we may go, we must learn to be the same as others. Then we shall enjoy the church life as the new man, the commonwealth of God, the household of God, and the dwelling place of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

THE TWO CREATED INTO ONE NEW MAN

In this message we come to the creation of the one new man (2:14-15). This matter is extremely crucial in the New Testament, but it has been neglected by most Christians.

THE ABOLISHING OF THE ORDINANCES

When Christ died on the cross, not only did He deal with sins, the old man, Satan, and the world; He also dealt with the ordinances. On the cross Christ abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances. Therefore, by His death on the cross, Christ dealt with five categories of things: sins, the old man, Satan, the world, and the ordinances. It seems that very few Christians today talk about Christ's dealing with the ordinances, and I doubt that any books have been written on this subject. Most Christians think that all our problems concern sins, the old man, Satan, and the world. Many think that we are all right as long as these four things are dealt with. But not all the problems are solved and we cannot be all right until the ordinances have been dealt with. The ordinances, the different ways of living and worshipping, had to be abolished by Christ on the cross so that He could create in Himself the one new man.

We have heard repeatedly that on the cross Christ accomplished redemption, destroyed the Devil, judged the world, and crucified the self. But perhaps you have never heard that Christ's death on the cross was also for the creation of the one new man. In order to create the one new man, it was necessary for Christ to abolish the ordinances. By abolishing in His flesh the separating ordinances and

by creating the Jewish and Gentile believers into one new man, Christ has made peace among all believers. The Jews and Gentiles were separated to the uttermost by the ordinances. But both peoples were created in Christ with the divine essence into one new entity, which is a corporate man, the church. Because no other Christians speak about the abolishing of the ordinances and the creating of the new man, we are very burdened to give a word concerning these things.

THE HIGHEST ASPECT OF THE CHURCH

Most believers recognize that the church is the *ecclesia*, the gathering or assembling of God's called people. The Brethren emphasized this aspect of the church and even translated the Greek word *ecclesia* into "assembly," which is an accurate rendering. This, however, is an even less than elementary understanding of the church. A somewhat more advanced concept of the church is that the church is God's household or family. An even higher understanding of the church is to see that the church is the Body of Christ. The highest understanding of the church is that the church is the one new man. These four concepts of the church are like four levels in the educational system: kindergarten, elementary, high school, and college. We need to advance from the kindergarten level of the church, that of the assembly, to the college level, that of the one new man.

The relationship among Christians in an assembly, a gathering, is not very close. It is much closer and more intimate among those in the family, the household. However, we are not only members of God's family, but also members of the Body of Christ, where the relationship among the members is still closer. Those in the assembly and the members of a family may be separated from one another, but the members of the Body cannot be separated from the Body unless they are amputated. Wherever the Body goes, the members must go also; they have no choice.

However, in the one new man the fellowship is even more intimate than in the Body. The new man is corporate and universal. There are many believers, but there is only one new man in the universe. All the believers are components of this one corporate and universal new man. May the Lord show us more light concerning the new man! We must admit that as yet we have not seen very much of this aspect of the church. The aspect of the church as the new man is a new discovery opened up in recent years. I believe that in the days to come the Lord will reveal more concerning the one new man.

The family is more intimate than the assembly, the Body is much higher than the family, and the new man is higher than the Body. Thus, with the new man we come to the highest aspect of the church. Although Christian teachers have spoken a great deal about the assembly, the family, and the Body, hardly any have touched the matter of the one new man. This lack is evident in the deplorable translation of Ephesians 4:22 and 24 in the *New American Standard Bible*. Instead of using the word "man" in these two verses, this version says in verse 22 to "lay aside the old self" and in verse 24 to "put on the new self." What a serious mistake this is in translation! The *Revised Standard Version* is also greatly in error by adopting the renderings, "put off your old nature" and "put on the new nature." These errors came in because the translators responsible for them did not have the proper concept or knowledge. W. E. Vine, however, had some understanding of this matter. In his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, he says that the new man in 4:24 is the church because it is the very new man mentioned in 2:15. Because the new man is created of two peoples, the Jewish and Gentile believers, it must be a corporate entity.

The Lord has no way to accomplish His purpose until He has this new man on earth. The situation among today's Christians is far short of God's goal. Although there is much talk about the Body, not many have a proper understanding of the Body. Furthermore, Christians rarely

even speak of the one new man. How crucial it is that this aspect of the church be fully recovered!

GOD'S INTENTION TO HAVE A CORPORATE MAN

In order to see the one new man, we need to have a proper understanding of the old man. Before exhorting us to put on the new man, Paul tells us to put off the old man (4:22). After creating heaven and earth, God created man, not merely as an individual, but as a collective entity. Genesis 1:26 speaks of man both in the singular and in the plural: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion...." This reveals that God's intention has always been to have one collective man. The corporate man created by God was damaged through the fall, and there is now the need for God to have a new man. In order to produce this new man, Christ had to deal not only with sin, the fallen nature of the old man, Satan, and the world, but as we have pointed out, He also had to abolish the ordinances. What most frustrates God from gaining the new man is ordinances. When Christ was crucified on the cross, our sins, our old man, Satan, and the world were not the only things crucified; all the ordinances were crucified also. The crucifixion of the ordinances was not for forgiveness, holiness, victory over Satan, or the imparting of life; rather, it was absolutely for the creation of the one new man.

We are familiar with such verses as John 1:1 and 3:16, but we are not familiar with Ephesians 2:15. This verse says, "Having 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." When Christ's flesh was nailed to the cross, He abolished the law of the commandments in ordinances so that He might create the two, the Jews and Gentiles, in Himself into one new man. When verse 15 is read along with verse 16, we see clearly that Christ abolished the ordinances through the cross and slew the enmity by the cross, not for the

purpose of accomplishing redemption or of imparting life, but for creating the Jews and the Gentiles into one new man.

CHRIST'S DEATH INVOLVING ALL OF CREATION

When Christ was nailed to the cross in the flesh, the entire old creation was involved, for all of creation was related to His flesh. According to Hebrews 10, Christ's flesh was typified by the veil in the temple on which were embroidered cherubim, signifying the living creatures. Therefore, when Christ was nailed to the cross, the entire creation was nailed there with Him. Furthermore, when the veil in the temple was rent, the cherubim were rent also. This signifies that when the flesh of Christ was crucified on the cross, all the creatures were crucified. This is the biblical understanding of the crucifixion.

If you ask an unbelieving Jew who it was that was crucified on the cross, he will answer, "The man Jesus of Nazareth." If you asked this question of a new believer, he would probably say that his Savior, Jesus Christ, died there. A more advanced Christian would reply that both he and the Savior were crucified on the cross. An even more advanced Christian would respond that the Savior, he himself, and the Devil were all crucified on the cross. Other Christians, those even further advanced than these, would say that on the cross the Savior, the self, the Devil, and the world were crucified. If we went on to inquire of a mature and enlightened Christian concerning who died on the cross, he would say that the Savior, the self, Satan, the world, and all the creatures were crucified there. If this question is addressed to us, we should include in our answer not only the five items already mentioned, but also the ordinances. Christ's death terminated all of the old creation; every negative thing in the universe was terminated.

THE NEW MAN CREATED IN CHRIST

Christ abolished in His flesh the law of commandments in ordinances; but He did not create the new man in

His flesh. No, in the flesh He terminated the negative things so that He might create the two, the Jews and the Gentiles, into one new man in Himself. The negative things were terminated in Christ's flesh, whereas the new man, which, of course, is positive, was germinated in Christ Himself. We need to pay careful attention to two phrases in verse 15: "in His flesh" and "in Himself." If I were to ask you where you are today, you should say, "Firstly, I was in Christ's flesh; now I am in Christ Himself. In His flesh I was terminated on the cross, but in Christ Himself I was created as part of the one new man."

Christ did not stop with the termination of the negative things. As we have pointed out again and again, death is the threshold of resurrection; it ushers us into resurrection. Although Christ in the flesh was crucified on the cross, this death brought Him into resurrection. In resurrection He is no longer in the flesh; rather, He is the wonderful Spirit. It was in His flesh that we, the old man, were terminated, but it is in the wonderful Spirit that we have been created into the one new man. When our old man and our old nature were crucified, the ordinances related to our fallen nature were slain. Then in Christ's resurrection and in His wonderful Spirit, we were created into one new man. It does not seem reasonable to say that we were crucified before we were born. Nevertheless, it is a marvelous fact that we were terminated in the flesh of Christ on the cross. Moreover, before we were born, we were also created in the wonderful Spirit to be the one new man.

CHRIST AS THE ESSENCE OF THE NEW MAN

The phrase "in Himself" is very significant. It indicates that Christ was not only the Creator of the one new man, the church, but also the sphere in which and the essence with which the one new man was created. He is the very element of the new man. After we were terminated, in Him we received the new essence. Christ Himself became this new element to us. Nothing of our old man was good

for the creation of the new man, for our former essence was sinful. But in Him there is a wonderful essence, in which the one new man has been created.

Christ created the one new man, the church, with God's nature wrought into humanity. This divine work was something new. In the old creation God did not work His nature into any of His creatures, not even into man. In the creation of the one new man, however, God's nature has been wrought into man to make His divine nature one entity with humanity.

THE BATTLE FOR THE TRUTH CONCERNING THE CREATION OF THE NEW MAN

The demons and evil angels know that the one new man has been created in the divine essence. This fact terrifies them. For this reason, the demonic powers would try to keep Christians from seeing the fact of the creation of the one new man. Hence, we must fight the battle for this truth. We need to pray for a clear and sober mind to perceive that not only have we been terminated on the cross, but that by means of this termination we have been transferred into Christ. In Christ, with His divine essence, we have been created into the one new man.

It is essential to believe that before we were born we were created into the one new man and that a new essence has been wrought into our being. If you believe that Christ died on the cross to take away your sins, then you must also believe that through His death you have been put into Him and that in Him you have been created, with His divine essence, into the new man. Have you ever heard before that in His crucifixion Christ terminated you in His flesh and then in His resurrection put you into Himself in order to create you, with the divine essence, into the new man? This concept is beyond our natural understanding. Nevertheless, according to the Word, it is a fact. If we read 2:15 carefully and with prayer, the light will come in. We shall see that we and all the creatures, signified by the

cherubim on the veil, were crucified in the flesh of Christ on the cross. Since death ushers us into resurrection, in His resurrection Christ put us into Himself. Then with His divine essence He created us in Himself into the one new man.

Ephesians 2:15 does not say, "That He might create the two into one new man." Do not ignore the phrase "in Himself." Apart from being in Him, we could not have been created into the new man, because in ourselves we do not have the divine essence which is the element of the new man. Only in the divine essence and with the divine essence were we created into the new man. It is possible to have this essence only in Christ. In fact, Christ Himself is this essence, this element. Hence, in Himself Christ created the two into one new man. We all need to be profoundly impressed with the fact that we, the believers, have been created into one new man in Christ.

PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN

As those who have been saved and regenerated, we now must put off the old man and put on the new man. Although the new man has already been created, we still need to put him on. Hardly any Christians know how to put off the old man, much less how to put on the new man. Most Christians think that to put off the old man is to put off the old nature or the old self and that to put on the new man is to put on the new nature. Those who hold this concept are utterly mistaken. Since the new man in 2:15 is a corporate man, the new man in 4:24 must also be corporate. According to 4:24, we need to put on the very new man that has already been created in Christ.

The way to put on the new man is found in 4:23: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." This word indicates that to be renewed in the spirit of our mind is to put on the new man. Now we must see what it means to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. Admittedly, this is a strange expression. If I had been the writer of this Epistle, I would

have said "the mind of the spirit" instead of "the spirit of the mind." To me, that would have been more logical. Nevertheless, Paul spoke here of the spirit of the mind.

OUR SPIRIT

The phrase "in spirit" is found in every chapter of Ephesians, except chapter one. Do you realize what is in our spirit? You may say that the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of God are in our spirit. This, of course, is correct. But now we need to see that the new man is also in our spirit. God's habitation, His dwelling place, is in our spirit (2:22). In type, the ancient city of Jerusalem was God's dwelling place, but today God's dwelling place is in our spirit. Our regenerated spirit is today's Jerusalem. You may think that there is no comparison between the city of Jerusalem and our spirit. Jerusalem was a large city, and our spirit is very small. But if you know the Bible, you will realize that our spirit today is much larger than Jerusalem. Our spirit is universally spacious. The problem is that we are too individualistic and think only of our individual spirit. But when the Bible speaks of "your spirit," it includes the spirits of all the saints.

For too long our mind has been preoccupied by natural concepts, religious thoughts, and traditional teachings. In considering the matter of our spirit, we need to drop all this and see that our spirit is universally spacious. We know that God dwells in the third heaven, but He also dwells in our spirit. This makes our spirit today's Jerusalem. Hallelujah for that wonderful entity in the universe called our spirit! The Spirit witnesses with our spirit (Rom. 8:16). The words "our spirit" include Paul's spirit, Martin Luther's spirit, John Wesley's spirit, Brother Nee's spirit, your spirit, and my spirit. How spacious our spirit is! The Bible reveals that God is the God of our spirit (Num. 16:22; Heb. 12:9). Where is God today? In our spirit. Where is God's dwelling place today? In our spirit. Where is the one new man? Also in our spirit.

THE SPIRIT DIRECTING OUR BEING

The way to put on the new man is for our spirit (which is mingled with the Spirit), in which are found God, God's

dwelling place, and the new man, to become the spirit of our mind. Our mind dominates and directs our whole being. For the spirit to become the spirit of our mind means that the spirit directs, controls, dominates, and possesses our mind. Instead of our mind being the mind of our spirit, our spirit should be the spirit of our mind. If the mind is the mind of our spirit, it means that our mind dominates, controls, and directs our spirit. But if our spirit is the spirit of our mind, it means that our spirit dominates, controls, and directs our mind. When the spirit directs our mind, it governs our whole being. When this is the case, our being is under the control of our spirit, in which are found God, the dwelling place of God, and the new man. It is in this spirit of our mind that we are renewed. By means of this spirit we put on the new man.

How much we put on the new man depends on how much our spirit directs our being. When our spirit dominates and directs us, there is no ground for opinions or ordinances. There is no room for our way, because our whole being is dominated, controlled, governed, and directed by our spirit.

A GRADUAL PROCESS

Putting on the new man does not take place once for all. On the contrary, it is a lifelong matter, a gradual process that goes on throughout our Christian life. We have pointed out again and again that the new man has been created in Christ and with Christ. In 2:15, the Greek word rendered "in" has an instrumental significance; it also means "with." Thus, in Himself actually means with Himself. The new man has already been created with Christ as the divine essence. When we were regenerated, this new man was put into our spirit. Now day by day we need to put on this new man by permitting the spirit to

control our being and renew our mind. Every time part of our being is renewed, we put on a little more of the new man. Hence, the more we are renewed through the spirit controlling our mind, the more of the new man we put on. Eventually, this process of putting on the new man will be completed.

CHRIST IS ALL

In the one new man there are none of the national and cultural distinctions between the peoples. Here there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bondman nor freeman, cultured nor uncultured (Col. 3:10-11). Likewise, there is no American, nor British, nor Japanese, nor Chinese, nor German, nor French. In this new man Christ is all because He is the very essence with which the new man is created. Hence, the new man is just Christ.

CREATED ACCORDING TO GOD

Because the new man has been created in Christ and with Christ according to God, the new man bears the image of God. In contrast to Genesis 1:26, which says that man was made in the image of God, Ephesians 4:24 says that the new man is created directly according to God. Eventually, the new man will bear the image of God in holiness and righteousness of the reality. By being renewed in the governing spirit of our mind, we put on this new man that has been created in Christ Jesus.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN

In this message we shall give a further word concerning how to put on the new man.

CREATED AND RENEWED

The way the New Testament speaks of the new man may sound strange to our natural mind. According to 4:24, the new man is created in righteousness and holiness of the truth, but according to Colossians 3:10, the new man is being renewed. How can the new man be both created, which has nothing to do with anything old, and renewed, which is related to something old? The creation of the new man is one thing, but the experience of the new man is another. From Christ's side, the new man has already been created. But from our side, our experience, the new man is being renewed. According to the new creation, the new man has been completed by the work of Christ. But according to our experience, the new man is in the process of being renewed daily. My burden in this message is to point out how the new man is being renewed. This renewing is actually the putting on of the new man. As we pointed out in the previous message, the new man has been created, but now our need is to put him on in our experience.

AN INWARD, SUBJECTIVE RENEWING

The Greek word rendered "put on" is used with respect to clothing. Suppose a brother has a suit of clothes tailor-made for him. We may say that the suit has been completed. Now the brother must put on this suit in a proper way. He cannot put it on all at once; rather, it is a gradual, step-by-step procedure.

The putting on of a suit of clothes, however, is not a fully accurate picture of the putting on of the new man. The putting on of a suit is objective, whereas the putting on of the new man involves an inward renewing. We do not put on the new man in an outward, objective way. On the contrary, the putting on of the new man begins from within; it is related to an inward, subjective renewing.

At the time of our regeneration, the new man was put into, or born into, our spirit. Now this new man must spread into every part of our being. This spreading of the new man is the putting on of the new man. It is also the renewing. By this we see that the putting on of the new man is not an outward, objective matter, but an inward, subjective experience.

We have pointed out that on the cross Christ has slain the ordinances in order to produce the one new man in resurrection. Hence, in the resurrection of Christ, the new man was created and brought forth. When we believed in the Lord Jesus, the life-giving Spirit came into our spirit, bringing with Him the new man as a finished product. In this way the new man was born into our spirit. Therefore, since the time of our regeneration, the new man has been in our spirit. Now the new man must saturate every part of us. This spreading is both the putting on of the new man and the renewing. As Colossians 3:10 says, we need to put on the new man, which is being renewed. How much of the new man we put on depends on how much we are renewed.

PUTTING OFF THE FORMER MANNER OF LIFE

Both Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 indicate that in order to put on the new man, we first need to put off the old man. Ephesians 4:22 says, "Put off concerning the former manner of life the old man." The words "manner of life" imply a great deal. Before you were saved, you had a certain manner of life. Perhaps you worked five days a week and then in the evenings or on the weekends amused yourself with certain worldly entertainments. To some, the manner of life may be gambling. To others, it may be going

to certain places or eating certain foods. These are all part of the manner of life. In every country of the world and among every people there is a characteristic manner of life.

If we truly desire to be renewed, we need to put off the former manner of life. By putting off our manner of life, we put off the old man in a practical way. To bury the former manner of life is virtually the same as burying the old man. Therefore, my burden in this message is not simply to encourage you to put off the old man; it is specifically to encourage you to put off your former manner of life.

Many of the saints in the Lord's recovery still hold on to their old manner of life. Do not say that I am legal, conservative, or old-fashioned in telling you to put off your former manner of life. To have this attitude toward what I am saying here is a sign of being caught in the evil current of today's satanic system. We should not be swept along by the current of this age; instead, we should bury our former manner of life and even hold a funeral for it. To speak merely of putting off the old man is too doctrinal. The actual putting off of the old man is the putting off of the former manner of life, which always involves ordinances and our way of living.

NO DISTINCTIONS

Speaking of the new man, Colossians 3:11 says, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bondman, and freeman; but Christ is all things and in all" (Gk.). In his *Word Studies of the New Testament* Vincent says that in the Greek language the words rendered "cannot be" are very strong and mean that there is no possibility. In the new man there is no possibility for Greek and Jew, Barbarian and Scythian, bondman and freeman to exist, because the former manner of life found among these peoples has been put away. No doubt, in the church in Colosse there were people from all these backgrounds. Nevertheless, according to Paul's word in Ephesians 4:22, they all had to put away their former manner of life. By doing this they were renewed.

If we consider today's church life from the perspective of the putting away of the former manner of life, we shall have to admit that we have not adequately done this. On the contrary, too many of us are still holding on to our manner of life.

When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians, there were Jews in virtually every city in the Mediterranean area. When the Jews and the Greeks in a particular city were saved, they came together as the church in that locality. In many localities there must have been not only Jews and Greeks but also Barbarians (northern Europeans) and Scythians, who, as some Bible teachers believe, were the most uncultured and barbarous of people. Therefore, in some cities it was possible for the church to include cultured Greeks, religious Jews, Barbarians, and uncultured Scythians. Furthermore, there were also bondmen, those who had been sold into slavery, and masters, those who owned slaves. What would happen if all these different peoples came together for the Lord's table? In order for them to have the church life, they had to put off the old man embodied in their former manner of life. The Greeks had to put off their philosophy; the Jews, their religious observances and dietary regulations; the Scythians, their barbarous living; the masters, their attitude toward slaves; and the slaves, the manner of life peculiar to them. In the church life there is no room for such distinctions. There cannot be Jews and Gentiles, Barbarians and Scythians, bondmen and freemen. In the church life there is room only for Christ.

Through modern means of transportation and communication, the peoples of the world have been brought together more closely today than at any other time in history. The United States in particular has been called a melting pot, a blend of all different races and peoples. People with completely different temperaments, some outwardly expressive and others silent and mysterious, are brought together. This certainly is true of the churches in the Lord's recovery, where we see so many different

peoples: Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Brazilians, Swiss, French, Germans, Swedes, Danes, Indonesians, Malaysians, Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Ghanians, and Americans. The difference between peoples is seen even in the way they sing hymns. Some may sing in what they regard as the dignified manner, barely moving their lips, whereas others may be filled with enthusiasm and exercise their whole body. Thus, even in singing and in praising the Lord we may hold on to our manner of life.

PUTTING OFF OUR HERITAGE FROM BABEL

After Babel, there began to be the differences among the peoples. But on the cross Christ slew all these differences in order to produce the one new man. Through regeneration, the one new man has been put into us, those who formerly had been under the influence of the differences caused by Babel. Except for the Jewish ordinances, all the various manners of life are the heritage of Babel. What should we do about this heritage? We should bury it. This means that we must put off the former manner of life. Do not justify your manner of life or glory in it. The issue is not which manner of life is right and which is wrong. Every way of life involves ordinances and must be put off. How deplorable it is to see so-called churches formed according to nationality! For example, in San Francisco there is a Chinese Presbyterian church. It seems that every nationality has a so-called church. When we come together for the practice of the genuine church life, we must all put off our national heritage and forget it.

PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN BY THE SPIRIT OF THE MIND

We all need to have a clear vision of the new man. Our former manner of life, our heritage from Babel, and even the Jewish ordinances have been abolished in the flesh of Christ by His death on the cross. Instead of treasuring our heritage, we should disown it. On the positive side, we need

to see that the new man has already been created and, by regeneration, has been put into our spirit. The need now is for our spirit to become the dominant part of our being. This means that our spirit mingled with the Spirit of God must become the spirit of our mind (4:23). If our spirit is the spirit of our mind, then all our living will be by the spirit. Whatever we do will be according to the spirit. This spirit of our mind will then become the renewing spirit. As we are renewed by this spirit, we put on the new man.

RENEWED UNTO FULL KNOWLEDGE

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

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HOLINESS OF THE TRUTH

Ephesians 4:24 says that the new man is created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Righteousness here signifies God's deeds, and holiness signifies His being. Whatever God does is righteous, and whatever God is, is holy. The new man is created according to God in both of these respects. Moreover, both righteousness and holiness are of the truth. Dean Alford says that in this verse truth denotes the very essence of God, for God is truth. This is in contrast with the lust of the deceit mentioned in 4:22. Deceit is the essence of Satan, who is a liar, but truth is the essence of

God, who is truth. Thus, the lusts are of Satan, who is the deceit, whereas righteousness and holiness are of God, who is the truth. Vincent points out that in these verses deceit and truth should be personified. The new man is created according to God in righteousness and holiness, two aspects of God's essence.

THE LIFE AND LIVING OF THE NEW MAN

In our experience of the new man, the new man is gradually renewed unto a full knowledge according to the image of the Creator. This renewal takes place by the putting away of the former manner of life and by our living according to the spirit. In the past we have spoken a great deal about our spirit. However, we should not separate this from the matter of putting off our former manner of life. If we would have the new man as our living, we must firstly put off our former manner of life. Then we must allow our spirit to become the leading, dominating, directing, and governing element of our whole being. If we live in this way, spontaneously the process of renewing will take place within us. Such a continual renewing is the putting on of the new man. This is the church life, the life and living of the new man.

In this message I have not put forth a philosophical teaching. On the contrary, I have shared with you the vision the Lord has shown me concerning the putting on of the new man. I do not care for teachings according to culture, custom, or ethics. My burden is that we have a heavenly vision of what God is seeking in these days. God desires the one new man. This new man must be the living of the church today. The way to live this new man is to put off the former manner of life and to allow our entire being and daily living to be dominated and directed by the spirit. Then we shall be renewed and experience the new man as our church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

BOTH RECONCILED TO GOD IN ONE BODY AND FELLOW-CITIZENS OF THE SAINTS AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

In this message we come to 2:16-19, where we see that the Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled to God in one Body and that now we, the believers, are fellow-citizens of the saints and members of the household of God.

I. BOTH NEEDING TO BE RECONCILED TO GOD

Ephesians 2:16 says, "And might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross, slaying the enmity by it." The word "both" refers to the Jews and the Gentiles. Not only the uncircumcised Gentiles but also the circumcised Jews needed reconciliation to God through the redemption of Christ accomplished on His cross.

II. IN ONE BODY

Verse 16 says that the Jews and the Gentiles have been reconciled in one Body. This one Body, the church (1:22-23), is the one new man in the previous verse. It was in this Body that both the Jews and the Gentiles were reconciled to God through the cross. We, the believers, both Jews and Gentiles, were reconciled not only *for* the Body of Christ, but also *in* the Body of Christ. What a revelation here! We were reconciled to God; we were saved in the Body of Christ.

We usually regard reconciliation as an individual matter; we do not often think of corporate reconciliation. However, the proper and genuine reconciliation is in the

one Body. The Body is the instrument, the means, by which we were reconciled to God. According to Colossians 3:15, we have even been called in the one Body.

This corporate concept pervades the New Testament. Our concept, however, is that we were reconciled to God as individuals. But in the eyes of God we have been called in one Body and reconciled to Him in the Body. The exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt is a clear picture of this. In Egypt the children of Israel were, in a sense, far off from God. After they were brought out of Egypt and passed through the Red Sea together, at Mount Sinai they were reconciled to God as one congregation, not as individuals. That was a type of our being reconciled to God in the one Body. We today need to have this corporate concept. Do not think that you have been saved individually. On the contrary, we were saved all together and reconciled to God in one Body.

III. TO GOD

Originally, we were without God, far away from God. But, through the cross with the blood of Christ, we have been brought back to God in the one Body. As long as we are in the Body, we are one with God. But if we are outside the Body, we are separated from Him.

IV. THROUGH THE CROSS

Our reconciliation to God in the one Body was accomplished through the cross. The cross of Christ, on the one hand, has slain the enmity caused by the ordinances which were given because of the flesh, and, on the other hand, has redeemed us with the blood of Christ shed upon it. It was through this cross that both Jews and Gentiles were reconciled in one Body to God.

V. THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

Verse 17 says, "And coming, He preached the gospel of peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were

near." This refers to the coming of Christ as the Spirit to preach the gospel of peace, which He has accomplished through His cross. Those who were far off are the uncircumcised Gentiles who were separated by the flesh. Those who were near are the circumcised Jews who were brought near by God's choosing.

The very Christ who died on the cross to slay the ordinances in order to create the new man, and shed His blood in order to reconcile us to God, came to us as the Spirit to preach the gospel of peace. This means that Christ has come as the life-giving Spirit, even as the preaching Spirit. Both those who were far off and those who were near needed to hear these good tidings of peace.

VI. ACCESS IN ONE SPIRIT

A. Christ's Cross and His Blood Being the Access

The preaching of the gospel is merely the objective fact; it is not the experience. Hence, after receiving this preaching, we need the experience, which is the access to the Father in the one Spirit. This access is constituted of Christ's cross and His blood (Heb. 10:19).

B. Through Christ

Both Jewish and Gentile believers have access to the Father through Christ--the very Christ who abolished the law of the commandments in ordinances, broke down the middle wall of partition, slew the enmity to reconcile the Gentiles to the Jews, and shed His blood for redeeming both to God.

C. In One Spirit

As verse 18 points out, our access unto the Father is in the one Spirit. If we have the cross without the Spirit, we have the fact without the experience. Hence, the Spirit is

crucial. Firstly, both the Jewish and Gentile believers were reconciled in one Body to God (v. 16). That was a positional matter. Then we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father. This is experiential.

D. Unto the Father

This access in one Spirit is unto the Father. Positionally we were reconciled to *God*; experientially we have access unto the *Father*. To be reconciled to God is to be saved; to have access unto the Father is to enjoy God, who, as the source of life, has regenerated us to be His sons.

In the one Body we have been reconciled to God through the cross. This is a fact. Now we may have access unto the Father and contact Him directly. This is an experience. We have been reconciled to God positionally for salvation, and we have access unto the Father experientially for enjoyment. It is significant that these verses do not say that we are reconciled to the Father and have access to God. No, having been reconciled to God once for all, we now have access to the Father for a continual enjoyment.

In verse 18 the Trinity of the Godhead is implied. Through God the Son who is the Accomplisher, the means, and in God the Spirit who is the Executor, the application, we have access to God the Father who is the Originator, the source of our enjoyment.

In verses 15 and 16 the Apostle Paul mentions the one new man before the Body. What is the reason for this? In order to answer this question we need to consider 2:14-16 again. As we come to these verses, we should not come with our natural concepts, religious understanding, or doctrinal preoccupations, all of which make us dull and insensitive in understanding the Word. Because the aspect of the church as the Body is not as high as that of the new man, we may think that the Body should be mentioned first. But how could there be the Body if there were not first a man? Firstly we speak about a man and then about

the body of the man. The creation of the new man was primary, and the producing of the Body was secondary. Therefore, Paul firstly said that Christ's death on the cross abolished in His flesh the ordinances in order to create in Himself the one new man. By doing this, the Body was produced. As soon as the man was created, the Body came into being. In this regard the word "and" at the beginning of verse 16 is significant; it connects the thought of reconciliation in the one Body with that of the creation of the one new man. When Christ created the two, the Jews and the Gentiles, into one new man, He reconciled them in one Body to God. For this reason, Paul mentioned the new man before the Body.

Remember, Christ did not reconcile individuals. He reconciled two peoples, the Jews and the Gentiles, in one Body. If He had merely reconciled individual sinners, He would not have needed to reconcile them in the Body. But in order to reconcile two collective peoples, He had to do so in the Body.

The Jews and the Gentiles once were separated, but on the cross Christ broke down the wall of separation and created them into one entity, the one new man. But what about their relationship to God? In order for them to be reconciled to God, there was the need of a body as the instrument. When Christ created the two into one new man, He simultaneously reconciled them to God in one Body. When they were created into the new man, it was possible for them to be reconciled to God in one Body. Hence, the one Body was the means through which they were reconciled to God. Therefore, in verses 15 and 16 the one new man is mentioned before the Body.

After being reconciled to God, there was still the need for the Jews and the Gentiles to have access unto the Father for enjoyment. This access is not merely in the Body, but also in the Spirit. To be in the Body is a fact, but to be in the Spirit is an experience. Although we are in the Body, we may not be in the Spirit. Instead, we may be in our wandering thoughts. As you sit in a meeting, for

example, you may travel around the world in your mind. This illustrates the fact that we need to be experientially in the Spirit.

When we are in the Spirit, we enjoy the Father. We may have God in fact by being in the Body, but if we would enjoy the Father in experience, we must be in the Spirit. Once we were far off from God, but we have been reconciled to Him positionally. Now there is no separation, no partition, between us and God. However, if we are not in the Spirit, we do not have the enjoyment of this fact. Hence, in order to enjoy experientially what we possess positionally, we need to be in the Spirit.

VII. NO LONGER STRANGERS AND SOJOURNERS

Now we come to verse 19: "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow-citizens of the saints and members of the household of God." This verse covers two aspects of the church: the kingdom, indicated by the term "fellow-citizens," and the family of God, indicated by the phrase "the household of God."

Verse 19 says that we, the Gentiles, are no longer strangers and sojourners. The word "you" in this verse refers to the Gentile believers. Strangers are aliens, and sojourners are foreigners sojourning among the Israelites without the right of citizenship. Both refer to the Gentiles.

VIII. FELLOW-CITIZENS OF THE SAINTS

Now that we are no longer strangers and sojourners, we are fellow-citizens of the saints. The term "fellow-citizens" indicates the kingdom of God. All the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, are citizens of God's kingdom, which is a sphere wherein God exercises His authority. As long as anyone is a believer, he is a citizen of the kingdom of God. This citizenship involves rights and responsibilities. We enjoy the rights of the kingdom, and we bear the responsibilities of the kingdom. These two things always go together. For example, as citizens of the United States, we

enjoy certain rights, but we must also fulfill our responsibility to pay taxes.

IX. MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

Verse 19 reveals that we are also "members of the household of God." This phrase indicates the house of God. Both the Jewish and Gentiles believers are members of God's house. God's house is a matter of life and enjoyment; all believers were born of God into His house to enjoy His riches. God's kingdom is a matter of rights and responsibility; all believers who were born into the house of God have the civil rights of and bear responsibility in the kingdom of God. In such a short verse two profound matters are covered: the kingdom of God with its rights and responsibilities and the house of God with its enjoyment of the Father's life and riches.

X. THE SAINTS, THE HOUSE OF GOD, AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Verse 19 speaks of the saints, the house of God, and the kingdom of God. The saints are individuals, but the house of God is corporate and results in the kingdom of God. If there were no house, there could be no kingdom. Firstly we are saints, individuals. Then, corporately, we are the house of God resulting in the kingdom of God. Therefore, we have both the individual aspect of the Christian life and the corporate aspect in the house of God and the kingdom of God.

In verse 19 why does the Apostle Paul refer to the kingdom of God before the house of God? Paul's thought here concerns our former status as strangers and sojourners. Strangers and sojourners are related to a kingdom, not to a household. Those who are aliens in this country are not aliens in relation to a family, but in relation to the nation. Because strangers and sojourners are aliens to kingdoms, not to families, Paul mentions the kingdom first. In this verse Paul's main concept is that of citizenship in God's kingdom. The kingdom, however, is

composed of families. For this reason, Paul also mentions the household of God, that is, the family of God.

In verse 19 there is the thought of intimacy, seen in the term *fellow*-citizens. As unsaved Gentiles, we once were far off from God and the commonwealth of Israel, but now we have an intimate relationship with the saints. We are fellow-citizens of the saints and members of God's household. Among the citizens of the United States, there is a certain intimacy. But this intimacy cannot compare with that among members of a family. The Jews and the Gentiles are not only citizens of the same kingdom, but also folks of the same family. We need to regard the saints in an intimate way as our folks. Being members of the family of God must not only be our doctrine, but also our experience. In the universe God has just one household, one family. No matter what our background may be, as believers we all are members of God's unique universal family, and all the saints are our folks. Do not take this matter lightly, but consider it seriously as an important aspect of the church. What an intimate relationship we have in the household of God!

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

GROWING INTO A HOLY TEMPLE AND BEING BUILT INTO A DWELLING PLACE OF GOD

In this message we come to the last portion of chapter two, verses 20 through 22. Here we have the revelation of the building in two aspects, the universal aspect and the local aspect. Universally the church is uniquely one, and the church in a particular locality is locally one. In verse 21 we see the universal aspect of the church: "All the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord." Then in verse 22 we have the local aspect: "You also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." Therefore, the holy temple refers to the universal aspect, and the dwelling place of God, to the local aspect.

I. BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

As the Body of Christ, the church has been regenerated, and as the house of God, the church is being built. Apparently, growth and building are separate things. Actually, the building of the house is the growth of the Body. If the Body does not grow, the house cannot be built.

In considering the church as God's building, we need to pay special attention to the foundation. Verse 20 says, "Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone." Many Christians have difficulty understanding what the foundation is in this verse. First Corinthians 3:11 says, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Christ is the only foundation.

Nevertheless, Ephesians 2:20 speaks of the foundation of the apostles and prophets. This does not mean, however, that the apostles and prophets themselves are the foundation. In contrast to Revelation 21 where the foundations are the very persons of the apostles, the foundation here is not the apostles and prophets themselves. Since the mystery of Christ has been revealed to the apostles (Eph. 3:4-5), the revelation they received is considered the foundation upon which the church is built. This corresponds to the rock in Matthew 16:18, which is not only Christ Himself but also the revelation concerning Christ, upon which Christ will build His church. Therefore, the foundation of the apostles and prophets is the revelation they received regarding Christ and the church for the building of the church. The church is built upon this revelation. This is the meaning of the foundation in Ephesians 2:20.

Upon what are we in the Lord's recovery building the church? To say that we are building upon Christ is too vague and indefinite. We need to build the church upon the revelation received by the apostles and prophets. The so-called churches established according to nationalities are not built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Some so-called churches even exclude members of particular racial or ethnic groups. Surely those congregations are not built upon the foundation spoken of in 2:20. The Roman Catholic Church and all the denominations claim that their foundation is Christ. However, none of these groups declares that their foundation is the foundation of the apostles and prophets. For example, the Presbyterian denomination is built upon the concept of presbytery. The apostles and prophets, however, never received a revelation that the presbytery should be the foundation of the church. The Methodist Church is built upon the principles of John Wesley, and the Catholic Church is built upon the concept of hierarchy. If the revelation given to the apostles and prophets were applied to the Catholic Church, the Catholic Church would collapse. The charismatic churches are built upon the

foundation of certain charismatic gifts and experiences. In contrast to all these so-called churches, we in the Lord's recovery must be able to strongly affirm that the churches in the recovery are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. This means that the churches in the Lord's recovery are built according to the revelation received by the apostles and prophets. This revelation embraces believers of all races and nationalities; it includes those who speak in tongues and those who do not. If you have the vision of the proper foundation of the church, you will realize that only the churches in the Lord's recovery, not the Catholic Church, the denominations, nor the independent groups, are built upon the proper foundation.

II. CHRIST HIMSELF BEING THE CORNERSTONE

Verse 20 reveals that in God's building Christ is the cornerstone. Here Christ is referred to, not as the foundation (Isa. 28:16), but as the cornerstone, because the main concern here is not the foundation but the cornerstone that joins together the two main walls: the wall of the Jewish believers and the wall of the Gentile believers.

When the Jewish builders rejected Christ, they rejected Him as the cornerstone (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7), which joins the Gentiles to them for the building of God's house.

In Matthew 21 the Lord Jesus indicated, in a figurative way, that the Pharisees would reject Him. Verse 42 says, "Have you never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, this has become the cornerstone; this was from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" By this word the Lord revealed that after His resurrection He would become the cornerstone to join the Jews and the Gentiles. Referring to Christ, Peter said to the religionists in Acts 4:11 and 12, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Peter's word shows that salvation

implies building. God's intention in saving us is not to bring us into the heavens; rather, it is to join us to the Jews so that He may have His building. Many unbelieving Jews despise the Lord Jesus because they do not want to be joined to the Gentiles. As long as a Jew does not believe in Christ, he may be separated from the Gentiles. But as soon as such a Jew believes in Him, he is joined by Christ, the cornerstone, to the Gentile believers. Whether we are Jews or Gentiles, we have been saved in order to be joined together in Christ for God's building.

III. GROWING INTO A HOLY TEMPLE

A. In Christ

Verse 21 says, "In Whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord." Here we see that in Christ, who is the cornerstone, all the building, including both Jewish and Gentile believers, is fitted together and is growing into a holy temple.

B. Growing

Since the building is a living one (1 Pet. 2:5), it is growing. It grows into a holy temple. The actual building of the church as the house of God is by the growth in life of the believers. Today the church is growing. However, it is not growing in our natural life, but in the divine life, the spiritual life.

Verse 21 also says that all the building is fitted together. The word "fitted" means being made suitable for the condition and situation of the building.

C. Into a Holy Temple

As verse 21 points out, all the building is growing into a holy temple. The Greek word rendered "temple" means the sanctuary, the inner part of the whole temple. It is in the Lord that the building is growing into a holy temple. This means that the entire building of God's house as His sanctuary is in Christ the Lord.

At this point I would like to ask you a question: Has the temple of God in the universe been completed? The fact that the temple is still growing indicates that, from our point of view at least, the temple of God is not complete. Verse 21 does not say that all the building has grown into a holy temple; it says that all the building is growing into a holy temple.

The phrase "all the building" refers to the universal church. If you consider the past nineteen centuries of church history, you may find it difficult to see the growth of the building. But do not be disappointed. The purpose of God cannot be thwarted. The universal building is still growing. In Matthew 16 the Lord Jesus prophesied that He would build His church. The building in Matthew 16:18 is the very building in Ephesians 2:21. Although the growth of the building is slow and hardly noticeable, it is nonetheless taking place.

IV. BUILT INTO A DWELLING PLACE OF GOD

Verse 22 says, "In Whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." The word "you" here, which refers to the local saints, indicates that the building in verse 21 is universal and the building in verse 22 is local. In this verse Paul was saying that the local saints, the saints in Ephesus, were being built together in Christ into a dwelling place of God. Therefore, in these verses Paul covered both the universal aspect and the local aspect of the church. All the building is growing--this refers to the universal aspect. The believers in a particular locality are being built together--this is the local aspect.

Why does Paul use the term "holy temple" in referring to the universal aspect and the term "dwelling place of God" when speaking of the local aspect? What is the difference, if any, between the holy temple and the dwelling place of God? Apart from the universal temple, there is not another temple called the local temple. The temple and the dwelling place refer to two aspects of the

same thing. Do not consider the temple a dwelling place. The temple is the place in which God's people contact God, worship Him, and hear His oracle. The dwelling place is a place of rest. God rests in His dwelling place. However, the temple and the dwelling place are not two distinct places. Rather, they are two aspects, two functions or usages, of the same building. The church is the place where God's people contact God, worship Him, and receive His word, and it is also the place of God's rest.

All the local churches are part of the universal church, not something in addition to it or apart from it. All the local churches added together equal the universal church. This means that apart from the local churches there is no universal church. Hence, the building of the local church is the building of the universal church. All the local churches have just one building. The church in Anaheim does not have one building; the church in Chicago, another; and the church in New York, still another. However, our natural concept of the building is that there is a different building in each locality. In this universe there is just one building with a universal aspect and a local aspect. No matter how many churches there may be on earth, there is still just one building with these two aspects.

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

Verse 21 says that the holy temple is in the Lord, and verse 22, that the dwelling place of God is in spirit. This indicates that the Lord is one with our spirit and that our spirit is one with the Lord. To be in our spirit actually is to be in the Lord. Also, to be in the Lord is to be in the spirit. He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). We simply cannot separate our spirit from the Lord. Therefore, our spirit is the place where the building of the church is.

The building is not in our mind, emotion, soul, or heart. It is absolutely a matter in our spirit.

If we wish to understand such matters as the foundation of the apostles and prophets and the difference between the holy temple and the dwelling place of God, we need to have a sober mind as we study the Bible. The Bible is the most logical of books. Our God is not foolish, and He never speaks nonsense. He is very logical, and everything in His Word is logical. Hence, we should not have an undisciplined mentality as we study the Bible. On the contrary, in reading the Bible we must exercise our sober mind to ask the proper questions. Then the light will shine. This is a basic principle in understanding the Word of God. May we all, especially the young brothers and sisters, learn to study the Bible in this way.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-EIGHT

THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE GRACE

Verses 2 through 21 of chapter three are a parenthesis, and 4:1 is a continuation of 3:1. In this parenthetical, beseeching word, the Apostle Paul described to the Gentile believers his ministry for them, a ministry which he received in the stewardship of grace through the revelation of the mystery of Christ. He also prayed in this parenthesis that the church might experience Christ to the fullest extent.

In this message we shall consider the stewardship of the grace of God. Paul says in 3:2, "If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you." In Greek, the word rendered "stewardship" in this verse is the same word rendered "dispensation" in 1:10 and 3:9. The stewardship of the grace is the dispensing of the grace of God into God's chosen people for the producing and building up of the church. Out of this stewardship comes the ministry of the apostle, who is a steward in God's house, ministering Christ as God's grace to God's household.

The Greek word translated "stewardship" in verse 2 is *oikonomia*. 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 necessities 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 for the stewardship of grace.

I. THE STEWARD--A PRISONER

In order to have such a stewardship, there is the need of stewards. Every apostle is a steward of God. As an apostle, Paul was a steward who dispensed the riches of God to His children.

A. Of Christ Jesus

Although Paul was a steward, in 3:1 he referred to himself as "the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the nations." The Apostle Paul considered himself the prisoner of Christ. Apparently he was confined in a physical prison; actually he was imprisoned in Christ. On the basis of such a status, the status of his actual living as a prisoner in Christ, he besought the saints. In releasing the revelation of God's mystery concerning the church in chapters one and two, Paul spoke on the basis of his status as the apostle of Christ through the will of God. That status was the authority of his revelation concerning the church. In beseeching the saints to walk worthily of God's calling, he spoke from his status as the prisoner of the Lord. His status as the apostle of Christ qualified him to release God's revelation, whereas his status as the prisoner of the Lord demonstrated his walk in the Lord, by which he could inspire and beseech the saints to walk in the Lord as he did.

Paul considered himself the prisoner of Christ because he had been imprisoned by Christ. Later, in 4:1 he refers to himself as "the prisoner in the Lord." Christ was Paul's prison. One day, the very Christ whom you love will become your prison. Sooner or later, every steward of God, every minister of God's riches, every faithful lover of Christ, will be imprisoned not only by Christ but also in

Christ. The more you love Him, the more you will be in Him. Eventually, you will be in Him to such an extent that He will become your prison. Once you are placed in this prison, you will not want to get out, because you will love this prison very much. Here you enjoy Christ to the uttermost.

Everyone who loves the Bible has a high regard for the Epistle to the Ephesians. It would be a great loss for us not to have this book in the New Testament, for Ephesians contains the highest revelation in the Bible. This revelation was given to a man imprisoned in Christ, a man who enjoyed Christ as his prison. This indicates that in order to see something so heavenly and divine, we need to be a prisoner in the Lord. The more freedom we have, the more blind we are. But if Christ is our prison, our eyes will be opened to see the heavenly vision, and we shall receive the highest revelation.

B. On Behalf of the Saints

Paul saw this vision on behalf of the saints, for as he says in 3:1, he was a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles. If we enjoy Christ as our prison, we also shall see a vision not for ourselves, but for the church.

Many Christians read Ephesians again and again without seeing the revelation contained in it because they are not imprisoned in Christ. They are too free, and their freedom makes them blind. But if you are willing to lose your freedom, the vision will come to you. Which do you prefer to have--the freedom or the vision? We all need to pray, "Lord, for the sake of the heavenly vision, I am willing to lose my freedom. Lord, I want to be imprisoned in You. Others may think that I am suffering, but when I am imprisoned in You, I enjoy You to the uttermost." The enjoyment of being imprisoned in Christ enables us to receive the heavenly revelation.

No doubt, there are precious truths in all the books of the Bible. But the sweetest and deepest truths are in Ephesians. These truths are conveyed in heavenly utterances such as, "Be strengthened into the inner man,"

"Are renewed in the spirit of the mind," and "Be filled unto all the fullness of God." These heavenly expressions were uttered by one who saw a vision as a prisoner in Christ. While he was imprisoned in Christ, Paul saw what it was to be strengthened into the inner man, to be renewed in the spirit of the mind, and to be filled unto all the fullness of God. In principle, it is the same with us today. Whenever we enjoy freedom outside of Christ, we lose our spiritual sight. But if we are willing to abide in Christ as our prison, the vision will come, and our sight will be restored. The heavens will be open to us, and everything will become crystal clear.

In Ephesians 3 the Apostle Paul had a very high vision. It was in this chapter that he used the term "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (v. 8). What Paul saw regarding this is far beyond our understanding. Not even Paul himself had words adequate to express it. Eventually, he could speak only of the breadth and length and depth and height (v. 18). These dimensions, which are the dimensions of Christ, are actually the dimensions of the universe. As he was confined and restricted in a prison, Paul had a vision of the universal dimensions of Christ. Although you may consider yourself a little brother or sister, you also will see something on behalf of the church if you are willing to be a prisoner in Christ.

II. THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE GRACE

A. The Stewardship

The stewardship of the grace is the dispensing of the riches of Christ. According to the context of chapter three, grace refers to the riches of Christ. When the riches of Christ are enjoyed by you, they become grace. Paul's ministry was to dispense the riches of Christ as grace to the believers. A stewardess on an airplane dispenses food to the passengers; she does not dispense information on how to cook. Likewise, the Apostle Paul dispensed the riches of Christ to the saints. This is what we are doing in the ministry today.

1. According to God's Economy

This stewardship is according to God's economy. 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 stewardship according to God's economy. This means that every saint can infuse Christ into others. Even a young sister in high school can dispense Christ into her classmates. This dispensing of Christ into others is the stewardship according to God's economy.

In the past we have pointed out that the heavens are for the earth, that the earth is for man, and that man is for God. The desire of God's heart is to dispense Himself into man. The heavens and the earth are for this dispensing. This is the central point of the whole Bible. God does not want to remain in Himself; He wants to get into us. Therefore, in eternity past He purposed to dispense Himself into us. For the fulfillment of this purpose, God created the heavens for the earth, the earth for man, and man for Himself. 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. Therefore, the stewardship of the grace is according to God's economy.

The Apostle Paul was not the only one with a stewardship. In 3:8 he refers to himself as "less than the least of all saints." This indicates that Paul was even smaller than we are. Our concept needs to be radically changed. If Paul could be a steward, then we also can be stewards and dispense the riches of Christ into others.

2. For God's Dispensation

This stewardship of the grace is for God's dispensation. We have seen that the desire of God's heart is to dispense His riches, which actually are Himself, into His chosen people. After these riches 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 stewardship; and when they are dispensed by us into others, they are 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.

Our concept of preaching the gospel needs to be uplifted. We should not be concerned merely with winning souls. Rather, we should preach the gospel to carry out God's economy by dispensing God into others. Go to school or to work for the purpose of carrying out your stewardship according to God's economy for His dispensation. We are not doing an ordinary work of gospel preaching. We are dispensing God into man. What a glorious ministry! What a wonderful stewardship! Praise the Lord that we all have such a stewardship! We have the privilege of dispensing the unsearchable riches of Christ into others.

B. The Grace

Since our stewardship is the stewardship of the grace, we need to see what grace is. John 1:17 says that grace came through Jesus Christ. During the time of the Old Testament, there was law, but not grace. Grace did not come until Christ came.

Many Christians think that grace refers mainly to material blessings. But the Bible indicates that grace did not come before Christ. However, God certainly bestowed material blessings on His people before Christ came. Grace is nothing less than God Himself given to us, gained by us, and enjoyed by us. Before Christ came, God could not be given to anyone. No one could receive God or enjoy Him. But in Christ and through Christ we receive God, and God becomes our enjoyment. Therefore, grace is God Himself as our enjoyment. The stewardship of grace is the dispensing of God into people to be their enjoyment. Dispensing this grace into others is our stewardship according to God's economy. Because we partake of God as our enjoyment, we can dispense Him as grace into others. This is the dispensation of grace.

III. THE MINISTRY OF A MINISTER

In 3:7 Paul says that he became a minister. In the New Testament there is just one ministry, which is the stewardship, the dispensing of God into people. The word "minister" corresponds to the word "steward," for a steward is one who serves by dispensing the necessities of life to others. Not only the brothers who minister the Word of God or the elders who care for the local building are ministers, but every saint, every member of the church, has a part in the ministry. Do not be cheated by the traditional concept and think that you are not a minister. A minister is simply one who serves. A minister of the gospel serves people with the gospel. If a young sister ministers Christ to her mother, she is carrying out the New Testament ministry. All the saints must be bold to declare that they are ministers. We must not only speak this but put it into practice. Young people, go to your parents and minister Christ to them. I encourage you all to fulfill this ministry. Although there may be thousands of saints in the Lord's recovery, there is just one ministry, the dispensing of the riches of Christ into others. Hallelujah for this glorious ministry!

A. According to the Gift of the Grace of God

Our ministry is according to the gift of the grace of God. To say that grace is God for our enjoyment means that grace is God as our life and life supply (1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 12:9). This life supply operates within us. By means of this operating life, we have a certain ability, which is the gift. Therefore, in 3:7 Paul speaks of being a minister "according to the gift of the grace of God."

All the saints have such a gift, such an ability. For example, my hand has the ability to grasp objects. This ability comes from the life blood in my body. If the blood does not flow into my hand, my hand will be short of life and therefore will not be able to function. But when the life blood flows into my hand, the blood operates within the hand to give it the ability to function. As members of

Christ, we all have the life of God operating within us to produce a certain ability. This ability is the gift that makes us ministers to impart Christ to others.

B. To Preach the Unsearchable Riches of Christ as the Gospel

Our ministry is to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel. It is not to present doctrine nor simply to teach the Word in letters. Our gospel is a Person with all His riches. To preach such a gospel is to minister the riches of Christ to others.

C. For Producing the Church

This ministry is for producing the church. The ministry of the Apostle Paul as God's steward was to bring forth the church by dispensing the unsearchable riches of Christ as grace into the believers. Paul's ministry was not only to save sinners, but to produce the church for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. This was the goal of his stewardship of grace.

D. By Revelation of the Mystery in Spirit

According to 3:3 and 5, our ministry is by the revelation of the mystery in spirit. The mystery of God is Christ, and the mystery of Christ is the church. As long as we have seen Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ, we have the revelation of the mystery in our spirit. This enables us to minister Christ to others. This is a matter in our regenerated spirit which is indwelt by the Spirit of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-NINE

THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY

In Ephesians 3, a parenthetical word, Paul begins to beseech the saints to walk worthily of God's calling. What Paul speaks regarding himself in this chapter is a pattern for one who would walk worthily of God's calling. In order to walk worthily of God's calling, we need to be a prisoner of the Lord, a steward, and a minister. As one imprisoned in Christ, Paul saw a heavenly vision. The more he saw of this vision, the more he experienced Christ and gained Christ. Paul was also a steward dispensing the riches of Christ to the members of the household of God. Furthermore, he was a faithful minister, one who ministered Christ to the members of the Body so that Christ might be expressed in the Body.

To walk worthily of God's calling is not simply to be kind, humble, and loving. It is to be imprisoned, confined, in Christ, where we see the vision. By seeing this vision, we experience Christ, and Christ is wrought into our being to make us stewards to dispense the riches of Christ into others. We also become ministers dispensing the riches of Christ to the members of the Body so that the Body may be built up. We all need to be imprisoned in Christ so that we may experience Him more and minister more of Him to others.

Having considered the stewardship of the grace in the previous message, we need now to see the revelation of the mystery. Ephesians 3:3 says, "That by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I have written previously in brief." God's hidden purpose is the mystery, and the unveiling of this mystery is the revelation. To carry out this revelation is the apostle's ministry for the

producing of the church. A revelation is an unveiling, the taking away of a veil. In the New Testament we have the revelation, the unveiling, of God's economy. In other ages and generations this economy was a hidden mystery. It was not made known to Adam, to Abraham, to Moses, to David, or to Isaiah and the other prophets. If they had been asked what God's economy is, they would have been unable to answer, for during their time the mystery was still veiled. God's economy, the dispensing of Himself into man to produce a Body for His Son, had not been revealed to them.

The Son of God is the embodiment of God. God's economy is to dispense Himself into a great number of human beings in order to produce a Body for this embodiment of Himself. This means that the Son of God as the embodiment of God requires a Body, an increase, an expansion. This expansion can be produced only by God's dispensing of Himself into His chosen people. This is the greatest mystery in the universe. Although many political leaders and dignitaries know nothing about this great mystery, by God's mercy we know what it is. Even the young sisters among us know what presidents and philosophers do not know. We know that God's economy is to dispense Himself into His chosen people in order to produce the Body as the expansion of the Son of God for the full expression of God in the universe. Nothing is greater or more important than this. Praise the Lord that not only do we know what God's economy is, but we are also in it! In fact, we even are it. We know it, we are in it, and we are it. By revelation this great mystery, which had been hidden until the coming of the Lord Jesus, has been unveiled to us.

I. THE REVELATION TO THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS

This mystery has been revealed to the apostles and prophets (3:5). Do you regard the apostles and prophets as outstanding people? The fact that the mystery has been revealed to them causes many to regard them as extraordinary. However, in 3:8 Paul, who was an apostle,

referred to himself as "less than the least of all saints." According to Paul's own word, the apostles and prophets were not extraordinary, for Paul said that he was less than we are. On the one hand, we may regard the apostles and prophets as extraordinary; but, on the other hand, we should consider them the same as we are.

Only in the book of Ephesians does Paul say that he was less than the least of all saints. Notice that he did not say here that he was less than the apostles, although in 1 Corinthians 15:9 he did say that he was "the least of the apostles." It is surely very significant that Paul inserted such a word into this section of Ephesians. If we did not have this verse, we would all be inclined to view the apostles as great men. Why did Paul mention this? It was because he was exhorting the believers to walk worthily of God's calling. As he made this exhortation, he presented himself as an example, saying that he was less than the least of all saints. If Paul had not uttered this word, we might be tempted to excuse ourselves by saying that Paul, who was a great apostle, could have such a walk, but that we are not able to have it. By inserting this word, Paul gave no place for such an excuse. In 3:8 Paul seemed to be saying, "Saints, don't think that I am greater than you. No, I am less. Since someone less than you can do this, then certainly you can do it also." We should not make excuses for ourselves. If Paul could have this kind of grace, we all can have it. If Paul could live such a life and walk worthily of God's calling, then we can also.

Many Christians think that only certain believers such as Peter are "saints." They even speak of Saint So-and-so. But according to the writings of the Apostle Paul, all believers are saints. As saints, we are not inferior to Paul. We all can walk in the same way he did.

The meaning of the Greek word rendered "apostle" is a sent one. If you send me to Los Angeles for a certain purpose, I am your apostle, your sent one. In the Bible an apostle is someone sent by God. Although John the Baptist was sent by God, he should not be considered the first sent one in the New Testament economy, because his ministry was during a transitional period. The first one sent by God

in the New Testament economy was the Lord Jesus. Hence, He was the first Apostle (Heb. 3:1). The Lord sent out the twelve Apostles. These twelve, however, were not the only sent ones. In John 20:21 the Lord Jesus said to the disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." This verse proves that all the disciples were sent ones. This means that every believer is a sent one. Even a young sister in junior high school is one sent to school by the Lord to minister Christ to her teachers and classmates. Likewise, if you are burdened for one of your relatives and the Lord sends you to him for the purpose of ministering Christ to him, are you not one sent by Christ? Yes, to your relatives you are Christ's apostle. You may even be an apostle to those in your own family. One day the Lord may send you to your mother to share Christ with her. At such a time you are an apostle to your mother. Therefore, in a sense, we all are the Lord's apostles, His sent ones.

In like manner, there is a sense in which all believers in Christ are prophets. Contrary to the concept of many Christians, a prophet is not primarily one who predicts the future; he is a spokesman for God. According to Hebrews 3, Moses, one called by God and sent to the children of Israel, was an apostle; he typified Christ as God's Apostle. When the Lord called him and sent him out as an apostle, Moses was timid and claimed that he could not speak well. Then the Lord told Moses that He would give him his brother Aaron as a prophet. Aaron was given by God to Moses not to predict the future on behalf of Moses, but to be his spokesman. By this we see that the ministry of a prophet goes along with that of an apostle. Moses was the apostle, and Aaron was the prophet.

On the one hand, we are apostles and, on the other hand, we are prophets. The young people are sent to school as apostles, but when they open their mouths to speak on behalf of the Lord, they are prophets. Likewise, if you go to your mother with the burden to minister Christ to her, you

are an apostle. But as you speak for Christ, you are also a prophet. It is a shame to be a Christian for years without ever going to someone with the burden to minister Christ to him. It is also a shame to be a Christian without ever speaking to others on behalf of Christ. A normal believer is both an apostle and a prophet, a sent one and a spokesman.

Suppose, under the Lord's sovereignty, some of you are burdened to move to another city. You minister Christ to the people there, and after a period of time a number become believers. Then you all meet together as the church in that locality. Through whom was that church raised up? It was raised up by the apostles sent by the Lord to that locality. Because these sent ones also speak for God, they are prophets as well as apostles.

I emphasize this matter because we all have been strongly influenced by the concepts in Christianity. In Catholicism Peter has been elevated to be a pope, and others have been given high positions in the so-called holy service. But all believers are in the holy service, and all of us could be called "popes," because the word "pope" simply means "father." If you bring new ones to the Lord, begetting them with Christ, you become their spiritual father. In this sense, as a sent one and a prophet, you are a "pope," a father. My basis for saying that all can be such fathers is the fact that every believer is a sent one and a prophet. If you are not a sent one and a prophet, then you are not faithful to the Lord and not obedient to Him. Suppose the Lord sends you to a remote region with the burden to minister Christ to the unbelievers there. This means that you are the apostle sent to that area. Because you are the one to speak for God, you are also the prophet. As the apostle and prophet, you are the "pope." Even the least among the saints in the Lord's recovery may be sent forth to be such a "pope," a genuine father.

Regarding apostles and prophets, we all have been drugged by religious concepts. I hope that this message will be a strong antidote to this drug. I am serious in saying

that we all must be apostles and prophets. Suppose a certain sister works as a nurse in a hospital. Do you think God wants her merely to be a nurse? No! God sends her to that hospital to be an apostle and a prophet. God's authority is always with such a person. If you practice your apostleship and prophethood, God will be with you as your authority. Many times we do not have authority because we fail to practice our apostleship. Wherever we are, at home, at school, or at work, we need to be there as those sent by the Lord to minister Christ to others by speaking for Christ.

The apostles and prophets, however, must bear a particular sign to prove that they are apostles and prophets. This sign is the revelation of the mystery. If you go to someone without this revelation, you are neither an apostle nor a prophet. When you contact people for Christ, you must let them know in a proper way that you have seen something they have not seen. It is by having this revelation that we have the boldness to say that we are God's sent ones and God's spokesmen. If a young brother has such a revelation, he can say to his unbelieving father, who may have a doctorate in physics, "Father, you know a great deal about science, but you don't know anything about Christ. I know Christ, for I have seen the revelation concerning Him. Christ is my life. He lives in me, He is one with me, and He is everything to me." If you have this revelation, then you are an apostle and a prophet. Do you not have the revelation concerning Christ and the church? Certainly you do. Therefore, go to your relatives and friends to tell them of what you have seen.

A. In Spirit

Verse 5 says that the mystery has been revealed to the apostles and prophets in spirit. The word "spirit" here refers to the human spirit of the apostles and prophets, a spirit regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. It can be considered the mingled spirit, the human spirit mingled with God's Spirit. Such a mingled spirit is the

means by which the New Testament revelation concerning Christ and the church is unveiled to the apostles and prophets. We need the same spirit to see such a revelation.

When we speak to others about Christ and the church, we should not speak from our mind, emotion, or will. Rather, from our spirit we should tell others what we have experienced of Christ and the church. The principle here is that emotion touches emotion, mind touches mind, and will touches will. Likewise, only spirit can contact spirit. If you speak to others from your emotion, you will not be able to touch their spirit. But if you speak out from your spirit, their spirit will be touched.

B. Concerning Christ and the Church

The revelation received by the apostles and prophets is not a revelation of the many secondary matters in the Bible. It is the revelation concerning Christ and the church. In order to dispense Christ to others, we need to have this revelation.

II. THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

In 3:4 Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ. The mystery of God in Colossians 2:2 (Gk.) is Christ, whereas the mystery of Christ here is the church. God is a mystery, and Christ, as the embodiment of God to express Him, is the mystery of God. Christ is also a mystery, and the church, as the Body of Christ to express Him, is the mystery of Christ.

A. Hidden in Other Generations but Revealed in the New Testament Age

This mystery was hidden in other generations, but has been revealed in the New Testament age. The mystery of Christ, the church, which is His Body, was hidden in the Old Testament ages. None of the Old Testament saints knew anything regarding this mystery. But it is revealed in the New Testament to all believers through the apostles

and prophets. Today our ministry is simply to carry on this revelation.

B. The Church, the Body of Christ

1. With the Nations as Joint-heirs and Joint-partakers of the Promise

We have pointed out that the mystery of Christ is the church, which is the Body of Christ. Regarding the church as the mystery of Christ, verse 6 says that "the nations are to be joint-heirs and a joint Body and joint-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." The term "joint-heirs" indicates that in God's New Testament economy, the nations, the chosen and redeemed Gentiles, are joined with the believing Jews to be the heirs of God, inheriting God. The term "joint Body" indicates that the saved Gentiles are joined with the saved Jews to be the one Body of Christ for His unique expression. The term "joint-partakers" indicates that the Gentile believers are joined with the Jewish believers to partake of God's promises given in the Old Testament concerning all the blessings of God's New Testament economy. Joint-heirs are related to the blessing of the household of God; a joint Body is related to the blessing of the Body of Christ; and the joint-partakers are related to the blessing of the promises of God, as found in Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 22:18; 28:14; and Isaiah 9:6. Both the blessing of God's household and the blessing of Christ's Body are particular, whereas the blessing of God's promise is general, all-inclusive.

2. Brought Forth out of the Unsearchable Riches of Christ

The church as the Body of Christ is brought forth out of the unsearchable riches of Christ (3:8). The church is not brought forth out of doctrines or systems of organization. As the Body of Christ, the church can only be brought forth out of the riches of what Christ is.

3. For Expressing the Multifarious Wisdom of God to the Rulers and Authorities in the Heavenlies

According to God's intention, the church is to express His multifarious wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies (3:10). This is to shame Satan and his

followers. Satan's plots afford God the opportunity to express His wisdom in a multifarious way through the church.

4. According to the Eternal Purpose Which God Made in Christ

The producing of the church to be the Body of Christ is according to the eternal purpose which God made in Christ in eternity past (3:11). The formation of the church is not accidental, but eternally planned.

5. For the Dispensation of God

God's purpose in having the church is to dispense Himself into His chosen people (3:9). Hence, the church as the Body of Christ is the dispensation of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY

THE RICHES OF CHRIST PRODUCING THE CHURCH

Chapter three of Ephesians reveals that the Apostle Paul had a walk worthy of God's calling. As one with such a worthy walk, he was a prisoner, a steward, and a minister. In this chapter Paul told us that the revelation of the mystery concerning Christ for the church has been given to the apostles and prophets (v. 5). Paul's revelation of Christ was mainly a revelation of Christ's unsearchable riches. Because Paul's walk was governed by his revelation of Christ, he could not keep from speaking of the riches of Christ. The apostle's preaching was focused on the riches of Christ, not on the doctrines. The riches of Christ are what Christ is to us, such as light, life, righteousness, and holiness. These riches are unsearchable; it is beyond our ability to trace them out. Since we also can be apostles and prophets, there is the need for us to see the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Many Christians have the mistaken concept that the apostles in the universal church and the elders in the local churches are high officials, far above the so-called laymen or common believers. As we pointed out in the foregoing message, the Apostle Paul, realizing that such was a wrong concept, purposely indicated that the apostles and prophets were not extraordinary. On the contrary, they should be regarded simply as leading ones among the saints in the churches. They take the lead to receive the revelation concerning Christ for the church, to live Christ, to experience Christ, to enjoy Christ, and to minister the riches of Christ to others. If the enjoyment of the riches of Christ were available only for certain exceptional persons

of high rank, then the rest of us would have no share in it. But in 3:8 Paul said that he was less than the least of all saints; yet he could preach the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel. The fact that Paul could do this indicates that we can do it also. Because he was less than we are, what was available to him is available also to us.

The apostles and prophets are not a special class of believers. Rather, they are ordinary believers like the rest of us. The difference between them and other believers is that they are leading ones. It is the same with the elders in the local churches. The elders are not extraordinary people of high rank, higher than other believers. No, they are simply those who take the lead in the church life. We all need to allow this concept to sink into our being.

In the Lord's recovery we must drop the thought of rank. There is no rank among us. At most, we just have some leading ones to take the lead to live Christ for the church life. There is no higher class, no special class, in the church. We have no leader. According to the Lord's word in Matthew 23:8-10, He is our unique Leader, and we all are brothers. We must drop the concept that the apostles and elders are special. We all are sheep, and the apostles, prophets, and elders take the lead to set an example, a pattern, of how to know Christ, to enjoy Him, to gain Him for the church life, and to dispense Him into others. This is a matter of setting an example, not a matter of rank or position.

I. THE RICHES OF CHRIST

In order to be apostles, prophets, stewards, ministers, and even prisoners in Christ, we need to know the unsearchable riches of Christ. These riches are for the producing of the church to be the fullness of Christ.

A. In Types

The riches of Christ are depicted in types. It is not easy to find all the types of Christ in the Old Testament. Some types are hidden. For example, the earth that emerges in

Genesis 1:9 and 10 is a type of Christ. Many other types are found in chapter one of Genesis: light, the sun, the star, and the trees. Elsewhere in the Bible we see that the vine tree, the apple tree, the cedar, and the cypress are all types of Christ. Herbs also typify Christ. At the time of the Passover, the children of Israel ate not only the lamb, but also unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Wheat and barley are also types of Christ, and the henna flower spoken of in Song of Songs as well. Certain persons also typify Christ. Adam, Abel, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron are some of these who are types of Christ. The priests, the kings, and the prophets also typify Him.

The more I study the Bible, the more I realize how little I know it. A hundred messages could be given on Genesis 1, mainly on the types of Christ in this chapter. The Bible is deep and profound. Only when we get into its depths do we see the riches it contains. Beneath the surface of the Bible are the riches of Christ. Because these riches are so vast, it is difficult for anyone to say how many types of Christ there are in the Old Testament. Just this one matter of the types reveals many of the riches of Christ.

B. In Shadows

Along with the types, there are the shadows and figures of Christ. Although types and shadows are similar in certain respects, they are like human faces in that they not only share similarities, but also differ from each other. Types are mainly persons or things that signify Christ, whereas shadows mainly refer to rituals and practices in the Old Testament that portray Christ. According to Colossians 2:16 and 17, eating regulations, rituals, and holy days were shadows. By this we see that the laws, ordinances, and ceremonies in the Old Testament were shadows portraying Christ. But Adam, Aaron, and Moses were not shadows; they were types. The Sabbath day and the new moon, on the contrary, were shadows. Although the Sabbath was a rest, it was not the real rest, for the real

rest is Christ. Likewise, the law as a testimony of God described what God was like. As a description and explanation of God, the law was a testimony of God. In this it was a shadow of Christ as the real explanation, definition, and testimony of God.

C. In Figures

A figure mainly refers to a situation that presents a certain picture. For example, the wandering of the children of Israel in the wilderness is a figure, a picture, of our experience in the Christian life today, which is often a life of wandering. The Passover is another figure. Although the Passover lamb is a type of Christ, the Passover itself is a figure depicting how Christ, our Passover, saves us from God's judgment and feeds us with what He is. Hence, the picture of the Passover is a figure of Christ.

Christ is so rich that He needs not only types, but also shadows and figures to portray Him. All the types, shadows, and figures of Christ in the Old Testament are descriptions, explanations, and definitions of what Christ is. We need to study all these matters in the Scriptures in order to know the riches of Christ.

D. In Prophecies

The riches of Christ are also seen in prophecies. In the Bible the first prophecy concerning Christ is Genesis 3:15, a verse which predicts that Christ as the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent, Satan. This implies that Christ had to become a man born of a virgin, for He was to be the seed of woman. Christ is not the descendant of a man; He is the seed of a woman. This one verse reveals much of the riches of Christ.

Isaiah 9:6 is another prophecy regarding Christ. This verse gives us seven titles of Christ: Child, Son, Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. In the Old Testament, there are a great many other prophecies of Christ. Even the short book of Zechariah contains many detailed prophecies concerning Him.

E. In Fulfillment

The riches of Christ are also seen in the fulfillment of the prophecies. Sometimes in the fulfillment of a prophecy in the New Testament something further is added. For example, the Old Testament reveals that Christ will be the lamb. But in the Old Testament, Christ is never called the Lamb of God. Nevertheless, in the fulfillment of the prophecy regarding Christ as the lamb, He is called the Lamb of God (John 1:29). What an addition this is!

When I was young, I was troubled by the fact that sometimes the New Testament writers added certain things when quoting the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ. I thought that they should not have gone beyond what was written in the Old Testament. Later I came to see that Christ could not be limited by the prophecies concerning Him. When He came, He fulfilled more than what had been prophesied. Furthermore, our experience of Christ surpasses the fulfillment of the prophecies. Actually, this is not adding something; it is experiencing the unlimited Christ. In our experience Christ is not only the Lamb of God, but the Lamb of eternity. Thus, the prophecy is short, the fulfillment is longer, and the experience is eternal. When we experience Christ in the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning Him, we do not add anything. Rather, we enter into the eternal experience of the inexhaustible riches of Christ.

F. As Plants

Plants also portray the riches of Christ. Grass, flowers, grains, and trees all depict Christ's riches.

G. As Animals

Christ is typified not only by trees and plants, but also by animals. The lamb, the cow, the eagle, the lion, and the dove are all types of Christ.

H. As Minerals

In the Bible, a number of minerals also show forth the riches of Christ. Gold, silver, brass, and precious stones, for example, typify Him.

I. As Persons

We have pointed out that a number of persons in the Bible typify Christ. All these depict different aspects of Christ's riches. We see certain riches of Christ in Adam, others in Abel, and others in Joseph. Throughout the Bible, many other persons portray different aspects of the riches of Christ.

J. As All the Positive Things in the Universe

All the positive things in the universe point to Christ. For example, Christ is the real gravity. Without Him, we would drift away. If Christ did not hold us in place, we would not be able to stand. Christ is the One with the true holding power. According to Hebrews 1:3, He upholds the entire universe.

Because all the positive things in the universe signify Christ, Christ could use so many things as illustrations of Himself when He was on earth. For instance, He could use the door as a picture of Himself and say, "I am the door." Christ is the reality of every positive thing. He is not only the gravity, but also the air, the light, and every positive thing.

K. As Human Virtues and Divine Attributes

The riches of Christ also include both human virtues and divine attributes. Christ is the real love, patience, and forgiveness. Apart from Christ, we cannot love, be patient, or forgive, not even in relation to our wife or husband. But when we have Christ, we have all the human virtues and divine attributes.

II. THE RICHES OF CHRIST FOR PRODUCING THE CHURCH

A. Through the Divine Dispensation of Christ into the Believers

All the riches of Christ are for the producing of the church. This takes place through the divine dispensation of Christ into the believers. The church is produced not by teaching, nor by organizing, but by the dispensation of Christ. The more Christ is dispensed into us, the more life we have, the stronger life we have, the richer life we have, and the more uplifted the church life becomes. I love the ministry that dispenses the riches of Christ into the believers. By means of such a ministry, we have a proper, strong, uplifted church life.

B. By the Believers' Experience and Enjoyment of Christ

The riches of Christ produce the church through the believers' experience and enjoyment of Christ. On Christ's side, it is a matter of dispensation, but on our side, it is a matter of experience and enjoyment. When we experience and enjoy the very Christ who is dispensed into us, we become part of the proper church life.

III. TO EXPRESS GOD'S MULTIFARIOUS WISDOM

The riches of Christ also express God's multifarious wisdom (3:10). God's wisdom is manifold; it has many aspects in many directions. This wisdom is expressed before the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies, mainly before the evil powers of Satan. God desires to demonstrate to the powers of Satan how wise He is. Thus, the riches of Christ display His wisdom in a multifarious way. This is according to God's eternal purpose (3:11).

IV. RESULTING IN THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

The experience of the riches of Christ results in the fullness of Christ, the Body as Christ's expression (1:23).

The book of Ephesians speaks both of the riches of Christ and of the fullness of Christ. A tall, husky man is the fullness of America because he has enjoyed the riches of American foodstuffs. Throughout the years of his growth and development, he has consumed a great deal of meat, poultry, vegetables, and fruit. Therefore, as a full-grown man, he becomes the fullness of America. The riches of American foodstuffs did not make him this fullness until he ate them, digested them, and assimilated them. By absorbing the riches in this way, the riches became part of him. Likewise all the aspects of the riches of Christ do not become the fullness of Christ until they are eaten, enjoyed, digested, and assimilated by us. By absorbing these riches in such a way, we become the Body of Christ as His fullness to express Him. Thus, the Body of Christ is constituted of the riches of Christ that have been enjoyed and assimilated by us. Therefore, the Body is the result, the issue, of the experience and enjoyment of the riches of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE

THE CHURCH FOR GOD'S WISDOM ACCORDING TO HIS ETERNAL PURPOSE

In this message we shall consider 3:9-13. Verse 9 says, "And to bring to light what is the dispensation of the mystery, which from the ages has been hidden in God, Who created all things." God's mystery is His hidden purpose, which is to dispense Himself into His chosen people. Hence, there is the dispensation of the mystery of God. This mystery was hidden in God from the ages (that is, from eternity) and through all past ages, but now it has been brought to light to the New Testament believers

I. GOD'S WISDOM

Verse 10 continues, "In order that now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the multifarious wisdom of God." This verse speaks of God's wisdom. Chapter one speaks of the power of God (vv. 19-20), chapter two, of the grace of God (vv. 5-8), and chapter three, of the wisdom of God. God is very wise, and the universe reveals His wisdom.

We need to see the difference between wisdom and knowledge. In Colossians 2:3 the two are mentioned together. Wisdom is both higher and deeper than knowledge. Wisdom is seen in the initiation of something, for example, in the formulation of a new invention, and knowledge is seen in the practical application. If you have only knowledge and lack wisdom, you will not be able to initiate anything nor to invent anything. God is the unique Initiator. He has initiated many things, not by His knowledge, but by His wisdom. When He comes in to apply what He has initiated, He displays His knowledge.

In our case, wisdom is in our spirit, and knowledge is in our mind. If you do not know how to get into your spirit, you may have a great deal of knowledge, but you will not have any wisdom. But if you are a person in the spirit, you will be wise. Furthermore, in your mind you will have knowledge, prudence.

Verse 10 says that through the church the multifarious wisdom of God is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. These rulers and authorities are the angelic rulers and authorities, both good and evil. The passage here especially refers to the evil ones--Satan and his angels. According to the New Testament, Satan has his kingdom, his angels, and his sphere of rule. Satan's sphere of rule is in the air and on the earth. The book of Daniel indicates that all nations on earth are under the rule of Satan in the air. Therefore, through the church God makes His wisdom known not mainly to human beings but to those rebellious angels who are the followers of God's enemy.

Verse 8 reveals that the church is produced from the unsearchable riches of Christ. When God's chosen people partake of and enjoy the riches of Christ, these riches constitute them the church, through which God's multifarious wisdom is made known to the angelic rulers and authorities in the heavenlies. Hence, the church is God's wise exhibition of all that Christ is.

Even the rebellion of Satan is within the realm of God's wisdom. If it were not for Satan's rebellion, God's wisdom could not be made known in a full way. If you are a person full of wisdom, the more troubles and difficulties you have, the more wisdom you will express. But if everything related to you is peaceful and without problems, you will have no opportunity to express your wisdom. Actually, when everything is going well, there is little need of wisdom. You need trouble in order to display your wisdom.

God also needs trouble. He even needs an adversary, Satan. Few Christians realize that God actually needs Satan. Although God needs us, He needs Satan even more.

When I was young, I wondered why God did not cast Satan into the lake of fire immediately when he rebelled against Him. I questioned why God gave Satan so much freedom. I also asked why God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden. If this tree had not been there, man would not have fallen. But without Satan and without the tree of knowledge, God's wisdom cannot be fully manifested. Satan and the tree of knowledge have created many opportunities for God's wisdom to be manifested in a multifarious way, that is, in various ways and aspects and from many angles. The Greek word translated "multifarious" indicates that God's wisdom has many sides, aspects, and directions. Only through problems can all the aspects of God's wisdom be manifested.

When some hear of such a word, they may be tempted to say. "Let us create more trouble for God. Let us do evil that good may come." Never say this. If you intend to create trouble or to do evil, you may find yourself unable to do so. For example, although it is easy to stand up, it is difficult to fall purposely. We need to realize our nothingness. On our own, we cannot succeed either in being defeated or in being victorious. If you try not to be defeated, you may be defeated. But if you want to be defeated, you may find that you cannot be defeated.

Consider the example of David. With respect to Bathsheba, David had a great failure. If God had not allowed him to fall in this matter, David could not have fallen. David's fall gave God an opportunity to express His wisdom. Through David's fall and repentance combined with God's forgiveness, David gained a son, Solomon to be the builder of the temple. Later, David fell again. this time in numbering the army of Israel. But through this second fall David acquired the site on which the temple was built. For the building of the temple there was the need for both the builder and the site. If you read the Bible with understanding, you will see that David's falls were neither of David nor of God; they were of Satan. It was Satan who tempted David to commit immorality and to number the

army of Israel. When David yielded to these temptations, Satan was pleased, convinced that he had damaged an excellent king whose heart was absolute for God. Satan, however, did not know that his temptations created opportunities for God's wisdom to be manifested.

Whatever the enemy of God does gives God the opportunity to show forth His wisdom. If we had never been poisoned and corrupted, we would not have needed God very much, and there would have been no need for God's salvation. The more sinful, corrupt, and damaged we are, the greater is our need for God and the more opportunity there is for God to do something for us.

In verse 10 Paul declares that God's multifarious wisdom is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies through the church. The church is the Body of Christ, the joint-heirs, and the joint-partakers. The church is composed of those who once were ruined, corrupted, and damaged. Before we were saved, we were vipers, poisonous serpents. Furthermore, we were dead in trespasses and sins. Moreover, we were scattered and divided, utterly unable to be one. Thus, all the members of the church were in a hopeless situation. Nevertheless, God in His wisdom is able to make us the church. Now we are not only redeemed, saved, cleansed, freed, liberated, and regenerated--we are also united. We are one with God and with one another. Therefore, we are the church.

The church is God's greatest boast. Although you may not care that much for the church, God cares very much for the church. Sometimes God may say, "Look, Satan, I have taken the very people whom you have ruined and I have made them into the church. Do you have the wisdom to do such a thing? You do not have this wisdom, but I have it."

After God had created man and had put him into the garden, Satan came in to intervene, convinced that the best way to ruin the man created by God for Himself was to inject his own evil nature into him. At the time of the fall, Satan as sin entered into man and, in many respects, caused man to be the same as he is. For this reason the

Bible refers to fallen men as the offspring of vipers. Having come into man as sin, Satan has made himself one with man and has transmuted man's body into the flesh. But one day God became flesh (John 1:14). Eventually, Satan caused this One who had become flesh to be crucified. Firstly Satan instigated Judas to betray the Lord Jesus, and secondly he stirred up the Jews and the Gentiles to cooperate in crucifying Him. What Satan did not realize, however, was that in putting this One on the cross, he was actually crucifying himself. As Hebrews 2:14 says, "Since therefore the children have partaken of blood and flesh, He also Himself in like manner shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who has the might of death, that is, the Devil." Through His own death on the cross, the Lord Jesus destroyed Satan. What a display of God's marvelous wisdom! This is one aspect of God's wisdom.

Another aspect of God's wisdom is revealed in 1 Corinthians 1. In this chapter Paul says that the Greeks, the philosophical people, seek wisdom. However, to us, the ones called by God and those who believe in the Lord Jesus, wisdom is Christ. Christ is God's wisdom. First Corinthians 1:30 says that it is of God that we are in Christ Jesus. For us to be in Christ is the wisdom of God. I cannot explain how God put us in Christ. Nevertheless, I have the deep conviction and assurance that we are in Christ. Praise the Lord that we are all in Him! In His wisdom God has put us in Christ.

According to 1 Corinthians 1:30, Christ is our wisdom with respect to righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. As our righteousness, Christ has dealt with our past, which was altogether unrighteous. For our present situation, Christ is our sanctification, and for the future, He is our redemption. One day our body will be redeemed, that is, transfigured. For Christ to be our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption requires much wisdom on God's part. Although Christ is our righteousness for the past, our sanctification for the

present, and our redemption for the future, He is also our daily righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

In order to understand this adequately, we need to see the full scope of God's economy. After the creation and the fall of man, God became flesh through incarnation. Then the Lord Jesus went to the cross and there crucified the flesh. After passing through death and resurrection, He ascended into the heavens, then descended, and entered into us as the life-giving Spirit in order to enliven our deadened spirit and to regenerate us. Having regenerated us, He now dwells in our spirit as life. In this life, the divine life, we have the law of life, the sense of life, and the fellowship of life. The Lord, however, is not only life to us; He is also the anointing within us. Furthermore, He is daily sealing us, saturating us, anointing us, and permeating us. As this takes place, we spontaneously live Him, and He becomes our righteousness. This is God's wisdom. Because of His wisdom God can boast to Satan of what He has done with corrupted and ruined man. Have you ever realized that what we are as believers today is of God's wisdom? Only God has the wisdom to initiate such a wonderful thing, to make sinful and corrupted people the members of Christ.

Through the work of the Spirit of life, a change is taking place in our very nature. It is a metabolic change, a change that sanctifies and transforms us. Thus, Christ is not only our righteousness, but also our sanctification. Furthermore, we are daily being redeemed, and eventually we shall be glorified. Christ is our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, not only in an objective way, but in a very subjective way, in the way of mingling and changing us metabolically. All this is a testimony to God's multifarious wisdom. Many aspects of God's wisdom are manifested in His making Christ our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Our experience of Christ in these matters is according to God's manifold wisdom.

The church through which God's wisdom is so marvelously displayed is God's masterpiece. In the eyes of

God the most wonderful thing in the universe is the church, for through the church God's multifarious wisdom is made known to Satan and his angels. The day is coming when Satan and his angels will be put to shame. They will realize that everything they have done has given God the opportunity to manifest His wisdom. In the same principle, our failures, mistakes, defeats, and wrongdoings have also given God opportunities to display His wisdom. None of us likes to be mistaken; on the contrary, we all want to be right. Although I have always intended to do the right thing, I have nevertheless made many mistakes, even some big mistakes. I certainly hate these mistakes, but I can testify that they have afforded God the opportunity to show forth His wisdom. Therefore, I can thank the Lord for all my mistakes.

If we review our past, we shall realize that we have received more grace through our mistakes than through the things we have done without any mistake. Although I have made some major mistakes, through them I have received much mercy and grace. It seems as if the amount of mercy and grace received has been in proportion to the seriousness of the mistakes. Hallelujah, we are God's chosen people, and even through our failures He manifests His multifarious wisdom! However, we should not intentionally try to fail in order to receive God's mercy and grace.

II. GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

Verse 11 says, "According to the purpose of the ages which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord." The purpose of the ages is the purpose of eternity, the eternal purpose, the eternal plan of God made in eternity past. It was made in Christ with a threefold intention for God's glory, for the blessing of God's chosen people, and for the shame of God's enemy. The main intention of God's purpose is to glorify God, to express Him through His chosen people. This is the greatest blessing to us. In this God's enemy is shamed to the uttermost.

III. OUR BOLDNESS, ACCESS, CONFIDENCE, AND GLORY

Verse 12 continues, "In Whom we have boldness and access in confidence through the faith of Him." In Christ we have access, entry, not only to approach God, but also to partake of His New Testament economy. Through the faith of Christ, we have such access with boldness in confidence to enjoy God and His eternal plan. We have boldness in Christ, we have access to God, we have confidence in God's purpose, and we also have the glory in the apostle's afflictions (v. 13).

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO

TO BE STRENGTHENED INTO THE INNER MAN THAT CHRIST MAY MAKE HIS HOME IN OUR HEARTS

In this message we come to 3:14-17, the first part of Paul's second prayer for the church, the prayer which is related to experience. The apostle's prayer in 1:15-23 is for the saints to receive revelation concerning the church. In 3:14-21 his prayer is for the saints to experience Christ for the church.

I. THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER FOR OUR EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

A. "For This Cause"

The Apostle Paul begins his prayer in verse 14 with the words "for this cause." The cause for which Paul prayed is hidden in the depths of chapter three. We have seen that in this chapter Paul presents himself as a pattern of one who has seen God's economy. Paul received the revelation that God's economy is God's dispensing of Himself into His chosen ones to make them the expansion, the enlargement, of Christ, who is the embodiment of God, for God's full expression. Having received such a revelation, Paul became an apostle, a sent one. He was also a prophet, one who spoke for God. Paul not only spoke for God, but he even spoke forth God. As God's spokesman, Paul ministered the unsearchable riches of Christ to others so that they might see the same revelation and also become apostles and prophets. This means that Paul's desire was to produce more apostles and prophets. For this purpose he even suffered imprisonment. But the more he was confined in prison, the more revelation he received and the more of

Christ he was able to minister to the believers to make them all apostles and prophets. All this is the cause for which Paul prayed in Ephesians 3.

When some hear that all the saints can be apostles and prophets, they may wonder about 1 Corinthians 12:29, a verse which says, "Are all apostles? are all prophets?" Not all are *the* apostles or *the* prophets, but, as 1 Corinthians 14:31 says, all can prophesy. *The* apostles and *the* prophets were those who took the lead in the New Testament. The difference between us and them is that they were the leaders and we are the followers. But this does not mean that we cannot do what the leading apostles and prophets did. In the same principle, the difference between the elders and all the other members in a local church is that the elders take the lead and the other members follow. This does not mean, however, that the other members cannot do what the elders do. On the contrary, all the members should do what the elders do, and they should do even more. How different this is from the concept in Christianity that the laymen cannot do what the ministers do! The elders are not a higher rank; rather, all are of the same rank. The only difference is that the elders take the lead, like sheep who walk at the front of the flock. Likewise, the leading apostles and prophets are not on a higher level than the rest of the saints. They take the lead, and we all follow them to do what they do.

When I came to this country, I came with a revelation concerning Christ for the church. Having received such a revelation, I was sent here to speak for God and even to speak forth God. I am simply a follower of *the* apostles and prophets in the New Testament. My burden is for all the saints to become such followers. I hope that one day thousands will be sent out to speak for God. Although we cannot be the leading apostles, we can be the followers. In like manner, we cannot be *the* prophets, but we all can prophesy. We all can be sent, and we all can speak for Christ. What a privilege, a mercy, and a grace to be the followers of the leading apostles and prophets!

B. Unto the Father

In verses 14 and 15 Paul says, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named." Notice that here Paul does not refer to God, but to the Father. The "Father" here is used in a broad sense, signifying not only the Father of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10), but the Father of every family in the heavens and on earth (v. 15). The Father is the source, not only of the regenerated believers, but also of the God-created mankind (Luke 3:38), of the God-created Israel (Isa. 63:16; 64:8), and of the God-created angels (Job 1:6). The Jew's concept was that God was Father only to them. So the apostle prayed to the Father of all the families in the heavens and on earth, according to his revelation, not as the Jews, who prayed only to the Father of Israel, according to the Jewish concept.

Since God is the source of the angelic family in the heavens and all the human families on earth, so it is of God that every family is named, just as producers give names to their products and fathers give names to their children.

II. TO BE STRENGTHENED

In verse 16 we have the subject of Paul's prayer: "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man." In contrast to the prayer in chapter one, which is a prayer for revelation, this is a prayer for experience. The need in chapter one is for us to see the things related to the Body of Christ, to see how the Body comes into existence and how it is constituted. But it is inadequate simply to see the revelation; we also need the experience of what we see. Because we need to experience Christ in a subjective way, Paul prayed that we would be strengthened with power into the inner man.

A. By the Father according to the Riches of His Glory

In verse 16 the word "strengthened" is modified by four

phrases: "according to the riches of His glory," "with power," "through His Spirit," and "into the inner man." Firstly, we are strengthened according to the riches of the Father's glory. Glory is the expression of God. John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." In this declaration of God there is glory, for the declaration of God is the manifestation of God, which is glory. When the Lord Jesus expressed God on earth, God's glory was manifested.

All the families in the heavens and on earth express God to some extent. With their expressions of God, there are the riches of His glory. The apostle prayed that the Gentile believers might experience God in a full way according to the riches of His glory, that He might be expressed through the Gentile believers by their experiencing Him in a full way.

What then are the riches of God's glory? The riches of glory in verse 16 are related to every family in verse 15. Every family is an expression of God to a certain degree. Because the Father is the source, the origin, of every family in the heavens and on earth, every family is His expression. The family that expresses the Father the most is the family of the believers. Therefore, Paul prayed to the Father that we might be strengthened for the purpose of expressing Him to the uttermost.

B. With Power

We are also strengthened with power. This power is the resurrection power referred to in 1:19-20; it is this power which operates in us (3:20). This power raised Christ up from among the dead, uplifted Him to the heavens, and put everything under His feet. With such a power God is strengthening us.

C. Through His Spirit

It is through the Spirit that the Father strengthens us. He strengthens us by the indwelling Spirit. This does not

mean that the Spirit is not with us or that the Spirit will come down from the heavens to strengthen us. The strengthening Spirit has been with us since He regenerated us. He is still within us now. Through this indwelling Spirit, the Father strengthens us from within.

D. Into Our Inner Man

Verse 16 also says that we are strengthened into the inner man. The inner man is our regenerated spirit with God's life as its life. It is our spirit regenerated by the Spirit of God (John 3:6), indwelt by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:11, 16), and mingled with the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:17). In order to experience Christ unto all the fullness of God, we need to be strengthened into the inner man. This implies that we need to get into our spirit, where we can be strengthened through the Holy Spirit.

Because human beings are souls, not spirits, our personality or our person is in our soul. This is the reason the Bible refers to men as souls (Exo. 1:5; Acts 2:41). Both the body and the spirit are vessels used by the soul. Therefore, as souls, we have an outward vessel, the body, and an inward vessel, the spirit. When we repented and believed in the Lord Jesus, the Lord came into us and regenerated us with Himself as our life. Before we were regenerated, there was no life in our spirit; we simply had our human life in our soul. But through regeneration we now have the divine life in our spirit. Therefore, our spirit is no longer merely a vessel; it has become our person with the life of God. But what about our human life and our old person in the soul? The old person, the soul with the human life, has been crucified on the cross, and now our new person is the spirit with the divine life. Our spirit regenerated with the divine life is now our inner man.

It is very difficult to remain in the spirit. We all are accustomed to going out from the spirit, not to going into the spirit and staying there. According to my experience, I can testify that I am not inclined to stay in the spirit. Because it is so easy for me to get out of the spirit, I am

still learning to remain in the spirit. Whenever we stay in the spirit, we are strengthened; but whenever we go out from the spirit, we are weakened. Have you ever noticed how easy it is for your mind to wander when you are praying? When you are not praying, you may not think of certain things. But when you begin to pray, you may suddenly find your thoughts dwelling on one thing and then another. You may even make a fast trip to another part of the world. This is the reason we need to be strengthened into our inner man. The more we are strengthened, the more the parts of our inner being are brought back into the spirit, into our inner man.

We need to be strengthened in order to stay in our spirit and not to be distracted by thoughts regarding so many things. In order to pray without being distracted, we need to be strengthened into our inner man. Oh, how we need to be strengthened so that our whole being may come back to the inner man and stay there!

The revelation in chapter three of Ephesians can be seen only when we are in the spirit. As verse 5 says, the mystery is made known to the apostles and prophets *in spirit*. Being strengthened into the inner man is the secret of seeing the revelation of the mystery. We need to be strengthened so that our whole being might be brought back to our spirit.

In our spirit we are also filled with the riches of Christ unto all the fullness of God (v. 19). The Greek word rendered "unto" in verse 19 means "resulting in." Our being filled with the riches of Christ results in the full expression of God. This is the fullness of God.

III. CHRIST MAKING HIS HOME IN OUR HEART

The first part of verse 17 says, "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith." Our heart is composed of all the parts of our soul--the mind, the emotion, and the will--plus our conscience, the main part of our spirit. These are the inward parts of our being. Through regeneration, Christ came into our spirit (2 Tim.

4:22). Subsequently, we should allow Him to spread Himself into every part of our heart. Our heart is the totality of all our inward parts and the center of our inward being; therefore, when Christ makes His home in our heart, He controls our entire inward being and supplies and strengthens every inward part with Himself.

In verse 17 Paul says that it is through faith that Christ makes His home in our hearts. Faith is the substantiating of things unseen (Heb. 11:1). Christ's indwelling is mysterious and abstract. We realize it not by our physical senses, but by the sense of faith.

The first three chapters of Ephesians are on the church, and the last three chapters are on the walk worthy of God's calling for the church. However, actually only the first two chapters are on the church, for chapter three marks the beginning of Paul's exhortation concerning a walk worthy of God's calling. In Ephesians 3 Paul presents himself as a pattern of one who could carry out God's eternal purpose concerning the church. If we had only chapters one and two without chapter three, we would have the teaching and even the vision regarding the church, but we would not have the way to fulfill the vision. In chapter three we see how the church is constituted and realized in a practical way. This chapter is concerned neither with the revelation of the church nor, strictly speaking, with the walk worthy of God's calling for the church; rather, it is concerned with the practical experience of the church being constituted.

The church life is constituted of those in the pattern of the Apostle Paul. We all need to follow Paul in receiving the revelation in our spirit and in being strengthened into our inner man. When Paul bowed his knees to the Father, he was so strong in his inner man that nothing could shake him or disturb him. Because his whole being was in his spirit, nothing outward could trouble him. We also need to be strengthened to such an extent that nothing will be able to carry us away from our inner man. Furthermore, we need Christ to make His home in our hearts so that we may be wholly occupied and possessed by Him.

When we are strengthened into our inner man and Christ makes His home in our hearts, we are able to see the revelation. We need to receive the same revelation given to the leading apostles and prophets. Paul could not receive this revelation for us; we must receive it ourselves personally and subjectively by being strengthened into our inner man. This revelation concerning Christ and the church is the economy of God, the hidden mystery. Whether or not we are today's apostles and prophets depends on whether or not we have seen the revelation. If we do not have the revelation, then we cannot be apostles and prophets. If I had come to this country without this revelation, all my speaking would have been in vain. But I did come with a revelation, and I have spoken according to this revelation. This made me a follower of the apostles and prophets in God's New Testament ministry. Today all the saints, including the young people, can be such followers.

When we were saved, Christ came into our spirit. Now we must give Him the opportunity to spread Himself throughout all the parts of our inner being. As we are strengthened into the inner man, the door is opened for Christ to spread in us, to spread from our spirit to every part of our mind, emotion, and will. The more Christ spreads within us, the more He settles down in us and makes His home in us. This means that He occupies every part of our inner being, possessing all these parts and saturating them with Himself. As a result, not only do we receive the revelation, but we also are filled with Christ. Then wherever we may go, we shall be the apostles, the sent ones, and the prophets, those who speak for Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-THREE

TO APPREHEND THE DIMENSIONS OF CHRIST AND TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST

In this message we shall consider the matters of apprehending the dimensions of Christ and of knowing the love of Christ (3:18-19). In verse 18 Paul speaks of the breadth, length, height, and depth, but he does not say to what these dimensions refer. Surely they refer to Christ. We need to be strong to apprehend with all the saints the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ.

THE STEPS TO APPREHENDING CHRIST'S DIMENSIONS AND TO KNOWING HIS LOVE

In verses 16 through 19 the word "that" is used four times: "that He would grant you...to be strengthened...into the inner man," "that Christ may make His home in your hearts," "that you...may be strong to apprehend...and to know," and "that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God." In each case the Greek word rendered "that" may also be rendered "in order that."

The first "that" is the result of Paul's prayer. Paul bowed his knees unto the Father and prayed that He would grant us to be strengthened into our inner man (vv. 14-16). Thus, the result of Paul's prayer is that the Father would grant us such a strengthening.

The second "that," found in verse 17, is that Christ may make His home in our hearts through faith. This is the result of being strengthened into the inner man.

Some may say that the third "that" is parallel to the second, but I agree with those who claim that it is a further result. This means that the second "that" is the result of

the first, that the third is the result of the second, and that the fourth is the result of the third.

In chapter three Paul prayed that we would be strengthened. If we have been strengthened into the inner man, Christ can then make His home in our hearts with the result that we are strong to apprehend with all saints what is the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of God. The result of all this is that we are filled unto all the fullness of God. Here we see several steps. From Paul's prayer we go on to being strengthened; from being strengthened we proceed to Christ's making His home in our hearts; and from this we progress to the apprehending and the knowing and finally to being filled unto all the fullness of God. It is by these steps that we can apprehend the dimensions of Christ and know His knowledge-surpassing love.

THE FULLNESS OF GOD

The fullness of God is the expression of God. We have pointed out that the Body is not the riches of Christ, but the fullness of Christ (1:23). As the riches of Christ are being digested and assimilated into us, they are metabolized. By this process of metabolism we become the fullness of Christ as His expression. Many Christians regard the riches and the fullness as synonymous. The riches of Christ are the various aspects of Christ for our enjoyment, whereas the fullness is the result, the issue, of the enjoyment of these riches. For example, when we eat and digest the riches of American foodstuffs, we become the fullness of America. As the fullness of America, we are the expression of America. Ephesians 3:19 does not say that we are filled with the riches of God, but that we are filled unto the fullness of God. This means that we are filled with the result that we become the expression of God. The expression of God today is the church, which is the Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Hence, the fullness of God in 3:19 is the fullness of Christ, which is the Body, in 1:23. The Body is constituted through our enjoyment of the riches of Christ.

Chapters one and two cover the revelation of the church, and chapter three covers the constitution of the church. In chapter three we see that Paul, who was a leading one and a pattern, received the revelation and enjoyed the riches of Christ. These riches were metabolically constituted into his being to make him a part of the Body. All who would follow him to be today's apostles and prophets must be the same as Paul in these matters. Then the church will be constituted to become the fullness of Christ and the fullness of God. In order for this to take place, Paul prayed that we might be strengthened into our inner man with the result that Christ could make His home in our heart and thereby occupy, possess, permeate, and saturate our whole inner being with Himself. In this way we are filled with Christ, and we become strong to apprehend the dimensions of Christ and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. Eventually, we shall be filled with Christ to such an extent that we become the fullness of God.

As we pass through all these steps, we need to apprehend the dimensions of Christ. The Greek word translated "apprehend" means not only to know, but also to grasp, to lay hold of intensively. In order to grasp the dimensions of Christ, we need all the saints; for this we must lay hold of Christ corporately.

THE UNIVERSAL DIMENSIONS OF CHRIST

The dimensions of Christ are the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth. These dimensions are the dimensions of the universe. Only God Himself knows the measurements of the universe. We can measure the distance from one point in the universe to another, for example, from the earth to the moon, but we cannot measure the universe itself. Now the very dimensions of the universe are also the dimensions of Christ.

Christ is our real universe. Elsewhere we have pointed out that Christ is our earth, our good land, and also our sun and morning star. Now, according to verse 18, we have the boldness to say that Christ is our universe, for His

dimensions are the dimensions of the universe. Ephesians 1:23 speaks of the fullness of Him who fills all in all, and 4:9 and 10 reveal that He who descended into the lower parts of the earth also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. When we enter into the new heaven and the new earth to dwell in the New Jerusalem, we all shall realize that Christ the Lord is our universe.

EXPERIENCING THE BREADTH AND LENGTH

In our experience of Christ, we firstly experience the breadth of what He is, and then we experience the length. This is horizontal. When we advance in Christ, we experience the height and depth of His riches. This is vertical. Firstly we experience Christ spreading as the breadth and the length. Later we experience Him rising up as the height and finally descending as the depth. As we shall see, our experience of Christ must eventually become three-dimensional, like a cube.

If we have only the length of Christ, without any breadth, our experience will be a "line," that is, an experience that is long and narrow to an extreme. Our experience of Christ, however, should not have only one dimension, like a line, but it should have two dimensions, like a square, and then three dimensions, like a cube. It is of great importance that we all have a two dimensional, or a "square," experience of Christ. If we have only a "line" experience of Him, this "line" will eventually continue until it reaches an extreme. All extremists are "one-liners," those whose experience of Christ is on a single "line." If you experience Christ properly and normally as the breadth and the length, you will be kept from going to an extreme. Do not go too far out on the "line" of a narrow and long experience of Christ. Rather, experience Him in a "square" way as the breadth and as the length. By experiencing Christ continually as the breadth and length, our experience will be like a solidly woven "carpet," not a long, single "thread."

Some examples will help to make this matter clear. For a number of years, I listened to a certain great Bible

teacher. He was extremely knowledgeable in the Scriptures. Although he spent very little time in prayer, he was constantly reading the Word and writing notes in his Bible. After talking about the Bible for a period of time, he would excuse himself in order to smoke his pipe. Then he would resume his discussion of the Scriptures. With him there was a "line" of only one dimension--an extreme emphasis on studying the Bible--but there was not the normal spreading of Christ in two dimensions as a "square" in his experience.

A sister in my home town also had a "line" experience. She did not read the Bible, but devoted a great deal of time to prayer. Being extremely earnest in prayer, she decided to fast and pray for many days. On the seventh day some of the brothers and sisters came to me very concerned about her situation. When we visited her, she was in bed, weakened because of seven days of fasting. We encouraged her to take care of her health, but she was offended by our suggestion. On the very next day, she died. This is an example of how a "line" experience can lead people to an extreme, even lead them astray. Sooner or later every "line" experience leads astray. Therefore, we need to be balanced. These two examples show that we need to take time both to pray and to study the Word.

Another extreme experience relates to the church meetings. Not long ago some among us decided that they no longer needed the meetings of the church. They preferred simply to enjoy the Lord at home. There is nothing wrong with enjoying the Lord in our homes, but we should not stretch such an experience until it becomes an extreme. Others, on the contrary, care only for the meetings. In their Christian life they reserve no time for prayer, for Bible study, or for enjoying the Lord at home. All they care about is the meetings. This also is an extreme.

How easy it is to have "line" experiences of a single dimension! It seems that not many saints desire the two-dimensional experiences, like a carpet. In order to have an experience of Christ like a solidly woven carpet, we need to be balanced in many ways. To be balanced is to be

enriched. We need both the breadth and the length; we need the two-dimensional, "square," experiences of Christ.

In order to experience Christ in His universal dimensions, we need the church life. We need to experience Christ with all the members of the Body. In particular, we need the church meetings, for in the meetings we are balanced. Through messages and the testimonies of the saints, we are balanced. If we experience the dimensions of Christ in the church life, we shall gradually be woven into a "carpet." We shall not be thin lines of "thread." What is needed today is not lines of "thread," but a "carpet" woven through the balanced experience of Christ in the church.

When we experience Christ in this way, we find that His breadth and length are immeasurable. Christ is immeasurable in His spreading forth. As we experience Christ in His spreading, we come to see that the dimensions of the universe are the very dimensions of Christ.

EXPERIENCING THE HEIGHT AND THE DEPTH

After we experience the breadth and length of Christ, we begin to experience the height of Christ and then the depth. Do not think that we firstly experience the depth of Christ. No, firstly we ascend and then we descend. Before we can have the depth, we must have the height. The spiritual experiences of the depth of Christ come from the experiences of the height of Christ. This means that firstly we grow upward and then we are rooted. Therefore, the proper understanding of the experience of the height and depth of Christ is contrary to our natural concept, which places depth before height.

In our experience of Christ, we should go on from the two dimensions to three, from a "square" to a "cube." A cube is solid. Both in the tabernacle and in the temple the Holy of Holies was a cube. The dimensions of this cube in the tabernacle and temple respectively were ten cubits and twenty cubits. The New Jerusalem will be an eternal cube, twelve thousand stadia in three dimensions. The church

life today must also be a "cube." Furthermore, our experience of Christ in the church must be "cubical," three-dimensional, with many lines going back and forth in all three directions. When we experience Christ in such a three-dimensional way, we are solid. In our experience of Christ we are firstly a "square" and then a "cube." When we become a cube, we cannot fall, and we cannot be broken. Christ is the universal cube, and the church life today is also a "cube," not a "line" nor even a "carpet." What about our experience of Christ? May the Lord open our eyes to see that our experience of Him must be a "cube." As we go back and forth and up and down in our experience of Christ, we eventually have a solid "cube."

ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE

In verse 17 Paul speaks of "having been rooted and grounded in love." We are God's farm and God's building (1 Cor. 3:9). As God's farm we need to be rooted for growth, and as God's building we need to be grounded for building up. Thus, in verse 17 Paul has in mind the matters of life and building. In speaking of our having been rooted and grounded, Paul indicates that the experience of Christ is for life and building. As those who have Christ making His home in our hearts and who are strong to apprehend the dimensions of Christ and to know His knowledge-surpassing love, we must have both the life and the building. All that we experience of Christ must be for this.

Paul says specifically that we are rooted and grounded in *love*. In order to experience Christ, we need faith and love (1 Tim. 1:14). Faith enables us to receive and realize Christ, and love enables us to enjoy Him. Both faith and love are not ours but His. His faith becomes our faith to believe in Him, and His love becomes our love to love Him. The love in which we are rooted and grounded is the divine love realized and experienced by us in a practical way. With such a love we love the Lord, and with that same love we love one another. In such a love we grow in life and are built up in life. Paul's thought here regarding the

relationship between the experience of Christ and the matters of life and building is surely deep and profound.

The more we grow up, the more we are rooted. Although this is opposed to our natural concept, it nonetheless corresponds to our experience. If you consider your experience, you will realize that you have had the sense, not firstly of being rooted and then of growing up, but of growing up and then of being rooted. As we grow upward, we are rooted downward.

KNOWING THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN EXPERIENCE

In the first part of verse 19 Paul says, "And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ." The love of Christ surpasses knowledge; yet, we can know it by experiencing it. According to our mentality, the love of Christ is knowledge-surpassing. Our mind is not able to know it. But in our spirit we can know the love of Christ through our experience.

The love of Christ is Christ Himself. Just as Christ is immeasurable, so His love is also immeasurable. Do not regard the love of Christ as something belonging to Christ. This love *is* Christ. Because Christ is immeasurable, His love is knowledge-surpassing; yet we can know it in our spirit, not by knowledge but by experience. If we compare what we have so far experienced of the immeasurable love of Christ to all there is to experience, it is like comparing a raindrop to the ocean. Christ in His universal dimensions and in His immeasurable love is like a vast, limitless ocean for us to experience.

MESSAGE THIRTY-FOUR

TO BE FILLED UNTO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD

In 3:19 the Apostle Paul says, "That you may be filled unto all the fullness of God." When Christ makes His home in our hearts and when we are strong to apprehend with all the saints the dimensions of Christ and to know by experience His knowledge-surpassing love, we shall be filled unto all the fullness of God. All this fullness dwells in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9). Through His indwelling, Christ continually imparts the very element of God into our being. We can be filled with God to such a measure and can attain such a standard, even unto all the fullness of God. In this way we fulfill God's intention that the church should be the expression of God.

When the riches of God are in God Himself, they are His riches. But when the riches of God are expressed, they become His fullness (John 1:16). When we speak of the fullness of God, we imply that the riches of all that God is have become His expression.

THE CHURCH METABOLICALLY CONSTITUTED

When we get into the depths of 3:19, we see that the fullness of God is the church. Chapter three of Ephesians is not concerned with the organization of the church nor with the formation of the church, but with the constitution of the church. The church is neither organized nor formed; it is metabolically constituted in us through our experience and enjoyment of the riches of Christ. In order for the church to be constituted in a practical way, we need to be strengthened into our inner man. Then Christ must make His home in our hearts; He must occupy all the parts of our

inner being and saturate them with His riches. Then we need to be rooted and grounded in love, rooted for growth and grounded for building. Following this, we must grasp the dimensions of Christ. This is to experience Christ in His universal dimensions both horizontally and vertically. Along with this, we come to know in our experience the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. As a result of all these experiences, we are eventually filled unto all the fullness of God. Therefore, being filled unto the fullness of God is the outcome, the result, of all the deeper, higher, and richer experiences of Christ described in Ephesians 3.

THE HIGHEST DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

The highest definition of the church is that the church is the fullness of God. Some may be troubled at such a statement and may wonder how this claim can be substantiated. In verse 21 Paul says, "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus." According to the context, the church in verse 21 is the very fullness of God in verse 19. When in our experience we are filled unto all the fullness of God, the church comes into being in a practical way. It is at such a time that Paul says, "To Him be the glory in the church." This glory is the expression of God. Hence, in the fullness of God there is the expression of God. Therefore, the fullness of God is the church as God's expression.

Some translations of verse 19 say, "filled *with* all the fullness of God." According to this rendering, the fullness of God would have to be the element, the essence, with which we are filled. But this is a mistaken understanding of this verse. Here Paul is saying that we shall be filled *unto* all the fullness of God, that is, we shall be filled to be the expression of God.

THE RICHES AND THE FULLNESS

When I first began to speak on the difference between the riches of Christ and the fullness of Christ, some tried to argue with me by quoting John 1:16, "For of His fullness

we all received, and grace upon grace." They said, "John 1:16 declares that of His fullness we have all received. Isn't this fullness the riches of Christ? How then can you make a distinction between the riches of Christ and the fullness of Christ?" When Christ was on earth with His disciples, would you say that the riches of God were there with Him or that the fullness of God was there with Him? If the riches had been with Him but the fullness had not, something would have been lacking; there would have been no completion. For example, suppose a glass jar contains just a few pieces of delicious candies. The jar contains some riches of the candies but not the fullness. However, after the jar is filled with the candies, it will have not only the riches but also the fullness. If the jar remains only partly filled, there will not be in the jar the expression of the candies. Because the fullness is the expression, without the fullness there can be no expression. Only when the candies fill the jar to the brim will there be the fullness as the expression of the riches.

When the Lord Jesus came, He no doubt brought all the riches of God with Him. However, with Him there were not only the riches of God, but there was also the fullness of God. This is the reason John 1:16 says that we all have received of His fullness; it does not say that we have received of His riches. If you take a piece of candy from a jar filled with candies, you will be receiving candy, not from the riches of the jar, but from its fullness.

The fullness is the completion of the riches. In Greek the word for "fullness" means completion. Hence, it is correct to render this Greek word as "completeness." The Greek word translated "of" in John 1:16 means "out from" or "out of." Thus, out of the fullness of Christ, the completeness of all the riches of God, we have all received.

Before retiring at night, I often enjoy a glass of protein drink, preferably a glass filled to the brim. As I drink from such a full glass, I partake of the fullness of the protein drink in the glass. When Christ came, He did not come only partially filled with the riches of God. On the contrary, He

was filled to the brim. Hence, the fullness, the completeness of what God is, was present with Him. This fullness, this completeness, is the expression of God. The Lord Jesus was like the glass, and the riches of God with which He was filled unto all the fullness of God were like the protein drink. The disciples received not merely of the riches of God, but of His fullness.

METABOLICALLY ASSIMILATING THE RICHES OF CHRIST

In the New Testament the fullness is the expression through the completeness of the riches. This is the reason that in 3:8 Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ and then in 1:23 and 4:13 speaks of the fullness of Christ. The riches of Christ are the various aspects of what Christ is, and the fullness of Christ is the result, the issue, of our enjoyment of these riches. As we enjoy the riches of Christ, these riches are assimilated into our being metabolically. Then they constitute us into the fullness of Christ, into the Body of Christ, the church, as His expression. Therefore, the fullness of Christ in 1:23 is the very fullness of God in 3:19. The fullness of God is the issue of the believers' being constituted metabolically through their experience of the riches of Christ.

In order to assimilate Christ metabolically, we need to be strengthened into our inner man. We also need Christ to make His home in our heart, that is, to occupy, possess, and metabolically saturate every part of our inward being with all that He is. Then we shall be rooted for the growth in life and grounded for the building. Furthermore, we shall become strong to grasp Christ experientially in all His universal dimensions. Along with this, we shall know through our experience the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. When we have experienced Christ to such an extent, we shall be filled with the riches of Christ unto all the fullness of God. All this is for the constituting of the church in a practical way as the Body of Christ for His expression.

THE NEED FOR A VISION

We all need to see the vision of how the church is constituted. How we need to be strengthened into our inner man! Every fiber of our being needs to be strengthened into our inner man. Not one part of our inward being should remain in a weak condition. We need to be strengthened so that the indwelling Christ can spread Himself throughout our being and make His home in our inward parts. As Christ spreads within us, He saturates every area of our inner being metabolically with all that He is. Then we are rooted and grounded in love, we lay hold of the dimensions of Christ, and we know His love that surpasses knowledge. Then, ultimately, we are filled unto the fullness of God which is the church. What a high revelation of the church this is!

In the light of such a vision we see that it is utterly wrong to regard the church as a material building where "services" are held. It is also not adequate to view the church merely as the *ecclesia*, the gathering together of God's called-out people. Although many Christians today use the term "the Body of Christ," few have any clear realization of what this term signifies. The Body of Christ is the expression of Christ. It is also the fullness of Christ, which is the fullness of God. This fullness of God comes into existence in a practical way by our being strengthened into the inner man, by Christ making his home in our hearts, by our being rooted and grounded in love, by our grasping the dimensions of the immeasurable Christ, and by our knowing Him as the knowledge-surpassing love. When we have been filled with all the riches of Christ and metabolically saturated with all that Christ is, we become the fullness of God. Surely this is the highest definition of the church.

Only by receiving such a vision do we truly know what the church is. Although chapters one and two of Ephesians give us a definition of the church, this definition is still not adequate. We need chapter three to show us how the church is constituted organically and metabolically with the riches of the living Christ. Not until chapter three does the church come into existence actually and in a practical

way. As we have seen, in this chapter the church comes into being as the expression of God, that is, as the very fullness of God. It is at this point that Paul is able to sound a high praise, even a doxology: "To Him be the glory in the church." Now that the church has come into existence in a practical way, Christ can be glorified in the church. Such a church is not merely a gathering of God's called-out people; it is the actual fullness of God.

THE EFFECT OF THE VISION

We all need such a vision, such a revelation. If we see this vision, our being will be changed. If we are filled with this vision and then go forth to speak for God, we shall surely be God's sent ones and His spokesmen. We shall be today's apostles and prophets.

This vision unfolds the unique way for the Lord to build up His church. Only when we see this vision will the Lord have a way to accomplish on earth the building up of the church. After more than nineteen centuries of Christian history, what has been accomplished for the Lord? Consider today's situation. Hardly any have seen the vision in chapter three of Ephesians. May the Lord burden us to pray, "Lord, have mercy on me. I need to see this vision. I need to see the fullness of God and how it comes into existence. Lord, show me the constitution of the Body. Show me how the church can be constituted in a practical way." Once you have seen this vision, you will become a different person. You will be an apostle and a prophet. Wherever you go, you will be a sent one, and whenever you speak this vision, you will be God's spokesman speaking Christ for God's economy.

I can testify that I came to this country with this vision and with a unique burden. Those who have been with me over the years can testify that I have not changed my concept nor my speaking. In various aspects and from

various angles, I have spoken just one thing--that God's economy is to dispense Himself into His chosen people to make them the expression of Christ. As we have seen in this message, this expression is the fullness of God.

FILLED UNTO THE EXPRESSION OF THE TRIUNE GOD

In these verses in chapter three of Ephesians concerning the economy of God resulting in the fullness of God, we see the Triune God. The Father (v. 14) answers and fulfills the apostle's prayer through the Spirit (v. 16) so that Christ, the Son (v. 17), may make His home in our hearts. Thus, we are filled unto the fullness of the Triune God. This is the dispensing of the Triune God into our entire being that we may become His expression.

According to Ephesians 3, the Triune God is not to be the object of doctrinal debate; He is for the dispensing of Himself into the believers so that they may be filled unto the fullness, not only of the Father, nor only of the Son, nor only of the Spirit, but of *God*. Paul prayed that the Father would strengthen us through His Spirit so that Christ might make His home in our hearts and thereby fully occupy our inward being with the result that we might be filled unto the expression of the Triune God. How glorious and how marvelous! This is God's economy, God's dispensation. This is also God's New Testament revelation, our ministry, and the Lord's recovery.

THE CHURCH AS THE CORPORATE FULLNESS OF GOD

We have seen that the fullness of God is the expression of God. According to John 1:16, the fullness of God came with Christ who is the embodiment of God's fullness (Col. 2:9; 1:19). With Christ, the expression was an individual matter. This expression, therefore, needed to be enlarged, to be expanded, from an individual matter to a corporate matter. The church today is to be the fullness of God in a corporate way. In the church God is not expressed through an individual; He is expressed corporately through the

Body, through the believers who have together been filled to the brim with the riches of Christ. Therefore, the fullness of God is embodied in the church. The church as the embodiment of the fullness of God is the expression of the Triune God. This is the church in the Lord's recovery today.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FIVE

GOD GLORIFIED IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST

In this message we shall consider 3:20 and 21: "But to Him Who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which operates in us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of the ages. Amen." These verses are a doxology, a high praise, even the highest to be found in the New Testament Epistles. Such a high praise could not have been uttered before the church had come into existence in a practical way.

As we pointed out in the foregoing message, in verse 19 we see the church as the fullness of God. The fullness of God here is the result, the issue, of our experience of the riches of Christ. After such a church has come into existence, the Apostle Paul sounds forth the doxology in verses 20 and 21, ascribing to God glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. Only after the church has come into being as the fullness of God can the glory of God be manifested.

THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S WORD CONCERNING THE CHURCH

Although the church has been on earth for more than nineteen centuries, it has not yet reached the point of being the fullness of God. The highest definition of the church is that it is the fullness of God. We must admit that among us today we do not yet have the church as the fullness of God, as God's full expression. However, we believe that the church will come up to this level. The fact that the Lord has spoken such a word concerning the church is an indication that He will do what He has spoken. The Lord's

word will not return void (Isa. 55:11). Whatever He speaks, He will perform. For example, when God spoke something in Genesis 1, it came to pass. Therefore, we believe that the Lord's word regarding the church as the fullness of God will be accomplished. Not only do we believe this word, but we also claim it and pray according to it. We need to pray, "Lord, You have spoken concerning the church as the fullness of God. Now You must fulfill what You have spoken." When the church on earth reaches the stage of being the fullness of God, we shall be able to say with Paul, "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus."

THE WAY GOD IS GLORIFIED IN THE CHURCH

The words "but to Him" in verse 20 convey the thought that something has initially gone forth from God and is now returning to Him. In his prayer Paul asked that the Father would strengthen the saints according to the riches of His glory. This implies that the glory of God is wrought into the saints. In the doxology Paul said, "To Him be the glory" (v. 21). This implies that the glory of God returns to God after it has been wrought into the saints. Firstly, the glory of God is wrought into us; then it returns to God for His glorification. As an illustration, Isaac's wealth was firstly given to Rebekah for her beautification; then when Rebekah came to Isaac, all the wealth came back to Isaac with Rebekah for his glorification (Gen. 24:47, 53, 61-67). The apostle prayed that God would strengthen the saints according to His glory, but eventually God's glory, after being wrought into them, returns to Him along with the strengthened saints. This is the way God is glorified in the church.

We have seen that in verse 16 Paul prayed that the Father would grant us, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power into our inner man. To be strengthened according to glory is to have the glory of God worked into our being. This is the only way to be strengthened according to God's glory. Suppose a person who is physically very weak can be strengthened according

to someone who is physically strong. This would mean that the strength of the strong one is wrought into the very fibers of the weak one. In the same principle, to be strengthened into the inner man according to the Father's glory means to have His glory wrought into our being. Firstly, the glory comes to us, and then it goes back to God. When the glory comes into our being, we are filled and strengthened. When it returns to God, He is glorified in the church.

The Greek word rendered "but" in verse 20 can also be translated "now." In such a case "now" would mean "in view of the fact that" or "based on the preceding." In verses 20 and 21 it seems that Paul was saying, "Now that the church has come into existence as the fullness of God, God can be glorified in the church. Before this time it was impossible for the glory to return to God. But because the church has become the fullness of God in a practical way, this is now possible."

It is correct to translate the Greek word here as either "but" or "now." In either case the word is not a meaningless insertion. The word "but" suggests that the glory which has come to us and which has been wrought into our being is now going back to God with us. The word "now" suggests that, in view of the fact that the church has come into existence as the fullness of God, God may at this time be glorified in the church. Both are true.

The church is the glory of God coming to us with God and going back to God with us. In such a church there is two-way traffic between God and us, and between us and God. By means of this two-way traffic, God's glory is wrought into us and God is glorified in us. This traffic is signified by the little word "but."

ABOVE ALL WE ASK OR THINK CONCERNING THE CHURCH

In verse 20 Paul speaks of "Him Who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think." Strictly speaking, "ask or think" here refers to the spiritual things

related to the church, not to material things. For these spiritual things, we need not only to ask, but also to think. We may think more than we ask. God fulfills not only what we ask for the church, but also what we think concerning the church, and God is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think for the church through the power which operates in us.

God's ability to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, as revealed in verse 20, is different from His ability in creation. Verse 20 refers not to creation, but to the church. A number of times I have heard the saints quote verse 20 in testifying concerning their experience of God's material blessing. To quote this verse for such a purpose is to misapply it. Paul's concept here is related not to what God does outside of us, but to what He does inside of us. He specifically mentions "the power which operates in us." This is the inward power, the resurrection power, as mentioned in 1:19 and 20.

God's creating power is the origin of the material things in our environment (Rom. 8:28), whereas God's resurrection power accomplishes the spiritual things for the church within our inward being. In order for God to give us a good job, there is no need for resurrection power to operate in us. God's being able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think is related not to His acts in our environment, but to His working organically and metabolically within us. As far as the environment is concerned, there may be times when God apparently does nothing for you. You may pray for a promotion, but He allows you to be laid off from your present job. During this time of unemployment, God may operate within you to enable Christ to make His home in you. When we are in a favorable environment, there may be very little opportunity for Christ to spread Himself in our hearts. But when we are placed in a difficult environment, the Lord may have more of an opportunity to spread within our inward being. From our side, it may seem beneficial for us to be in a good environment, but from the Lord's side, it

may be better for us to be in a difficult environment, for then He may have greater opportunity to work within us.

The asking and thinking referred to in verse 20 should be applied to the church. We need to ask and to think concerning the church, not concerning trivial things related to our environment. Our asking and our thinking should be focused on God's economy to dispense Himself into us to produce the church as the expression of Christ. When our asking and thinking concern the church, God will always do superabundantly above all that we ask or think. We need to ask and to think concerning Christ making His home in our hearts and concerning the church being filled unto all the fullness of God. If we ask and think in this way, we shall certainly be in the spirit. Then whatever we ask concerning the church will be answered, and it will be answered superabundantly. How we need to ask and to think concerning the church!

GOD GLORIFIED IN CHRIST

Verse 21 says, "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations of the age of the ages. Amen." God's glory is wrought into the church, and He is expressed in the church. Hence, the glory in the church is to God; that is, God is glorified in the church.

God's glorification is not only in the church, but also in Christ. Hence, the word "and" is used here to emphasize this point. In the church the sphere of God's glorification is narrow, limited to the household of faith. But in Christ the sphere is much broader, because Christ is the Head of all the families in the heavens and on earth (1:22; 3:15). Hence, God's glorification in Christ is in the realm of all the families created by God, not only on earth but also in the heavens. Not only is the sphere in Christ much broader than that in the church, but the scope in Christ is eternal, as indicated by the phrase, "unto all the generations of the age of the ages." All the generations of the age of the ages constitute eternity. God's glorification in the church is

mainly in this age, whereas God's glorification in Christ is for eternity.

The church is just one of the many families in the universe. The other families include the angelic family, the family of mankind, and the family of Israel. According to verse 15, God is the source of the angelic family in the heavens and of all the human families on earth. Of course, He is also the source of the church, which is the family, the household, of the believers. To say that God is glorified in the church means that He is glorified in just one of the many families. But to say that God is glorified in Christ means that He is glorified in Christ as the Head of all things. Christ is the Head over the angels, over mankind, over Israel, and also over the church. If God were glorified only in the church, He would not be glorified in an all-inclusive way. For Him to be glorified all-inclusively, He must also be glorified in Christ.

God will be glorified not only in this age, the age of the church, but also in the coming age, the age of the kingdom, and in the age of the ages, which is eternity. For God to be glorified in all the ages, from the present age throughout eternity, He must be glorified both in the church and in Christ.

THE CHURCH TAKING THE LEAD TO GLORIFY GOD

As the household of the believers, the church, we take the lead to give the glory to God the Father by having God's glory wrought into our being. In order for the glory of God to be wrought into us, we need to be strengthened into our inner man according to the riches of God's glory. Then this glory will come to us with God and, after being worked into us, will return to God with us. By means of this two-way traffic the church takes the lead to give the glory to God. In this universe, as the believers, we are the firstfruit. If we take the lead to give glory to God, all the other families both in heaven and on earth will follow us to glorify Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SIX

KEEPING THE ONENESS OF THE SPIRIT

Ephesians 4:1 says, "I beseech you therefore, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called." This verse is somewhat a repetition of 3:1, which begins the apostle's exhortation in chapters four through six. This indicates that 3:2-21 is all parenthetical.

WALKING WORTHILY OF GOD'S CALLING

The book of Ephesians is divided into two main sections. The first, composed of chapters one through three, reveals the blessing and the position which the church has obtained in Christ in the heavenlies. Chapter three, in particular, reveals how the church comes into existence in a practical way through being constituted with the riches of the living Christ. The second section, comprising chapters four through six, charges us concerning the living and responsibility the church should have in the Spirit on the earth. The basic charge is that we should walk worthily of the calling, which is the totality of the blessings bestowed upon the church, as revealed in 1:3-14. In the church, under the Triune God's abundant blessing, the saints should walk worthily of the Father's selection and predestination, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's sealing and pledging.

In walking worthily of God's calling, the church must have a certain kind of life and also bear responsibility to the full extent. Hence, in chapters four through six we see, on the one hand, the living the church should have, and, on the other hand, the responsibility the church should bear.

In exhorting the saints to walk worthily of God's calling,

Paul spoke from his status as a prisoner in the Lord. His status as an apostle of Christ through the will of God authorized him to reveal the things concerning the church, to speak concerning the mystery of Christ. However, his status as a prisoner in the Lord qualified him to exhort us to walk worthily of God's high calling. Paul's living was surely worthy of God's calling. Furthermore, he bore the responsibility required by this calling.

In 3:1 Paul speaks of himself as "the prisoner of Christ Jesus," but in 4:1 he says that he is "the prisoner in the Lord." To be a prisoner *in* the Lord is deeper than to be a prisoner *of* the Lord. As such a prisoner, Paul was a pattern for those who would walk worthily of God's calling.

KEEPING THE ONENESS OF THE SPIRIT

To walk worthily of God's calling, to have the proper Body life, we need firstly to care for the matter of oneness. We must keep the oneness of the Spirit. This is crucial and vital to the Body of Christ.

Oneness, strictly speaking, differs from unity. Unity is formed by many people uniting together, whereas oneness is the one entity of the Spirit within the believers making them all one. Some Christians may have a certain kind of unity, but we in the Lord's recovery appreciate oneness much more than unity. In the Lord's recovery, we are not united--that is, we have not formed a certain kind of union--but we are one. Our oneness is a Person, even the Lord Jesus Himself realized as the life-giving Spirit. Today the Lord is the life-giving Spirit within us, and this Spirit is our oneness. Therefore, our oneness is not an objective Person far away in the heavens; it is a subjective Person indwelling us as our life.

This oneness is similar to the electricity in many lights that makes them all one in the shining. Although there may be dozens of lights in a large room, they are one in the electricity that flows within them. In themselves, the lights are not one; neither are they united to form one entity. The unique electricity in the lights is their oneness. This

electricity does not unite the lights; it is the oneness within them. In themselves, the lights are individual and separate, but in the electricity they have oneness. It is the same in principle with the believers in Christ. The Spirit indwelling us is our oneness.

In 4:3 this oneness is called "the oneness of the Spirit." The oneness of the Spirit is actually the Spirit Himself. In the illustration of the electricity and the lights, the oneness of the electricity is the electricity itself. There is not another element, apart from the electricity, that is the oneness of the electricity. The oneness of the electricity is simply the electricity itself. In the same principle, the oneness of the Spirit is not something apart from the Spirit. On the contrary, it is the Spirit Himself. The oneness within us and among us is the very life-giving Spirit. Therefore, to keep the oneness is to keep the life-giving Spirit.

Many Christians talk about unity or oneness but neglect the Spirit. This indicates that they make oneness something separate from the Spirit. The more talk certain believers have had about unity, the more divided they have become. Some can even argue with one another in a fleshly way over the matter of unity. There is no need for us to talk so much about oneness. Oneness is like a dove. If we do not talk about it, the dove is present with us. But if we talk about it, it flies away. When we talk a great deal about oneness, we are in danger of losing it. We do not keep the oneness by talking about it; we keep it by staying in the life-giving Spirit. As long as we love the Lord and embrace Him, we keep the oneness; for, as we have strongly emphasized, oneness is the Person of Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

Keeping the oneness of the Spirit implies that we already have the Spirit. If we did not have Him, how could we keep Him? However, most Christians live apart from the Spirit most of the time. Any action taken apart from the life-giving Spirit is divisive. When we are one with the Spirit, living according to Him and doing all things in Him, we keep the oneness without making any conscious effort to do so. But whenever we act apart from the Spirit, we

are divisive and lose the oneness. Therefore, instead of charging you to talk about oneness, I would encourage you to take care of the life-giving Spirit, who is the Lord Himself as life within you.

LOWLINESS, MEEKNESS, AND LONG-SUFFERING

Verse 2 says, "With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing one another in love." To have lowliness is to remain in a low estate, and to have meekness is to not fight for ourselves. We should have these two virtues in dealing with ourselves. Long-suffering is to endure mistreatment. We should have this virtue in dealing with others. By these virtues we bear one another; that is, we do not forsake the troublesome ones but bear them in love. This is the expression of life.

The word "all" governs both lowliness and meekness. It does not mean that there are many kinds of lowliness and meekness; it means that we should have lowliness and meekness in all things. Thus, we must keep the oneness of the Spirit with all lowliness and meekness.

The problem, however, is that in ourselves we cannot be either lowly or meek. If we are honest and sincere, we shall admit that we have no genuine lowliness or meekness. On the contrary, we tend to exalt ourselves and to fight in defense of ourselves. Just as we do not have lowliness or meekness, we are not long-suffering and we cannot bear others in love. Nevertheless, Paul charges us to have such a worthy walk.

If we would keep the oneness of the Spirit, we must have a proper humanity, a humanity with lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering and a humanity that bears others in love. If we do not have such a humanity as our "capital," then we cannot operate the "business" of keeping the oneness of the Spirit. The fact that the virtues in verse 2 are mentioned before the oneness of the Spirit in verse 3

indicates that we must have these virtues in order to keep the oneness of the Spirit.

A TRANSFORMED HUMANITY

In order to have the virtues spoken of in verse 2, we need a transformed humanity. In our natural humanity there is no lowliness, meekness, nor long-suffering. But these virtues are to be found in our transformed humanity, that is, in the humanity of Jesus. In Matthew 11:29 the Lord Jesus said that He was meek and lowly in heart. Meekness and lowliness are characteristics of the humanity of Jesus. Any meekness or lowliness that we may seem to have in ourselves is a pretense and cannot survive any real testing. Praise the Lord that the humanity of Jesus in His resurrection life can be ours today! The more we are transformed, the more of the humanity of Jesus we have. By having the humanity of the resurrected Christ, we spontaneously have the virtues required to keep the oneness of the Spirit.

A PICTURE OF GENUINE ONENESS

The genuine oneness in the Triune God is seen in the picture of the tabernacle with its forty-eight boards of acacia wood overlaid with gold. In themselves, the boards were separate from one another, but in the gold they were one. The bars that held the boards together were also made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. As we have pointed out elsewhere, the golden bars signify the uniting Spirit. The acacia wood signifies humanity, and the gold signifies the divine nature. In the uniting Spirit there is the element of humanity. This indicates that the uniting Spirit is not merely the Holy Spirit of God, but the Holy Spirit mingled with our spirit.

This mingled spirit is seen in Romans 8. Romans 8:4 says, "That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh, but according to spirit." The spirit here is our human spirit mingled with God's Holy Spirit. Furthermore, Romans 8:16

says, "The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God." This verse clearly points to the mingled spirit, that is, the Spirit with our spirit. In the mingled spirit which constitutes the uniting bars, there is the transformed humanity with the virtues of lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering.

For years I tried to be meek and lowly, but I failed time after time. Eventually I learned that the lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering in 4:2 are not to be found in our natural humanity, but are characteristics of the transformed humanity, the humanity of Jesus Christ. This transformed humanity with all its virtues is typified by the acacia wood within the uniting bars. This indicates that in the uniting Spirit there is the transformed humanity, our humanity transformed by the resurrection life of Christ.

TRANSFORMATION AND ONENESS

Keeping the oneness of the Spirit requires transformation. For this reason, we should not expect a new believer to be able to keep the oneness of the Spirit. It is useless to charge the new ones to keep the oneness, because keeping the oneness of the Spirit requires transformation. If you have not been transformed, you will not have the lowliness nor the meekness necessary to keep the oneness. The more we have been transformed, the more we spontaneously inherit lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering. All these virtues are our heritage by transformation.

The oneness of the Spirit cannot be kept by babyish or childish Christians. It can be kept only by the transformed ones. Those who are natural and fleshly cannot be meek, lowly, or long-suffering. They cannot keep the oneness, because nothing in their natural being can ever enable them to keep it. Therefore, I wish to emphasize the fact once again that 4:2 implies the need of transformation. We have problems with oneness because we are so natural, so fleshly, and so much in ourselves. But if we have been transformed, we keep the oneness spontaneously because

in our transformed humanity we have lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering.

THE UNITING BOND OF PEACE

Verse 3 speaks of keeping the oneness of the Spirit "in the uniting bond of peace." Christ has abolished on the cross all the differences due to ordinances. In so doing, He has made peace for His Body. This peace should bind all believers together and thus become the uniting bond.

Before Christ was crucified on the cross, there was no peace between the Jews and the Gentiles. According to 2:15, by Christ's abolishing in His flesh the separating ordinances and creating the Jewish and Gentile believers into one new man, peace was made between all believers. Furthermore, on the cross, Christ dealt with all the negative things between us and God. This means that He also made peace between man and God. Now there is no longer a separation between the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers nor between us and God. However, at the time Ephesians was written, some of the Jewish believers still held the concept that they should be separate from the Gentile believers. For this reason, Paul said that the middle wall of partition has been broken down and that the Jewish and Gentile believers must be one. Otherwise, there can be no oneness. And without the oneness there cannot be the one Body. Therefore, in 4:3 Paul says strongly that we must keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace. If we would do this, we must realize that the differences between us have been abolished on the cross.

The uniting bond of peace is actually the working of the cross. By our experience we know that whenever we go to the cross, there are no differences between us and others. However, as soon as we come down from the cross, differences appear. This is true not only in the church life but also in our family life. Often the love between a husband and wife is buried beneath the differences that emerge when they come down from the cross. The only way to get rid of the differences is to go to the cross. When we

go to the cross and remain there, the differences disappear, and we have peace. As we remain on the cross, this peace becomes the uniting bond in which we keep the oneness of the Spirit. Therefore, in order to keep the oneness of the Spirit we need both transformation and the cross.

Ephesians 4:2 indicates the need of transformation, and 4:3 indicates the need of the cross. We need to be transformed in order to have lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering; and we need to be crossed out in order to have the uniting bond of peace. Then we shall keep the oneness of the Spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SEVEN

THE BASE OF OUR ONENESS

In exhorting us to safeguard the oneness (4:3), the Apostle Paul points out seven things as the base, the very foundation, of our oneness: one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. These seven ones are of three groups. The first three can be grouped together, the Spirit with the Body as His expression and the Body related to the one hope. This Body, having been regenerated and being saturated with the Spirit as its essence, has the hope of being transfigured into the full likeness of Christ. The next three can also be grouped together, the Lord with faith and baptism, that we may be joined to Him. Then we have one God and Father, who is the Originator and source of all. The Spirit as the Executor of the Body, the Son as the Creator of the Body, and God the Father as the Originator of the Body--all three of the Triune God--are related to the Body. The third of the Trinity is mentioned first because the main concern here is the Body, and the Spirit is the essence of the Body. Then the course is traced back to the Son and then to the Father.

I. THE FIRST GROUP, RELATED TO THE SPIRIT

A. One Body

Verse 4 says, "One Body and one Spirit, as also you were called in one hope of your calling." The Body is mentioned before the Spirit because the oneness among us is related to the Body and is for the Body. The reason we need to keep the oneness is that we are all one Body.

B. One Spirit

There is a deep relationship between the one Spirit and the one hope. If we do not see this relationship, we shall not be able to know why Paul put the one Spirit and the one hope together with the one Body. The Spirit is the essence of the one Body. Without the Spirit, the Body is empty and has no life. The Body here is the Body of Christ, and the essence of the Body of Christ is the Spirit. Hence, the Body and the essence of the Body are one. It is impossible for the Body of Christ to have more than one essence. The unique essence of the Body is the Spirit.

The Spirit is in the Body. First Corinthians 12:13 says, "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (Gk.). This verse reveals that the one Spirit is not only the essence of the Body, but also the life and the life supply of the Body. Without the one Spirit, the Body would be a corpse.

C. One Hope

The hope in verse 4 is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). As saved ones, we have the hope that one day the Lord Jesus will come as our hope of glory and that through Him our vile body will be transfigured (Phil. 3:21). On one hand, we appreciate our bodies because they are useful and because without them we cannot exist in this world. On the other hand, our bodies are troublesome, for they are often weak and subject to illness. Therefore, we believers in Christ have the hope that one day our troublesome bodies will be metabolically transfigured by Christ to become glorified bodies.

If you find it difficult to believe that our vile bodies will be transfigured into glorious bodies, I ask you to consider the process a carnation seed undergoes to produce blossoms. In itself a carnation seed has no beauty. But by being sown into the soil and by growing normally, the seed is transfigured into a plant with beautiful blossoms. In

speaking about the transfiguration of the body in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul compares our bodies to seeds (vv. 35-44). We have the solid hope that the day will come for the "seed" to blossom.

According to Romans 8, our hope also implies our manifestation as sons of God. We are sons of God today, but our sonship is hidden and even somewhat mysterious. For this reason, the worldly people treat us the same as everyone else, without any realization that we are sons of God. However, the time is coming when our sonship will be manifested. Then it will no longer be necessary to tell others that we are Christians. It will be apparent to all that we are sons of God in glory. The manifestation of the sons of God will also be the glorification of the sons of God. This is our hope.

Neither the transfiguration of our body nor our manifestation as the sons of God will merely be a sudden, unexpected occurrence. On the contrary, both our transfiguration and our manifestation are gradually taking place today. Yes, there is a sense in which transfiguration and manifestation will take place suddenly. But according to the truth of the New Testament and according to our experience, transfiguration and manifestation are also a gradual process in which we are involved today. This process is being carried out by the one Spirit, who is the essence, the life, and the life supply of the Body of Christ. The Spirit is presently working within us to transfigure us and to manifest our sonship. This is the reason Paul linked the one hope and the one Spirit to the one Body.

As believers, we are members of the Body of Christ. Although you are a member of the Body, are you satisfied with the way you are? If we are honest, we shall admit that the present situation of both ourselves and the church is less than satisfactory. We need to be transfigured. Within us as members of the Body and within the Body as a whole there is the one Spirit, who is the essence of the Body and the life and life supply of the Body. This Spirit is neither dormant nor idle; on the contrary, He is working

energetically within us toward the goal of bringing us into the fulfillment of the hope of our calling. This is why we say that the transfiguration of the body will not be accidental. Today the indwelling Spirit is carrying out both the transfiguration of the body and the manifestation of the sons of God. Because we are in the process of transfiguration and manifestation, the rapture should not come as a surprise. Rather, it should be a normal experience.

Verse 4 implies that the indwelling Spirit today is carrying out the process of bringing the Body of Christ into glory as the fulfillment of our hope. Therefore, in this verse we have the one Body, the one Spirit, and the one hope. Because we all are in the one Body with the one Spirit and have the one hope, we are one. There is no reason for us not to be one, and there is no cause to be different. We are one Body, and we have the one Spirit working within us to bring us to the goal of our hope.

II. THE SECOND GROUP, RELATED TO THE LORD

A. One Lord

Verse 5 says, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." This verse does not speak of one Son, but of one Lord. In the Gospel of John it is the Son in whom we believe (3:16), but in Acts, it is the Lord in whom we believe (Acts 16:31). In the writings of John, the Son is for life (1 John 5:12), whereas in Acts, the Lord, after His ascension, is for authority (Acts 2:36), a matter which concerns His headship. Here, as the Head of the Body (Eph. 1:22), He is the Lord. Our believing in Christ is related to both life and authority. Not many Christians, however, realize that they must believe in the Lord for authority as well as for life. As lost sinners, we were not only spiritually dead, but we were also without the Lord, without a head. But after believing in the Lord, we have both life and a head.

In Ephesians the oneness of the Body is related not only to life but also to headship. Christians are divided because they do not care for the Head. In verse 4 Paul covers life,

which is closely related to the Spirit. But in verse 5 he deals with authority. Today few Christians care for life, and even fewer have any care for authority. By the Lord's mercy and grace, we in the Lord's recovery care both for life and for headship. We have not only the one Body with the one Spirit and the one hope, but also the one Lord with the one faith and the one baptism.

B. One Faith

In the New Testament faith denotes both the act of believing and the content of what we believe. Faith as our act of believing is personal and subjective. But faith as the content of what we believe is objective. The one faith in verse 5 is not our personal act of believing; it is the object of our faith.

As Christians we may differ concerning various doctrines, but we all have the one faith. We all believe in the Person of the Lord Jesus and His redemptive work. We believe that Christ is the Son of God incarnated to be a man, that He died on the cross for our redemption, that He was resurrected on the third day, and that He has ascended into the heavens. This unique faith is held by all genuine Christians.

It is through this faith that we are joined to Christ. As soon as a person comes to believe in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, he is made one with Christ. Before this he was outside of Christ, but now he is in Christ. This Christ is our Lord, our Head, and we are under His authority. We are members of His Body, and He is our Head.

If we would keep the oneness, we must take care of both life and authority. The life-giving Spirit is working within us so that we may be transformed in soul, transfigured in body, and fully manifested as sons of God. This is a matter of life. But we have not only the life-giving Spirit within us, but also the Lord as the Head of the Body. Hence, we must be submissive to the authority and headship of Christ.

C. One Baptism

In faith we believe into the Lord (John 3:36, Gk.), and in baptism we are baptized into Him (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3) and terminated in Adam (Rom. 6:4). Through faith and baptism we have been transferred out of Adam into Christ and have thus been joined to the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17).

The reality of baptism consists in realizing and confessing that our natural being has been crucified and buried. Hence, baptism is the realization of death, burial, and resurrection. Through faith we are joined to Christ, and in Christ we are crucified, buried, and resurrected. Immediately after we believe in Christ, we should be baptized as a testimony of our realization of this fact. Baptism always follows faith. Through baptism, we have a complete and thorough transfer out of Adam and into Christ. Now we are in Christ who is our life and our Lord. No longer are we in Adam with Adam as our head. We are in Christ with Christ as our Head. Because the Lord, faith, and baptism are related in such a way, Paul spoke of them together in verse 5.

III. THE ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL

Verse 6 says, "One God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all." God is the Originator of all things, and the Father is the source of life for the Body. In verse 4 we have life; in verse 5, headship; and in verse 6, origin or source. Because everything has a source, it is possible to trace things back to their origin. However, most Christians today, being superficial, do not care for the origin or source of things. We in the church life, on the contrary, must have sober discernment. This means that we must consider the matters of life, headship, and source, or origin. If we trace something back to its source, we shall not be cheated or deceived or led astray.

The Apostle Paul was a very discerning person, having received a keen discernment from the Lord. Beginning with

the one Body, Paul traced the source all the way back to the one God and Father. This means that he went all the way back to the very source, to the origin.

In verse 6 Paul speaks of the one God and Father "Who is over all and through all and in all." The thought of the Trinity is implied here. "Over all" mainly refers to the Father; "through all," to the Son; and "in all," to the Spirit. The Triune God eventually enters into us by reaching us as the Spirit. Our oneness is constituted of the Trinity of the Godhead: with the Spirit as the life-giving Spirit, with the Son as the Lord and Head, and with the Father as the source and origin. If we see this, nothing will be able to distract us or lead us astray. We shall have the proper discernment regarding the oneness and how to keep it.

The keeping of the oneness is a matter in the Triune God. This means that the Triune God Himself is the base of our oneness, its fundamental basis and very foundation. The Originator of our oneness is the Father, the Accomplisher of our oneness is the Lord, and the Executor of our oneness is the Spirit. In our experience, however, the Spirit is first because He is directly related to the oneness, to the carrying out of the oneness in the one Body. Following this, we have the Lord as the Accomplisher and the Father as the source. Therefore, our oneness is the Triune God realized and experienced by us in our Christian life.

Although many of us have been Christians for years, we have never heard that oneness is actually the Triune God becoming our experience. Our oneness is the Triune God--the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father--wrought into the Body. Along with the Triune God, we have the faith, the baptism, and the hope. One day we received faith and were brought into Christ. What a glorious visitation was this coming of faith! After we believed into Christ, we were baptized. We became members of the Body with the hope of glorification. This is our oneness. This oneness is the Triune God wrought into the Body, which comes into existence through faith and baptism and which has the

hope of one day being glorified. May we all have the heart to care for this oneness.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-EIGHT

THE GIFTS PERFECTING THE SAINTS

Ephesians 4:7 says, "But to each one of us was given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Concerning the Body, all the basic elements are one. This is covered in verses 4 through 6, where we have one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. Although the basic elements of the Body are one, the gifts, or the functions, are many and varied. The word "but" at the beginning of verse 7 brings out this contrast between the oneness of the Body and the variety of the gifts or functions.

GRACE ACCORDING TO THE GIFT

Verse 7 says that each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Here grace is given according to the gift, but in Romans 12:6 gifts differ according to grace. Grace actually is the divine life that both produces and supplies the gifts. In Romans 12 it is the grace that produces the gift. Thus, the gift is according to grace. In Ephesians 4 it is grace that supplies the gift. Hence, here the grace is according to the gift, according to the measure of the gift. Grace according to the measure of the gift can be compared to our blood, which supplies the members of our body according to their size. The measure of the gift of Christ is the size of a member of His Body.

CHRIST GIVING GIFTS TO MEN

Verse 8 continues, "Wherefore He says, Having ascended to the height, He led captive those taken captive and gave gifts to men." "Height" in the quotation of Psalm 68:18 refers to Mount Zion (Psa. 68:15-16), symbolizing the

third heaven where God dwells (1 Kings 8:30). Psalm 68 implies that it was in the ark that God ascended to Mount Zion after the ark had led the way to victory.

Verse 1 of Psalm 68 is a quotation of Numbers 10:35. This indicates that the background of Psalm 68 is God's move in the tabernacle with the ark as its center. The ark was a clear type of Christ. Wherever the ark went, the victory was won. Eventually this ark ascended triumphantly to the top of Mount Zion. This portrays how Christ has won the victory and ascended triumphantly to the heavens.

"Those" in verse 8 refers to the redeemed saints who had been taken captive by Satan before they were saved by Christ's death and resurrection. In His ascension Christ led them captive; that is, He rescued them from Satan's captivity and took them to Himself. This indicates that He has conquered and overcome Satan, who had captured them by sin and death.

The Amplified New Testament renders "He led a train of vanquished foes" for "He led captive those taken captive." "Vanquished foes" may refer to Satan, to his angels, and to us the sinners, also indicating Christ's victory over Satan, sin, and death. In His ascension there was a procession of these vanquished foes as captives from a war for a celebration of Christ's victory.

"Gifts" here does not refer to the abilities or enablements for varied services, but to the various gifted persons in verse 11--apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. After conquering and rescuing them from Satan and death through His own death and resurrection, Christ in His ascension made the rescued sinners themselves such gifts with His resurrection life and gave them to His Body for its building up.

Verses 9 and 10 are a parenthesis. This means that verse 11 is the continuation of verse 8. Verse 8 says that Christ gave gifts to men, and verse 11 says that He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers. "Each one" in verse 7 refers to

every member of the Body of Christ, each of whom has received a general gift, whereas the four kinds of gifted persons mentioned in verse 11 are those who have been endued with a special gift. As we shall see, these are the leading apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. As followers, we all can be such gifts to the Body.

Verses 9 and 10 explain how Christ gave the gifts to the Body: "Now this, He ascended, what is it except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He Who descended is the same Who also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things." The "lower parts of the earth" refers to Hades, underneath the earth, where Christ went after His death (Acts 2:27). Christ firstly descended from heaven to earth in His incarnation. Then after He died on the cross, in His death He descended further, from earth to Hades. Eventually, in His resurrection He ascended from Hades to earth, and from earth to heaven in His ascension. By His descending in death and ascending in resurrection, He gave gifts to men.

CHRIST FILLING ALL THINGS

By descending and ascending, Christ also cut the way that He might fill all things. The thought here is profound. Firstly, Christ was in the heavens. In His incarnation He came down to earth as a man and lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years. Then He died on the cross and descended into Hades, ascended in resurrection from Hades to earth, and then ascended to the third heaven. By means of such a traffic of descending and ascending, He fills all things. Now Christ is everywhere, on the earth as well as in the heavens.

FOR THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS

In verse 12 we see the reason for Christ's giving of the gifts: "For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ." The Greek word rendered "for" in this verse is weighty and

significant. It indicates that Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers for the purpose of perfecting the saints. The saints are perfected "unto the work of ministry." The Greek word translated "unto" means "resulting in." Therefore, the perfecting of the saints results in the work of ministry. The many gifted persons in verse 11 have only one ministry, that of ministering Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ, the church. This is the unique ministry in the New Testament economy (2 Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim. 1:12). According to the grammatical construction, "the building up of the Body of Christ" is "the work of ministry." Whatever the gifted persons in verse 11 do as the work of ministry must be for the building up of the Body of Christ.

ARRIVING AT THREE THINGS

Verse 13 continues, "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." According to this verse, the perfected saints will arrive at three things: at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Christ has a fullness, the fullness has a stature, and the stature has a measure. We must arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We shall cover this matter in a later message.

CHRIST'S UNIVERSAL TRAFFIC

Let us now consider in more detail how the gifts are given by Christ to the Body. We have seen that, concerning the Body, all the basic elements are one. However, the gifts and the functions are different. Christ has traveled from the heavens to the earth, from the earth to Hades, from Hades back to earth, and from the earth to the third heaven. It is by this universal traffic that the gifts have been given by Christ to the Body.

Consider the Apostle Paul as an example. How could a

sinful, devilish persecutor of the church such as Saul of Tarsus become a gift to the Body of Christ? Only by the traveling of Christ throughout the universe. Christ traveled from the heavens to the earth. He was born in a manger in Bethlehem, and He lived for about thirty years in the little town of Nazareth. After He was crucified on the cross, He went down into Hades and took a tour of that region for three days. Then He came out of Hades on the day of His resurrection. Between His resurrection and ascension, He appeared to His disciples over a period of forty days. At the end of those forty days, He ascended into the heavens.

If we had Ephesians 4 without Psalm 68, we probably would not realize that when Christ ascended to the heavens He led a train of captives. He entered into the heavens as a conqueror with a train of captives. He presented these captives to His Father, who in turn gave them back to Him as gifts. Then Christ gave all these captives as gifts to men. One of these gifts was Saul of Tarsus. This is the way Christ gave gifts to men.

By His universal traveling Christ not only gathered up many sinners, but He also defeated Satan, the one who had captured them. At one time, we all were captives, those who had been captured by Satan, sin, and death. By traveling from heaven to earth, from earth to Hades, from Hades back to earth, and from earth back to heaven, on the one hand, Christ gained all of us and, on the other hand, He conquered Satan, who had usurped us and held us under his power of death. Having been released from Satan, sin, and death, we are now Christ's captives. All the angels know that when Christ ascended to the third heaven, He was leading a train of captives and that these captives were presented to the Father. What a victorious celebration this procession must have been! Although this glorious event was hidden from the eyes of men, it was seen by angels. They knew that an event of tremendous significance was taking place in the history of the universe. This is not a product of our imagination; it is a marvelous fact.

CAPTURED BY CHRIST

More than nineteen centuries ago we were captured by Christ and put into His train of captives. As those who have been captured by Him, we have no way to escape. Although we have never seen the Lord Jesus, we have no choice but to believe in Him because we have been captured by Him. Now that we are in His train, we cannot get away from Him. Not only have we been captured by Christ, but He has also presented us to the Father. After beholding us with great appreciation, the Father returned us to the Son as gifts. In this way we all were made gifts to the Body through Christ's universal traveling.

In His travels Christ died for our sins and accomplished all things for the fulfillment of God's purpose. He defeated Satan, and He released us from the enemy's usurping hand. Once we were Satan's captives, but now we are Christ's captives, those who have been led in His train to the height of the universe, presented to the Father, and given back to the Son as gifts to men.

According to the New Testament, we were saved before we were born. When people ask me when I was saved, I sometimes tell them that I was saved more than nineteen hundred years ago, at the time of Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. We were redeemed in Christ's crucifixion, and we were regenerated in His resurrection. Even before Christ put us in His train of captives, we were already saved. By the time He presented us to the Father, we had already been saved and regenerated.

GIFTS TO THE BODY AND TO MEN

Now we can see the steps by which sinners have become gifts to the Body of Christ. These steps include Christ's incarnation, His human living, His death on the cross, His burial in the tomb, His descent into Hades, His resurrection from among the dead, and His ascension to the heavens to return to the Father. By means of these steps we, the sinners, have become apostles, prophets,

evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Now we are gifts to men. Wherever the Lord may send us in the days ahead, we shall be sent as gifts to the people there.

Not only the leading apostles and prophets are gifts, but every member of the Body is a gift. For example, my little finger is a gift to my body. It can do something for my body that no other member can do. None of us should regard ourselves as too small to be a gift. Sometimes it is the smallest members who are the most useful and who render the greatest comfort to the Body. Therefore, we all are gifts given by Christ to His Body. Because of Christ's universal traveling, we are no longer sinners, but sons of God, trophies to the Father, and gifts to the Body.

In Ephesians 4 we see the giving of the gifts, whereas in Psalm 68 we have the receiving of the gifts. According to Psalm 68, the Son received trophies from the Father as gifts. Then in Ephesians 4 the Son gave them all as gifts to the church. We, the saved ones, have been given not only to the church, but even to the whole world. Thus, wherever we may go, we shall be a great blessing to others.

In some of the foregoing messages I have pointed out that all the saints can be today's apostles and prophets. In this message I would like to point out that we also can be evangelists, those who preach the good news, those who proclaim the glad tidings. As we contact people in our daily living, we need to tell them the good news. If we are faithful to do this, we are evangelists. We are also shepherds and teachers, those who take care of others and instruct them in the way of the Lord and in the things concerning God's economy.

NO CLERGY OR LAITY

Ephesians 4:11 does speak of *some* apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Perhaps you are wondering how I can say that *all* the saints can be such gifts to the Body. The gifts in 4:11 are the leading apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. We, of course, cannot be these leading ones; however, as their

followers, we can be the same kind of persons. I certainly do not consider myself an apostle like Paul, who was a leading one. But as a follower of Paul, I do regard myself as one of today's apostles, today's sent ones. We all should have such a concept concerning ourselves. We all should be followers of the leading apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. If we are not such followers, we shall fall into a great heresy--the heresy of a clergy-laity system. We shall make the leading ones the clergy, and the followers will become the laymen. But in the church, the Body of Christ, there is no such thing as either clergy or laity. As gifts to the Body, we all are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. As gifts given by Christ to the Body and to all mankind, we can be a great blessing to the whole world.

Ephesians 4 tells us that grace is given according to the measure, the size, of the gift. The grace produces the gifted persons and then supplies them according to the measure of the gift. All the gifted persons are for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ, until we all arrive at the three items mentioned in verse 13. In a later message we shall consider these items in detail.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-NINE

THE BELIEVER'S STANDARD

In 1 Timothy 1:16 Paul says, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." According to this verse, Paul was made a pattern of God's salvation. Paul, however, was a model not only of God's salvation, but also of one called by the Lord.

In the book of Ephesians the matter of God's calling is of great significance. In 1:17-18 Paul prayed that we would have a spirit of wisdom and revelation to "know what is the hope of His calling." In 4:1 Paul besought us, God's called people, to walk worthily of the calling with which we were called.

THE GOAL OF GOD'S CALLING

Not many Christians know the goal of God's calling. Many think that this goal is simply to receive grace and to be saved. Grace and salvation, however, are not the ultimate goal of God's calling. According to Ephesians, the unique goal of God's calling is the building up of the Body of Christ. In Matthew 16 the Lord Jesus said that He would build His church. The book of Acts and the Epistles reveal that the church is built up not by the Lord directly, but through the members of the Body. Christ builds the Body by the Body. God has called us for the fulfillment of this goal.

Ephesians 3:2 speaks of the stewardship of the grace of God, and 4:12, of the building up of the Body of Christ. Hence, the portion of Ephesians from 3:2 to 4:12 begins with the stewardship of the grace of God and ends with the building up of the Body of Christ.

The stewardship of the grace of God is not limited to Paul and the other apostles. Do not think that Paul was such a steward and that you are not. Paul's intention here is to impress the saints with the fact that they all have received the stewardship of the grace of God for the building up of the Body of Christ. According to 4:12, the building up of the Body is not the work of the apostles alone; it is the responsibility of all the saints. This verse reveals that the saints are perfected unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ. The Greek word rendered "unto" in this verse also means "for the purpose of," "with a view to," or "resulting in." The perfecting of the saints results in the work of ministry, which in turn results in the building up of the Body of Christ. The Body is not built up directly by the apostles and the other leading ones; it is built up directly by the saints.

In 4:16 Paul says, "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." Verse 12 speaks of the saints, and verse 16 mentions "each one part." According to verse 16, the Body causes the growth of itself unto the building up of itself in love. In order for this to take place in a practical way, all the saints need to be perfected by the apostles and the other leading ones.

THE SAME AS PAUL

As we read this book of Ephesians, we need to get into Paul's burden and feeling. Paul's expectation was that every believer would be an apostle. This means that Paul expected every saint to be the same as he was.

Paul was not only an apostle; he was also a prophet, an evangelist, and a shepherd and teacher. Many of us, however, may classify the gifted ones mentioned in verse 11 into four distinct categories: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers. But Paul, the pattern of God's called one, was all of these. Paul

certainly was a prophet. In his Epistles he uttered some great prophecies, such as those found in 1 Corinthians 15 and in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Paul was also an evangelist. Who was a greater evangelist than he was? He preached the gospel wherever he went. Furthermore, Paul was a shepherd and a teacher. Day and night, he cared for all the churches and all the saints. Finally, who can deny that Paul was a teacher? If Paul was not a teacher, then no one in the New Testament was a teacher. Therefore, Paul was an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, and a shepherd and teacher. His burden and intention in chapters three and four was to point out that every saint should be the same as he was in these respects.

Chapters three and four are part of Paul's charge concerning a walk worthy of God's calling. If we would have a walk worthy of God's calling, we need to be like the Apostle Paul. To have a worthy walk, we should devote our attention not only to such things as humility, kindness, and love, but to the important matter of being apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. If we are not such persons, then we do not have a walk worthy of God's calling. In these chapters Paul is an example, not of a victorious Christian nor even of a believer who is full of life, but of one who is an apostle, prophet, evangelist, and shepherd and teacher.

ALL DISCIPLES BEING APOSTLES, PROPHETS, EVANGELISTS, AND SHEPHERDS AND TEACHERS

Every Christian who is up to the standard is an apostle, prophet, evangelist, and shepherd and teacher. An apostle is not a king; he is a sent one. If I send you out to do a specific task, then you are my sent one, my apostle. In John 17:18 the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father, "As You have sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." The "them" in this verse refers not only to the twelve Apostles, but to all the disciples. This indicates that all who believe in Christ should be sent ones. This is confirmed by the Lord's word to the disciples in John 20:21: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." All disciples

of the Lord Jesus, both male and female, are to be sent ones. If you have been a Christian for years without ever having been sent by Him, you are not up to the standard. If we consider our past experience, we shall realize that many of us have been sent--to our husband or wife, to our parents and relatives, and to our friends. Like Paul, we are sent ones, we are apostles.

We are also prophets. According to the Scriptures, a prophet does not primarily predict the future; he is one who speaks for God. For example, when Moses was called by God in Exodus 3 and 4, he told the Lord that he was not eloquent (4:10). The Lord said that He would give Aaron to Moses to be his prophet (4:14-16; 7:1). Aaron did not predict things for Moses; he spoke on his behalf. This indicates that to be a prophet is to be a spokesman. Just as we have functioned as apostles, so we have also been prophets, perhaps to our parents, relatives, and friends. As prophets, we speak on behalf of the Lord, telling others how the Lord loves them and desires to be life and everything to them. The more we speak in such a way, the more we function as prophets.

In speaking for God, we also preach the gospel. This means that we are evangelists. To be an evangelist is simply to preach the gospel.

In the same principle, we are also shepherds and teachers. In caring for the ones saved through our gospel preaching, we shepherd them and teach them. Hence, we are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers.

To have a walk worthy of God's calling is to be one who is sent by God, who speaks for God, who preaches the gospel, and who shepherds others and teaches them. If we are not such a person, we are not up to God's standard. Due to the influence of our religious background and environment, we are accustomed to thinking of apostles and prophets as extraordinary people. But an apostle is an ordinary Christian, a Christian who meets God's standard.

We should not have a false humility and say that we are too small, too insignificant, to be apostles and prophets.

It is a fact that we can be sent out by the Lord, at least to our relatives and friends, and that we can speak for Him. It is a fact that we all can be and should be God's sent ones. We are of the same category as Paul, although, as apostles, we do not have, of course, as great a measure as he had.

THE STEWARDSHIP OF THE GRACE

Ephesians 3:2 says, "If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you." Do you realize that not only Paul was a steward, but that you are a steward also? Like Paul, you have received the stewardship of the grace of God. A steward is a serving one. For example, a steward or stewardess on an airplane serves the passengers and takes care of them. This indicates that a steward is not some kind of high official, but one who serves others. The service of a steward is called the stewardship. According to 3:2, our stewardship is the stewardship of the grace of God.

We all have received a certain amount of grace. In 4:7 Paul says, "But to each one of us was given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." By receiving grace, we spontaneously have the stewardship of the amount of grace we have received. By grace we have been constituted stewards.

Ephesians 3:2 says that grace has been given to Paul, and 4:7 says that grace has been given to each one of us. In the light of these verses, we should not consider that Paul was something that we are not. In fact, 3:8 reveals that Paul regarded himself as "less than the least of all saints." This indicates that all the saints can receive the same kind of grace as was given to the Apostle Paul. As to the person of Paul, he was the least among the apostles (1 Cor. 15:9); but as to his ministry, he was not behind the chiefest apostles (2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11). Yet, as one who received grace, he was less than the least of all saints. This implies that all the saints can receive the grace which he received. This can be compared to all the members of our physical body which receive the same lifeblood, however large or small they may be. But the ability, or the gift, that comes

out of the lifeblood differs with the members. All the members of the Body of Christ can have the same grace of life as Paul, but their gifts are not the same as Paul's gift was. If grace could be given to Paul, who thought of himself as less than the least of all saints, then it can certainly be given to all of us.

To Paul, it was not a matter of who had received more grace and who had received less. We need to forget all such comparisons. The important thing is that we see that we all can be the same as the Apostle Paul. Since one who was less than the least of all saints could be such a person as described in chapters three and four, then we have no excuse.

However, throughout the centuries, Christians have been under the influence of the natural concept. According to this concept, one of the early apostles was enthroned to be a pope. But we all can be "popes" in a proper sense, for a pope simply means a father. This indicates that we all can be spiritual fathers to those we bring to the Lord.

Our mind needs to be purged from the natural concept that uplifts the apostles above the ordinary believers in Christ. Apostles are simply those sent by God to carry out His purpose for the building of the church. Certainly we all can be such sent ones, and, having been sent, we all can speak for God as His prophets, His spokesmen. Do not be held back by traditional teachings. Instead, believe the fact that the stewardship of the grace of God has been given to every believer.

THE REVELATION OF THE MYSTERY

In 3:3 Paul says that by revelation the mystery was made known to him. Do you think that the mystery has been made known only to the Apostle Paul and not been made known to all the other New Testament believers? We all have received the revelation of the mystery, the very revelation given to Paul. The reason Paul wrote the book of Ephesians was so that all the saints might know the mystery of Christ. In the years the Lord's recovery has been in this country, the saints have seen more and more of the mystery of Christ. By receiving this revelation, we

are constituted apostles and prophets, and we are qualified to speak concerning Christ and the church.

As prophets, we need to speak to those around us, regardless of whether we think that they understand what we are saying. Our responsibility is to speak wherever we are--at home or at our places of employment. Those who are parents need to speak to their children concerning God's economy. We also should contact our parents and relatives and tell them what we have seen regarding God's eternal purpose. Do not be concerned about what others may think of you. Speak so that the unbelievers may be brought to the Lord. If we do not speak, how can others be saved? If we speak, at least some of those who hear us will come to the Lord. What an impact there will be if all the saints in the Lord's recovery open their mouths and speak concerning Christ and the church! Many of us have been cheated by the enemy into thinking that we are not qualified to speak for the Lord. Do not expect brothers with certain outstanding gifts to do all the speaking. This concept is wrong. As those who have received grace and who have seen the revelation of the mystery of Christ, we are today's apostles and prophets, and we can speak for the Lord.

ALL SERVING ONES

In 3:7 Paul said, "Of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God, which was given to me according to the operation of His power." The Greek word translated "minister" in this verse is the same word that is elsewhere in the New Testament rendered "deacon." In fact "deacon" is the anglicized form of the Greek word used here. A minister or deacon is a serving one, not a high official. In this verse Paul was saying that he became a servant. According to the natural concept, the ministers are above the elders, and the elders are above the deacons. But if we have the proper understanding of this verse, we shall see that the ministers actually are deacons, those who serve. The word "minister" is a good word, but its meaning has been spoiled by traditional usage. According

to the New Testament, to say that one is a minister is to say that he is simply a serving one. All believers in Christ are serving ones.

THE OPERATION OF GOD'S POWER

In 3:7 Paul speaks of the operation of God's power. This is the power of the resurrection life (Phil. 3:10), which operates within the apostle and all the believers (Eph. 1:19; 3:20). By such an inward operating power of life, the gift of grace was given to the apostle; that is, it was manifested in him.

The Greek word rendered "operation" in verse 7 is the word from which the English word "energy" is derived. Within us and among us there is a divine energizing. This operation, this energizing, was not exclusively for the Apostle Paul; it is for all the saints. This is proved by 4:16, which, using the same Greek word, speaks of the "operation in measure of each one part." The very same energizing that was in Paul is in every part of the Body. Such an energy is working within us today.

THE DISPENSATION OF THE MYSTERY

In 3:9 Paul speaks of bringing to light what is the dispensation of the mystery. The word "dispensation" here refers to the process of dispensing Christ as life, as the life supply, and as everything to the believers. We all have a part in such a marvelous dispensation. As believers we need to be brought up to God's standard, the standard set by the Apostle Paul.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FORTY

THE WAY TO REACH THE STANDARD

In the last message we saw the believer's standard. In this message we shall consider the way to reach this standard.

Ephesians 3:1 says, "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you, the nations." This verse is not a complete sentence; it contains a subject but not a predicate. All the verses from 3:2 through 3:21 are a parenthesis, and Darby places them within parentheses in his translation. This means that 4:1 continues Paul's thought in 3:1. As Paul was writing this Epistle, a burden rose up in him in 3:2 to utter a parenthetical word. Then he continued in 4:1, "I beseech you therefore, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called." Here Paul completed the thought he began to express in 3:1. Thus, by putting 3:1 and 4:1 together we have a complete thought.

The lengthy parenthesis between 3:1 and 4:1 is an extremely crucial section of Ephesians. In this portion Paul indicated that he longed for all the believers to be the same as he was. As those who would walk worthily of God's calling, we must take Paul as our standard. In order that we might do this, Paul presented himself as an example. In chapter three Paul did not speak on the basis of being an apostle called by God, but he spoke on the basis of being a prisoner of the Lord. As such a prisoner, he was the standard model of one who walked worthily of God's calling. In chapter three of Ephesians Paul presented not only the standard, but also the way to reach this standard. Let us consider the various aspects of this way in some detail.

THE UNIVERSAL STEWARDSHIP

Firstly, we must all be stewards, just as Paul was (3:2). The stewardship is not limited to the leading apostles. Rather, it is universal; that is, it is for all the Lord's disciples. For example, the parable of the steward in Luke 16 was spoken to the disciples. This indicates that every believer, including all of us, must be a steward. I believe that, when Paul spoke of the stewardship in 3:2, he realized within him that the stewardship is for all believers.

In Ephesians 3 Paul develops a concept presented by the Lord Jesus in the four Gospels. The Gospels reveal that all the believers are both stewards and slaves (Matt. 25:14-30). According to the Gospels, a slave is not different from a servant, a steward. The concept in Ephesians 3 is that not only the apostles are stewards and servants, but that all the believers are stewards and servants.

Because of the influence of their religious background and environment, not many Christians regard themselves as stewards. Do you realize that you are not simply a believer, one who trusts in the Lord for salvation? Moreover, have you seen that you are not just a disciple, one who is disciplined and trained? Have you seen that you are a steward, one who serves others with the riches of Christ? We all need to regard ourselves as stewards. If we have this concept, our whole Christian life will be changed. We are all stewards; even we could be called waiters, those imparting Christ's riches to others as nourishing food. The "kitchen" in which all this food is prepared is the church. If you do not have anything with which to serve others, you may come to this "kitchen" and receive the supply.

RECEIVING GRACE

Because our stewardship is the stewardship of the grace of God, we need to receive grace, even the abundance of grace. Yes, we all can be God's sent ones and God's spokesmen, but in order to fulfill such a function, we must have grace. John 1:16 says, "For of His fullness we all received, and grace upon grace."

We have pointed out that all the believers are stewards. Furthermore, we as the stewards have the supply that comes from an excellent "kitchen." But when we contact the "customers," what shall we serve them? We need to serve them the very grace we have received.

Perhaps you are wondering how you can receive grace in a practical way. For this, we must get into the Word and pray with the Word. To get into the Word is to receive grace, and to pray with the Word is to touch reality. After getting into the Word and praying with the Word, we need to walk in spirit according to the Word. If we do these three things daily, we shall receive a continual supply of grace. With this grace, we shall be enlightened and shall experience the reality of God as grace. This grace spontaneously connects us to the church, giving us a vital link to the "kitchen." In this way we become proper stewards.

If we say that we are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers, but we do not get into the Word, pray, and walk in the spirit according to the Word, then what we have is just an empty title. We have no reality, and we have no way to reach the standard set by Paul.

In our prayer we should not be concerned about trivial matters. For example, do not pray about a minor problem with your health or about your temper. The more you pray about your temper, the more you will be troubled by it. Pray with the Word, especially with chapters like Ephesians 3. We should pray with the Word until it gets into us and fills us. When the Word gets into us and the Spirit fills our spirit, spontaneously our daily walk becomes worthy of God's calling. We shall then walk in spirit according to the Word, and we shall receive grace and experience grace. By receiving grace in this way, we are brought on to the standard established by Paul.

RECEIVING REVELATION

In order to reach the standard, we also need to receive revelation (3:3, 5). A prophet is one who is full of light, one

who sees what others do not see. Those who are in darkness have nothing to say, but those who are in the light have a great deal to speak forth. Whenever we see something by revelation, we automatically have something to talk about. If we would be today's sent ones and prophets, we must receive both grace and revelation.

By receiving grace and revelation, we shall spontaneously become burdened to contact others. One who gets into the Word daily and who prays consistently will have a burden to speak to others about what he has seen and experienced. At the very least, he will have the desire to call someone on the telephone. Do not think that the grace and revelation you receive will allow you to remain passive or inactive. No, the grace and revelation will burden you to go to others and to minister to them. This is to be an apostle and a prophet in a practical way. It is useless for me or anyone else to charge you to be such a sent one and spokesman. The only thing that avails is for you to get into the Word, pray, and receive grace and revelation. Whenever you are enlightened by the Lord, you will be eager to tell others what you have seen.

The way to receive revelation is to get into the Word. I believe that Paul received revelation through his study of the Old Testament. Because he spent so much time in the Word, revelation could come to him by means of the Word. The Pharisees, however, could not receive revelation from the Word because they were closed and disobedient. Paul, however, was open. All the veils that covered him were taken away by the Lord. As we come to the Word, we should ask the Lord to remove the veils from our eyes. Although we do not know what veils are still upon us, the Lord knows, and He is willing to remove them. We need to pray, "Lord, I am coming to Your Word. Take away anything that veils my sight, and make Your Word open to me." If we pray in this manner, light will come in, and we shall receive revelation. Then we shall speak to others according to the light we have received from the Lord. Such a speaking, a speaking full of divine light, will greatly

surprise the religious ones. Oh, the church people must be full of light, full of revelation!

ASKING PROPER QUESTIONS

In receiving revelation, we should not be concerned with minor things such as footwashing, the method of baptism, or the size of the cup used at the Lord's table. I am troubled when saints question me regarding secondary matters, but neglect the matters of God's eternal purpose and God's economy. Once I visited a certain place where the people were supposed to be quite spiritual. During a fellowship meeting held for the purpose of answering questions, I was disappointed by the kind of questions that were asked. I was asked questions about minor things, but no one asked me about significant things such as the difference between the mystery of Christ and the mystery of God.

The questions we ask indicate where we are and what we are. For example, many of the questions addressed to me by my little grandchildren are nonsensical. I do not expect them to ask questions about profound subjects. In order to ask a high question, we need to have considerable knowledge and experience. As we read chapter three of Ephesians, we need to ask question after question. Here are some questions we should ask: What is the stewardship of the grace? What is the mystery of Christ? What is a joint-heir? What are the unsearchable riches of Christ? What is the dispensation of the mystery? What is the difference between ages and generations? What is the purpose of the ages? What does it mean to be strengthened into the inner man? How can Christ make His home in our hearts? If we seek out the answers to questions like these, we shall receive revelation.

After we receive light and revelation in answer to questions such as these, we shall have a great deal to share with others. We in the Lord's recovery must be speaking people, those who speak day by day because we have received revelation. The more we see, the more we shall

desire to speak. This is the reason that I always have something to speak in the ministry. Actually, the more I speak, the more there is to speak. If we would be such speaking ones, we need to receive revelation. All the saints, not just the leading apostles, should receive revelation.

MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL

In 3:7 Paul says that he "became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God." As we pointed out in the previous message, a minister is one who serves. Therefore, we should not just be stewards, but also ministers, serving ones.

The words "of which" in verse 7 refer to the gospel in verse 6. This indicates that Paul became a minister of the gospel, that is, one who served others with the gospel. We also are ministers of the gospel. This gospel is not concerned with heaven, but with the nations becoming "joint-heirs and a joint Body and joint-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus" (v. 6). The gospel spoken of in verse 6 has to do with joint-heirs, a joint Body, and joint-partakers of the promise. All the saints can be ministers of such a high and rich gospel.

We need to preach the high gospel to our parents, neighbors, and friends. Tell them about becoming joint-heirs and joint-partakers of the promise in Christ. If they argue with you in a negative way, simply continue to speak positively to them about what you have seen in the book of Ephesians. Do not be worried that they may not be able to understand you. If you regularly speak to them in a proper way, they will eventually understand what you are saying. Let us all speak to others from the book of Ephesians.

STRENGTHENED INTO THE INNER MAN

If we would reach the standard established by the Apostle Paul, our whole being needs to be strengthened into the inner man. By being strengthened into the inner man, we shall be rooted and grounded in love and shall become strong to apprehend the dimensions of Christ, to

know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, and to be filled unto all the fullness of God (3:16-19). Paul was a person with his entire being strengthened into the inner man. Therefore, he was rooted and grounded in love and knew the dimensions of Christ and the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. What about us? Paul prayed that we would be strengthened into the inner man so that, ultimately, we might be filled unto all the fullness of God.

Do not think that Paul could be such a person, but that you cannot. The crucial point in chapter three is that Paul expected all the saints to be the same as he was. We all can and should be strengthened into the inner man. Likewise, we all should be rooted and grounded in love, and we all should be strong to know the dimensions of Christ, to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, and to be filled unto all the fullness of God.

In chapter three of Ephesians we see that Paul's desire was for all the saints to be the same as he was. In verses 2 through 9 he expressed this from one angle, and in verses 16 through 19 he related it from another. From one angle, we are stewards, we have received grace, we have seen the revelation of the mystery, and we are ministers of the high gospel. We minister the riches of Christ so that the church may be produced in a practical way. From another angle, we need to be strengthened into the inner man so that we may be rooted and grounded in love and may become strong to know the dimensions of Christ, to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, and to be filled unto all the fullness of God. From both angles, we need to be the same as Paul was. If we are the same as he was, we shall be walking worthily of God's calling, for we shall be up to the standard for a believer.

As he was about to beseech the saints to have a walk worthy of God's calling, Paul became burdened to insert the parenthetical word found in 3:2-21. In this parenthetical section, Paul presented himself as the standard of a normal, proper believer in Christ. He was one who had received grace, who was a steward, who had seen

the revelation, and who had become a minister of the high gospel. He was one who preached the riches of Christ as the gospel for the producing of the church. As such a one, he was strengthened into the inner man, he was rooted and grounded in love, he knew the dimensions of Christ and the love of Christ, and he was filled unto the fullness of God, which is the church as the expression of the Triune God. Today we all can be such a person. Praise the Lord that in Ephesians 3 we have not only the standard, but also the way to reach the standard!

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-ONE

THE WAY TO BE PERFECTED

In 4:12 Paul speaks of the "perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ." In this message we shall consider the way to be perfected.

GRACE ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE OF THE GIFT OF CHRIST

Ephesians 4:7 says, "But to each one of us was given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Notice that in this verse Paul does not say, "to each one of you"; he says, "to each one of us." This indicates that Paul was including himself. He did not put himself in a special category, in a category separate from that of the other saints.

Grace has been given to each of us according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Each member of our physical body has a certain measure. For example, the measure of the ear is of one size, and the measure of the shoulder is of another. The words "the measure of the gift of Christ" refer to the size of a member of Christ's Body. With every member there is a certain size, a certain measure. Just as our blood supplies the members of our body according to their size, grace also is given to each member according to its size. Although there is more blood in the shoulder than in the ear, the quality of the blood is the same. Just as blood is the life supply to our physical body, so grace is the life supply to the members in the Body of Christ. Praise the Lord that all the saints are gifts of Christ to whom grace has been given!

THE WORK OF MINISTRY

Since verses 9 and 10 are parenthetical, verse 11 is the continuation of verse 8. Verse 11 says, "And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers." As verse 12 makes clear, these have been given for the "perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ." According to grammar, the phrase "unto the building up of the Body of Christ" is in apposition to the phrase "unto the work of ministry." This indicates that both phrases refer to the same thing. Hence, the work of ministry is the building up of the Body.

The apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers perfect the saints unto the work of ministry. Whose work is this--the work of the gifted ones mentioned in verse 11, or the work of the saints? Is it the work of the perfecting ones, or the work of the perfected ones? The answer is that it is the work both of the perfecting ones and the perfected ones. The building up of the Body is not only the work of the apostles and the other gifted ones, but also the work of all the saints. I believe that the work of ministry in verse 12 refers more to the work of the saints than it does to the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers.

The work of building the meeting hall in Anaheim is an illustration of this. Many brothers worked on the construction of the hall. But very few of these brothers were professional builders. Most of them had little experience in the building trades. The few experienced tradesmen took the lead, and gradually the inexperienced ones were perfected. Eventually, both the journeymen and the learners worked together on the building of the meeting hall. However, most of the work was done, not by the professionals, but by the learners. In the same principle, the work of ministry refers to the unique work of building up the Body of Christ. This work is the responsibility not mainly of the apostles, but of all the saints. Both the leading apostles and prophets and all the

believers, including even the smallest member, work together to build up the Body.

THE CONCEPT OF HIERARCHY

At this point I need to say a frank and honest word about the degraded condition of today's Christianity. Christianity has become degraded largely because of the influence of the natural concept. According to the natural concept, in any group or society there should be ranks among the people, with some of a higher rank and others of a lower rank. Ignatius, one of the great church fathers, a good teacher and a pious man, made the mistake of saying that bishops are higher than elders. He said that the authority of the elders is local, but that the authority of the bishops is regional. Through such a concept the seed of hierarchy was sown. As the hierarchy developed, there were not only bishops, but also archbishops, cardinals, and, at the top, the pope. After the Reformation, this hierarchy was not abolished. Rather, it continued in various forms in the Protestant denominations, and it still exists today.

The concept of a hierarchy or a pyramid arrangement among the believers, fits into the natural concept. But if we have the light from the clear revelation in the New Testament, we shall see that the church is not a pyramid; it is a living organism, the Body, with Christ as the unique Head. In Matthew 23:8-10 the Lord Jesus said, "But you, do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone your father on the earth; for One is your Father, He Who is in the heavens. Neither be called leaders, because One is your Leader, the Christ." Nevertheless, according to the natural concept, the twelve apostles are regarded as being above all the other saints. However, if you study the New Testament carefully, you will not find very much difference between the twelve apostles and all the other disciples. The grace in the New Testament is not given uniquely to the twelve apostles, but

generally to all the disciples. In John 17 the Lord Jesus prayed, not for the apostles, but for the disciples. Furthermore, in chapter twenty of John, the Lord appeared on the day of His resurrection to the disciples. On the day of Pentecost one hundred twenty were together praying. The Spirit poured out on the day of Pentecost was poured out upon all the disciples, not just upon the apostles.

NO RANK AMONG THE BELIEVERS

In the New Testament economy there is no thought of hierarchy. On the contrary, God's economy in the New Testament makes all the believers of the same rank. This is the reason that the Lord Jesus said that we all are brothers and that only Christ is our Leader, Guide, Instructor, and Director. Although God's economy puts all believers in Christ on the same level, the natural concept is that in the church, as in any social group or organization, there should be a special class of leaders.

THE APOSTOLIC AGE

Due to the influence of this concept, a great mistake was made in the history of the church. According to the traditional view of church history, the first century is regarded as the apostolic age. This concept is erroneous. The apostolic age includes the entire New Testament age. Is the present age not part of the apostolic age? If it is not, then what age is it--the age of the clergy or the age of the hierarchy? If we are enlightened by the revelation in the New Testament, we shall see that the whole New Testament age is the apostolic age.

Some have said that the apostolic age is over and that it is impossible to have apostles today. In his early ministry, Brother Nee was not yet entirely free from the influence of this concept. In *The Assembly Life*, a book published in 1934, Brother Nee said that there are no official elders, only "unofficial" elders. Furthermore, he said that there are no apostles today, but that there is a group of people who are doing the work of apostles, such as preaching the

gospel and establishing churches. Brother Nee admitted that those who do the work of apostles today do not have the holiness, the power, nor the victory of the apostles. Nevertheless, as Brother Nee remarked, God is using people to work for Him in every locality in a way similar to the way He used the apostles in the first century. In the past it was the apostles who established churches, but today it is those who are doing the work of the apostles who establish churches in various localities. Brother Nee pointed out that these ones are not worthy to be compared to the apostles nor even to be called apostles, but that they are nonetheless doing part of the work of the apostles. These are the people God is using in the midst of the degraded situation of the church today. In that book published in 1934 Brother Nee realized that certain people were doing the work of apostles, but he did not dare to call them apostles. However, he called them "unofficial" apostles who appointed "unofficial" elders in the local assemblies.

Three years later, in 1937, Brother Nee saw from the New Testament that it is erroneous to say that the apostolic age is over and that there can be no apostles today. Therefore, he published the book entitled *The Normal Christian Church Life*, where he boldly said that there are still apostles today. When this book was published about forty years ago, we had seen only part of the light on this matter and on matters related to it. Now, in the light of chapters three and four of Ephesians, we see that all the saints can do the same kind of work as the early apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers did.

PERFECTING THE SAINTS

We have pointed out that the gifted persons in 4:11 are for the perfecting of the saints. What do you suppose the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers perfect the saints to do? The only reasonable and logical answer is that they perfect them to do the same thing that they themselves do. For example, a mathematics teacher trains his students in mathematics.

His goal is to teach them to do what he himself is able to do. Eventually, through years of training, his students will also be able to become teachers of mathematics. But suppose a certain teacher has taught mathematics for many years without perfecting even one student. What a poor teacher he would be! Nevertheless, this is actually the situation that exists among many Christians today. Many Christians attend so-called church services year after year without being perfected in the least.

About twenty-five years ago, some brothers from the church in Manila went to a hospital to visit a certain brother who was sick. As they gathered around the brother's bed, each of them offered prayer to the Lord. Some other Christians were nearby and were greatly surprised to hear so many people praying. One of them said to our brothers, "In our church, the pastor is the only one who prays in a public way. We don't know how to pray. But look at you--every one is able to pray. What kind of church do you go to?" This is just one example of the shortage of a perfecting work among today's Christians.

I am very burdened about the situation among us in the Lord's recovery. I must honestly ask myself how many brothers and sisters have been perfected under this ministry. Just as we can earn a college degree by four years of diligent study, so we should show some marks of being perfected after several years in the Lord's recovery. But many have been with us for years, but they seem not to have been perfected very much. Because of this, certain aspects of the clergy-laity system have crept in among us. We cannot tolerate this. We are not here to have so-called services as in Christianity. What we do in the meetings must be for the perfecting of the saints. If we are faithful to perfect the brothers and sisters, then after three or four years everyone will be perfected to do the same kind of work as was done by the early apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers.

In Acts 8 a persecution rose up against the church, and the believers were forced to scatter. The apostles, however,

remained in Jerusalem. The disciples who were scattered spontaneously did the work of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Suppose today's Christians were scattered because of persecution. What would these scattered ones be able to do? We need to ask this question of ourselves. What would we be able to do if we were scattered? My hope is that many would be able to function as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. Finding themselves in an unfamiliar place, some would become burdened for the Lord's interests there. Firstly, they would preach the gospel. Then they would care for those who are saved by shepherding them and teaching them. We all need to be perfected in order to do this work.

IN THE CHURCH AND UNDER THE MINISTRY

The practice of today's Christianity is not the Lord's way according to the New Testament. In Christianity seminaries are established to train people to serve the Lord. But those educated in the seminaries are not perfected according to God's New Testament economy. The genuine perfection of the saints must be in the church and under the ministry. Today the Lord's ministry is criticized, slandered, and scorned. If the eyes of the believers are opened, they will see what the ministry is and where it is today. In the church the ministry is needed to perfect the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.

I am very concerned that little has actually been accomplished among us to perfect the saints unto the work of ministry. How much we have been under the influence of degraded Christianity! Many Christians today care mainly for the preaching of the gospel and somewhat for the teaching of the Bible. We all need to see clearly that today the Lord is doing one work--to perfect all the saints until we all arrive. We have seen that in Ephesians 4 Paul did not place himself in a separate category. Rather, he included himself with all the saints. We all, including Paul,

need to hold the truth and grow up into Christ until we arrive at a full-grown man.

In these days I bear a very heavy burden concerning the perfecting of the saints. This burden cannot be discharged until I see that all the saints are able to do the same kind of work as was done by the early apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. I do not care merely to be a preacher or a teacher of the Bible. I desire to be perfected and to perfect others unto the building up of the Body of Christ.

LIFE AND FUNCTION

In order to be perfected, we must pay attention to life and to function. The way to be perfected is to grow in life and to become skillful in function. The Greek word rendered "perfecting" here also means completing, equipping, furnishing. To perfect a saint is to complete him, to equip him, and to furnish him. Only by growing in life can we be completed. Not until we become mature will we be completed. For example, a child of five is not a full-grown person. As long as, spiritually speaking, we remain under-age, we shall not be complete. Mothers perfect their children by feeding them. Furthermore, parents equip their children and furnish them by training them to behave and to speak in a certain way. Thus, children are perfected by feeding and by training. The same is true with respect to perfecting the saints according to God's economy. The saints need to be fed and they need to be trained so that they may function with the proper skill.

Once when I was visiting a certain place which was regarded as being rather spiritual, I was asked why we conduct trainings in the Lord's recovery. I replied that as human beings we need to grow and we need also to learn. If we do not grow, we shall not have the stature required to do certain things. If we do not learn, we shall be "barbarians." For example, if a child is not taught to eat properly with the necessary utensils, he will be "wild" and unruly at the table. Do not think that as long as a person is

spiritual in life, he requires no training. No, in spiritual things, as in physical things, there is the need of training. In spiritual things we need the maturity, the growth in life, and we also need the skill. The maturity comes from growth, and the skill comes from training. Therefore, in order to perfect the saints, we need to feed them with spiritual food that they may grow, and we also need to train them to develop certain skills.

THE NEED FOR THOROUGH TRAINING

To the present moment, I have not yet discharged my burden in the matter of training. We need to be trained for the practice of the church life. This means that the training should enrich and uplift our practice of the church life. Although the help given to the saints thus far is far from adequate, we cannot deny the fact that since coming into the Lord's recovery many saints have undergone some training. This is evident as we listen to them testify or pray in the meetings. However, the need remains for more thorough and complete training. My burden is that after a period of time, perhaps after three or four years, virtually all the saints in the Lord's recovery in this country will have been adequately trained.

To be trained is to have the rich supply of Christ ministered to us that we may grow, and it is to be equipped that we may be skillful in speaking, in contacting new ones, in shepherding, and in preaching and teaching. Do not say that you cannot speak because you are not a talented speaker. We all are able to speak for the Lord.

THE LORD'S WAY

Once the saints have been perfected, then wherever they go, they will be apostles, the ones sent to that place. They will also be prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. To perfect the saints to be such gifts to the Body is the Lord's way. If we do not follow this way, the Lord will not be able to get what He desires. How we thank Him that, in His mercy, He has shown us His way!

We have seen that in 4:13-15 Paul did not exclude himself. Rather, he said, "Until we all arrive...that we may be no longer babes...but holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things...." None of us should think that we have already been perfected. On the contrary, we all need more life supply and more training. If we are willing to grow and to be trained, then we shall not repeat the history of Christianity. If we are faithful to practice what the Lord shows us, the Lord will have a way among us. The Lord's way has never changed. His way is to perfect the saints to do the work of ministry for the building up of the Body of Christ. This is the way for the Lord to gain what He desires as the necessary preparation for His coming back.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-TWO

ALL BUILDING MEMBERS WITHOUT RANK

Throughout the centuries Christians have held the natural concept that the church is merely a social organization. Actually the church is not an organization. As Paul says in his Epistles, the church is the Body of Christ. Our physical body, which is a picture of the mystical Body of Christ, is not an organization, but an organism. As an organism, it is altogether dependent upon life. When the life is gone, the body becomes a corpse, which could possibly be regarded as an organization.

AN ORDER OF FUNCTION, NOT OF RANK

The concept that the church is a social organization has caused a great deal of damage. In social organizations there is the need for certain members to be on the top, to be of the highest rank. In religion this may take the form of hierarchy. But there is no hierarchy in our physical body. No doubt, certain members are above others, but this is a matter of functional order, not of rank. For example, for the purpose of function, the nose is higher than the mouth. It would be absurd to say that the nose has a higher rank than the mouth has. In like manner, our fingers are below both our arms and shoulders. But this does not mean that the fingers have a lower rank. This is entirely a matter of order according to function. How could the fingers function if they were attached to the shoulders? Therefore, in the physical body, a picture of the living organism of the Body of Christ, there is no rank nor hierarchal order, but only order according to function.

In the past I have met some women who did not agree with Paul's word in Ephesians 5 about wives submitting to

their husbands. Likewise, they could not accept Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 11 about the man being the head of the woman. Under the influence of the modern concept of female emancipation, they questioned why the woman had to be under the man. I answered them by pointing to the arrangement of the members in our physical body. I tried to show them that this arrangement is not a matter of rank, but a matter of function. For example, the nose is in the right place for its particular function. The same is true of all the members of the body. However, the fact that the nose is higher than the mouth in functional order does not mean that it is of a higher rank than the mouth. To consider the matter of rank with respect to the Body of Christ is to be under the influence of the fallen human concept. Many troubles and problems have been caused by this very concept.

As we consider the apostles, prophets, and elders spoken of in the New Testament, we need to drop the natural concept. If we hold to our natural concept, we shall automatically think that the apostles, prophets, and elders have a higher rank. The concept of rank is altogether a natural concept, a concept foreign to the Scriptures. The apostles, prophets, and elders carry out certain functions, but fulfilling these functions does not place them on a level above the other saints. In the Body there are many members, and these members have different functions. Although there is a difference of function, there is no difference of rank. In an organism there is no consciousness of rank. If our shoulders could speak, they would say that they have never thought of having any rank in our body; they would say that they have never regarded themselves as higher than the other members.

Some of the elders have been rather proud of their position and have expected the saints to give place to them. Other brothers have been ambitious to become elders. There is no room for such ambition in the church life. If we know the Bible, we shall realize that an elder is a slave. The thought of rank must be purged away. The apostles

and elders are not high officials. On the contrary, they are those who serve Christ to the churches and to the saints.

THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS UNTO THE WORK OF MINISTRY

My burden in this message is to point out that all the saints should be building members. Ephesians 4:11 says, "And He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers." These gifted ones are not high officials with a special rank. Rather, they are given for the perfecting of the saints (v. 12). The saints need to be perfected, equipped, furnished, unto the work of ministry. This work of ministry is the building up of the Body of Christ. Because so many saints are not yet doing the work of ministry, they need the gifted ones mentioned in verse 11 to perfect them, to equip them, that they may be qualified to carry out the work of ministry for the building up of the Body of Christ. The perfecting or equipping is related both to growth in life and to training in certain skills.

The light on these verses has never been as bright and clear as it is today. We have seen that the work of ministry is simply the building up of the Body of Christ. This work should be carried out not only by the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers, but by all the members. Hence, all the saints are building members. We are not only members who have been built up, but we are also members who build up the Body. Firstly, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers perfect the saints. This means that they build up the saints. Then the perfected saints become the building members. In these days the saints are being perfected. But after another period of time I expect that the saints who are being perfected now will also become the building ones.

UNTIL WE ALL ARRIVE

Verse 13 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." Notice that in this verse Paul says "we," not "you." When Paul wrote this verse, he himself was already mature. However, he was waiting for the immature ones to grow up. In other words, he was waiting until we all arrive. Paul did not want to arrive at the destination ahead of the younger ones. Rather, he was waiting until we all arrive at three things: at the oneness of the faith, at a full-grown man, and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. In this verse there are three phrases beginning with the word *at*. The fact that there is no conjunction indicates that the second is in apposition to the first and that the third is in apposition to the second. Thus, the three phrases actually refer to one thing.

Paul expected all the saints to come up to his standard and to be the same as he was. Paul was a builder, and we all should be builders also. Paul was not some great official. At most, he was simply a member of the Body. The difference between him and most of us is that Paul was a building member, whereas most of us are just builded members. Nevertheless, the day is coming, perhaps after a few years, when we all shall be building members. Then we shall all arrive at the destination together.

GROWTH AND TRAINING

Verse 14 continues, "That we may be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error." A babe cannot be a building one. He first needs to become a builded one. For this, a spiritual babe needs to grow. If we would be a builded member and especially a building member, we must grow. Furthermore, we need to develop certain skills. In the foregoing message we pointed out that the way to perfect the saints is to feed them so that they may grow and to train them so that they may learn certain skills. The learning of skills is related to our growth in life. The more mature we are, the more we are able to be trained. For example, an older child is able to

learn more skills in mathematics than a younger child. It is the growth in life that gives us the capacity to learn certain skills.

Not many Christians today pay attention to the growth in life. Furthermore, very few concentrate on the matter of training. Therefore, among most Christians today there is no growth and there is no training. This is the reason that one can attend so-called church services for many years and still remain a babe. Such a one can never do what the apostles and prophets were able to do, because he has been neither fed nor trained.

The situation in the Lord's recovery must be altogether different from this. We need to rise up and declare that we want to grow in life and that we want to develop the necessary skills to become building members. I hope that after a few years all the saints will become building members with the growth in life and with the skills. This is what it means to be perfected, completed, equipped, and furnished.

OUR POTENTIAL REALIZED BY GROWTH

Verse 15 says, "But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, Who is the Head, Christ." This verse clearly speaks of growth. Oh, how we need to grow! It is good to be encouraged by the word that we all can do the same kind of work as was done by the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. We all have the potential for this, but this potential can be realized only by growth. Without growth, the potential does not mean anything. If we would grow, we need to get into the Word, feed on the Word, and exercise our spirit to pray and to receive the Lord each day. By feeding on the Word and by receiving the Lord, we shall receive the nourishment required for the growth in life.

THE OPERATION IN THE MEASURE OF EACH PART

The following verse, verse 16, reveals that the Body comes out of the Head: "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." This verse indicates that the Body causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. Here "every joint of the supply" refers to the specially gifted persons, such as those mentioned in verse 11. But "each one part" denotes the members of the Body. There is an operation in the measure of every member. This indicates that every member is a building member. The building members in this verse are those who have grown in life and who have developed the skills in function.

THE NEED FOR TRAINING

I am extremely burdened that we all grow in life and that we all receive training in order to function. We are here to be absolute with the Lord. The church meetings are not a time for relaxation or entertainment. The Lord needs a people who are willing to grow, to be trained, and to be disciplined. Thus, every church should set aside one evening a week for training. If we are faithful to the Lord in this matter of training, after a few years all the saints will be useful in His hand. May we be willing to say, "Lord, we want to be trained. We want to know how to grow in life in a practical way, and we want to develop all the necessary skills."

We need training in how to speak, how to preach the gospel, and how to teach and shepherd others. Every proper Christian who is up to the Lord's standard should be one who is sent out, who speaks for God, who preaches the gospel, and who takes care of others. We should not be those who are merely saved and who are just waiting for heaven. Such believers are actually not very different from the people in the world. In contrast, we must be those who are continually sent out to speak for the Lord. We must preach the gospel and shepherd those who are saved through our gospel preaching. If we are like this, we shall

be different both from the worldly people and from most Christians. We shall be a heavenly people carrying out a heavenly commission.

Do not wait for others to be raised up to be the Lord's servants or to do the work of ministry. We all must function as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. We all must be and we all can be the building members. We do not care to have some vain title or empty position. We would like to be today's apostles and prophets in a practical way. We need to be genuine preachers of the high and rich gospel and also those who truly know how to shepherd the new ones. May we all go to the Lord in a desperate way and pray that He train us to be such members of His Body. I cannot be at rest until I see that all the saints in the Lord's recovery are being trained in such a way. Our burden is to perfect the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.

MAKING A DEFINITE DECISION

I believe that the Lord has made this vision clear to us all. Now the crucial matter is how the saints will respond. I believe that all those among us are sincere and faithful to the Lord. The only thing remaining is that we make a definite decision before Him, even a vow, that we do not want to be left behind. Rather, we want to be those who answer the Lord's call, satisfy His desire, and make Him happy. If we are not for this, then our life on earth is meaningless.

Perhaps we can do little to help those Christians in today's religion, but by the Lord's mercy and grace we ourselves can be helped to become building members in reality and in practicality. We believe that even the weakest one among us can become a building member. On the one hand, the leading ones must endeavor to perfect the saints. On the other hand, the saints must make a definite decision with the Lord regarding their willingness to be trained to be building members. If we are faithful on

both sides, then God will do superabundantly above all we ask or think for the sake of His economy concerning Christ and the church.

CHRIST, THE UNIQUE LEADER

Among the building members in the Body of Christ there should be no rank. In Matthew 23:10 the Lord Jesus said, "Neither be called leaders, because One is your Leader, the Christ." We all are brothers in the Lord, and there should be no leader among us. The Lord's clear word is that none of us should be called the leader, for He Himself is our unique Leader.

HELPS AND GOVERNMENTS

It is quite significant that in 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul places "helps" before "governments." The helps refer to the service of the deacons, whereas governments denote the function of the elders. In this verse Paul purposely places the service of the deacons ahead of the function of the elders. He may have done this to impress the Corinthians with the fact that in the church there should be no concept of rank. We should not regard the governing of the elders as higher than the service of the deacons.

STEWARDS OF THE GRACE OF GOD

We have seen that in Ephesians 3 Paul said that he had been given the stewardship of the grace of God. He mentioned this with the intention of helping the saints to realize that they all are to be stewards of God's grace. The same thought is found in 1 Peter 4:10: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Thus, all the saints, not just the apostles, should be stewards. The elders should not place themselves in a special category, but they should consider themselves stewards, just as all the saints are stewards.

NOT LORDING IT OVER THE CHURCH, BUT SETTING AN EXAMPLE

In 1 Peter 5:3 Peter encouraged the elders not to lord it over the church as if the church were their private possession. The church is the Body of Christ; it is not the personal property of the elders. The elders, therefore, should not regard the church as their own possession. However, in certain places I have known elders who had such an attitude. They kept the church in their "pocket" as their possession and conducted themselves as if they were the "boss." Such an attitude is utterly wrong. The elders must remember that they are stewards among a company of stewards.

As stewards, the elders should set an example for the saints to follow. In reading the Word, in prayer, in offering themselves to the Lord, in the growth in life, in the practical service of the church, and in all other things as well, they should be examples. The elders are not lords or kings; they are slaves, servants. They are also stewards of the grace of God. As such stewards, they should be models for the saints in shepherding, in teaching, and in preaching. If we are all clear about this, then there will be no problem among us as far as leadership is concerned.

MUTUAL SUBMISSION

Some have asked me whether or not they should submit themselves to the elders in their church. Certainly the saints should be submissive to the elders. In 1 Peter 5:5 Peter says, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder." However, in the very same verse Peter goes on to say, "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility." This indicates that not only should the younger ones submit to the older ones, but that the older ones should also submit to the younger ones. Both the older ones and the younger ones need to be clothed with humility. For the younger to submit to the elder is somewhat difficult, but for the elder to submit to the

younger is even more difficult. Nevertheless, in the church life there should be such a mutual submission.

A QUESTION ABOUT AUTHORITY

Others have asked me if the elders have authority. This question springs from the natural concept concerning rank. If we were not under the influence of the natural concept, we would not raise this question. I repeat, in the church there is no such thing as rank. Rather, we all are stewards of the grace of God, and we submit ourselves one to another. If the Lord has placed you in the eldership, you should not be proud. Do not regard yourselves as higher than others, and do not lord it over the church as if the church were your possession. On the contrary, as a leading one, set an example for the saints to follow. When the saints see such examples established for them by the leading ones, they may say, "Lord, thank You for these good examples. We desire to follow them in praying, in reading the Word, in preaching and teaching, and in shepherding the saints." By the setting of the example and the following of the example, we all shall eventually serve together as stewards of the manifold grace of God. This is the proper church life, where there is no organization, no rank, no hierarchy, and no clergy-laity.

In order for the church to go on in a proper way, there is the need for some brothers to take care of the administrative affairs. But this does not make them high officials with all the other saints as their subordinates. This natural concept must be dropped. There is no place for it in the kingdom of God. In the church life, which is the kingdom of God in a practical way today, we have one King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we all are His subjects.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-THREE

ARRIVING AT THREE THINGS

Ephesians 4:13 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." This verse is the direct continuation of verses 11 and 12, which say that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers have been given for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry. We have pointed out that the gifted ones in verse 11 perfect the saints to do the same things that they themselves do. We all can be sent out and we all can speak for the Lord as prophets, preach the gospel as evangelists, and shepherd others and teach them as shepherds and teachers. If we love the Lord, we shall speak for Him as His witnesses. Furthermore, we need to preach the gospel, whether in season or out of season. This is not only the task of the leading evangelists, but of all the saints. Furthermore, we daily need to shepherd others and to teach them. The leading ones set the pattern for these functions, and we follow their example. Hence, all the saints can do the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers.

The saints need to be perfected unto the work of ministry. In the New Testament there is a unique ministry: the dispensing of Christ into others for the building up of the Body. In order to carry on the work of ministry, the saints need to be perfected.

The building up of the Body of Christ is not accomplished directly by the leading ones. The direct work of building is carried out by the saints who have been perfected. How different this is from the situation in

today's Christianity! The proper way is for the leading ones to set up a pattern and then train the saints to do what they do. After the saints have been perfected, the leading ones should step aside and allow the saints to do the direct work of building. Every leading one must learn when and how to step aside. Firstly, the leading ones must learn how to perfect others. After this work of perfecting has been accomplished, the leading ones must leave the direct work of building in the hands of all the members of the Body.

In verse 13 Paul did not say, "until *you* all arrive"; he said, "until *we* all arrive." This indicates that Paul included himself with all the saints. It is not good for a few to arrive at the destination and to leave so many others behind. On the contrary, we all should arrive together. Arriving at the three things spoken of in verse 13 is not a matter of a race; it is a matter of all arriving at the destination at the same time.

I. ARRIVING AT THE ONENESS

A. Of the Faith

The Greek word rendered arrive in verse 13 may also be rendered attain to. This indicates that a process is required for us to attain to or arrive at the practical oneness.

The oneness of the Spirit in verse 3 is the oneness of the divine life in reality, whereas the oneness in verse 13 is the oneness of our living in practicality. We already have the oneness of the divine life in reality. We only need to keep it. But we need to go on until we arrive at the oneness of our living in practicality. This aspect of oneness is of two things: the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. The faith does not refer to the act of our believing, but refers to what we believe in, such as the divine Person of Christ and His redemptive work for our salvation. The faith is used in this sense in Jude 3, 2 Timothy 4:7, and 1 Timothy 6:21.

B. The Full Knowledge of the Son of God

The full knowledge of the Son of God is the realization of the revelation concerning the Son of God for our experience. The Son of God refers to the Lord's Person as life to us, whereas Christ refers to His commission to minister life to us that we, as members of His Body, may have gifts for function. The more we grow in life, the more we shall cleave to the faith and to the realization of Christ and the more we shall drop all the concepts concerning minor doctrines which cause divisions. Then we shall arrive at or attain to the practical oneness; that is to say, we shall arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Many Christians do not know the difference between the oneness of the Spirit and the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. The first is the oneness of reality, and the second is the oneness of practicality. Because the Spirit is the reality of our oneness, the oneness of the Spirit is the oneness of reality. Oneness is nothing less than the Spirit Himself. If there were no Spirit, then there would be no oneness. Although we have the oneness in reality, there is still the need for the oneness of practicality. This means that the oneness of reality must be practiced; that is, it must become the oneness in practice. Hence, in verse 13 Paul speaks of the oneness of practicality.

Between the oneness of reality and the oneness of practicality there is a distance. For this reason, there is the need to "arrive at" the oneness of practicality. The oneness of the Spirit is the beginning, whereas the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God is the destination. This indicates that we must journey from the oneness of the Spirit to the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. In other words, we must travel from the oneness of reality until we arrive at the oneness of practicality.

As believers, we already have the oneness of reality.

But we need to keep it. The best way to keep the oneness of reality is to go on, to proceed, toward the oneness of practicality.

We have pointed out that the faith in verse 13 does not refer to our act of believing, but refers to the object in which we believe. Every believer in Christ accepts this faith. When we first believed in the Lord Jesus, we were very simple. All we had was the faith. But afterward we became quite complicated by taking in various doctrines, teachings, and concepts, nearly all of which are divisive.

Several young men may be saved at the same time, through the preaching of the same evangelist. On the day they are saved, they all accept the faith. Afterward, however, they take in different doctrinal concepts. These concepts cause them to be divided from one another. In order for these believers to arrive at the oneness of the faith, they need to be perfected through the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. This work of perfecting will cause them to care for the oneness of the Spirit and to lay aside the divisive doctrines. As they arrive at the oneness of the faith, they no longer care for the various divisive doctrines, but care only for the unique faith concerning Christ and His redemptive work. By the perfecting work they also arrive experientially at the full knowledge of the Son of God. They do not pay attention to divisive doctrines or practices, but care only for Christ as the Son of God. They care for the full knowledge of the Son of God as life experientially. They desire more and more to experience Christ in their daily life. By arriving at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, these believers have not only the oneness of reality, but also the oneness of practicality. Now they are able to come together without division and to enjoy oneness in a practical way.

The oneness in the Lord's recovery is such a practical oneness. Our oneness is the oneness of our unique faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God in our daily experience of Him as our life. I believe that most of us in

the Lord's recovery have arrived at the oneness of practicality. Therefore, we are one both in reality and in practicality.

Today many Christians who love the Lord, including a good number of pastors and ministers, have not seen the oneness of practicality. However, they do have the oneness of reality, which is the oneness of the Spirit. Many of these Christians say that as long as we are genuine believers in Christ and have the indwelling of the Spirit, we all can be one. In a sense, this is true. But this oneness is not yet the oneness of practicality. It is real, but it is not practical. Therefore, such Christians need to journey the distance between the oneness of reality and the oneness of practicality. I praise the Lord that so many of us have traveled from the beginning, the oneness of the Spirit, to the destination, the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. We have made the journey from the oneness of reality to the oneness of practicality.

II. ARRIVING AT A FULL-GROWN MAN

Verse 13 also says that we need to arrive at a full-grown man. A full-grown man is a mature man. Through regeneration the saints have become babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3:1). Now the saints need to grow into maturity (1 Cor. 3:6, Gk.; Heb. 6:1). Such maturity in life is needed for the practical oneness.

If we are still divided by doctrinal differences, it is an indication that we are childish. Such divisive doctrines are "toys." During the early stages of our Christian life, we may be fond of playing with such "toys." The more childish the saints are, the more "toys" they have. But as children grow up, they gradually lay aside their toys. When people become fully matured, they have no toys at all. In the first few years of my Christian life I dearly loved my doctrinal "toys." Because these "toys" meant so much to me, it took me a rather long time to drop them. But today I have no "toys." I have only Christ and the church.

In 1 Corinthians 13:11 Paul said, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." Here Paul indicates that certain things may be "toys." As the believers grow, they will drop these "toys." Eventually, by being perfected, they will all arrive at a full-grown man.

III. ARRIVING AT THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

According to verse 13, we also are to arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Christ is the Body of Christ (1:23), which has a stature with a measure. To arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is also a necessity for the practical oneness. Hence, to go from the oneness of reality to the oneness of practicality we need to press onward until we arrive at the three things mentioned in this verse.

The fullness of Christ is simply the expression of Christ. As Christ's fullness, the Body is Christ's expression. Christ's fullness, the Body, has a stature, and with this stature there is a certain measure. Hence, verse 13 speaks of the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

To arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is to arrive at the full building up of the Body of Christ. It is to arrive at the full completion of the building up of the Body.

We have seen that we need to arrive at the practical oneness, at the full growth, and at the complete building up of the Body. If we would arrive at these three things, we need to do the work of ministry. As verse 12 indicates, the work of ministry is equal to building up the Body of Christ. Among us there is just one ministry. Although thousands of us may participate in the work of ministry, the ministry itself is unique. This ministry is strictly for the building up of the Body of Christ. No matter who we may be, leaders or followers, we all are working to carry out the ministry in the New Testament economy to build up the Body of

Christ. We are not here to go on alone, but to go on with others, even to bring others on. As we ourselves go on, we need to bring others on. We take others on by speaking for Christ, by teaching, and by shepherding.

Once again I wish to point out the need in all the churches for some kind of practical training. We need to be trained in the matters of teaching, shepherding, and preaching the gospel. Through this training the saints will learn how to function as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. As we function in all these ways, we have one goal: the building up of the Body of Christ. As we participate in the work of ministry for the building up of the Body, we arrive at the practical oneness, at full growth, and at the completion of the building up of the Body of Christ.

If our only goal is the building up of the Body, we shall spontaneously be regulated. As we carry on a particular work, it will be with the consciousness that this work is for the building up of the Body. Formerly, we may have preached the gospel without realizing that gospel preaching must be for the building up of the Body. Now we see that whatever we may do as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers must be for the unique goal of building up Christ's Body. If we have seen the goal, then we shall be burdened to help others arrive with us at the practical oneness, at the full growth, and at the full building up of the Body. If we are clear about this, then the Lord will have a way to come back, for He will have a way to obtain the Bride He desires.

The Lord's way to do this is found in three crucial verses--in Ephesians 4:11-13. These verses reveal that all those who have been captured by the Lord have been presented to the Body as gifts for the perfecting of the saints, so that the work of ministry may be carried out and that the building up of the Body of Christ may be accomplished. Then we shall all arrive together at our destination--at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, and at

the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This is our goal, and we must diligently press toward it until we all reach it together.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-FOUR

BABYISHNESS AND THE WINDS OF TEACHING

Ephesians 4:13 says that we need to arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. It is difficult to define these items adequately because they are all related to life and life is very mysterious. The real oneness in practicality is a matter of life. Likewise, the full-grown man and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ are matters of life. Only after our experience of life has reached a certain degree can we understand such a verse as 4:13.

In 4:13 Paul begins with the oneness of the faith. From my limited experience, I can say that the faith here refers to Christ with His redemptive work. Hence, the object of our Christian faith is the living Christ with His work.

Verse 13 also speaks of the full knowledge of the Son of God. Apparently there is little relationship between the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. According to our experience, however, the two are actually one, for both refer to Christ. The full knowledge of the Son of God is a matter of knowing Christ as life and everything to us. In the New Testament the Lord is called the Son of God in relation to life, but in relation to His commission He is called Christ. When Peter received the revelation regarding Christ, he said that the Lord Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16). Furthermore, in the Gospel of John we are told that we need to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31). This means that we believe in the Lord Jesus for life and for His commission. To know the Lord's commission is rather easy, but to know Him as our life is quite difficult. This comes not by mere objective

knowledge,

but by experience. When we experience Christ as our life, we know Him as the Son of God. Then we have the experiential and practical oneness, that is, the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God.

God desires that Christ be everything to us. Christ is the object of our faith, and He is also our life. If we see this, we shall begin to lay aside whatever distracts us from Christ; we shall drop everything other than Christ Himself. How much we drop depends on our experience of Christ. The more we experience Christ as life, the more things we shall lay aside. In this way we arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God.

Today, because we are still short of the experience of life, we do not have the full realization of this practical oneness. But we are growing. We cannot say that we have arrived at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, or at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Nevertheless, we thank the Lord that, in His recovery, we are on the way toward this goal.

I. BABES IN CHRIST

Verse 14 says, "That we may be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error." This verse is the continuation of verse 13. The word "that," which may also be rendered "in order that," indicates that the result of arriving at the three things in verse 13 is that we are no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching. Therefore, arriving at the three things in verse 13 has a purpose, and this purpose is that we be no longer babes.

A. Those Lacking Maturity in Life

Babes are those believers who are young in Christ, who lack maturity in life (1 Cor. 3:1; 13:11; Heb. 5:13). In the first stage of our spiritual life, we Christians are all babes.

B. Tossed by Waves and Carried About by Winds

Verse 14 indicates that the babes are tossed by waves. The Christian life is like a journey on the sea, where there are many storms. As Christians, we should not expect our journey to be calm, with no waves or winds. The waves and the storms come not only upon individual believers, but even upon the church. There are times when the church experiences waves and is in the midst of storms. Paul's concept here is not that we can avoid the waves and winds, but that we can be kept from being tossed by waves and carried about by winds.

Difficulties and hardships are different from waves and storms. Hardships are like rocks, and difficulties are like heavy weights that we must bear. Waves, on the contrary, often come in a pleasant, appealing way and even with a sweet, loving appearance. Most of those who are tossed by waves are not tossed against their will, but are tossed willingly by waves that seem most pleasant and enjoyable to them. As they are being tossed by the waves, they have no sense of danger. Rather, they may have a sense of excitement or enjoyment. Because waves may have such a pleasant appearance, they are quite different from hardships or difficulties. Actually, few Christians are tossed by difficulties, but many are tossed by waves and carried away by winds.

Perhaps you are wondering what the waves and the winds are. They are the various teachings, doctrines, concepts, and opinions. As the church is journeying on the sea, Satan will seek an opportunity to send in some appealing teachings, concepts, and opinions to entice the believers. His purpose in doing so is to carry them away from Christ and the church.

At the time of Paul, certain Judaizers taught the Old Testament in an enticing manner. Their teaching was related to certain practices that had been ordained by God in the Old Testament. It was difficult for the babes in Christ to discern the subtleties of these appealing

teachings. The principle is the same today, but now there are even more distracting teachings, concepts, and opinions. All these have a pleasant and positive appearance. Otherwise, no one could be cheated by them. Thus, many today are being tossed by waves and carried about by winds of teaching.

A babe can easily be deceived or led astray. For example, children can be led away from home by someone who offers them candy or gum. Their love for candy causes them to forget everything else. Because many Christians are still babyish, desiring sugar-coated teachings, they are easily deceived.

The only way to escape from the waves and the winds is to grow in life. As you are growing, you need to hide under the covering of your parents in the Lord. Do not care for spiritual candies, but care for the way your parents in Christ are taking. In this way you will be preserved and safeguarded.

In the church life the young ones should hide under the shelter provided by the older ones. This covering is the best hiding place. On your own do not take in any concept, no matter how sweet it may seem. Whenever you are tempted in this way, you should say, "I don't care for these sweet things. I care for Christ, for the church, and for the shelter of the older ones." If you take in the candy, you will discover that there is poison under its sugar coating.

By reading verse 14 in its context we see that the most reliable test to expose any deceptive teaching is Christ and the church. In his subtlety, the enemy, Satan, uses waves and winds to distract the saints from Christ and the church. At times, Satan will even use the Bible to do this. This indicates that even scriptural teachings may be used by Satan to carry us away from God's purpose. Satan can use almost anything to distract us from Christ and the church. He used even the words of Scripture to tempt the Lord Jesus in the wilderness. There is no better safeguard than Christ with the church. Do not accept any teaching that cannot pass the test of Christ and the church.

Satan may even come to you with a teaching under the

pretense that this teaching will help you to enjoy the church life more. However, when you take in such a teaching, you find that your appetite for the church life is actually nullified. Before you accepted that teaching, you were absolute for the church and for the church testimony; you desired to attend the meetings of the church and had a high regard for the ground of the church. But the subtle satanic teaching kills your desire for the meetings, dilutes your absoluteness for the church life, and causes you to disregard the church ground. As this teaching does its damaging work within your being, no longer do you care for the genuine testimony of the church; yet all the while you are convinced that, through the concept you have absorbed, you are on the way to a better church life. This is the most subtle doctrine of all! This subtle wind carries you away from the church life.

This kind of subtle teaching also causes you to lose your appetite for Christ. Through its influence, you are no longer as hungry and thirsty for Christ as you once were. You come to feel that it is religious or legal to love the Lord in an absolute way. All this is evidence that the poisonous essence of this satanic teaching has entered into your being and corrupted it, causing your spiritual senses to become dull. This is the most subtle way for a believer to be carried away from Christ and the genuine church life.

The only way to grow, to be protected, and to be covered is to stay in the proper church life. Do not place so much confidence in your personal sense about any situation. Certain teachings may cause you to feel that the church life is not very good or that it is even unnecessary. Through the years I have learned that we must always be on guard against any thought that the church is poor, wrong, or unnecessary. Such a thought is a clear sign that a wind of teaching is approaching. I do not claim that the church today is perfect. However, I do say that any negative thought about the condition of the church is an indication of the working of a subtle teaching. Such a teaching does not first appear to be threatening. It is usually concealed beneath a pleasant appearance. The color may at first be

very appealing, but after this teaching enters into you, its color becomes darker as time goes by. This is a sign that this teaching is exerting a poisonous influence within you.

I say again that the only way to escape the waves and the winds is to grow. However, we cannot grow up overnight like a mushroom. Rather, we grow gradually little by little and day by day. As we are slowly growing in the Lord, we need to remain under the protective covering of the church. Trust the church, not your individual, subjective feeling. Look to the Lord that He will cause you to place your trust in Him and in the church. This is necessary especially when, according to your feeling, the church is not so good. At the very time you feel the condition of the church is not positive, you should place your trust in the church all the more.

II. WINDS OF TEACHING

A. A Teaching That Differs from God's Economy

In verse 14 Paul does not speak of the wind of heresy, but he speaks of the wind of teaching. Any teaching, even a scriptural one, that distracts believers from Christ and the church is a wind that carries them away from God's central purpose. First Timothy 1:3 and 4 reveal that some in Paul's time were teaching differently. This does not mean that they were teaching heresy; it means that they were teaching something different from God's New Testament economy. Their teaching was not the teaching of the New Testament ministry. In the New Testament there is one ministry. This ministry is the dispensing of the Triune God into the believers for the building up of the churches. We must beware of any teaching or supposed ministry that teaches something different from God's economy, that is, that teaches something other than God's dispensation for the building up of the churches.

As a whole, Christians today have been carried away by various winds of teaching. Every denomination or

independent group is under the influence of some kind of doctrinal wind. What Christians today are not being tossed by waves or carried about by winds? We need to ask ourselves whether we are still under the influence of such waves and winds. I can strongly proclaim that I am not tossed by any waves or carried about by any winds, because I care only for Christ and the church. Some have asked me about pray-reading. I have answered that I am not for pray-reading, but that I am for Christ and the church. As a result, I do not make myself different from other Christians. However many Christians have made themselves different from me.

For example, some strongly disagree with immersion and advocate sprinkling. I can say to such a one, "Brother, I don't care for sprinkling, but I certainly care for you. I simply receive you as my brother in the Lord." By receiving him in this way, I am the same as he. But by insisting on sprinkling, he makes himself different from me. Therefore, he, not I, must bear the responsibility for any difference between us.

Before you came into the Lord's recovery, you were probably concerned about certain things besides Christ and the church. You may have cared for a particular doctrine, practice, or work. But in the church life in the Lord's recovery, we care only for Christ and the church. It is crucial that we have the clear vision that the New Testament economy is for nothing other than the dispensing of the Triune God into people for the building up of the Body of Christ. This is our goal and our testimony. It is also God's recovery. If we have this goal always before us, we shall not receive any teaching, concept, or opinion that distracts us from the central lane of God's economy.

B. In the Sleight of Men

In verse 14 Paul speaks of the "sleight of men." The Greek word for sleight signifies the cheating of dice players. The teachings that become winds, carrying believers away from the central lane of Christ and the church, are a deception instigated by Satan in his subtlety

and utilizing the sleight of men, in order to frustrate God's eternal purpose to build up the Body of Christ. No matter how good a teaching may appear to be, if it distracts us from Christ and the church, it is something of the sleight of men. The sleight of men is even worse than deceit, for not only is it false, but it also involves an evil plot. Even if a doctrine is scriptural, it may be utilized in such a wicked plot.

C. In Craftiness

In this verse Paul also mentions craftiness. This word indicates that a certain evil skill is involved. Hence, the sleight of men involves both the formulation of a plot and the use of skill to deceive.

D. With a View to a System of Error

Finally, Paul says, "with a view to a system of error." These teachings that divide are organized and systematized by Satan to cause serious error and thus damage the practical oneness of the Body life. The plot is apparently of man, but the system is of Satan. We have seen that God's economy is to dispense the Triune God into us for the building up of the Body of Christ. Satan hates this. Therefore, he uses teachings, concepts, doctrines, and opinions in craftiness as part of an evil plot to carry people away and eventually to lead them into a system of error. How devilish! May the Lord expose the subtlety of the enemy so that we may detect the system of error related to the deceitful teachings that are designed to distract the saints from Christ and the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-FIVE

THE GROWTH OF THE MEMBERS FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY

In this message we come to 4:15 and 16. Verse 15 says, "But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, Who is the Head, Christ." The fact that Paul begins this verse with the word "but" indicates that the truth in verse 15 is in contrast to the sleight of men, the craftiness, and the system of error in verse 14. Holding to truth in love is in contrast to the sleight of men and error in verse 14. To be carried away by the winds of teaching in the sleight of men unto a system of error is not holding to truth.

I. HOLDING TO TRUTH IN LOVE

There is some disagreement among translators concerning the rendering of the Greek word for "holding to." Some prefer the translation "speaking." Those who advocate this translation regard truth in verse 15 as that which is opposed to a lie. Hence, to them speaking the truth is in contrast to telling lies. I do not say that this understanding is wrong. However, if we consider this verse in its context, we shall see that in its spiritual meaning a great deal more is involved here than merely speaking truth instead of lies.

A. Truth

Truth here means things that are true. According to the context, it refers to Christ and His Body. Both are true things. We should hold to these true things in love so that we may grow up into Christ.

To hold the truth in love is to handle the truth in love. The word truth in verse 15 denotes that which is real. In this universe the real things, the true things, are Christ and the church. Only by speaking concerning Christ with the church do we actually handle the truth. This means that although we may refrain from telling lies, we still may not be speaking the truth. For example, certain reports in the newspapers may not be lies; however, these reports are not the truth, the reality. On the contrary, they are vanity. Anything apart from Christ with the church is a vanity and a falsehood. If I am a person without Christ, my very being is vanity. A person may be extremely wealthy and possess an abundance of material things, but if he does not have Christ, all those riches and material items are nothing but vanity. The book of Ecclesiastes says that all is vanity (1:2). Apart from Christ with the church, nothing is true, nothing is real. To those who love the Lord Jesus and who are for today's church life, the only reality in the universe is Christ with the church. Day by day, we may talk about many things. But if we do not speak concerning Christ and the church, we are handling vanity; we are not handling the truth.

Instead of being carried about by winds of teaching, we should handle the truth and embrace it. Suppose someone comes to you advocating a particular doctrine, such as the doctrine of foot-washing. Although his particular teaching may be true, even this true teaching can distract you from Christ and the proper church life. Thus, even something such as foot-washing may become a falsehood, a vanity. I know of a brother who became distracted and eventually dissenting over this very thing. This indicates that we may talk about scriptural doctrines but still not be handling the truth.

The entire fourth chapter of Ephesians is a chapter of truth. The first item of truth in this chapter is the oneness in two aspects: the oneness of the Spirit and oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. If you truly desire to handle the truth and to speak the truth, you

must care for the oneness of the Spirit and the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. Furthermore, you must take care of Christ, who is the center of God's New Testament economy. God's economy today is nothing less than Christ with His Body. However, many Christians care neither for the Head nor for the Body. Instead, they are occupied by secondary teachings. To neglect Christ as the Head and the church as the Body and to speak about secondary matters is not handling the truth. This is not the speaking of the truth; it is the speaking of vanity.

Holding to truth in love means to handle, embrace, and speak Christ with the church. Others may teach differently, emphasizing doctrines or opinions that distract people from Christ and the church. However, we should not speak in such a way. Rather, we should speak those things that bring us into contact with Christ and that build us up as the Body of Christ. To speak in this way is to handle the truth.

According to verse 14, the babes are tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by winds of teaching. No doubt these waves and winds refer to various teachings and practices. Although these teachings may be scriptural or fundamental, they do not minister Christ to people. Their effect is to distract people from Christ and the church. Others may be tossed or carried about by such teachings, but we must hold to the truth in love; that is, we must hold to Christ and the church. This is what we speak, and this is our fellowship. It should even be the focal point of our prayer.

B. Love

In verse 15, Paul says that we should hold to truth in love. This is the love of Christ in us, by which we love Christ and the fellow-members of His Body. The love here is not our love, but the love of God with which He first loved us. Now with the very love with which God has loved

us, we love the Lord and one another. It is in such a love that we hold to the truth, that is, to Christ with His Body.

If we speak about things other than Christ and the church, we are not acting in love. We may not only waste time, but also bring in elements that are foreign to the Body. If we truly love others, we shall be exercised to hold the truth and speak concerning Christ and the church. Instead of being influenced by the winds of teaching, we shall hold to Christ and the church in love.

II. GROWING UP

A. Into the Head, Christ

By holding to truth in love we grow up into Christ in all things. To be no longer babes (v. 14) we need to grow up into Christ. This is to have Christ increase in us in all things until we attain to a full-grown man (v. 13). The word Head here in verse 14 indicates that our growth in life with Christ should be the growth of the members in the Body under the Head.

The fact that we grow in Christ by holding to truth in love proves that holding to truth involves more than not telling lies. Do you believe that you can grow in Christ simply by telling the truth instead of lies? This is not what enables us to grow in Christ. There are a good number of unbelievers who are honest and who do not tell lies. Nevertheless, their speaking of the truth does not cause them to grow up in Christ.

To grow up into the Head means that we care only for Christ and the church. We grow by caring only for Christ and the church, that is, by handling truth in love. We do not grow by some kind of honesty or sincerity related to ethical behavior.

In this verse the matter of growth is specifically related to growing up into Christ, the Head, in all things. Verses 13 and 14 both point to the need for growth. If we would be a full-grown man, we need to grow. Likewise, if we would be no longer babes tossed to and fro and carried about, we

also need to grow. But we should grow up into Christ, not up into ourselves or into something else apart from Christ.

Paul clearly says that we are to grow up into the One who is the Head. This indicates that our growth must be in the Body. In order to grow into the Head, we must surely be in the Body. Many Christians are apparently growing spiritually; however, their supposed growth is not in the Body. I have known some Christians who have actually become more dissenting as they have had this kind of growth. It seems that the more they grow, the more critical they become. When they have relatively little growth, they are no problem in the church life. But as they grow, they become troublesome. This is an indication that their growth is not growth into the Head. As long as anyone's growth is not into the Head, it is not growth in the Body.

It is of great importance that Paul does not tell us to grow up into the Savior, into the Master, or into the Lord. He says specifically that we are to grow up into the Head. This can take place only in the Body. If you do not remain in the Body, you may have a certain kind of growth, but it will not be the growth into the Head.

B. In All Things

In verse 15 Paul tells us that we must grow up into the Head in all things. In certain aspects you have grown up into the Head, but in other aspects you probably have not. According to my experience, the most difficult matter in which to grow up into Christ, the Head, is in our talking. Psalm 141:3 says, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." Because it is so hard for us to control our speaking, we should make this our prayer also. Whether you are young or old, a brother or a sister, this is an area in which all of us desperately need to grow up into Christ as the Head.

If we bring to the Lord this matter of growing up into Him in all things, we shall see that there are many small things in which we have not yet grown up into the Head.

How much we still need to grow up into Christ! May this need for growth touch our heart and turn us afresh to the Lord.

III. OUT FROM THE HEAD

Verse 16 says, "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." Our growth in life is to grow into the Head, Christ, but our function in the Body is to function out from Him. Firstly, we grow up into the Head. Then we have something which is out from the Head.

Verse 16 indicates that growth is not for individuals, but for the Body. Any growth that is not for the Body is not genuine. The words "each one part" refer to every member of the Body. Every member of the Body of Christ has its own measure, and this measure works for the growth of the Body. The Body causes the growth of itself through the supplying joints and working parts. Both the joints of the supply and every single part with its measure are needed for the church to build itself up. The growth of the Body is the increase of Christ in the church. This results in the Body building itself up.

A. Every Joint of the Supply

In this verse Paul speaks of "every joint of the supply." This refers to the specially gifted persons, such as those mentioned in verse 11. The article before the Greek word rendered "supply" is emphatic. It indicates that the supply should be a particular supply, the supply of Christ. As the leading ones, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers have *the* supply, the particular supply. Yes, we all can be today's sent ones. Nevertheless, among the saints there are those who have the particular supply. This supply is not common to all.

Once again we see the twofoldness of the truth in the Scriptures. It is correct to say that all the saints can do the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. However, not all have the particular supply spoken of in this verse. In the Body the leading ones are the joints with the particular supply.

B. Causing the Growth of the Body

If we read verse 16 carefully, we shall see that it says that all the Body causes the growth of the Body. This means that the Body grows by the Body itself. The Body makes the growth of the Body. It is not wrong for churches to invite certain ones to come to minister the Word to them. However, a local church is not built up in this way. A local church must grow by the local church itself. For example, it is the church in Anaheim that makes the growth of the church in Anaheim. Even a very small church must grow by itself. If you cannot cause the church in your locality to grow, then you should not be there as the church. Do not expect that visits from those brothers who share in the ministry of the Word will cause the growth of the church in your locality.

Verse 16 speaks of the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. This indicates that a local church must build itself up in love through every joint of the supply and according to the operation of the measure of each one part. Those with the particular supply are not only in the Body as a whole, but also in the local churches, which are the practical expression of the one Body. Even if the number of saints in a church is very small, perhaps only fifteen, there will still be some with the particular supply. This should be an encouragement to every local church. Through the particular supply of the leading ones and through the operation in each part, the church will cause the growth of itself in love. In this way we shall see the growth of the members for the building up of the Body of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-SIX

LEARNING CHRIST AS THE TRUTH IS IN JESUS

In this message we shall consider 4:17-21, with special attention to verses 20 and 21, which speak of learning Christ as the truth is in Jesus.

I. THE THIRD ITEM OF A WALK WORTHY OF GOD'S CALLING

In 4:1 Paul beseeches us to walk worthily of the calling with which we are called. The first item of a walk worthy of God's calling is to keep the oneness, and the second is to grow up into Christ the Head. The third item is to learn Christ as the truth is in Jesus.

Verse 17 of chapter four begins a new paragraph. The first two items of a worthy walk are put together in the first paragraph in this chapter. The reason for this is that growth in Christ is intimately related to the keeping of the oneness; they cannot be separated. In verses 1 through 16 the living and the function of the Body are dealt with. Now in verses 17 through 32 the daily life is touched. Verses 17 through 24 give us the principles of our daily walk, and verses 25 through 32 give us the details.

II. NO LONGER WALKING AS THE NATIONS

Verse 17 says, "This therefore I say and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the nations also walk, in the vanity of their mind." This word indicates that what the apostle is about to say is not only his exhortation, but also his testimony. What he exhorts is what he lives. Because he himself lives the kind of life he intends to describe, in his teaching he gives us a testimony.

A. Walking in the Vanity of Their Mind

Paul's exhortation is to "no longer walk as the nations...walk in the vanity of their mind." The nations, the Gentiles, are the fallen people, who have become vain in their reasonings (Rom. 1:21). They walk without God in the vanity of their mind and are controlled and directed by their vain thoughts. Whatever they do according to their fallen mind is vanity; it is all without reality. The life of fallen mankind is a walk in the vanity of the mind. All the worldly people today walk in such vanity. In the eyes of God and in the eyes of the Apostle Paul, whatever the people in the world think, say, and do is nothing but vanity. None of those things is real or solid--everything is empty. As believers, we should no longer walk in the vanity of the mind. Instead, we must walk in the reality of our spirit.

B. Darkened in Their Understanding

According to verse 18, the nations who walk in the vanity of the mind are "darkened in their understanding." When the mind of fallen people is filled with vanity, their understanding is darkened regarding the things of God.

C. Estranged from the Life of God

The nations are also "estranged from the life of God" (v. 18). This life is the uncreated, eternal life of God, which man did not receive at the time of creation. After being created, man with the created human life was placed before the tree of life (Gen. 2:8-9) to receive the uncreated divine life. But man fell into the vanity of his mind and became darkened in his understanding. In such a fallen condition, man is not able to touch the life of God until he has his mind turned to God, until he repents and believes in the Lord Jesus to receive God's eternal life (Acts 11:18; John 3:16).

God's intention in His creation of man was that man would partake of the fruit of the tree of life and thereby

receive the eternal life of God. But in the fall, Satan's evil nature was injected into man. As a result, man had to be barred from the tree of life. According to Genesis 3:24, the Lord "drove out the man: and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." Thus, man was estranged from the life of God. The cherubim, the flame, and the sword signify God's glory, holiness, and righteousness. These three things kept sinful man from receiving eternal life. When the Lord Jesus died on the cross, He fulfilled all the requirements of God's glory, holiness, and righteousness. Therefore, through the redemption of the Lord Jesus, the way has been opened for us to contact the tree of life once more. This is the reason Hebrews 10:19 says that we have "boldness for entering the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus." The tree of life is in the Holy of Holies. As believers in Christ, we have been brought back to the tree of life. Now the divine life in the Holy of Holies may be our daily enjoyment. The nations, however, are still estranged from the life of God.

1. Because of the Ignorance Which Is in Them

One reason for this estrangement is "the ignorance which is in them" (v. 18). Ignorance here means not only lack of knowledge, but also not wanting to know. Fallen man does not approve of knowing the things of God (Rom. 1:28) because of the hardness of his heart. Due to this, his understanding is darkened that he cannot know God.

The unbelievers have no knowledge of God or of spiritual things. Furthermore, they are not willing to gain this knowledge. What a mercy that we not only have the proper knowledge, but also have the desire to know! It is a great blessing to have within us the desire to know God, to know life, and to know spiritual things. Before we were saved, we did not have this desire. We, like the nations, lacked both the knowledge and the willingness to know. But now we hunger and thirst to know God. The more we

can know of Him and of the divine life, the better it is. Any Christian who does not seek to know the Lord cannot be happy or satisfied. To seek the Lord and to seek to know life and the things of God is a source of great happiness. This is the reason we are so happy in the church meetings. It is also the reason that I have an inward joy when I minister the Word to the Lord's people. Something of the Lord has been sown into us to give us the desire to know Him.

2. Because of the Hardness of Their Heart

Another reason the nations are estranged from the life of God is the hardness of their heart. The hardness of fallen man's heart is the source of the darkness in his understanding and the vanity of his mind. Before we were saved, we also were hard of heart. We seemed to be impenetrable, and God's words could not enter into us. This is the situation of unbelievers today.

D. Having Ceased from Feeling

Furthermore, in his thorough diagnosis of the condition of fallen man, Paul points out that the nations have "ceased from feeling" (v. 19). The word feeling here refers mainly to the consciousness of the conscience. Hence, "having ceased from feeling" means not to care for the conscience. After man's fall, God ordained that man should be under the rule of his conscience. But rather than regard his conscience, fallen man gave himself over to unsatisfied lust. Because the unbelievers refused to care for the feeling of their conscience, eventually the conscience stopped functioning. Therefore, the feeling within them ceased.

E. Having Given Themselves Over to Lewdness

Moreover, they give "themselves over to lewdness to work all uncleanness in greedy unsatisfied lust" (v. 19). They are given over to lusts that cannot be satisfied. If we look at the situation in the world today, we shall see that unbelievers have given themselves over to lewdness to work uncleanness in their unsatisfied lust.

III. LEARNING CHRIST

Verses 17 through 19 are a dark background for what Paul says in verse 20: "But you did not so learn Christ." The New Testament strongly indicates that we should live Christ. In Philippians 1:21 Paul declares, "To me to live is Christ." But here in Ephesians 4:20 we are told that we have learned Christ. Notice that Paul uses the past tense in speaking of our learning Christ. He also uses the past tense in the next verse, which says, "Since indeed you have heard Him and been taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus." This matter of learning Christ as the truth is in Jesus is difficult to comprehend, and we need to consider it very carefully.

Christ is not only life to us, but also an example (John 13:15; 1 Pet. 2:21). We learn from Him (Matt. 11:29) according to His example, not by our natural life, but by Him as our life. According to the New Testament, the Lord Jesus did not come into us as life directly. Rather, after living on earth for thirty years, He ministered for another three and a half years. During the thirty-three and half years of His life on earth, He set up a pattern, a mold, a model. This is a matter of great significance. One reason the four Gospels were written was to show the pattern of the life that God desires, the mold of the life that can satisfy God and fulfill His purpose. For this reason, the New Testament gives us a unique biography, the biography of the Lord Jesus, written from four directions. After the Lord Jesus set up the pattern revealed in the Gospels, He was crucified on the cross and then He entered into resurrection. It is in resurrection that He comes into us to be our life.

According to the New Testament, to be saved is to be put by God into Christ. First Corinthians 1:30 says, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus." When God put us into Christ, He put us into the mold. Just as a sister shapes dough into the form of a mold, so God intends to form us into the mold of Christ. Hence, Romans 8:29 indicates that we are to be

conformed to the image of Christ, the Firstborn among many brothers. To be conformed is to be molded. The Firstborn is the pattern, and the many brothers of the Firstborn are those who are to be conformed to this pattern. To learn Christ is simply to be molded into the pattern of Christ, that is, to be conformed to the image of Christ.

By means of baptism God has put us into Christ, who is the pattern. To be baptized is to be placed into Christ as the mold. Both Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 speak of being baptized into Christ. To be baptized into Christ is to be buried into Him. The tomb of this baptism is the pattern, the mold. In God's eyes, we were put into this mold when we were baptized. Through being placed into the mold we have put off the old man and have put on the new man. By being buried into Christ, we have been brought out of Adam and the old creation. By baptism we have been put into Christ, who is both our life and our pattern. This explains why Paul uses the past tense in speaking about learning Christ. We learned Christ when we were buried into Him in baptism. This means that to learn Christ is to be put into Christ as the mold. It is to be molded into the pattern set up by Him during His years on earth.

After Christ established the pattern, He was crucified and then He entered into resurrection, becoming in resurrection the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). It is as the Spirit that He comes into us to be our life. We have pointed out that at the time we believed in Christ and were baptized in Him, God put us into Him as the pattern, the mold. Therefore, Paul could tell the Ephesians that they "did...learn Christ." According to the light of the New Testament and according to our experience, to learn Christ is to be placed into Christ by God. On God's side, He has put us into Christ. On our side, we have learned Christ by being put into Him.

After a person is saved, deep within him he desires to live a life in the pattern established by the Lord Jesus.

However, many either ignore this desire or cultivate it in a mistaken way, thinking that by self-effort they can succeed in imitating Him. It is a mistake to think that we can imitate Christ by the exercise of our natural life. The believers in Christ should imitate Him, but they should not do so according to their natural life.

The truth in Jesus is the real situation of the life of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels. In the godless walk of the nations, the fallen people, there is vanity. But in the godly life of Jesus there is truth, reality. Jesus lived a life always doing things in God, with God, and for God. God was in His life, and He was one with God. This is the truth in Jesus. We, the believers, regenerated with Christ as our life and taught in Him, learn from Him as the truth is in Jesus.

We have pointed out that it is a mistake to endeavor to imitate Christ by the efforts of our natural life. We have also seen that when we believed in the Lord Jesus and were saved, God put us into Christ as the mold. This mold is the life of Jesus recorded in the four Gospels, a life absolutely according to truth. Truth is the shining of light, the expression of light. Since God is light (1 John 1:5), truth is the expression of God. Every aspect of the life of Jesus recorded in the Gospels is an expression of God. In everything He said and did, He expressed God. This expression of God is the shining of light; hence, it is the truth. This life of Jesus according to truth is the pattern in which God has placed us. In this pattern we have learned Christ as the truth is in Jesus. This means that we have learned Christ according to the truth shown in the Gospels, that is, according to the life of the Lord Jesus, which was wholly according to God's truth. This life is the shining of light. The shining of the light is truth, and truth is the expression of God. Therefore, in the life of Jesus there is truth. The essence of the pattern set up by the Lord Jesus is truth. This means that the essence of the life of Jesus is truth. We have learned Christ as the truth is in Jesus.

The truth, the reality, in Jesus in verse 21 is in contrast

to the vanity of the mind in verse 17. The nations walk in the vanity of their mind, but we believers live a life as the truth is in Jesus. When the Lord Jesus was living on earth, He never walked in vanity. Rather, He always walked in truth, that is, in the shining of the divine light. This means that the Lord Jesus lived and walked in the expression of God. We have learned Christ according to this very truth that is in Jesus.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-SEVEN

HAVING PUT OFF THE OLD MAN AND HAVING PUT ON THE NEW MAN

In His thirty-three and a half years on earth, the Lord Jesus formed the mold, the pattern, to which all those who believe in Him are to be conformed. According to the record of the four Gospels, the life of the Lord Jesus was a life of truth. Truth is the shining of light. Light is the source, and truth is its expression. As Hebrews 1:3 says, the Lord Jesus is the effulgence of God's glory. This means that He is the shining of God who is light. Because in every aspect of the Lord's living on earth there was the shining of light, His life was a life of truth, a life of the shining of God Himself. That life of truth was the very expression of God. For this reason Paul says that we learn Christ as the truth is in Jesus. In other words, we learn Christ according to the mold of the life of Jesus. The mold of the life of Jesus is the truth.

After Christ established this mold, He passed through death and resurrection, and in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit. As such a Spirit, He comes into us to be our life. When we believed in Him and were baptized, God put us into Him as the mold, just as dough is placed into a mold. By being put into the mold we learned the mold. This means that by being put into Christ, we learn Christ. On the one hand, God put us into Christ; on the other hand, Christ has come into us to be our life. Now we may live by Him according to the mold in which we have been placed by God.

Not many of us may realize the influence the four Gospels have on us. When we read in the Gospels of the mold formed by the Lord Jesus, that mold spontaneously

influences our living. As we love the Lord, contact Him, and pray to Him, we automatically live Him according to the mold described in the Gospels. In this way we are shaped, conformed, to the image of this mold. This is what it means to learn Christ.

Learning Christ in this way is altogether different from taking Him as an objective example and endeavoring in our natural life to imitate Him. God has put us into the mold formed by the life of Jesus on earth. Simultaneously, Christ as the life-giving Spirit has come into our being as life. The more we love Him and contact Him, the more we live Him according to this mold. As a result, we are spontaneously conformed to the image of that mold. Therefore, with Paul we can say, "For to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). We live Christ in the form of His own life, in the form recorded in the Gospels.

We must distinguish this kind of living from that according to the modernistic teaching regarding imitating Christ as our example. The modernists falsely teach that Christ is not God, but a man who established the highest standard for us to follow. This teaching requires that we exercise our natural life to imitate Christ and to live up to His standard. Such a teaching is heretical. It has absolutely nothing to do with the truth as it is in Jesus. It denies the fact that a true believer is in Christ and has Christ in him. In contrast to this heretical, modernistic teaching, we say according to the New Testament that when a sinner repents and believes in Christ and is baptized into Christ, God puts this one into Christ as the mold. At the same time, Christ as the life-giving Spirit comes into him to be his life. Thereafter, this believer is to live by Christ as his life according to the mold. The more he lives by Christ, the more he will be spontaneously shaped into the form of the mold. This is a life in Christ and also a life of Christ in us. We are in Christ as the mold, and He is in us as our life. In this way we learn Christ as the truth is in Jesus.

Ephesians 4 covers three items concerning a life worthy

of God's calling: keeping the oneness (vv. 1-14), growing up into the Head (vv. 15-16), and learning Christ as the truth is in Jesus (vv. 17-32). Concerning the learning of Christ as the truth is in Jesus, Paul firstly exhorts us and testifies to us that we should no longer walk as the Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind (v. 17). Instead, we should walk in the life that is according to the truth in Jesus. The Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, but we walk in the reality expressed in the life of Jesus recorded in the Gospels. In His life we see reality, truth, the shining of light, the expression of God. As the believers in Christ, we are to walk in such a reality.

Verse 21 says that we have been taught in Christ as the truth is in Jesus. Verses 22 and 24 show us what we have been taught: that we have put off the old man and have put on the new man. We were taught this when we were put into the mold, that is, when we were baptized. In baptism we were taught that our old man has been crucified and that he is to be buried by baptism. Furthermore, we were taught that as we come out of the water, we are resurrected into the new man. Therefore, by baptism we were taught that we have put off the old man and have put on the new man.

At this point we need to consider Romans 6:3-5. Verse 3 says, "Are you ignorant that as many as have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" To be baptized into Christ Jesus means to be put into Him. Furthermore, through baptism we have been buried into Christ's death. In verses 4 and 5 we see the mold. These verses indicate that through baptism we were taught that we have put off the old man and have put on the new man. This is the normal Christian experience.

Normally, as we preach the gospel to sinners, we tell them of the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Then we encourage those who are willing to believe in Christ to receive Him into them as their life. The next step is to baptize them. This indicates that we put them into Christ as the mold. Thereafter, they are to live by Christ

according to the mold. By baptism they have been taught that they have put off the old man and have put on the new man. By being buried through baptism, they learned Christ as the truth is in Jesus.

We should not try to understand verses such as 4:20-24 through the exercise of our natural mind. Rather, we need to consider them in the light of our Christian experience. If we do this, the light will gradually shine upon us, and we shall see the truth. The truth here is that when we were baptized, we were taught that we have put off the old man and that we have put on the new man. Notice that Paul does not say that we have been taught *to* put off the old man and *to* put on the new man. No, we have already put off the old man and have put on the new man. Our old man was buried in the waters of baptism. Hence, we have put off the old man. Furthermore, as we rose up from the water in resurrection, we were clothed with the new man. Hence, we have also put on the new man. Therefore, we have been taught in Christ as the truth is in Jesus that we have put off the old man and put on the new man.

I. A CONDITION OF LEARNING CHRIST

Having put off the old man and having put on the new man is a condition of learning Christ. This is utterly different from the devilish, modernistic teaching which says that Christ established the highest standard of human living and that we must endeavor to copy Him and to live up to this standard. If we would learn Christ as the truth is in Jesus, we must fulfill the condition of having put off the old man and of having put on the new man. This is not a superficial truth.

II. HAVING PUT OFF THE OLD MAN

A. As Regards Our Former Manner of Life

Verse 22 says that we have put off, as regards the former manner of life, the old man. The former manner of

life was a walk in the vanity of the mind. Such a manner of life has been terminated and put away.

B. The Old Man

Verse 22 also says that the old man "is being corrupted according to the lusts of the deceit." The old man is of Adam, created by God, but fallen through sin. The article before the word deceit is emphatic and indicates that the word deceit is personified. Hence, deceit here refers to the deceiver, the Devil, from whom are the lusts of the corrupted old man. The old man is corrupted according to the lusts of the Devil, the deceiving one. Outwardly, the manner of life of the old man is a walk in the vanity of the mind. Inwardly, the old man is corrupted according to the lusts of the Devil, the lusts of the deceit.

This old man was crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6) and was buried in baptism (Rom. 6:4). Hallelujah, we have put off the old man in baptism!

III. BEING RENEWED

Between the word regarding the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man, Paul wedges in the thought of being renewed in the spirit of our mind (v. 23). Based upon the accomplished facts of the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man, verse 23 tells us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. To be renewed is for our transformation to the image of Christ (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The spirit here is the regenerated spirit of the believers mingled with the indwelling Spirit of God. Such a mingled spirit spreads into our mind, thus becoming the spirit of our mind. It is in such a spirit that we are renewed for our transformation. In this way our natural mind is conquered, subdued, and put under the spirit. This, of course, implies a process of metabolic transformation. As this process takes place, the mingled spirit enters our mind, takes over our mind, and becomes the spirit of our mind.

By the spirit of the mind we are renewed to fulfill in experience what was accomplished in the putting off of the

old man and the putting on of the new man. The putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man are accomplished facts. Now we must experience and realize these facts by being renewed in the spirit of our mind. As these facts are realized in experience, we live a life that corresponds to the life of Jesus. This means that we live a life of truth, a life in the shining of light and in the expression of God. When we are renewed in the spirit of our mind to execute the fact of having put off the old man and having put on the new man, we live a life according to the truth that is in Jesus.

V. HAVING PUT ON THE NEW MAN

A. Corporate

The new man is of Christ. It is His Body, created in Him on the cross (2:15-16). It is not individual, but corporate (Col. 3:10-11). The fact that the new man is created of two peoples proves that it is corporate. Furthermore, Colossians 3:10 and 11 reveal that the new man is a composition of many different peoples. In this corporate new man there is no Greek or Jew, no bond or free, no barbarian or Scythian, but Christ is all and in all. In Colossians 3:11 the word "all" refers to people. This means that in the new man Christ is all the people and is in all the people. Therefore, in the corporate new man Christ is all and in all.

The book of Ephesians reveals that the church is the Body of Christ (1:22-23), the kingdom of God, the household of God (2:19), and the temple, the dwelling place of God (2:21-22). It reveals further that the church is the new man. This is the highest aspect of the church. The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, means those called out for a gathering, hence, an assembly. This is the initial aspect of the church. From this the apostle goes on to the aspects of fellow-citizens of the kingdom of God and members of the household of God. These are higher than the initial aspect, but not as high as the aspect of the church as the Body of Christ. Yet the new man is still higher than the Body of

Christ. Thus, the church is not just an assembly of believers, a kingdom of heavenly citizens, a household of God's children, nor even a Body for Christ. It is in its uttermost aspect a new man to accomplish God's eternal purpose. As the Body of Christ, the church needs Christ as its life; whereas as the new man, the church needs Christ as its person. This new corporate person should live a life as Jesus lived on earth, that is, a life of truth, expressing God and causing God to be realized as the reality by man. Hence, the new man is the focus of the apostle's exhortation in this section (vv. 17-32).

B. Created According to God

Verse 24 says that the new man was created according to God. The old man was created according to the image of God outwardly, without God's life and nature (Gen. 1:26-27). But the new man was created according to God Himself inwardly, with God's life and nature (Col. 3:10).

C. In Righteousness and Holiness of the Truth

Furthermore, the new man was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Righteousness is being right with God and with man according to God's righteous way, whereas holiness is being separated unto God from anything common and being saturated with God's holy nature. Righteousness refers to the outward acts, whereas holiness refers to the inward nature. Outwardly everything related to the new man is righteous; and inwardly everything related to the new man is holy.

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

of this truth, which is God realized and expressed, that the new man was created.

Deceit is the Devil, and truth is God. The old man is according to the lusts of the Devil, but the new man is in the righteousness and holiness of God. It is a serious mistake to render the Greek word for truth here as an adjective. The King James Version made such a mistake in adopting the rendering "true holiness." Here Paul's concept is not that of true holiness but that of the holiness of the truth. Holiness here is the holiness of the divine Person. The new man was created according to God in the righteousness and holiness of God Himself.

In order that we might learn Christ, Paul presents a sharp contrast between the old man and the new man, between the Devil and God, and between lusts, on the one hand, and righteousness and holiness, on the other. We have been taught that we have already put off the old man and have put on the new man. This means we have put off the lusts and the falsehood of the Devil and have put on the righteousness and holiness of God. This God is the truth, and this truth is seen in the living of Jesus on earth. The human living of Jesus was according to the truth, that is, according to God Himself, full of righteousness and holiness. Praise the Lord that we have learned Christ as the truth is in Jesus!

If we learn Christ by putting off the old man and by putting on the new man, we shall be in the church life, for the new man actually is the church. If we learn Christ as the truth is in Jesus, then we can have a genuine, proper, and practical church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-EIGHT

A LIVING THAT DOES NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD

In this message we come to 4:25-32. In 4:17-24 Paul gives us the basic principles for the living needed in our daily walk. In verses 22 and 24 we see that the condition for learning Christ is having put off the old man and having put on the new man. Once this condition is met, it is possible for us to live a life of truth, which is the expression of God in the shining of light.

I. A LIVING OF LEARNING CHRIST

In verses 25 through 32 we have a description of the practical daily life in the learning of Christ. In covering the daily life of learning Christ, Paul goes into a lot of detail. He mentions things such as anger, stealing, bitterness, wrath, clamor, evil speaking, malice, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. Although these details are easy to see, it is more difficult to discern two important matters that Paul's speaking is based upon. These matters are truth and grace. The apostle's exhortation in verses 17 through 32 takes truth and grace as its basic elements (vv. 21, 24, 25, and 29). He wants us to live as Jesus did, a life full of grace and truth (John 1:14, 17). Grace is God given to us for our enjoyment, and truth is God revealed to us as our reality. When we live and speak truth (Eph. 4:21, 24), we express God as our reality, and others receive God as grace for their enjoyment (v. 29).

In the New Testament grace and truth are a pair. John 1:14 says that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, full of grace and truth, and verse 17 says that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Just as grace and truth are a pair, so love and light are also a pair. In the Gospel of John we have grace and truth, but in the First Epistle of John we have love and light (4:16; 1:5). Grace is the expression of love, and love is the source of grace. In the same principle, truth is the expression of light, and light is the source of truth. In God's heart there is love. When this love is expressed, it becomes grace. Likewise, with God there is light. When the light shines forth, it becomes truth. When we trace grace and truth back to their source in God, we are in love and light.

We have pointed out that Paul's exhortation in 4:17-32 covers both truth and grace. Truth is clearly mentioned, but grace is somewhat hidden, being especially implied in Paul's mention of the details related to daily living. If we are short of grace, we cannot meet the standard in relation to these details. The principles for our learning of Christ are related to the truth, whereas the details are related to grace. If we would be conformed to the image of Christ, that is, if we would learn Christ, we need both the principles and the details. If we have the truth, we have the principles. If we have grace, we shall succeed in meeting the standard in all the details.

Paul says that we learn Christ as the truth is in Jesus (4:21). The pattern, the mold, set up by the Lord Jesus is the truth. The truth is the principle, the principle is the pattern, and the pattern is a matter of having put off the old man and of having put on the new man. In verses 17 through 24 we have the principle of our renewed daily living for the learning of Christ. This principle is the truth, the living of the Lord Jesus when He was on earth. The Lord's living was that of always putting off His own life and of putting on the Father's life. This is the life of Jesus, and this life is the truth that is the principle of a life of learning Christ. According to this principle, we have put off the old man and have put on the new man.

Every aspect of our daily living should be governed by this principle, not by a standard of ethics. For example, our conversation should be governed not by a standard of

ethics, but by the New Testament principle of having put off the old man and of having put on the new man. Even how much we laugh or cry should be determined by the principle of having put off the old man and of having put on the new man. This principle is much higher than any ethical standard.

In baptism we put off the old man and put on the new man, which is the church life. Now our daily living in the church life is to be according to the principle of truth, according to the pattern of the life of truth set up by the living of the Lord Jesus. We have been taught according to this principle as the truth is in Jesus.

The details of our daily living are related to grace. In every aspect of our daily living, we need grace. Grace is God Himself in Christ as our enjoyment. We need to allow this enjoyment to remove from us the negative elements mentioned in verse 31. One of these negative elements is bitterness. Without grace, we cannot let go of our bitterness. But when we have God in Christ as our enjoyment, our bitterness will disappear. When we have sufficient grace, we can say, "I am filled with Christ as my enjoyment. Because I am filled to the brim with grace, there is no room in me for bitterness of any kind."

Only when we are filled with grace will the negative things be removed from us. Take gossip as an example. We enjoy gossiping because we are short of grace. If we are filled with grace, we shall not seek satisfaction in gossiping. On the contrary, we shall be content with the satisfaction that is in Christ. When we are filled with grace and when Christ is everything to us, we have no need to find satisfaction in other things.

Only by grace can we have a life that is according to the divine standard in all the details mentioned by Paul in these verses. If we are filled with grace, then in the place of bitterness, wrath, anger, and clamor, we shall have kindness, patience, mercy, forgiveness, and love. These qualities come not from self-effort, but from Christ as our enjoyment. When Christ is our enjoyment, we have no

appetite for bitterness, wrath, anger, or clamor. Instead, we desire to have kindness, patience, endurance, gentleness, mercy, love, and various other virtues and qualities. What a difference it makes in our daily living when we are happy and satisfied through the enjoyment of God in Christ as grace!

II. HAVING PUT OFF THE FALSEHOOD

Let us now consider the details of a living of learning Christ. In verse 25 Paul says, "Wherefore, having put off the falsehood, speak truth each one with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." Falsehood here refers to anything that is false in nature. As we have put off the old man, we have also put off everything false. If we have the enjoyment of Christ, then in a practical way in our daily living we shall put off every false thing. The most honest and faithful people are those who have the full enjoyment of Christ. When we are filled to the brim with Christ, all falsehood will be put away from us.

III. SPEAKING TRUTH EACH ONE WITH HIS NEIGHBOR

Having put off the falsehood, we should speak truth each one with his neighbor. When we are filled with Christ, our speaking will be of things that are true. In our speaking there will be no lies and no vanity.

IV. BEING ANGRY AND NOT SINNING

Verses 26 and 27 say, "Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your indignation, neither give place to the Devil." Anger itself is not sin, but it is dangerously close to sin. We should not continue in anger, but rather relinquish our anger before the sun sets.

According to the four Gospels, the Lord Jesus sometimes was angry. But His anger was always under control. Hence, He could be angry and not sin. It must be

the same with us in our daily living. Our anger must be under control. Otherwise, serious damage will result. In order to control our anger, we need much grace. The more we enjoy Christ, the more our anger will be limited and controlled.

A. Not Letting the Sun Go Down on Our Indignation

In verse 26 Paul tells us not to let the sun go down on our indignation. We should be slow to become angry, but we should be quick to relinquish our anger. According to this verse, we should not keep it past the setting of the sun. We should not let our anger carry over into the next day. According to the Scriptures, we must relinquish our anger before the sun goes down. We all need to practice this. For such a practice, we need God in Christ as grace. If we have the supply of grace, we shall be slow to anger, and we shall not remain angry very long when we do become angry. If we have grace, our anger will not linger.

B. Neither Giving Place to the Devil

Verse 27 says, "Neither give place to the Devil." According to the context, to continue in anger is to give place to the Devil. In nothing should we give any place to him. If we hold on to our anger, we are actually welcoming the Devil. But if we relinquish our anger, we close the door to the Devil and give him no place.

V. LETTING HIM WHO STEALS STEAL NO MORE

Verse 28 continues, "Let him who steals steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his own hands that which is good, that he may have to share with him who has need." In a book of such high revelation, the apostle still touches things on a practical level, even such low things as anger and stealing. Stealing is due mainly to slothfulness and greed. Hence, the apostle charges him who steals to labor instead of being slothful and to share what he gains with others instead of being greedy.

VI. LETTING NO CORRUPT WORD PROCEED OUT OF THE MOUTH

Verse 29 says, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for needful building up, that it may give grace to those who hear." The Greek word for corrupt signifies something that is noxious, offensive, or worthless. Our conversation should not corrupt others, but should build them up. The church and every member of the church need the proper building up. This building up is accomplished primarily by our speaking. What proceeds out of our mouth should be that which is good for the building up of the church and all the saints.

Furthermore, the word out of our mouth should give grace to those who hear. Grace is God embodied in Christ as our enjoyment and supply. Our word should convey this as grace to others. The word that builds up others always ministers grace to the hearers. Our word should communicate God in Christ as enjoyment, imparting Christ to others as their life supply.

VII. NOT GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD

In verse 30 Paul says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in Whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption." The word "and" at the beginning of this verse indicates that in addition to all the things mentioned in verses 25 through 29, one crucial thing is needed, that is, that we should not grieve the Holy Spirit. To grieve the Holy Spirit is to displease Him. The Holy Spirit abides in us forever (John 14:16-17); He never leaves us. Hence, He is grieved when we do not walk according to Him (Rom. 8:4). If we have a life according to the principle of truth with grace for the details of our daily walk, we shall not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. However, if we do not live this way, the Spirit within us will be grieved.

For the Holy Spirit to be grieved means that He is not happy with us. Often when we feel unhappy, that feeling of unhappiness is actually the feeling of the Holy Spirit.

However, when He feels happy within us, we are happy also. A proper life according to truth and in grace will always make the Holy Spirit happy and give us the joy of the Spirit.

In the apostle's exhortation in verses 17 through 32, there are not only grace and truth as the basic elements, but there are also the life of God (v. 18) and the Spirit of God as the basic factors on the positive side and the Devil (v. 27) on the negative side. It is by the life of God in the Spirit of God, with no place given to the Devil, that we can live a life full of grace and truth as the Lord Jesus did.

VIII. LETTING VARIOUS EVILS BE REMOVED FROM US

In verse 31 Paul says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be removed from you, with all malice." All the evil things mentioned in this verse can be removed from us if we enjoy God in Christ as our grace. For example, there will be no clamor in our daily living, and there will be no evil speaking. No one who lives by the principle of truth and in grace will speak evil of others.

IX. BEING KIND ONE TO ANOTHER

Finally, verse 32 says, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as also God in Christ forgave you." Only the enjoyment of Christ as our life supply and as our joy can make our hearts tender. If we are tenderhearted, we shall forgive others. In our daily walk, we need both to forgive others and to ask others to forgive us. This is necessary because we are easily offended and we easily offend others. If we have offended someone, we need to ask for forgiveness. But if we have been offended, we need to extend forgiveness to others, even as God in Christ has forgiven us.

In his exhortation in this section, the apostle presents God as the pattern of our daily life. By the life of God, in His Spirit, we can forgive as God forgives. If this is our

daily living, we shall not grieve the Holy Spirit of God. To have such a living, we need to live according to truth and by God in Christ as our grace.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-NINE

A SUMMARY OF LEARNING CHRIST

In previous messages we have covered the condition of learning Christ and the living of learning Christ. The condition is a matter of having put off the old man and of having put on the new man. The living of learning Christ is a matter of applying the principle of truth and of living according to grace. In this message we shall present a summary of learning Christ. This summary includes truth (4:21, 24, 25) and grace (v. 29) as the basic elements and the life of God (v. 18), the Spirit of God (v. 30), and the Devil (v. 27) as the basic factors.

I. BASIC ELEMENTS

In the foregoing message we pointed out that in the New Testament grace and truth are a pair and that love and light are another pair. These pairs are revealed mainly in the writings of John. His Gospel speaks of grace and truth, and his First Epistle speaks of love and light. The Gospel of John tells how God came to us in the Son so that we may receive Him as grace and realize Him as truth. Then 1 John reveals that after we have received God in the Son, we may come to God the Father to enjoy Him as love and light. Thus in the Gospel of John God comes to us as grace and truth, but in the First Epistle of John we go to God to enter into His love and light in fellowship. This indicates that there is traffic between God and us and between us and God. According to the book of Revelation, the issue, the result, of this divine traffic is the golden lampstands in this age and the New Jerusalem in eternity.

John 1:17 says that the law was given through Moses and that grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. This

means that before the coming of Christ grace and truth had not come to God's people. Yes, there were shadows of grace and truth in the Old Testament age, but there was not the reality of grace and truth until Jesus Christ appeared. When Christ came, grace and truth came also.

The Gospel of John reveals how God came to man through incarnation. The Word which was with God and which was God became flesh and tabernacled among us (John 1:1, 14). Verse 14 says that this incarnated One was full of grace and truth. It does not say that He was full of power and authority, majesty and sovereignty, or love and light. Many Christians quote John 1:14 without knowing the meaning of grace and truth. Grace and truth are intimately related to God Himself. Grace is something sweet, and truth is something real. Grace is actually the sweet Person of the Lord Jesus, who is the embodiment of the fullness of God and the effulgence of the divine glory (Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3). This means that He is the expression of God.

The Gospel of John speaks a great deal about life. John 10:10 says that the Lord came that we may have life and may have it abundantly. The sweet and lovely Person of Jesus is the shining forth of God Himself, His very expression. As such a One, He is life to us. Life is the essence, whereas grace is the enjoyment that comes by tasting life. When we taste the sweetness of life, we experience grace as our enjoyment. Thus, life is the substance, and grace is the enjoyment.

This is confirmed in the writings of Paul. Paul suffered from "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). This thorn may have been a physical ailment or defect. Paul prayed to the Lord three times that this thorn might depart from him (2 Cor. 12:8). The Lord answered him by saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee: my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9, Gk.). The Lord allowed the thorn to remain so that Paul could have an opportunity to enjoy His grace. In Paul's weakness God's power, His sufficient grace, was made perfect.

Grace is the enjoyment of the Triune God in all that He is to us. When He is life to us, that is grace. When He is power to us, that also is grace. Grace is whatever Christ is to us subjectively as our enjoyment. We need grace daily, even hourly. We need the enjoyment of Christ as our life, our power, and everything to us. Grace is the Triune God becoming our enjoyment. He has come to us so that we may gain Him, experience Him, and enjoy Him. When we experience Him as our enjoyment, He becomes grace to us.

We come now to the matter of truth. Because our mind may be preoccupied with natural concepts of truth, we may find it difficult to understand the meaning of truth according to the New Testament. Many regard truth merely as doctrine. Whenever they see the word truth in the Bible, they automatically interpret it as doctrine. However, in the New Testament, truth does not denote doctrine. If you want proof of this, try substituting doctrine for truth in various verses where truth is mentioned. John 1:14 would then say that the Word became flesh, full of grace and doctrine; John 1:17, that grace and doctrine came through Jesus Christ; and John 14:6, that the Lord is the way, the doctrine, and the life. How ridiculous! It is absurd to say that we have learned Christ as the doctrine is in Jesus. Nevertheless, in the concept of many believers, truth means nothing more than doctrine. Others regard truth as sincerity. According to this understanding, to speak in truth is to speak in sincerity.

If we would know the meaning of truth in the New Testament, we need to lay aside these definitions. Truth is God revealed. How much different this is from saying that truth is doctrine or sincerity! In principle, because grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ, they must be something of God Himself. Jesus is God coming to us. When God comes to us, He does not come as doctrine or sincerity. When He comes, everything related to His being also comes. God comes to us for our enjoyment. This is grace. God also comes to reveal Himself to us. This is truth. In other words, when God is enjoyed by us, He is grace. But

when God is revealed to us, He is truth. Truth, therefore, is God revealed to us.

These definitions of grace and truth can be applied to almost every case recorded in the four Gospels, especially to those cases found in the Gospel of John. Let us consider two such cases, one in John 4 and the other in John 8. In both chapters truth is mentioned (4:23-24; 8:32). As the Lord Jesus was going from Judea into Galilee, "He had to pass through Samaria" (John 4:4) in order to meet a certain immoral Samaritan woman, who came to the well to draw water. Wearied from His journey, the Lord sat down by the well and waited for this Samaritan woman to appear. When the Lord Jesus asked her for a drink, she was surprised that a Jew would ask a drink from a Samaritan woman. The Lord replied, "If you knew the gift of God, and Who it is that says to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (v. 10). After she questioned Him further, the Lord answered, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a spring of water welling up into eternal life" (vv. 13-14). What grace He showed toward her! After the Samaritan woman tasted the grace of God, she came to realize something of who the Lord Jesus was. Thus God was not only enjoyed by her, but also revealed to her. When the Lord Jesus contacted the Samaritan woman, He was the embodiment of grace and truth.

In John 8 the Lord contacted another sinful woman, a woman caught in adultery. Through His contact with her, God became her enjoyment and was also revealed to her. The Lord helped her to receive Him as grace and to know Him as God revealed.

According to the Gospels, all who contacted the Lord Jesus in a positive way received grace and saw truth. The grace they received was God Himself, and the truth they beheld was also God. Therefore, John tells us that of His

fullness we have all received grace upon grace (1:16). We have received from Him the riches of what God is. This is God received, experienced, and enjoyed. This is grace. Following this, God is seen and realized by us. This is truth.

When I was young, I was bothered by the fact that John puts grace before truth. I thought that the revelation of God should precede the enjoyment of God. One day I saw that the Lord Jesus firstly comes to us as grace and then as truth. As I looked back on my experience, I realized that I enjoyed Christ as grace long before I knew Him as truth. Many of us enjoyed Christ as grace before we knew Him as truth. This means that we enjoyed Him without realizing what He is. This indicates that enjoyment comes before realization, that grace comes before truth.

We have pointed out that in the Gospel of John God comes to us, but that in the First Epistle of John we go to God. As we go to God, we enter into the inner chamber to contact the Father through the Son under the cleansing of the blood of Jesus. Here in this inner chamber we experience not grace and truth, but love and light. For this reason, in 1 John we have love instead of grace and light instead of truth. When God comes to us, we receive Him as grace and truth. But when we go to God, we meet Him as love and light. This is deeper and more inward than the experience of grace and truth.

When we have fellowship with the Father in the inner chamber and enjoy Him as love and light, we then have grace and truth for our practical daily living in the world. In our fellowship with the Father we have love and light, but at home or in our place of employment we have grace and truth. Through grace and truth we have the kind of daily living Paul exhorts us to have in Ephesians 4. Although we may be under pressure at work or at home, we can still live according to truth and by the supply of grace. If others are not pleasant toward us, we have the grace to bear it. Then others will see that God is with us. In this way our daily living will be of grace and truth.

The church life is the issue of God coming to us as grace and truth and of our going to God to meet Him as love and light. Out of this traffic come the seven lampstands in the book of Revelation. Ultimately, the issue of this heavenly traffic will be the New Jerusalem as God's eternal testimony. Both the lampstands and the New Jerusalem come out from the traffic between God and us and between us and God. In this traffic God comes to us to be our grace and truth, and we go to God to experience Him as our love and light.

A. Truth

We may apply this now to the book of Ephesians. We have seen that the basic elements in the learning of Christ are truth and grace. In contrast to the Gospel of John, in Ephesians 4 truth precedes grace. Truth is not the supply; it is the shining of light. Hence, truth is the principle, the pattern, the standard. As members of the Body of Christ under the Head, we are learning Christ as the truth is in Jesus.

Before he mentions grace here, Paul presents the principle, the pattern, the standard; that is, he presents the truth. We all have been baptized not into grace, but into the mold, into the pattern, which is the life of truth in Jesus. We have been placed by God through baptism into the pattern, the standard, the principle, set up by the living of the Lord Jesus on earth. This is the truth in Ephesians 4.

B. Grace

In order to live out such a standard, we must have grace. In verse 29 Paul relates grace to our speaking. This indicates that we need grace for the details of our daily life, not just for what we regard as important matters. We may have grace in big matters, but not in small matters. For example, a brother may have grace to minister the Word, but he may lack grace in speaking to his wife. Furthermore, in the prayer meeting we may all have grace, but in our daily conversation we may be devoid of grace. In no area of our daily life do we require grace more

than in our conversation. If we have grace in this aspect of our living, we shall have grace in every other aspect.

In all things we need grace to live a life according to the truth that is in Jesus and to be molded into the image of Christ. Grace is our rich supply and enjoyment. If we have this supply and enjoyment, we shall be able to live according to the standard of the principle of truth. For this reason Paul takes truth and grace as the basic elements in his exhortation in chapter four.

II. BASIC FACTORS

A. On the Positive Side

Along with these basic elements, there are also some basic factors. On the positive side, these factors are the life of God (v. 18) and the Spirit of God (v. 30).

1. The Life of God

In contrast to the Gentiles, we are not strangers to the life of God. Instead of being alienated from the life of God, we are attached to the source of life. The life of God has become a fountain within our very being. Hallelujah for the life supply within us!

2. The Spirit of God

We also have the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is the Person of God. God Himself in the Person of the Spirit dwells within us. We must be careful, therefore, not to grieve Him. Rather, we should obey Him, honor Him, respect Him, and be one with Him at all times.

B. On the Negative Side

The basic factor on the negative side is the Devil. In verse 27 Paul exhorts us not to give place to the Devil. Although we have the life of God and the Spirit of God within us, the enemy is still lurking about us; he is always

seeking an opportunity to gain an advantage over us or to damage us. We need to be on the alert for this crouching enemy.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY

LIVING IN LOVE AND LIGHT

In this message we come to 5:1-14. This portion of Ephesians covers the matter of living in love and light, the fourth item of a walk worthy of God's calling.

I. AS BELOVED CHILDREN, BECOMING IMITATORS OF GOD

Verse 1 says, "Become therefore imitators of God, as beloved children." Paul's word here is an imperative, a command. He commands us to become imitators of God. What a glorious fact that since we are His beloved children, we can be imitators of God! As the children of God, we have His life and nature. We imitate God, not by our natural life, but by His divine life. It is by our Father's life that we, His children, can be perfect as He is (Matt. 5:48).

According to the New Testament, the believers in Christ are children of God. As God's children, we have God's life. John 1:13 says that we have been born of God. To be born of God is to have the life of God. Furthermore, 2 Peter 1:4 says that we are partakers of the divine nature. Because we have the divine life and the divine nature, we can be imitators of God. Imitating God in this way is much different from training a monkey to imitate a man. A monkey does not have human life or human nature. But we have the divine life and the divine nature. Therefore, we can be imitators of God.

II. WALKING IN LOVE

In verse 2 Paul issues another commandment: "Walk in love." As grace and truth are the basic elements in 4:17-32, so love (5:2, 25) and light (5:8, 9, 13) are the basic elements

in the apostle's exhortation in 5:1-33. Grace is the expression of love, and love is the source of grace. Truth is the revelation of light, and light is the origin of truth. God is love and light (1 John 4:8; 1:5). When God is expressed and revealed in the Lord Jesus, His love becomes grace and His light becomes truth. After we have, in the Lord Jesus, received God as grace and realized Him as truth, we come to Him and enjoy His love and light. Love and light are deeper than grace and truth. Hence, the apostle firstly takes grace and truth as the basic elements for exhortation and then love and light. This implies that he wants our daily life to grow deeper, from the outward elements to the inward.

Love is the substance of God within, whereas light is the element of God expressed. It is possible to sense the love of God inwardly, and it is possible to see the light of God shining out. Our walk in love should be constituted of both the loving substance and the shining element of God. This should be the inner source of our walk. It is deeper than grace and truth.

Paul commands us to walk in love, even as Christ also loved us and "gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor" (5:2). In 4:32 the apostle presents God as the pattern for our daily walk. Here he sets forth Christ as the example for our living. There it is God in Christ as our pattern since, in that section, God's grace and truth expressed in the life of Jesus are taken as the basic elements. According to 4:32, we are to forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us. This means that God is the pattern of forgiveness. But in chapter five Christ Himself is our example since, in this section, love expressed by Christ to us (vv. 2, 25) and light shined by Christ upon us (v. 14) are taken as the basic elements. Here Christ, who loved us and gave Himself up for us, is the example of walking in love.

Paul says that Christ "gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor." In the Bible there is a difference between an offering and a

sacrifice. An offering is for fellowship with God, whereas a sacrifice is for redemption from sin. Christ gave Himself up for us both as an offering to have fellowship with God and as a sacrifice to redeem us from sin.

In loving us Christ gave Himself up for us. It was for us, but it was a sweet-smelling savor to God. In following His example, our walk in love should not only be something for others, but also a sweet-smelling savor to God.

III. THINGS NOT FITTING FOR SAINTS

In verses 3 and 4 Paul lists certain things not fitting for saints: "But fornication and all uncleanness or unbridled greedy lust, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; and filthiness and foolish talking or coarse jesting, which are not becoming, but rather giving of thanks." Nothing is more damaging to mankind than fornication. Unbridled greedy lust is a lust full of greed and uncontrolled. Such evil things should not even be named among us, as is fitting for saints, for persons separated unto God and saturated with God, living a life according to God's holy nature.

Instead of foolish talking or coarse jesting, there should be the giving of thanks. To give thanks to God is to speak God as truth, whereas foolish talking or coarse jesting is to speak the Devil as falsehood.

IV. NO INHERITANCE IN THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST AND OF GOD

Verse 5 says, "For this you know, knowing that every fornicator or unclean person or person of unbridled greedy lust, who is an idolator, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." The Greek word rendered know is *oida* and signifies subjective knowledge, whereas the Greek word rendered knowing is *ginosko* and signifies objective knowledge. What Paul speaks in verse 5 we are to know both subjectively and objectively. We must realize that no fornicator or unclean person or person of unbridled greedy lust has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of

God. In the eyes of God, a person of unbridled greedy lust is actually an idolator, one who worships idols.

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

According to John 3, all those who are regenerated are in the kingdom of God. Romans 14:17 also indicates that in the church life we are in the kingdom of God today. However, the millennium will be the kingdom in a way that is more practical than what we are experiencing in the church today. Only in the millennium does the kingdom of Christ also become the kingdom of God. Therefore, the term the kingdom of Christ and of God refers not to the kingdom today in the church life, but to the manifestation of the kingdom in the coming millennium. Today all believers are in the kingdom of God, but not all of them will have an inheritance in the coming millennial kingdom. Both the defeated ones and the overcoming ones may be in the church as the kingdom of God. But only the overcoming ones will inherit the kingdom during the millennium. The fornicators, the unclean persons, and those of unbridled greedy lust will have no share in the reign of Christ in the millennium.

V. THE WRATH OF GOD COMING UPON THE SONS OF DISOBEDIENCE

Verse 6 continues, "Let no one deceive you with vain words, for because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience." The wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience mainly because of the three evil things spoken of in verse 3. The sons of

disobedience are the unbelievers. We, the believers, are beloved children of God. Nevertheless, some of God's children behave as if they were sons of disobedience. Therefore, the wrath of God will come upon them. For this reason, in verse 7 Paul tells us, "Do not become partakers together with them." We should be good imitators of God and not be partakers of any unclean thing.

VI. WALKING AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT

In verse 8 Paul says, "For you were once darkness, but now light in the Lord; walk as children of light." We were once not only dark, but darkness itself. Now we are not only the children of light, but light itself (Matt. 5:14). As light is God, so darkness is the Devil. We were darkness because we were one with the Devil. Now we are light because we are one with God in the Lord.

In this verse Paul exhorts us to "walk as children of light." As God is light, so we, the children of God, are also the children of light. Because we are now light in the Lord, we should walk as children of light.

In verse 2 Paul tells us to walk in love, and in verse 8 he tells us to walk as children of light. The first seven verses of this chapter cover the matter of love. If we walk in love, we shall keep ourselves from uncleanness. To walk in love is to walk in intimacy with God. An intimate relationship between a daughter and mother may illustrate what it means to walk in love. Certain young women enjoy an intimate love with their mothers. They love whatever their mothers love. Because of the love they have for their mothers, they are not willing to do anything opposed to their mothers' feeling. Rather, they walk in intimate love toward their mothers. In the same principle, we have an intimate relationship with the Father. As those who have received grace, we may come in the Son to contact the Father. In the Father's presence we not only enjoy grace, the expression of love, but we also enjoy love itself. We experience this love in a very intimate way. Because we enjoy the love of God in such an intimate way, we do not

want to do anything that displeases the Father. The Father hates fornication, uncleanness, and lust. If we walk in love, we shall stay away from such things. Because we love the Father, we shall not do anything to grieve His heart. What a tender, delicate walk this is! This is not simply living by grace; it is walking in love. We should always remember that we are children of God enjoying His love. We are saints separated unto Him and saturated with Him. Therefore, in our daily walk we would always take care of the Father's feeling, for we live intimately in His tender love.

The difference between love and grace can be illustrated by the relationship between a mother and her child. Sometimes a child may want something from the mother. However, at other times the child simply wants to enjoy the mother's loving embrace. Receiving something from the mother which expresses the mother's love is grace. But resting in the loving embrace of the mother is an illustration of love. In the same principle, we have received grace, the expression of the Father's love. But as we go to the Father in fellowship, we enter into His love, which is the source of grace.

It is rather difficult to point out the difference between truth and light. In our experience we may often realize God as truth to us, as our reality. But sometimes when we get into God's presence, we sense that we are in the light. At such times, we are not only experiencing reality, but we are in the very light itself. Thus, the experience of light is deeper than the experience of truth.

We should not simply be according to truth and by grace, but in love and under light. Walking in love and in light is deeper and more tender than living according to truth and by grace.

After commanding us to walk as children of light, Paul inserts in verse 9 a parenthetical statement regarding the fruit of the light, saying that "the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth." Goodness is the nature of the fruit of the light; righteousness is the way or the procedure to produce the fruit of the light; and the

truth is the reality, the real expression of the fruit of the light. This expression is God Himself. The fruit of the light must be good in nature, righteous in procedure, and real in expression so that God may be expressed as the reality of our daily walk.

It is significant that in speaking of the fruit of the light Paul mentions only three things: goodness, righteousness, and truth. He does not speak of holiness, kindness, or humility. The reason he mentions just three things is that the fruit of the light in goodness, righteousness, and truth is related to the Triune God. Goodness refers to the nature of the fruit of light. The Lord Jesus once indicated that the only One who is good is God Himself (Matt. 19:17). Hence, goodness here denotes God the Father. God the Father as goodness is the nature of the fruit of the light.

Notice that here Paul speaks not of the work of the light nor of the conduct of the light, but of the fruit of the light. Fruit is a matter of life with its nature. The nature of the fruit of the light is God the Father.

We have pointed out that the righteousness denotes the way or the procedure of the fruit of the light. Righteousness is the procedure by which the fruit of the light is produced. In the Godhead, the Son, Christ, is our righteousness. He came to earth to produce certain things according to God's procedure, which is always righteous. Righteousness is God's way, God's procedure. Christ came to accomplish God's purpose according to His righteous procedure. Therefore, the second aspect of the fruit of the light refers to God the Son.

The truth is the expression of the fruit of the light. This fruit must be real; that is, it must be the expression of God, the shining of the hidden light. No doubt, this truth refers to the Spirit of reality, the third of the Triune God. Therefore, the Father as the goodness, the Son as the righteousness, and the Spirit as the truth, the reality, are all related to the fruit of the light.

Verse 9 is the definition of walking as children of light. If we walk as the children of light, we shall bear the fruit

described in verse 9. The fruit we bear by walking as the children of the light must be in goodness, in righteousness, and in truth. The proof that we are walking as children of light is seen in the bearing of such fruit.

VII. PROVING WHAT IS WELL-PLEASING TO THE LORD

Verse 10 says, "Proving what is well-pleasing to the Lord." This phrase is related to verse 8. We should not walk foolishly or blindly or ignorantly. Rather, we should walk as children of light, proving what is well-pleasing to the Lord.

VIII. NOT PARTICIPATING IN THE UNFRUITFUL WORKS OF DARKNESS

In verse 11 Paul says, "And do not participate in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even expose them." The unfruitful works of darkness are vanity, whereas the fruit of the light is truth, reality. Just as Paul commands us to walk as children of light, he also commands us not to participate in the unfruitful works of darkness.

IX. EXPOSING THE WORKS OF DARKNESS

In verse 11 Paul commands us to expose the unfruitful works of darkness. In verse 13 he says, "But all things which are exposed are made manifest by the light; for everything that makes manifest is light." The Greek word rendered exposed may also be rendered reprove or rebuke.

It is a very difficult matter to expose or rebuke someone. Most people reject a rebuke and feel enmity toward the one who rebukes them. There is an element in the fallen human nature that rejects rebuking, reproving, or exposing. Therefore, if possible, we should not expose or rebuke anyone. However, there are times when rebuking is necessary. At such times, the one who does the rebuking must be sure that he himself is very clean. He is like a surgeon who must cleanse himself of all germs before

performing surgery. If you have not been purified, you are not qualified to operate on someone by rebuking or exposing him, for the germs in you will cause the other to be contaminated. The reason most rebukes are not successful is that those who give the rebuke are not pure. Therefore, immediately after the "surgery" infection sets in. Before we can reprove or expose someone, we must be purified, or even sterilized. We must be clean in our thought, motive, feeling, and intention. We must be pure in our heart and in our spirit. This is one aspect of the matter of reproving.

Another aspect concerns the one who receives the reproof or the rebuke. If you are being rebuked by someone, you should not try to discern whether or not the one rebuking you is pure. Simply receive the rebuke, the exposure. If you do this, you will be blessed. You will be aroused from sleep, and Christ will shine on you. Every rebuke, whether pure or impure, clean or unclean, is the shining of Christ. Whenever we are rebuked, we should say, "Lord, I worship You for Your shining. This rebuke is Your shining, and I receive it." To receive a rebuke is to walk in light. This means that if we are not willing to accept a rebuke, we are walking in darkness. If we are truly walking in the light, we shall be able to profit from any kind of rebuking.

X. AWAKE AND ARISE

In verse 14 Paul says, "Wherefore He says, Awake, sleeper, and arise from among the dead, and Christ shall shine on you." The sleeping one who needs the exposing mentioned in verses 11 and 13 is also a dead one. He needs to awake from sleep and arise from death. When we expose or reprove anyone who is sleeping and in the darkness of death, Christ will shine on him. Our exposing or reproving in light is Christ's shining.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-ONE

LIVING BY BEING FILLED IN SPIRIT

In this message we shall consider the matter of living by being filled in spirit. This is covered by Paul in 5:15-21.

I. THE FIFTH ITEM OF THE WALK WORTHY OF GOD'S CALLING

To live by being filled in spirit is the fifth item of a walk worthy of God's calling. The first four aspects of such a worthy walk are the keeping of the oneness, the growing up into the Head, the learning of Christ, and the living in love and light. In chapter four Paul speaks of keeping the oneness, of growing up into the Head, and of learning Christ. In chapter five he speaks of living in love and in light and of living by being filled in spirit. Thus, in chapter five there are three crucial words: love, light, and spirit. Love and light are covered in the first fourteen verses. The next section of this chapter deals with the mingled spirit.

To be filled in spirit (v. 18) is to be filled in our regenerated spirit, the human spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. Our spirit should not be empty, but should be filled with the riches of Christ unto all the fullness of God (3:19). All the items in 5:18--6:9 are related to the one matter of being filled in spirit. Many readers of this chapter pay attention to such details as wives submitting to their own husbands or husbands loving their wives, but they fail to see the source of all these virtues, that is, being filled in spirit. When we are filled in our spirit with Christ unto all the fullness of God, then wives will be subject to their husbands, husbands will love their wives, parents will care for their children, slaves will obey their masters, and

masters will treat their slaves in a proper way. All of these things are the issue of being filled in spirit.

Those from a Pentecostal or charismatic background may regard the spirit in verse 18 as the Holy Spirit. They may interpret Paul's word to mean that we should be filled with the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues. But according to the Greek text, Paul here is not saying that we should be filled with the Spirit, but that we should be filled in our spirit, that is, in our regenerated spirit. Our spirit may be empty and flat, like a flat tire. If our spirit is flat, it needs to be filled with *pneuma*. We need to go to the heavenly "filling station" and get our spirit filled with *pneuma*. In this way we shall be filled in spirit. According to chapter three, we are to be filled with the riches of Christ unto all the fullness of God. If our spirit is filled with the riches of Christ, we shall have no problems in our Christian life.

We have pointed out that living by being filled in spirit is the fifth aspect of a walk worthy of God's calling. The first aspect is the keeping of the oneness. This is for the Body life, the church life. The second aspect is the growing up into Christ the Head in all things. This is for the building. Following this, we learn Christ by being placed into the mold, the standard of a living according to the truth in Jesus. We Christians have a high standard with an uplifted principle to govern our daily walk. To learn Christ is to take Him as the standard and to take His life as the principle. Fourthly, a life worthy of God's calling is a life in love and in light. We must live not only according to truth and by grace, but also in light and in love. We need to be those who live in intimacy with God and walk in His presence. Our daily life must be altogether according to God's heart and in His presence. If we have these four aspects of a worthy walk, we shall spontaneously be filled in our spirit.

These five items are arranged in a marvelous sequence. Firstly we keep the oneness, and then we grow in Christ. After this, we learn Christ and live in love and in light. Then we are spontaneously filled in our spirit with the

riches of Christ unto all the fullness of God. Out of this inner filling will come submission, love, obedience, care, and all the other attributes of a proper Christian life, church life, family life, and community life. Therefore, the fifth aspect of a walk worthy of God's calling is the issue of the first four aspects; that is, it is the issue of keeping the oneness, growing in Christ, learning Christ, and living in love and in light. What a life we have when we demonstrate these five aspects of a worthy walk! If we are filled inwardly unto the fullness of God, there will be no problems at home, in the church, or in the community. This is the crucial point in this message.

II. WALKING NOT AS UNWISE, BUT AS WISE

Verse 15 says, "Look therefore carefully how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise." The word "therefore" in this verse indicates that verse 15 is a conclusion drawn from verses 1 through 14. If we walk in love and in light, then we shall walk, not as unwise, but as wise. The unwise are the nations, the Gentiles, in chapter four, whereas the wise are the beloved children of God.

III. REDEEMING THE TIME

Verse 16 is related to the walk presented in verse 15. In verse 16 Paul says, "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." To redeem the time is to seize every available opportunity. This is to be wise in our walk.

We must redeem the time because the days are evil. In this evil age (Gal. 1:4, Gk.), every day is an evil day, full of pernicious things which destroy, injure, and spoil our time. Therefore, we must walk wisely that we may redeem the time, seizing every available opportunity. If we do not seize every opportunity, our time will be wasted. Many evil things will come in to distract us and frustrate us. We may be distracted by telephone calls, letters, or visitors. We may be enjoying the presence of the Lord and suddenly be attacked through a negative telephone call. Because the

days are evil, we must be on the alert to take advantage of every opportunity.

IV. NOT BEING FOOLISH, BUT UNDERSTANDING THE WILL OF THE LORD

Verse 17 continues, "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." To understand the will of the Lord is the best way to redeem our time. Not knowing the will of the Lord is the main cause of our time being wasted.

V. NOT DRUNKEN WITH WINE, BUT FILLED IN SPIRIT

In verse 18 Paul says, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled in spirit." To be drunk with wine is to be filled in the body, whereas to be filled in our regenerated spirit is to be filled with Christ (1:23) unto the fullness of God (3:19). To be drunk with wine in the body causes us to be dissipated, but to be filled with Christ unto the fullness of God causes us to overflow with Him in speaking, singing, psalming, giving thanks to God, and subjecting ourselves one to another. Day by day we need to be filled in our spirit with the riches of Christ.

A. Speaking, Singing, and Psalming

Verses 19 through 21 are related to "be filled in spirit" in verse 18. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are not only for singing and psalming, but also for speaking to one another. Such speaking, singing, and psalming are not only the outflow of being filled in spirit, but also the way to be filled in spirit. Psalms are long poems, hymns are shorter ones, and spiritual songs are the shortest. All are needed in order for us to be filled with the Lord and to overflow with Him in our Christian life.

According to the New Testament, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are good not only for singing, but also for speaking. Sometimes we are inspired by singing. But on other occasions, speaking that is filled with *pneuma* may

be more inspiring than singing. If we are flat, short of *pneuma*, then our speaking will afford no inspiration. But if we are full of *pneuma*, then our speaking will have impact and will inspire others. This is not eloquence; it is utterance with impact.

In 1967 I visited the church in Jakarta, Indonesia. In one of the meetings I suggested to the saints that we not only sing the hymns, but speak the hymns as well, according to Ephesians 5:19. Immediately we practiced this in the meeting. This speaking was marvelous, filled with the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes we need to practice this in the meetings, without making it a legality. Before we sing a hymn, we may speak it to one another. The brothers may speak the first line and the sisters may respond by speaking the second. However, in doing this we should not fall into an unwritten form. I must admit that some of our meetings are not as living as they should be. Hence, we need to experience the indwelling Spirit in a living way in our singing and speaking.

Verse 19 also speaks of psalming. Singing may be short. Psalming is always long. Sometimes just by singing we cannot express what is within us to praise the Lord; we need psalming to pour out our praise to the Lord adequately.

B. Giving Thanks

Verse 20 goes on to say, "Giving thanks at all times for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God and the Father." We should give thanks to God the Father, not only at good times, but at all times, and not only for good things, but for all things. Even at the worst times, we should give thanks for all things to God our Father.

This verse tells us to give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The reality of the name of the Lord is His Person. To be in His name is to be in His Person, in the Lord Himself. This implies that we should be one with the Lord in giving thanks to God.

C. Subject to One Another in the Fear of Christ

In verse 21 Paul speaks of being "subject to one another in the fear of Christ." Being subject to one another is also the way to be filled in spirit with the Lord and also the overflow of being filled. Our subjection should be one to another, not only the younger ones to the older ones, but also the older ones to the younger ones (1 Pet. 5:5).

According to the context of the following verses, to be in the fear of Christ is to fear offending Him as the Head. This is related to Christ's headship (v. 23) and involves our subjection one to another. Christ is the Head of the Body. If we mistreat any member of the Body, we offend the Head of the Body. We need to keep the relationship with the members of the Body in the fear of the Head.

The life of speaking, singing, psalming, and thanking is a life of subjection. When we speak, sing, psalm, and give thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are willing to submit ourselves to one another. We all submit to Christ the Head and also to the Body. But this submitting comes from the speaking, the singing, the psalming, and the giving of thanks, which in turn come from the infilling. When we are filled in our spirit, we sing, we psalm, we speak, and we thank. Spontaneously, we also submit. However, if we are not filled, there will be no speaking, singing, psalming, or thanking God, and consequently there will be no submitting. The proper church people are those who are submissive by speaking, singing, psalming, and giving thanks to God from their inner being. They live in the way of being filled in spirit with all the riches of Christ unto the fullness of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-TWO

LIVING IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WIFE AND HUSBAND

In this message we come to 5:22-33, where we see the proper living in the relationship between wife and husband.

I. AN ASPECT OF THE LIVING FILLED IN SPIRIT UNTO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD

In 4:1-24 Paul gives us the principle of a life worthy of God's calling. This principle is a matter of having put off the old man and of having put on the new man. From 4:25 through 6:9 Paul presents the details of a proper living. If we would fulfill all these detailed requirements, we need to live according to the truth and by grace. Furthermore, we must live in love and in light, and we must be filled in our spirit. As we have pointed out, being filled in spirit is an aspect of the life worthy of God's calling.

The relationship between wives and husbands is connected to the matter of being filled in spirit. It is an aspect of the daily living of those who are filled in spirit unto all the fullness of God. Therefore, when we speak about the relationship between wives and husbands, we should not neglect the infilling. Only by being filled in our spirit can we have a proper married life.

II. WIVES

Verse 22 says, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands as to the Lord." This is one of the kinds of subjection implied in verse 21. In the exhortations concerning married life, the apostle deals first with the wives, since the wives,

like Eve in Genesis 3, more easily get out of line than the husbands.

In the same principle, Paul deals with children before parents, and slaves before masters. Regarding the relationship between children and parents, most of the problems are caused by the children, not by the parents. The children are disobedient to their parents, but, in actual practice, the parents are obedient to their children. The same is true of the relationship between wives and husbands. Husbands, in your married life, do you obey your wife more than she obeys you, or does she obey you more? Most husbands would have to answer that they obey their wives more than their wives obey them. You may think that it is not right for husbands to obey their wives or for parents to obey their children. Although this may seem backwards according to doctrine, it is true according to practice. If husbands do not know how to obey their wives, they will not have a peaceful married life. Any husband who does not obey his wife does not know how to sympathize with her and to love her. In order for a husband to love his wife, he must sympathize with her and even obey her. Only obedience can beget obedience. Only obedience can pay the price to produce obedience in others. If a husband never obeys his wife, it will be very difficult for his wife to obey him.

First Peter 3:7 says that wives are weaker vessels. This is the reason Paul speaks to wives first here in Ephesians 5. In his exhortations concerning wives and husbands, children and parents, and slaves and masters, Paul takes care firstly of the weaker side and then of the stronger side. Those on the stronger side should not place demands on those on the weaker side. If a husband realizes that his wife is the weaker vessel, he will not be demanding of her.

What we have said thus far does not deny the obvious fact in 5:22 that wives are to be subject to their husbands. Because we all are familiar with this exhortation, there is no need for us to say anything to strengthen it or to intensify it.

A. Subject to Their Own Husbands

In verse 22 Paul exhorts wives to be subject to their own husbands. Most wives appreciate and respect others' husbands. Hence, the apostle exhorts the wives to be subject to their *own* husbands, no matter what kind of husbands they are.

Paul's word about wives submitting to their own husbands indicates that there is the tendency for wives to compare their husbands with the husbands of others. Husbands may do the same thing regarding their wives. If we are short of grace and do not live in the light of God, we may make such comparisons. This is the subtlety of Satan to damage married life. During your engagement, you may have thought that the one you were planning to marry was the best. But after you married him, you may have begun to compare him with others. Therefore, Paul exhorted the wives to submit to their own husbands and not to make comparisons.

In the same principle, when Paul addresses the husbands, he exhorts them to love their own wives (vv. 28, 33). This indicates that they should not compare their wives with the wives of others. We must hate such comparisons. They originate with the enemy, Satan, and can lead to separation or even divorce. If we desire to live a life worthy of God's calling, a life according to truth, by grace, and in love and light, we must not compare our wife or husband with others. Rather, wives should submit to their own husbands, and husbands should love their own wives.

B. As to the Lord

According to Paul's word in verse 22, wives are to be subject to their own husbands "as to the Lord." The wives need to realize that in the eyes of the Lord the husband represents the Lord. The reason the wife must submit to her own husband is that in married life he is as the Lord. I doubt that many married sisters regard their husbands as

the Lord. The situation regarding married life today is deplorable, filled with disobedience and rebellion. Nevertheless, as Christ is the Head of the church and the Savior of the Body, wives must be subject to their husbands as to the Lord. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, was a good example of this. According to 1 Peter 3:6, "Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord."

C. Taking the Husband as the Head

Wives must also take their husbands as the head. Verse 23 says, "For a husband is head of the wife as also Christ is head of the church, being Himself the Savior of the Body." As head of the wife, a husband typifies Christ as the Head of the church. In addition to being the Savior of the Body, Christ is also the Head of the church. The Savior is a matter of love, whereas the Head is a matter of authority. We love Christ as our Savior, but we must also be subject to Him as our Head. It ought to be the same in the relationship between wives and husbands.

D. In Everything

In verse 24 Paul goes on to say, "But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives to their husbands in everything." The thought here is this: although husbands are not the savior of their wives as Christ is of the church, the wives still need to be subject to their husbands as the church is to Christ. According to divine ordination, the subjection of the wives to their husbands should be absolute, without any choice. This does not mean that they should obey their husbands in everything. To obey is different from being subject. In sinful things, things against God, the wives should not obey their husbands. However, they should still be in subjection to them.

E. Fearing the Husband

In verse 33 Paul says that the wife should see that "she fear her husband." Because the wife should respect her husband as the head, the one who typifies Christ as the

Head of the church, she should fear her husband in the fear of Christ (v. 21). As the head of the wife, the husband is the representative of the Lord. For this reason, the wife should fear the husband.

III. HUSBANDS

A. Loving Their Wives

Paul exhorts the husbands to love their wives. The opposite of subjection is ruling. However, the apostle does not exhort the husbands to rule over the wives, but to love them. In married life, the wife's obligation is subjection and the husband's, love. The wife's subjection plus the husband's love constitutes proper married life and typifies the normal church life, in which the church is subject to Christ and Christ loves the church.

B. As Christ Loved the Church and Gave Himself Up for Her

Verse 25 says, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." A husband's love for his wife must be like Christ's love for the church. This means that a husband ought to give himself up for his wife.

The requirement for the husband is much heavier than that for the wife. Submitting to someone is not as difficult as giving yourself up for someone. To give yourself up is to be a martyr, to sacrifice your life. Husbands are to love their wives at such a cost to themselves. They must be willing to pay a great price, even to die for their wives.

C. As Their Own Bodies

Verse 28 says, "So the husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself." In this verse Paul twice speaks of husbands loving their own wives. As we have pointed out, this indicates that a husband is to love his wife without comparing her to others.

In this verse Paul exhorts the husbands to love their own wives as their own bodies. Everyone loves his body. A husband should regard his wife as part of his body and care for her as his own body.

1. Nourishing

Verse 29 goes on to say, "For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church." We show love for our body by nourishing and cherishing it. To nourish is to feed. Concerning physical nourishment, it is the wife who nourishes the husband. It is a somewhat abnormal situation for the husband to do the cooking for the wife. But spiritually speaking, husbands are to nourish their wives. Just as we eat for the sake of our body, so husbands need to take in something of the Lord for the sake of their wives. In doing this a husband regards his wife as part of his body. A husband needs to nourish his wife, to take care of her need, just as he takes care of the need of his body. This is the meaning of nourish in verse 29.

To take in something to meet the wife's need reveals a deep love. I have known some husbands who were skillful in cooking. They even cooked for their wives. Eventually I learned that they were cooking only for their own enjoyment, but they neglected the real need of their wives. To nourish your wife does not mean to serve food to her. It means that you take in something of the Lord to care for her need. In this way you nourish her just as you nourish your own body. This is real love.

2. Cherishing

Husbands should also love their wives as their own bodies by cherishing their wives. To cherish is to nurture with tender love and foster with tender care. This is the way Christ cares for the church as His Body. To cherish something is to care for it deeply and tenderly. It is to soften it through tender warmth. For example, a mother

bird softens baby birds with the warmth of her body as she holds them under her wings. Under her embrace, the little birds are warmed tenderly. The heat from the loving embrace of the mother's body softens and warms the cold little birds.

Sometimes wives are like cold birds. They may not argue with their husbands or even be angry with them, but they may become cold. They may use coldness as a weapon to subdue their husbands. At such times, a husband should tenderly warm and soften his wife, just as a mother bird warms her baby birds by embracing them. This is cherishing. A brother who by grace and in love cherishes his wife in this way will surely be a good husband.

The warmth conveyed through such cherishing does not burn others; it soothes them tenderly and even melts their hearts. This is exactly what the Lord does to us in the church. Although we love the Lord, sometimes in our experience we become "cold birds." We may not rebel against the Lord, but we may become cold. At these times, the Lord embraces us, spreading His wings over us in order to warm us up. By the warmth of His embrace He softens the "cold birds" and melts our hard hearts. This is the Lord's tender love for His Body.

D. Leaving Father and Mother and Being Joined to the Wife as One Flesh

Verse 31 says, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh." Christ and the church being one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), as typified by the husband and wife being one flesh, are the great mystery.

For a proper married life, a man must leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife as one flesh. A man and a woman get married for the sake of their own married life, not for the sake of their parents' family life. Neither the parents of the wife nor those of the husband should interfere with the marriage. It is absolutely against the

biblical principle for a married couple to live either with the husband's parents or with the wife's parents. Such an arrangement spoils married life. According to biblical principle, a man should leave his father and mother and be one with his wife. This principle, of course, also applies to the wife. I know of some young women who became engaged with the condition that after marriage the couple would live with the wife's parents. This is wrong. Only when the husband and the wife both leave their parents can they have a proper married life. This is the teaching of the Word of God.

E. Loving Their Own Wives as Themselves

Finally, in verse 28 Paul says that the husband ought to love his own wife as his own body. He also says, "He who loves his own wife loves himself." The same point is stressed again in verse 33. This indicates the depth of the love a husband must have for his wife.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-THREE

A MYSTERIOUS TYPE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

In his exhortation in chapter five, the apostle presents the church as the Bride of Christ. This aspect of the church reveals that the church comes out of Christ as Eve came out of Adam (Gen. 2:21-22), that she has the same life and nature as Christ, and that she, as His counterpart, becomes one with Him as Eve became one flesh with Adam (Gen. 2:24). The church as the new man is a matter of grace and truth, whereas the church as the Bride of Christ is a matter of love and light. The apostle's exhortation in chapter four is focused on the new man with grace and truth as its basic elements, but his exhortation in chapter five is focused on the Bride of Christ with love and light as its basic substances. In grace and truth we should live as the new man, and in love and light we should conduct ourselves as the Bride of Christ.

Many Christians know that husband and wife are a type of Christ and the church. However, most know this type only in a superficial way. Their knowledge of this mysterious type does not touch their being or affect their living. We need to get into the depths of this type in order that our being and our life may be changed by it.

A COMPLETE PICTURE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

The first couple in the Bible, Adam and Eve, present a significant and complete picture of Christ and the church. According to the book of Genesis, God did not create man and woman at the same time and in the same way. Firstly, God formed man's body from the dust of the ground. Then He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man

became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). After God created man, He said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). The animals and the fowl were brought to Adam, and Adam named them. But for Adam "there was not found a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:20). Within Adam there was the desire to have a counterpart, to have someone to match him. Among the cattle, the beasts, and the fowl, there was no counterpart to Adam. In order to produce such a counterpart, "the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam" (Gen. 2:21). While Adam slept, the Lord took one of Adam's ribs and used it for the building of a woman (Gen. 2:22, Heb.). In life, nature, and form the woman was the same as the man. Therefore, when God brought the woman to Adam, Adam exclaimed, "This time it is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23, Heb.). Adam knew that at last he had found his counterpart.

Genesis 2:24 indicates that a man and his wife are one flesh. We should regard a husband and wife not as two separate persons, but as one complete person, as two halves of a whole unit. A husband and a wife as a complete unit are a marvelous picture of Christ and the church as one entity.

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

It is with this eternal life that the church is built up as the Bride, the counterpart prepared for Christ. In this building up of the Bride, Christ gains the church as a match for Himself.

We have pointed out that Eve had the same life and nature that Adam had. This signifies that the church has the same life and nature that Christ has. Furthermore, just as Eve had virtually the same image as Adam, so the church bears the same image as Christ. Moreover, in stature Eve was very nearly the same as Adam. This indicates that the church has the same stature as Christ.

A COMPLETE UNIT

Together Adam and Eve made a complete unit. In the same principle, Christ and the church make a complete unit. The church is Christ's other half. Adam and Eve became one flesh, but Christ and the church are one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). We can say to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, without the church, You are just a half. You are not complete. Likewise, without You, we are not complete either." Praise the Lord that when Christ and the church are joined as one, they make a complete unit!

In the church there is no place for our natural life and fallen human nature. The human life and nature are not adequate to match Christ. In order to be His counterpart, we need to be one with Christ in life and in nature. This means that Christ and the church as one unit have the same life and nature. Furthermore, Christ and the church have the same image and stature. We should not merely know this as a doctrine, but see it as a heavenly vision. We need to see why we must receive Christ as our life and partake of His divine nature and, furthermore, be transformed into His image from glory to glory. We also need to see that we must attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ because we are to be Christ's counterpart. If we see this vision, we shall be able to understand the type of Christ and the church in chapter five of Ephesians.

CHRIST NOURISHING THE CHURCH

At this point we need to go on to consider how Christ nourishes and cherishes the church. When we are nourished, something enters into our being to meet our need. Nourishment, therefore, must come out of a supply. Without a supply, it is impossible to have nourishment.

Christ nourishes the church with all the riches of the Father. Christ is the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead. Hence, all the riches of God are in Him, and He enjoys these riches. Then He nourishes the church with the very riches of the Godhead that He Himself has enjoyed.

This is proved by John 15. In this chapter the Lord Jesus says that He is the vine and that the Father is the husbandman. The Father is the cultivator, the planter, the farmer. We, the believers in Christ, are the branches. The vine nourishes the branches with what the vine absorbs from the soil. God the Father is the soil, the water, and everything to Christ as the vine. The vine absorbs the riches from the soil and the water, digests them, and then transmits them to the branches. This is the nourishing. Christ nourishes the church with the riches of the Father which He has absorbed and assimilated. By nourishing the church, Christ meets the inward need of the church.

It is correct to say that Christ nourishes the church with His life and with His word. But neither life nor His word is the source. The source is the Father. What Christ receives of the Father becomes the life and the life supply which are embodied in the Word. For this reason, the Word is the word of life, even the bread of life or the supply of life. If we would be nourished by Christ today, we need to abide in Him to absorb His content into our being as life and the life supply. In order to experience this in a practical way, we daily need to contact the living Word, for the Word is the embodiment of life and of the life supply. The more we abide in the Lord and contact the Word, the more we experience His nourishing. This is the way Christ nourishes the church.

All the members of the church need to practice abiding in the Lord. There should be no insulation, no separation, between us and the Lord and no detachment from Him. As soon as we are detached from Him, the supply of nourishment is cut off. Along with abiding in the Lord constantly, we must daily come to the Word and take it in as our life and life supply. Then we shall receive nourishment. Furthermore, all the meetings of the church should be meetings of nourishment. Morning watch and our fellowship with the saints should also be times of nourishment.

As we are nourished by the life and the life supply, we grow and we are purified. In the following message we shall see that the nourishing word is also the washing word, the cleansing word. The water we drink cleanses the fibers of our inner being. As we abide in the Lord to receive the riches of the Father and as we contact the Word to receive the life and the life supply, we are nourished by Christ. In this way Christ nourishes the church He loves.

CHRIST CHERISHING THE CHURCH

According to the New Testament, Christ's care of the church has two aspects. The inner aspect is the nourishing, and the outer aspect is the cherishing. To be nourished is to have something imparted into us inwardly, whereas to be cherished is to be warmed and comforted outwardly. Cherishing is related to environment. In our environment or circumstances the Lord Jesus is often real to us as a warm, tender breeze blowing upon us. As this warm breeze comes upon us, we have the sense of being soothed tenderly. Although this takes place in the environment, it is something more than the environment itself. It is even something that surpasses the Lord's presence. When the Lord's presence becomes a gentle breeze, we experience His cherishing. This cherishing includes soothing, comfort, and rest.

In the environment of the church life, we often experience the Lord's cherishing, although we may not even be conscious of it. However, if for any length of time we are in an environment where there is no church, we sense that the climate has changed and that the environment is different. Then we begin to sense that we have lost something, that the tender, warm breeze is no longer blowing upon us. We may have everything necessary for our material existence, but we know that something we formerly enjoyed is missing. When we return to the church life, we immediately and spontaneously enter into the environment and atmosphere of the Lord's cherishing. Once again we are warmed, soothed, and comforted. This is cherishing.

Just as a child is cherished by the very presence of his mother, so we are cherished by the Lord's presence. My little granddaughter often desires simply to be intimately in her mother's presence. Simply to be in the presence of her mother is a comfort to her. The presence of her mother provides a tender, warm atmosphere. In like manner, the Lord's presence produces an atmosphere of tenderness and warmth to cherish our very being.

We experience such an atmosphere in the church meetings. I am saddened whenever there are saints who do not care for the meetings, but prefer simply to have fellowship in their homes. No matter how enjoyable the fellowship may be in your home, the atmosphere there is not nearly as cherishing as the atmosphere in the meetings. How pleasant is the spiritual climate in the gathering of the saints! As soon as we enter this atmosphere, we are cherished by the Lord's presence. It is by the atmosphere produced by the Lord's brooding presence that the Lord cherishes the church. To be in this climate, this atmosphere, this environment, gives us rest, comfort, healing, cleansing, and encouragement. No atmosphere can compare to the atmosphere of the church meetings. For this reason I do not want to miss even one meeting of the church.

Nourishing and cherishing go together. Through the nourishing we enjoy the supply of life inwardly, and through the cherishing we experience the soothing, comforting atmosphere outwardly. Whenever we are in an atmosphere of cherishing, we can absorb every word of the ministry. This indicates that under the cherishing we receive nourishing. A church that is nourished and cherished in such a way will be strong and healthy.

The nourishing and the cherishing are the church's portion, and they should be found in every meeting. If there is no nourishing and cherishing in the meetings, then there is a problem. The problem, however, may be with you and not with the church. If you are proper, normal, and healthy, you will enjoy the cherishing atmosphere of the Lord's presence in the church and in this atmosphere receive the nourishing supply of life. Praise the Lord for the way He cares for the church! The church people have the privilege of enjoying the Lord in such a fine, tender, intimate, real way.

CHRIST'S INCREASE

As Eve was Adam's wife, so the church is Christ's Bride (John 3:29; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9). Furthermore, Eve was Adam's increase, and the church is Christ's increase (John 3:30). When John the Baptist was told of the many who were coming to Christ, John said, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom" (John 3:29). Then he went on to say, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (v. 30). The increase in verse 30 is the Bride in verse 29. For the Lord to increase means that He must have the Bride. All the following must go to Him. All those who believe in Him should follow Him to be His increase. Although John spoke a clear word regarding this, he was not willing to practice it. This was the reason that God allowed him to be imprisoned and later beheaded. Eventually, John the Baptist received nothing, and all the increase, the Bride, went to the Bridegroom to be His increase. Just as Eve was Adam's

increase, so the church as the Bride of Christ is Christ's increase.

THE MARRIED LIFE AND THE CHURCH LIFE

If we are impressed with the various aspects of the mysterious type of Christ and the church unveiled in this chapter of Ephesians, we shall have not only a proper church life, but also a proper married life. The wives will know what their responsibility is, and the husbands will know their responsibility. Paul's burden here was to cover both married life and the church life at the same time. In his writing he did not separate married life from the church life. Rather, he blended the two together, for he knew that married life is actually part of the church life. Without the married life being proper, it is difficult to have a proper church life. We thank the Lord that through the proper church life our married life also can become proper. How wonderful! This is a mysterious type of Christ and the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FOUR

CHRIST SANCTIFYING THE CHURCH BY CLEANSING HER

In the foregoing message we pointed out that the church has the same life and nature as Christ. This is revealed in the type of Adam and Eve. If the church did not have the life and nature of Christ, the church could not be Christ's counterpart and could never be a match for Christ. If two halves of a unit did not have the same life and nature, they could not make a complete whole. Christ and the church as one entity share the same life and the same nature.

We have also pointed out that Christ nourishes and cherishes the church. He supplies the church and cares for the church in order that the church may grow. Although the church has received Christ's own life and nature, there is still need for supply and for care so that there may be growth. Growth is implied in the formation of Eve, who is a type of the church. God created Adam as a full-grown man. Hence, with Adam, there was no need for growth. However, Eve was built from a rib taken out of Adam's side. This building implies growth. Firstly, Eve received the life and nature of Adam. Then she grew into a woman by being built into a woman. The reference to nourishing and cherishing in Ephesians 5 indicates the need for growth. Nourishing and cherishing are not related to the initial impartation of life. They are related to supplying and caring for the life that has already come into existence so that this life may grow to its full measure.

Consider the vine tree as an illustration. The vine firstly receives nourishment from the soil and the water. The nourishing element is absorbed into the vine to supply life to meet the inward need of the vine. As the vine is

nourished, it is simultaneously cherished by its environment, mainly by the fresh air and the sunshine. The wind and the sun regulate the atmosphere to promote the growth of the vine. If the weather is too cold, the sun warms the vine. If the temperature is too high, the wind cools the vine. This outward regulation of the environment is what we mean by cherishing, as distinguished from the inward supply of life, the nourishing. Today Christ is nourishing the church from within and also cherishing the church from without. He supplies us with life, and He regulates the atmosphere so that we may grow properly.

In this message we shall consider a third aspect concerning Christ and the church--the aspect of sanctifying by cleansing. Christ sanctifies the church by cleansing her (5:25-27). The purpose of Christ in giving Himself to the church is to sanctify her, not only separating her to Himself from anything common, but also saturating her with Himself that she may be His counterpart. This is accomplished by cleansing her with the washing of the water in the Word.

I. CHRIST LOVING THE CHURCH AND GIVING HIMSELF UP FOR HER

Verses 25 through 27 are actually one long sentence. In these verses Paul is saying that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of water in the Word, in order that He might present the church to Himself glorious, without spot, wrinkle, or any such things. Christ's purpose in loving the church and in giving Himself up for the church was to sanctify her by the washing of the water in the Word. Sanctifying is by cleansing, cleansing is by washing, washing is by water, and water is in the Word.

Christ is sanctifying the church so that He might present the church to Himself. In the past, Christ gave

Himself up for the church; in the present, He is sanctifying the church; and in the future, He will present the church to Himself as His counterpart for His satisfaction. Therefore, loving is for sanctifying, and sanctifying is for presenting.

The first point in these three verses is that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. The second point is the sanctifying in verse 26, and the third is the presenting in verse 27. The first point is for the second, and the second is for the third.

Christ's loving the church and giving Himself up for her was for redemption and for the impartation of life. According to John 19:34, blood and water came out of the Lord's pierced side. The blood was for redemption, and the water was for the impartation of life so that the church might come into existence. In Ephesians 5:25 we have the church coming into existence through Christ's loving her and giving Himself up for her.

After the church has come into existence, the church needs the sanctifying. The process of sanctification includes saturation, transformation, growth, and building up. Although sanctification includes separation, the main aspect of sanctification is saturation. The church needs to be saturated with all that Christ is. Saturation is accompanied by transformation, growth, and building. Through such a process of sanctification with all these aspects, the church becomes complete and perfect, the reality of what is typified by Eve in Genesis 2.

After Eve had been prepared for Adam by being built out of Adam's rib, she was presented to Adam, the source from which she came. In like manner, the church will be presented to Christ, who is her source. This presentation will be done not by God, but by Christ Himself. Verse 27 says that Christ will present the church to Himself glorious. Hence, He will be both the presenter and the receiver.

Without separation, saturation, transformation, growth, and building, the church cannot be perfected and

grow into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Only through an all-inclusive process of sanctification can the church become complete and attain to the measure of the stature of Christ's fullness so that Christ can present a perfect church to Himself.

In these verses we have three stages of the production of the church. Firstly, the church is brought into existence. Secondly, the church is sanctified and thereby perfected and completed. Finally, the church is presented to Christ as a glorious church without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing. It is presented to Him holy and without blemish. We are presently in the second stage of the production of the church, the stage of sanctification. When this stage is complete, we shall be presented to Christ as a glorious church.

II. CHRIST SANCTIFYING THE CHURCH

A. Separated and Saturated

In this message we need to dwell on the matter of the all-inclusive sanctification of the church. In the church meetings we are nourished inwardly and cherished outwardly. We are also sanctified. Not many of us have been separated unto the Lord simply through our private time with the Lord. On the contrary, most of us have been separated from the world unto God through the help we have received in the church meetings. We need to be nourished and cherished in order to be separated from the world. As we are separated, we are also saturated. It is the nourishment that brings in the saturation. Furthermore, the more we are cherished by the atmosphere in the meetings, the more we are willing to give up the things of the world. By the cherishing we simply lose our taste for those things, for we realize that they are the very things which cause us to be cold toward the Lord. The cherishing also helps us to be saturated with Christ. This saturation spontaneously produces transformation. You may not be conscious of how much you have been transformed, but others are aware of it. They can see the change in your life and in your living.

Transformation does not come through teaching or correction or through chastisement. It comes through the nourishing and the cherishing. If you faithfully come to the meetings to be nourished and cherished, spontaneously you will be separated from the world and saturated with the riches of Christ. Then with you there will be growth, transformation, and building. This is the way the Bride will be prepared for Christ. Eventually, the Bride will be complete, perfect, and grown to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Then the Lord Jesus will come and present this prepared Bride to Himself.

B. The Washing of the Water in the Word

Now we must see the way the Lord sanctifies us. In verse 26 Paul says that Christ sanctifies the church by cleansing her through the washing of the water in the Word. According to the divine concept, water here refers to the flowing life of God typified by flowing water (Exo. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4; John 7:38-39; Rev. 21:6; 22:1, 17). The washing of such water is different from the washing of the redeeming blood of Christ. The redeeming blood washes away our sins (1 John 1:7; Rev. 7:14), whereas the water of life washes away the blemishes of the natural life of our old man, such as "spot or wrinkle or any such things" (v. 27). In sanctifying the church, the Lord firstly washes away our sins with His blood (Heb. 13:12) and then washes away our natural blemishes with His life. We are now in such a washing process in order that the church may be holy and without blemish.

With Eve in Genesis 2 there was no need of cleansing because in that chapter she had not fallen. Rather, she was pure and without mixture. But because we are fallen, contaminated, and defiled, we today need to be cleansed. Many things in us must be purged away: the flesh, the self, the old man, the natural life. Furthermore, we have many spots and wrinkles from which we need to be cleansed.

If we had the nourishing and the cherishing without the cleansing, our problems would remain with us. The Lord's

nourishing and cherishing always issue in His cleansing. In the process of spiritual metabolism brought about by the cleansing, the "germs" in our being are killed and the negative things are discharged. Through the nourishing and the cherishing with the cleansing, we become healthy and strong. In the meetings the cleansing takes place within us unconsciously. The more we are nourished and cherished in the meetings of the church, the more we are cleansed metabolically.

It is the nourishment that we receive that makes the cleansing possible. If the nourishment ceases, the cleansing will cease also. But if we continually take in the spiritual supply, the elements we absorb into our being will cleanse us inwardly and carry away the old, dead, and unclean things. This metabolic process is taking place day by day in the church life.

The cleansing is the sanctifying. The cleansing by the washing of the water of life is in the Word. This indicates that in the Word there is the water of life, which is typified by the laver between the altar and the tabernacle (Exo. 38:8; 40:7). In Greek the word rendered washing in verse 26 means laver. This Greek word is used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for laver. In the Old Testament, the priests wash themselves from earthly defilement in the laver (Exo. 30:18-21). Now the washing of the water washes us from defilement. Therefore, we are cleansed by the laver of the water in the Word.

In a very real sense, the Word of God is a laver. According to the Old Testament, the priests who served God in the tabernacle had to have their sins dealt with by the blood on the altar, and they had to have their defilement dealt with by washing in the laver. I believe that Paul's concept here is that the church is cleansed by the laver of the water in the Word. Hallelujah, we have the real laver! The priests had only a type, a material laver made of brass. But we have the real laver, the laver in the Word of God.

As the priests in the Old Testament came firstly to the altar and then to the laver, so we come firstly to the cross

to be saved, redeemed, and justified, and then we come to the Word to be cleansed. Day by day, morning and evening, we need to come to the Bible and be cleansed by the laver of water in the Word. By coming to the Word in this way, we are cleansed from the defilement we have accumulated in our contact with the world. Whenever you contact the world in the course of your human living, you need to come to the Word to be cleansed.

In the laver of the Word there is water. This is not the water that quenches our thirst; rather, it is the water that washes us. Here Paul is concerned not about thirst, but about the removal of negative things. These things are washed away by the water in the Word.

One day Brother Nee was speaking about Bible reading. A certain sister told him that she had a poor memory and forgot everything she read in the Word. She asked Brother Nee what was the purpose for her to go on reading the Bible. In his answer, Brother Nee spoke of the way women in China wash rice in a willow basket. They dip the basket in and out of the water a number of times. Every time they take the basket out of the water, all the water flows out of the basket. Nevertheless, although the basket retains no water, both the basket and the rice are washed. He then applied this illustration to the reading of the Word. Although we may not retain anything of what we read, we are washed by it nonetheless, and we are cleansed. Let us be encouraged to come to the Word again and again to be washed. Let us place our basket in the water of the Word and draw it out. The water may flow through the basket, but we shall be cleansed.

C. Dealing with Spots and Wrinkles

The washing in verse 26 does not deal mainly with sins, but deals with spots and wrinkles. Spots are something out of the natural life, and wrinkles are signs of oldness. Only the water of life can metabolically wash away such defects by the transformation of life. All the spots and wrinkles in

the church will be washed away through the inner cleansing of the water in the Word. The more we come to the Word, the more we are nourished. The nourishment we receive brings about an inner cleansing from the defects caused by the natural life and from the wrinkles caused by oldness. We all need such an organic, metabolic washing to take away our defects and the marks of our oldness. As the church is washed organically and metabolically in this way, the church is renewed and without blemish.

Such a washing takes place entirely by life and by the nourishment of life. Let us be encouraged to abide in Christ as the source of nourishment and to contact the Word to receive the nourishing element so that we may be washed organically and metabolically from all defects and oldness. By means of such a washing, the church will be perfected and become glorious.

III. CHRIST PRESENTING THE CHURCH TO HIMSELF

A. A Glorious Church

It is such a glorious church that Christ will present to Himself at His coming back. Glory is God expressed. Hence, to be glorious is to be God's expression. Eventually, the church presented to Christ will be a God-expressing one. Such a church will also be holy and without blemish. To be holy is to be saturated and transformed with Christ, and to be without blemish is to be spotless and without wrinkle, with nothing of the natural life of our old man.

The church that comes out of Christ will go back to Christ just as Eve came out of Adam and went back to Adam. As Eve became one flesh with Adam, so the church which goes back to Christ will be one spirit with Christ.

The church presented to Christ will be glorious; it will be the expression, the manifestation, of God. For the church to become glorious means that the church becomes God's expression. Because the nourishing, the cherishing, and the sanctifying will cause the church to be saturated

with the essence of God, the church will eventually become the Bride to express God. Every local church today must be God's expression. The only way for us to become His expression is to be continually saturated with the divine essence. If we would experience this saturation, we need Christ's nourishing, cherishing, and sanctifying.

B. Holy and Without Blemish

We have pointed out that the glorious church, the church that expresses God, will be holy and without blemish. To be holy is to be separated to the Lord from common things and then saturated and permeated with the divine nature, with all that God is. The church that has become holy in this way will also be without blemish. Blemish here is like a defect in a precious stone. This defect comes from mixture within the stone. If we would be pure, we must be without mixture; that is, we must not have anything other than God in our being. One day, the church will be like this. It will be not only clean and pure, but also without blemish, without mixture. The church will be the expression of God Himself mingled with a resurrected, uplifted, and transformed humanity. This is the glorious church, the church that is holy and without blemish. In the future such a glorious church will be presented by Christ to Himself. Today, however, the church is undergoing the process of Christ's nourishing, cherishing, and sanctifying.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FIVE

CHRIST IN THREE STAGES

Ephesians 5:25-27 presents Christ to us in three stages. Verse 25 says that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Here we see Christ in the stage of the flesh. Verse 26 speaks of Christ sanctifying the church, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the Word. In this verse we have Christ in the stage of the life-giving Spirit. Finally, a third stage of Christ is revealed in verse 27, which speaks of Christ presenting the church to Himself in His coming back. Hence, in this stage Christ will be the Bridegroom receiving His Bride. The first of these three stages was in the past, the second is in the present, and the third will be in the future. In the first stage Christ was the Redeemer; in the second, He is the life-giving Spirit; and in the third, He will be the Bridegroom.

In this message we need to consider certain points found in these verses. However, I wish to point out that our concern is not doctrinal. In the Lord's recovery there is no need for us to pay very much attention to doctrine. The important matter is that we see what a Christ we have and come to experience and enjoy Him more and more.

THE GOD-MAN

Although Christ is God, He is not God only. If He were simply God, He could not be our Christ. To be the Christ to us, He had to be incarnated. Through incarnation, Christ became a man with flesh, blood, and bones. How wonderful that God put on human nature! Our God is not merely God. In Christ He has become a God-man.

It was in the flesh that the Lord gave Himself up for us. If He had not given Himself up as a man in the flesh, there

would have been no way for us to gain Him. We are not spirits; we are flesh. Angels are spirits. God has no intention for us to become spirits like angels. God's concern is not with angels, but with men of flesh. Nothing is more pleasing to God than a man of flesh. At times we regret that we are fleshly. However, if we see ourselves from God's point of view, we shall realize that there is a positive aspect of the flesh. According to Hebrews 2, Christ did not take on the nature of angels, but He did take on blood and flesh. Furthermore, John 1 says that the Word which was God and was with God became flesh (v. 14). Great is the mystery of godliness--God was manifest in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). God cannot be manifest in angels; He can be manifest only in the flesh. The portion of the angels is to behold the manifestation of God in the flesh.

The Word became flesh and God was manifested in the flesh. Yes, we must condemn the sinful flesh. But there is also a positive aspect of the flesh. We are not spirits as angels are--we are flesh! Our Christ did not become an angelic spirit; He became flesh. The Christ who gave Himself up for us was God incarnate.

If Christ had not put on human nature, it would be impossible for us to receive Him into us. The very Christ we take as our person is the God-man. It is impossible for us to take in God directly. Only after God has become the God-man can we take Him into our being to be our life and our person.

A PROPER HUMAN LIFE

Some Christians think that they should behave as if they were angels. They try to live like heavenly beings. In the eyes of God, this kind of living is abnormal. He does not want His children to imitate angels; on the contrary, He wants them to be very human. All the members of the church should have a genuine humanity. For this reason, Ephesians, a book dealing with the church, covers various human relationships: the relationship between wife and husband, between children and parents, between servants

and masters. In order to have a proper church life, we must have a proper human life.

The very Christ we have received and gained is not an angel or some kind of heavenly being, but a God-man. It was as a man in the flesh that He gave Himself up for us. Furthermore, it is as a man that He is able to fit into our situation and meet our need. He has put on human nature in order to be like us. Now He lives in us as our life and as our person to be manifested from within us. When a sister takes Christ as her person in submitting to her husband, her submission will be glorious, full of the reality of Christ lived out from within her. Likewise, when a brother takes Christ as his person in loving his wife, Christ will be expressed in his love for her. Such a manifestation of Christ is possible because as the God-man He gave Himself up for us.

THE SPEAKING SPIRIT

According to verse 26, Christ gave Himself up for the church so that "He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word." After the Lord Jesus gave Himself for us in the flesh, He was resurrected and in resurrection became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). As the life-giving Spirit, He is the speaking Spirit. Whatever He speaks is the word that washes us. The Greek word rendered word in verse 26 is not *logos*, the constant word, but *rhema*, which denotes the instant word, the word the Lord presently speaks to us. As the life-giving Spirit, the Lord is not silent; He is constantly speaking. If you take Him as your person, you will discover how much He desires to speak within you. Idols are dumb, but the indwelling Christ is always speaking. No one who takes Christ as his life and his person can remain silent. On the contrary, he will be constrained by Christ to speak. As I minister to the Lord's children, I experience Christ speaking within me.

In John 6:63 the Lord Jesus said, "The words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." The Greek

word rendered words here is also *rhema*, the instant and present spoken word. This differs from *logos*, the constant word, as in John 1:1. As the speaking Spirit, the Lord is speaking the *rhema* to us. Whatever He speaks is spirit.

If day by day there is no speaking of the Lord within us, it is an indication that there is some problem within us. If there is no speaking, no *rhema*, then in our practical experience the Spirit is absent, for the Lord's speaking actually is the Spirit. As long as we have the Lord's present word, we have the Spirit, the life-giving Spirit. We cannot separate Christ as the life-giving Spirit from His speaking. His presence consists in His speaking. How can we know that Christ as our person is present with us? We know it by His speaking. If we do not have His speaking within us, we do not have His presence. But if we turn to Him, to mean business to take Christ as our life and our person, His speaking will begin again. His speaking is the living word, the living word is the Spirit, and the Spirit is our wonderful Christ Himself. How practical, subjective, intimate, and real He is as the speaking Spirit!

METABOLIC CLEANSING AND TRANSFORMATION

This Spirit is the water that washes us. The more the Spirit speaks, the more we are washed, cleansed. Every time He speaks within us we should experience cleansing.

This cleansing is a metabolic cleansing that removes what is old and replaces it with what is new. How different this is from some type of outward cleansing! It is by the inward, metabolic cleansing that we have transformation. By the metabolic cleansing that comes from the speaking of Christ as the life-giving Spirit, we are truly changed, transformed.

Because such an inward transformation is taking place within us, there is no need for outward correction in the church life. God's way in His economy is not to change us outwardly. His way is for Christ to give Himself up for us and then to come into us as the life-giving Spirit. In a very

practical sense, the Lord's presence is one with His speaking. Whenever He speaks, we realize His presence within us. This speaking of the life-giving Spirit within is the water that cleanses our inner being. This cleansing water deposits a new element into us to replace the old element in our nature and disposition. This metabolic cleansing causes a genuine change in life. This change is what we mean by transformation. Outward correction has no value. What the church needs is the inward metabolic cleansing that comes from allowing Christ as the life-giving Spirit to be our life and our person.

In verse 26 we have Christ not in the stage of the flesh, but in the stage of the life-giving Spirit. As we have pointed out, the life-giving Spirit is the speaking Spirit. Christ's speaking is the Spirit; it is the very presence of the life-giving Spirit. If we honor the speaking of the Spirit within us, the Spirit's speaking will become the water that cleanses, purifies, sanctifies, and supplies us with the element of Christ. This element replaces and discharges our old element and brings about genuine transformation. In this way we are purified and sanctified; in this way we also experience the practicality of the church life.

NOT OUTWARD CORRECTION, BUT CHRIST AS OUR LIFE AND PERSON

Suppose two brothers who live together in a brothers' house have a problem with each other. One may contact an elder for help, and another may go to an elderly sister for fellowship. The elder may tell the one brother that in the church life we all must learn patience, whereas the elderly sister may tell the other that the Lord has put him into his situation so he could learn certain lessons. Such advice may be mere religious talk. If these brothers try to follow it, they will have even greater problems. Eventually, they may choose to move out of the brothers' house and even leave the church life.

In the church life we do not need outward correction. Instead, the church life is a life in which we all take Christ

as our life and person. The elders and the elderly sisters need to help the saints to realize that their need is to take the Lord Jesus as their person. The more all the saints do this, the more they will experience the speaking of Christ as the life-giving Spirit. This speaking will be to them the cleansing, purifying water. This water will spread the element of Christ throughout their being, and it will discharge all oldness. Eventually, brothers like those in the illustration above will no longer be bothered by problems with each other, but will grow together and be built up together. This is the proper church life. Oh, how we all need the inward cleansing, the metabolic purification that transforms us!

What I am ministering to you in this message is something I have learned through years of experience in the Christian life as well as in the church life. I am familiar with various teachings concerning the inner life, holiness, and spirituality. Although I put these teachings into practice, most of them were not very effective. Many of us can testify that although we endeavored to practice what we read on holiness and spirituality, what we read did not work very well in our experience. Out of failure and disappointment many have come to believe that it simply is not possible to have the proper church life today. They claim that for this we must wait until the next age. By the Lord's mercy I can testify that it is possible to have the genuine church life. We have the church life not by trying to carry out teachings in an outward way, but by taking Christ as our life and as our person. Then we enjoy and experience Christ as the life-giving, speaking Spirit. We enjoy the speaking that cleanses us, transforms us, and causes us to grow.

As we grow in life, we are spontaneously built up with others. In such a building there is no place for division or strife concerning opinion and doctrine. We in the church in Los Angeles can testify that we do not care for opinions, suggestions, or proposals. We care only for taking Christ as our life and as our speaking person. We treasure His

speaking because His presence as the life-giving Spirit is in His speaking. By His speaking He cleanses us, purifies, and sanctifies us. Eventually, all the spots and wrinkles are swallowed up by life.

A GLORIOUS CHURCH

Through the Lord's speaking within us as the life-giving Spirit, we are becoming a glorious church, a church holy and without blemish. Today we are waiting for the Lord's coming back, knowing that when He comes, He will present us to Himself a glorious church, holy and without blemish. At that time, we shall experience Christ in the third stage as the Bridegroom coming for His Bride. Until then, our need is to daily take Christ as our person and to be cleansed, purified, and sanctified, through the speaking of the life-giving Spirit. In this way we shall undergo a metabolic change leading to the transformation in life which is necessary for the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SIX

SANCTIFYING, CLEANSING, NOURISHING, AND CHERISHING

(1)

God's economy is not a religion, but a wonderful, unlimited, immeasurable, unsearchable, and all-inclusive Person, Christ Jesus Himself. Christ is the embodiment of God and the content of the church. This Christ is to be our life and our person.

NOT RELIGION BUT A WONDERFUL PERSON

However, in today's Christianity God's economy has become a mere religion. Under the influence of this religion, Christians believe that God loved the world and gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross for our sins. After Christ's resurrection, He ascended to the heavens. Until He comes back, we are to study the Bible and follow its teachings. But teachings are not the living Person of Christ Himself. God's economy is not a matter of religion with doctrines and teachings; it is a matter of a wonderful, living Person. Now this Person must become our person. Our need today is not to be concerned with doctrine, but to be concerned with contacting the living Christ within us.

RECOVERED TO THE SUBJECTIVE CHRIST

Many Christians pay more attention to the Bible than to Christ. This indicates that even the Bible can be utilized to distract people from Christ. Surely, we believe, respect, and honor the Bible to the uttermost. But we recognize that the Bible is the revelation of the living Person of Christ. If we do not pay attention to the Christ revealed in

the Bible, then we ignore the main function of the Bible, which is to reveal this very Christ to us. How we need to be recovered fully to Christ Himself!

We need to be recovered not merely to the objective Christ in the heavens, but to the subjective Christ in our spirit. This subjective One is seeking to spread Himself into our heart. Not only is Christ our Savior objectively, but He is our life and our person subjectively. We need to devote our full attention to such a subjective Christ. In Galatians 2:20 Paul could say, "Not I, but Christ who lives in me." Here Paul did not speak of the life of Christ, the work of Christ, or the power of Christ; he spoke of Christ Himself living in him. Hallelujah, the very Person of Christ is living in us!

In the foregoing message we pointed out that when Christ was in the flesh, He gave Himself up for us. Then in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit. This life-giving Spirit is the One we are to take daily as our person. As the life-giving Spirit, Christ is washing us, sanctifying us, cleansing us, nourishing us, and cherishing us. We shall consider these matters in this message.

BECOMING HOLY DISPOSITIONALLY

Perhaps you have heard messages or read books about sanctification. In order to know the true meaning of sanctification, we need to contact the life-giving Spirit indwelling our spirit. One aspect of sanctification involves separation. To be sanctified is to be separated positionally, to undergo a change of position. However, this is not the only aspect of sanctification. In sanctification something that once was natural gradually becomes holy in nature. Hence, as we are sanctified subjectively, we become holy dispositionally.

This aspect of sanctification can be illustrated by the process of making tea. When tea is placed in a cup of water, the water is "tea-ified." As the water is "tea-ified," it becomes tea-water. We can compare ourselves to the cup of water and Christ to the tea. Just as water is "tea-ified" by

the element of tea, so we are sanctified by the element of Christ. Therefore, to be sanctified is to have Christ Himself added into our being. The more Christ is added into us, the more we have the appearance, taste, and aroma of Christ. Day by day, our need is to take more of Christ as the heavenly tea into us so that more of His element may be added into our being. In this way we shall be "Christ-ified."

Suppose Christ were simply an objective Christ at the right hand of God in the heavens. Could we be sanctified dispositionally simply by trying to follow in an outward way the teachings of the Bible? Certainly not. Nothing of the element of Christ could be added into our being. We thank the Lord for showing us that subjective sanctification is a matter of having Christ added into us. The only way this can happen is by our taking Him as our life and as our person.

CHRIST'S INTENTION IN HIS SPEAKING

We have pointed out that when we take Christ as our person, we experience Him speaking in us as the life-giving Spirit. The Lord's intention in His inward speaking is not simply to tell us to do certain things or not to do other things; it is to impart Himself into us by speaking to us. The more the Lord speaks within us, the more He imparts Himself into us. Whenever we tell the Lord that we want Him to be our person, He begins to speak within us.

Even if we do not hearken to His speaking, He will still impart Himself to us by His speaking. Many times we may disobey the Lord's inner speaking, but He spreads within us a little more nevertheless. The Lord's main concern is not with how much we obey Him, but with how much opportunity He has to impart Himself to us and to spread Himself within us. As soon as you say, "Lord Jesus, I take You as my person," the Lord begins to impart Himself into you. However, should you change your mind and tell the Lord that you want to withdraw your promise, He will say, "Even if you withdraw your promise, I have already

imparted Myself into you." If we tell the Lord that we are not able to obey Him, He will reply, "I am not concerned whether or not you feel you are able to obey Me. I only care to be given the opportunity to get Myself into you." Even as we are speaking to the Lord about not wanting to fulfill the promise we have made to Him or about being unable to obey Him, He is imparting Himself into us. The more we speak to Him, the more we are "Christ-ified."

Sanctification comes from our dealing with the living Person of Christ. I have the full assurance that those who have told the Lord that they are willing to take Him as their person cannot escape the Lord's speaking. As the Lord speaks, He imparts Himself into us. This impartation is sanctification.

CLEANSED BY THE SUBJECTIVE CHRIST

We come now to cleansing. In sanctification a new element is added into us, whereas in cleansing a particular element is removed from us. We all need our natural disposition to be cleansed. No matter how good or kind you may be naturally your natural disposition is a problem. Furthermore, we have the problems of our habits, customs, and self-made ordinances. All these things need to be eradicated.

Contrary to religious teachings, we are not cleansed by self-correction. This means that we are not cleansed by dealing with ourselves in an outward way. For example, it is impossible to remove wrinkles, signs of oldness, by washing the skin outwardly. During our first period of time in the church life, we may experience a church honeymoon. However, inevitably oldness sets in and wrinkles appear. In order for our wrinkles to be removed, our youthfulness in life must be restored. As the life-giving Spirit, Christ is doing such a work of restoration among us today. Christ will not come back for a bride with wrinkles. If we would be His Bride, we must be kept up to date with Him. Wrinkles are not taken away by teaching or by trying to obey the doctrines in the Bible. Wrinkles are removed as we take

Christ as our person and allow Him to live in us. It is not the objective Christ in the heavens who cleanses us; on the contrary, it is the subjective Christ, the Christ so intimate and available, who cleanses us. Whenever we contact Him, we are refreshed, renewed, and made more youthful in life.

Ephesians 5:25 and 26 say that Christ gave Himself up for the church that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word. In the foregoing message we pointed out that the water in the word is Christ as the speaking Spirit. The more Christ speaks within us, the more He flows within us. This flowing water is not in the *logos*, the constant word, but in the *rhema*, the present, instant word. As this water washes us, it carries away our oldness. This washing is a metabolic washing. It supplies a new element to replace the old. This leads to transformation. Therefore, cleansing is not a matter of teaching, but a matter of taking Christ as our living person. When we take Him as our person, He adds Himself into us and washes us metabolically.

NOURISHED BY TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON

In verse 29 there are two important words: nourish and cherish. To nourish is to feed. In the past many of us attended so-called Christian services or read the Bible without receiving any nourishment. But if we take Christ as our person, we shall experience Him nourishing us. We shall continually have the sense of His inward nourishment. To be nourished by Christ is to be supplied with His riches. I believe that we all have experienced the nourishment that comes from taking Christ as our person.

Nourishment brings about transformation. We all become what we eat. This means that if we eat Christ, we shall eventually be constituted with Christ. We shall be transformed by the element of Christ that has been dispensed into us. The more we take Christ as our person, the more He nourishes us. Through Christ's nourishment we are transformed. This means that we become a new

person with a new element and substance. Hallelujah, Christ nourishes us with Himself, with the riches of all He is! What we need today is not doctrine or religion, but the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ.

OUR BURDEN

In these messages our burden is not to pass on more teachings to the saints. Our burden is to minister the living Christ. Today the need of the Lord's people is to take Christ as their person for nourishment. Because we are conscious of this need, we are not interested in mere objective teachings. Our desire is to help others come in touch with the living Christ, to open to Him, and to take Him as their life and person. I hope that many will say, "Lord, I have been a Christian for years, but I have not taken You as my person. Lord, by Your mercy, I want to begin now to take You as my person." If your husband or wife troubles you and you are tempted to exchange words, that is the time to take Christ as your person. Instead of arguing with others or defending ourselves, we should allow Christ to make His home in our heart.

"WRECKED" BY CHRIST

Many of us can testify that we have been "wrecked" by Christ. On the one hand, Christ rescues us; but on the other hand, He "wrecks" us and makes us useless for anything other than Himself and the church life. The more we take Christ as our person, the more He "wrecks" us. Actually, this ministry is a "wrecking" ministry. Through it, thousands have been "wrecked" for Christ and the church. Now nothing other than the living Christ and the proper church life can satisfy us.

WARMED AND SOFTENED

Along with the nourishing we have the cherishing. To be cherished is to be softened by being warmed. When we are hard and cold, we need Christ to cherish us. We need Him to warm our hearts. After some experiences of His

warming, we are softened. Many can testify that through their contact with the church in the Lord's recovery, they have been warmed and softened. Before coming into the church life, they were somewhat cold and hard. But Christ, the nourishing and cherishing One, has made them warm and soft. Many of us can give testimony of what it is to be cherished by Christ in such a tender, intimate way.

Just as a mother cherishes a child by holding the child to her breast, so the Lord cherishes us by holding us close to Him. Although I am an elderly person, I still need Christ's cherishing. Sometimes I tell Him, "Lord, You know how small I am." He replies, "Yes, I know. This is why I am here not only to sanctify, cleanse, and nourish you, but also to cherish you." How tender, sweet, and warm the Lord Jesus is! By resting on Him, we who once were hard and cold become soft and warm. Such a change takes place through the Lord's care for us from within. Inwardly the Lord warms us and softens us as we enjoy His tenderness, sweetness, and lovingness. Praise Him, He is the cherishing One! May we all take Christ as our person and experience more of His sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing. In this way we enjoy Him and experience Him in a living way.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SEVEN

HOW CHRIST GLORIFIES THE CHURCH

We have seen that 5:25-27 presents Christ in three stages. In the first stage, the stage of the flesh, Christ gave Himself up for the church. In the second stage, He as the life-giving Spirit is sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing the church. Eventually, in the third stage, He will present a glorious church to Himself as His Bride.

HOW CHRIST PRESENTS THE CHURCH TO HIMSELF

We need to consider how Christ will present the church to Himself as a glorious church. When I was young, I thought that Christ was merely in the heavens and that the church was on earth. My concept was that at His coming back from the heavens to the earth, He would suddenly take up the church and present her to Himself. According to this concept, Christ is far away in the heavens, and we on earth are making ourselves ready to be presented to Him. I realized later, however, that this is a natural concept that makes Christ too objective.

God's economy is altogether different from the natural concept and from religion. In His economy, God is working Christ into us. Eventually, Christ will present the glorious church to Himself not by coming merely in an objective way, but by expanding within us and then by coming out of us.

Romans 8 indicates that God has not only called us and justified us, but that He will also glorify us. Years ago I was taught that one day the Lord would suddenly descend from the heavens and sweep us up into glory. But this concept of glorification is not according to God's economy. Christ will glorify us not by descending upon us from the

heavens, but by coming forth from within us. The hope of glory is not the Christ in the heavens, but the Christ who is in us (Col. 1:27). If we do not take Christ as our life and our person, we shall have no way to enjoy the glory that is within us. We need to say, "Lord Jesus, I take You as my life and my person. Lord, I offer my heart to You. Take my heart, Lord. Possess it, occupy it, and make Your home in it." If you practice this, spontaneously you will come to know the glory within you.

THE SHINING OF THE INNER GLORY

Many of us were taught that the light of God shines upon us from outside of us. Our experience of the Lord's shining, however, is different from this. According to our experience, the light shines not from the outside, but from within us. When you take Christ as your life and your person, do not expect the heavens to open and a great light to shine upon you in an outward way. If your experience is like that of so many, the Lord's shining will be inward, a shining from within. Such a shining is an expression of the inner glory. Our hope of glory is Christ in us. Hence, when God glorifies us, He will not need to send the glory from above; rather, He will cause Christ to shine forth from within us. This indicates that glorification is a subjective experience of the indwelling Christ.

SWALLOWED UP BY CHRIST AS GLORY

Contrary to the religious concept, our glorification will not be a sudden event. Rather, it will take place gradually as Christ expands within us and saturates us with Himself. Christ glorifies us as He "eats us up" little by little. We all need to be eaten, devoured, swallowed up, by Christ as the glory within us. Within us we have Christ not only as our life and our person, but also as the very glory of God.

We may use the metamorphosis of an ugly caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly as an illustration of glorification. A caterpillar is not instantaneously transformed into a butterfly by a beauty that suddenly descends upon it and

envelops it. No, the beauty of the butterfly is contained within the life of the caterpillar. As the law of this life functions within the caterpillar, the caterpillar is gradually transformed into a butterfly. As this process takes place, the beauty of the butterfly swallows up the ugliness of the caterpillar.

In the same principle, Christ is in us to be our hope of glory. As the indwelling glory, He takes every opportunity to expand within us. The inner glory saturates us and even swallows us up. One day our entire being will be saturated with the divine glory. On that day we shall be brought into glory in a full way.

This is completely different from the religious teaching that tells us we must try to behave ourselves until someday when we hope to be suddenly transported into a realm of glory. According to the religious concept, we must try our best to please the Lord. If we are pleasing to Him, one day He will swoop down from heaven and carry us away to glory. What a contrast between this and God's economy! God's economy is to dispense Christ into us. As believers, we have Christ in us as our glory. Our need is not to behave ourselves or to endeavor to please God; it is to take care of Christ as the hope of glory and to allow this glory to be our life and person.

CHRIST COMING FROM WITHIN US

What we have within us is not simply life or the Spirit, but Christ Himself as the very glory of God. This Christ will present the church to Himself as a glorious church. However, He will do this not in a religious way, but in the way that is according to God's economy. This means that He will expand within us and saturate us with Himself until we have been wholly swallowed up by the inner glory. Then He will come forth from within us.

Most Christians expect Christ to come from the heavens. I am very familiar with the verses which speak of this. On the one hand, Christ will come from the heavens. But on the other hand, much to the surprise of many, He

will come from within us. Objectively Christ is in the heavens, but subjectively and experientially He is in us. As the One indwelling us, He will come from within us.

Since the day Christ came into us, He has been seeking a way to come out through us. It is easy for Him to get into us, but it is not easy for Him to get out of us. For example, we can easily sow a seed into the soil, but it takes time and it requires a process for this seed to grow out from the soil. Nevertheless, just as the seed eventually grows and comes out from the earth, so Christ eventually will saturate us, swallow us up, and then come out through us.

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN RELIGION AND GOD'S ECONOMY

Most Christians today miss the mark of God's economy because they are veiled by religious concepts. They simply do not know what God's economy is. The contrast between religion and God's economy can be illustrated by the Lord's human living. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, the temple with all its rituals, practices, and ordinances was still in Jerusalem. In the temple the priests presented the offerings, burned the incense, and lighted the lamps. However, God was not in the temple--He was in the Lord Jesus. Sometimes the Lord stayed in the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary in Bethany. He visited with them and spoke with them in a normal, human way. Nevertheless, while He was in that house in Bethany, the priests continued to perform the rituals in the temple. With the priests in the temple we see the practice of religion, but with the Lord in Bethany we see God's economy. God's economy is to work Himself into man. His economy was carried out not in the temple, but in that house in Bethany, for there Christ, the embodiment of the fullness of God, was present. Those who worshipped in the temple were practicing their religion, but Lazarus, Martha, and Mary enjoyed the presence of the Lord Jesus. The local churches today should not be like the temple in Jerusalem, but be like that home in Bethany. This means that the churches

should not be places of religion, but be places where God's economy is being carried out.

Religion teaches that God will bring us into a sphere, a realm, of glory. According to the religious concept, the Lord will instantaneously transport us into this objective glory. Until then we must behave ourselves and seek to order our lives according to the Scriptures. In everything and in every way we must try our best to be scriptural. Then, according to this teaching, we shall be qualified one day to be caught up into the realm of God's glory.

Contrast this concept with the economy of God. According to God's economy, the glory has already come into us and is now dwelling within us. This glory is the very Christ who is our life and our person. Christ will present a glorious church to Himself not by suddenly coming down upon the church, but by expanding within the church until the church has been wholly permeated, saturated, and swallowed up with Himself. How different this is from trying to please God in an outward way! Glorification is altogether a matter of Christ's expanding within us and swallowing us up with Himself. This is God's economy.

Let us turn from religious teachings and give ourselves absolutely to God's economy. The Bible reveals that in His economy God is working Christ into us. On the day we repented and believed in the Lord Jesus, Christ came into us as the element of glory. Now He is in the process of presenting a glorious church to Himself by spreading Himself within us. According to Ephesians 3:17, Christ's expanding within us is actually His making His home in our heart. Christ is saturating us and even "eating us up." This will go on until He comes out of us. By this process Christ is presenting the church to Himself as a glorious church.

NOT ONLY VICTORIOUS, BUT ALSO GLORIOUS

Ephesians 5:27 does not say that Christ will present to Himself a nice church nor even a victorious church, but it says that Christ will have a glorious church. It is possible to be victorious without being glorious. Many books tell us

how to be victorious, but I do not know of a book that tells us how to be glorious. Likewise, many messages have been given on the way to have victory. But have you ever heard a message about how to be glorious? Christ wants a glorious church, not merely a victorious one.

BACK TO THE INDWELLING CHRIST

Not many of us have the confidence to say that we are glorious. The reason for this is that we realize that we have not given the Lord the full opportunity to saturate us and to come out through us. After receiving the Lord Jesus into us, many of us became distracted or snared by religious teachings. Instead of concentrating on the indwelling Christ, we paid attention to other things. Therefore, in the Lord's recovery we all must be brought back to the indwelling Christ. From the depths of our being we need to tell the Lord that we want to take Him as our life and our person and give Him the full ground within our being.

If the Lord were only in the heavens, He could not be our life and our person. But Christ is both in the heavens and in us. It is this indwelling One whom we must take as our life and person. When we do this, He makes His home in our heart. He expands in us, saturates us, and gradually swallows us up. Eventually, at the time of His coming back, He will be fully expressed from within us. This is God's economy in life.

THE PROCESS OF GLORIFICATION

In God's economy, Christ is even now in the process of presenting the glorious church to Himself. As this process takes place, He is making His home in our heart by becoming our life and our person. In this way, He saturates our inner being with Himself. It is not His intention to correct us, adjust us, or to improve us. His aim is to glorify us. In order to achieve this goal, He is now carrying on the process of glorification within us.

No matter how nice, good, right, or victorious you may be, you are not yet glorious. Christ's intention is not to

obtain a church that is nice, right, or good, but to obtain a church that is altogether glorious. Hence, Christ cares only to glorify us by saturating us with Himself and by swallowing us up. Day by day, He is devouring us and replacing us with the element of what He is. This process transpires in the depths of our being. Oh, how we need to experience such an intimate, personal Christ! Our Christ must not be a Christ in teaching, but be a Christ making His home in our heart, a Christ saturating our being with His element.

A MUTUAL EATING

A well-known hymn tells us to trust and obey. God's economy, however, is more than just trusting and obeying; it requires that we be "eaten up" by Christ. Christ wants us to eat Him, and He wants to eat us. Hence, in God's economy there is a mutual eating. My burden in this message is to point out that Christ's intention is to "eat us up." When we have been consumed by Christ in a full way, He will then present the church to Himself as a glorious church.

Do you know why the church today is not very glorious? The reason is that not many have allowed Christ to eat them up. If the church is to become glorious, we need to allow the indwelling Christ to consume every part of our inward being. According to verse 25, Christ gave Himself up for the church. Now He is working within us to saturate us and to come out of us. However, He does not intend to come out of us and leave us aside. On the contrary, He wants to come out of us by saturating us and devouring us. We need to pray, "Lord Jesus, eat me up!" When Christ has finished consuming us inwardly, He will be able to boast to Satan, "Satan, look at My glorious church!"

The goal of God's economy is to gain a glorious church. God has ordained us unto glory (1 Cor. 2:7). This is not an objective glory, but a glory that is subjective and experiential. Such a glory is actually the very Christ whom we eat and by whom we are being eaten up. Our desperate

need today is to eat the Lord and to allow Him to consume us. Only in this way will the church become the glorious church for which Christ is longing.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-EIGHT

SANCTIFYING, CLEANSING, NOURISHING, AND CHERISHING

(2)

In 5:26 and 29 there are four crucial words: sanctify, cleanse, nourish, and cherish. Because the enemy has veiled these matters, not many Christians have a clear understanding of their significance. For this reason, I am very burdened of the Lord to consider them further in this message.

THE ADDITION OF THE ELEMENT OF CHRIST

God's intention in His economy is not to correct us or to improve us. Neither is it to have good people in place of bad people. In the eyes of God, it does not matter whether we are good or bad, for the only thing of value in His economy is Christ Himself. Therefore, God's desire is to work Christ into us. Whether we are good or bad, we need the element of Christ added into us. This involves Christ's work in sanctifying us. Sanctification in 5:26 does not mean merely to be separated from what is common, but it means to have the very element of Christ added to us.

Sanctification is not a matter of adjusting ourselves outwardly to fit into the situation of the church life. For example, a young brother may have been rather loose before coming into the church. Now that he is living in a brothers' house he constantly reminds himself to behave properly. This behavior is not sanctification--it is religion. In the eyes of God, such religious behavior is included in what Paul calls dung (Phil. 3:8). The Lord does not want

our self-improvement or self-adjustment; He wants to saturate our whole being with Himself. Hence, sanctification is not behavior, but the addition of the element of Christ to our being.

NOT DELIBERATE BEHAVIOR, BUT A SPONTANEOUS EXPRESSION

As one who is familiar with both the Bible and the teachings of Confucius, I have come to realize that in their daily living many Christians live as if they were disciples of Confucius. Under the influence of the religious concept, they regard the Bible as a book of doctrines and ethical teachings. For example, a sister may try desperately to submit to her husband. In doing this, she is actually living like a follower of Confucius, all the while believing that she is being a good Christian. She explains her behavior by saying that, according to the Bible, her husband is the head and she is obligated to submit to him. Such a word sounds very good, but it is religious, for it is not according to God's economy to work Christ into us. We all know that in 5:22 Paul exhorts the wives to be subject to their own husbands. But do not forget that this follows his word about being filled in spirit (v. 18). This indicates that a wife's submission should come out of the infilling of the Spirit, not out of an outward, deliberate attempt to be submissive.

Often in Christian weddings a pastor will charge the bride and groom according to Paul's word in Ephesians 5 regarding husbands and wives. The wife promises to submit to her husband, and the husband vows to love his wife. However, neither the bride nor the groom realizes that submission and love are the issue of being filled in our spirit with the Triune God.

If a sister's submission is genuine, it will not require deliberate effort. On the contrary, she will submit spontaneously out of her experience of Christ and her enjoyment of Him. She may not even realize that she is submissive, for she submits without purposely trying to do

so. Such submission comes out of the element of Christ that has been imparted into that sister. How different this is from submitting because she has been taught to be under the headship of her husband! Such deliberate submission is religious and is not according to God's economy.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR LIFE AND OUR PERSON

There is a great difference between sanctification and behavior. In sanctification we do things without trying on purpose to do them. They are the spontaneous expression of our taking Christ as our life and our person. When Christ is our life and our person, He lives within us. It is He who is loving and submissive. To submit because of the indwelling Christ is one thing, but to submit because of behavior or outward correction is an altogether different matter.

The leading ones in the churches should not tell others what to do. Instead, we all must be able to testify that we live, not according to outward teachings, but according to the Christ who dwells in us to be our life and our person. Our aim is not to behave in a particular way, but simply to take Christ as our life and our person. Then what we do will be the outflow of the inner life. Spontaneously, the wives will submit to their husbands, the husbands will love their wives, and the children will be obedient to their parents. However, this kind of living will not be deliberate; it will be the issue of being filled in spirit with the Triune God.

When the young people are helped by a message, they may say that they will never be the same. But even this may be religious, for the young people may unconsciously try to improve themselves. They may try by their own effort to do what they heard in that message. Striving to make ourselves different is not sanctification.

In order to be sanctified in a genuine way, we simply need to contact the Lord and take Him as our life and our person. We need to pray, "Lord Jesus, You are my life and my person. Lord, take me, occupy me, and possess me. O Lord, come into every corner of my heart, fill my heart

with Yourself, and make Your home in my heart. Lord, I don't care whether or not I'll be different, and I'm not concerned about behavior. I care only that You fill me and come out through me." If you contact the Lord in this way, He will gradually and spontaneously be added into your being. This addition of Christ will sanctify you.

A HEAVY BURDEN

Subjective sanctification does not take place by teaching, but takes place by the inward working of the living Christ. This is the reason we emphasize the fact that in the Lord's recovery we care little for doctrine in letters, but very much for the experience of Christ as our life and our person. I cannot express how heavy is the burden on my heart concerning this matter. If I can help the saints realize what sanctification is, I believe that this burden will be discharged. Please be impressed that sanctification definitely is not a matter of outward behavior or improvement. God desires to daily dispense the element of Christ into our being. It is this element alone that causes us to be sanctified.

WASHING AWAY THE NATURAL DISPOSITION

In subjective sanctification something of Christ is added to us, but in cleansing something of us, especially our natural disposition, is subtracted. As we are cleansed, our natural disposition is washed away. Disposition is the most inward aspect of our constitution; it is the very root of our being. We were born with a certain disposition. Disposition, therefore, is altogether inward. However, character, a combination of disposition, custom, and habit, is partly inward and partly outward, whereas behavior is wholly outward. The Lord Jesus cares little about our behavior, more about our character, but very much about our disposition. As Christ is adding His element into us, He is also cleansing us and subtracting our natural disposition. His cleansing washes away the natural element from the depths of our being.

We have pointed out that the Lord will wash the church from all wrinkles. Wrinkles are caused by our natural disposition. Hence, the only way these wrinkles can be removed is for the element of our natural disposition to be cleansed away.

With the young people it is easy to point out what their disposition is. However, if the Apostle Paul were with us, it would be difficult to discern his disposition, because he has been so deeply cleansed and purified. His old, natural disposition has been washed away by the element of Christ.

The washing away of our natural disposition cannot be accomplished by teaching, but can be accomplished only by the impartation of the element of Christ into our being. At the same time the element of Christ is being added, something of ourselves is being carried away. Therefore, on the one hand, we have the addition of Christ, but, on the other hand, we have the subtraction of the natural disposition. Gradually, Christ is being added into our being, and our natural disposition is being subtracted. The result of this process is transformation, a metabolic change in which the new element is constituted into us and the old element is carried away.

THE WORK OF THE LIVING CHRIST

We have pointed out that 5:25-27 presents Christ in three stages. When Christ was in the first of these stages, the stage of the flesh, He went to the cross and there gave Himself up for the church. Then in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). In this second stage He is sanctifying and cleansing us. If we open to Him and tell Him that we are willing to take Him as our life and our person, He will work within us as the life-giving Spirit to add Himself to us and to carry away our oldness and our natural disposition. This is the work of the living Christ in sanctification and cleansing.

NOURISHMENT AND SATISFACTION

We proceed to the nourishing and the cherishing. When I was young, I spent a great deal of time studying the book of Ephesians. Nevertheless, I did not understand what it meant to be nourished and cherished. But through experience I have come to know what it is to be nourished and cherished by Christ. Whenever we open to the Lord Jesus and take Him as our life and our person, He sanctifies us and cleanses us. At the same time He gives us nourishment. We know this by the fact that we have a wonderful sense of satisfaction within. Satisfaction comes from nourishment.

CLEANSING AND NOURISHING

Only by receiving the life supply can we endure the Lord's cleansing of our disposition. Surgeons realize that for a patient to withstand surgery, he must have nourishment. For this reason, blood and glucose are transfused into the patient. The Lord's cleansing is a kind of spiritual surgery, surgery on the depths of our inner being. The Lord's cleansing is His operating. For such an operation we surely need His nourishing.

I know of a certain brother whose natural disposition was rude, mean, and even cruel. Sometimes he came to me in tears distraught over the kind of person he was. He admitted that no one could satisfy him. Regarding himself as the most loathesome person on earth, he was desperate to know what to do about his situation. I could not do anything to help him in an outward way. But I can testify that the Lord gradually cleansed and purified him thoroughly. He loved the Lord very much and was completely open to Him. Because he gave the Lord the ground within him, the Lord could come in to sanctify him and to cleanse him. The Lord operated on him and washed away the element of his natural disposition. In order to bear such extensive surgery, we need the supply of the Lord's inward nourishment. This brother could testify of

the nourishment and enjoyment the Lord gave to him as He was cleansing him. Be assured, whenever the Lord sanctifies and cleanses, He also nourishes.

Any sanctification or cleansing that is not accompanied by nourishment is not genuine. It is the product of self-effort. Whenever you try to sanctify yourself or cleanse yourself, you will have the sense of spiritual starvation. But if the Lord does the sanctifying and the cleansing, He will supply the nourishment, and you will enjoy sweet satisfaction. The more the Lord purifies you, the more of His nourishment you will receive. Instead of suffering under the process of purification, you will enjoy the Lord and His abundant life-supply.

CHERISHED BY THE LORD'S TENDER WARMTH

As the Lord nourishes us, He also cherishes us. He is like a mother who cherishes her child even as she feeds him. How the little ones enjoy the warmth and comfort of their mothers! If you consider your experience, you will realize that when the Lord sanctifies, cleanses, and nourishes you, He cherishes you with His tender warmth. His cherishing comforts you, soothes you, and calms you. Hallelujah for the Lord's sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing!

PLACING OUR TRUST IN THE LIVING CHRIST

Only the living Christ can do all this. Doctrines cannot do it and not even the Bible can do it. If you want the sanctifying, the cleansing, the nourishing, and the cherishing, you must place all your trust in the living Christ. Tell Him, "Lord Jesus, nothing can replace You. Lord, I love You, I open my heart to You, and I give You all the ground in my being. Lord, possess me and be my life and my person. Lord, I don't care about outward things, not even about the church life in an outward way. I care only that You, Lord, will be my life and my person." If you contact the Lord in this way, you will discover how living,

real, available, and present He is. He will sanctify you by adding Himself to you. He will cleanse you by washing away the old element of your natural disposition. He will also nourish you with His riches and cherish you with His warmth. As all this is taking place within you, you will have a marvelous enjoyment of the Lord. This is the way the Lord is preparing His Bride. In this way we are becoming the glorious church Christ will present to Himself at His coming back.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-NINE

GOD'S DESIRE FOR A GLORIOUS CHURCH

We have seen that God's intention in His economy is to obtain a glorious church. Strictly speaking, God is not seeking a spiritual church, a heavenly church, nor even a victorious church. He wants a church of glory. Glory is the expression of God and it is altogether different from human morality and behavior. When God filled the tabernacle and the temple, both of them were filled with glory, with the very manifestation of God. The church should be characterized by glory--not by anything else, not even spirituality. I am not happy to hear talk about a so-called spiritual church. The only way God can have a glorious church is through Christ's sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing. As we experience these things in a personal and practical way, the church becomes glorious.

The Bible does not speak of a spiritual church. But in Ephesians 5 Paul speaks of a glorious church. One of Brother Nee's books is entitled *The Glorious Church*. Many Christians have as their goal a so-called spiritual church. Instead of seeking spirituality, we should seek to be filled with glory so that Christ may have His glorious church.

GOD'S GOAL

Because of religious teachings, many have been blinded to God's desire for a glorious church. In a sense, some have been helped by those teachings, but in another sense, they have been frustrated by them. Religious teachings can keep the saints from seeing the revelation of the glorious church and can cause them instead to seek such things as spirituality, gifts, and victory. Ultimately, it is not God's

intention to have a church that is merely spiritual, victorious, or heavenly. His goal is a glorious church. Do not aspire to be like the angels. They may be spiritual, heavenly, and victorious, but they are not glorious, for they do not bear the glory of God. Praise the Lord that we who believe in Christ bear God's glory! Religion actually brings people down to the level of angels. Under the influence of the religious concept, many Christians are envious of the angels. If we see God's economy, we shall reject such an influence and desire to become filled with glory in order that God may reach His goal.

NOT VICTORIOUS BUT GLORIOUS

It is possible to be victorious without being glorious. For example, a brother may be pleased at his success in overcoming his temper. He may have been defeated by his temper for years and now at last he has gained victory over it. Such a victory, however, may be completely lacking in glory. God's economy is not a matter of becoming victorious over such things as our temper. It is a matter of taking Christ as our life and our person and allowing Him to live in us. The result of this is the expression of God as glory. In ourselves we may be victorious, but in order to be glorious we need Christ to be our life and our person.

THE DECEPTIVENESS OF RELIGION

In a sense, religion is deceptive. While it is helping us, it is also deceiving us. The reason is that religion is part truth and part falsehood. This mixture of truth and falsehood is a subtle form of deception. For example, it is rather easy to preach the gospel to the heathen and to bring people to the Lord. However, it is very difficult to bring someone to the Lord who has had a background in Catholicism, for he has been cheated by the half-truths of that religious system. On the one hand, we have been helped by the religious teachings we received in the past. But on the other hand, these same teachings have veiled us

in relation to God's economy. Therefore, we need to discard religious concepts and teachings and come back to the whole truth of the pure Word of God.

GOD EXPRESSED THROUGH MAN

According to the truth in the Word, God has no intention of gaining a group of spiritual beings. He already has myriads of angels. God's goal is to have a glorious people as His expression. In the midst of this dark, evil age, God desires to have on earth a people full of His glory. If the meeting hall were filled with angels, we would probably think that the situation of the church is glorious. We perhaps would marvel at all the spiritual, heavenly, victorious beings. However, such a situation would not be a true manifestation of God's glory. God expresses Himself not through angels, but through man. Although we are men in the flesh, we can take Christ as our life and our person. When we do this, even the angels will marvel at the expression of glory in us. The angels may say, "Look at these people. They are full of God's glory!"

Do you still desire to have a spiritual church, a heavenly church, a victorious church? If you know God's economy, your desire will be for a glorious church. We should be able to say to the angels, "Angels, we don't envy your spirituality, victory, or heavenliness. We have Christ within us as our life and our person, and we are being filled with glory. Angels, do you have Christ as your life and your person? Gabriel could announce the birth of Christ, but he does not have the privilege of taking Christ as his life and person. Angels, we would like to tell you that Christ dwells within us. You may be spiritual, heavenly, and victorious, but we are glorious."

Verse 27 of Ephesians 5 has been in the New Testament for centuries, but it has been lost as far as the experience of believers is concerned. Therefore, today the Lord is in the process of recovering the glorious church. Let us read this verse again: "That He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she should be holy and without

blemish." Christ is sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing us so that we may be a glorious church. He is not doing these things simply to make us spiritual, heavenly, or victorious.

A CORPORATE MAN

The glorious church is a corporate man. This means that every part of this corporate man is glorious. Are you a part of this glorious man in a practical way? In other words, are you being filled with glory? Even after reading all these messages, we still may be occupied with the thought of victory and may seek to be victorious over our temper or a difficult situation. We may be very appreciative of those whose teaching can lead us into the way of victory. Oh, may the Lord impress us with His desire to have a glorious, shining people! The goal of His economy is to gain a church that shines with His glory.

CHRIST COMING FROM WITHIN US

The concept of glorification common among believers today is that Christ will suddenly descend from the heavens and sweep us away into a realm of glory. Until then, we are simply to wait until the Lord Jesus comes to glorify us. But as we pointed out in message fifty-seven, Christ will come from within us. I fully realize that certain verses in the New Testament indicate that Christ will come objectively from the heavens. Nevertheless, other verses indicate that He will come forth from within us and will glorify us in a very subjective way.

THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST

A number of verses in the New Testament show that the experience of glory is subjective. Second Corinthians 4:4 says, "In whom the god of this age hath blinded the thoughts of them that believe not, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (Gk.). In this verse Paul does not

speak of the gospel of forgiveness or of justification by faith. He speaks instead of the gospel of the glory of Christ. Our gospel is not simply a gospel of redemption, forgiveness, and regeneration. It is also the gospel of the glory of Christ.

Only this gospel has the ability to shine into us. Firstly it shines into us and then it shines out from within us. The more the glory shines within us, the more it penetrates into our being and saturates it. Eventually, the inner glory will consume, swallow up, our entire inward being. Then the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ will shine out through us. Such a shining cannot come by way of teaching, but only through the experience of Christ who is Himself the glory of God and the manifestation of God. Hallelujah, Christ has shone into the depths of our being and now He is shining within us! The time is coming when He will shine throughout our inward being. Hence, the light of God's glory will shine not in an outward way, but will shine from within us. The more Christ shines, the more we are filled with glory.

CONCENTRATING ON THE LORD'S INWARD SHINING

When we are in a difficult situation, we do not need to strive to be victorious. Forget about trying to be victorious and pay attention to the inner shining of Christ as the glory within. Learn to say, "Hallelujah, Christ is shining in me and through me! He is my life and my person. How sweet and pleasant is His inward shining!" As we concentrate on the Lord's shining within, we shall spontaneously be victorious without any conscious effort on our part.

The goal of God's economy is that we all shine forth His glory. As we are under such a shining, we enjoy the sweetness of Christ living in us to be our life and our person. This comes not by teaching, but by Christ's saturating us with Himself according to God's economy. The saints taking the way of God's economy are those built up with the glory of God.

THE FACE OF JESUS

In 2 Corinthians 4:6 Paul also speaks of glory: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The word face here refers to the Lord's countenance, to His presence. How we need to have the presence of the Lord Jesus within us! His presence is the very glory of God, for the glory of God is in the face of Christ. If our Christ is only a Christ objectively in the heavens, we shall not have the shining of His face within us. Neither shall we have the experience of His indwelling glory. We have pointed out that glory is the manifestation of God. Now, according to this verse, we see furthermore that glory is simply the face of Jesus. When we have His face, we have the glory. When we are in the presence of Christ and before His countenance, we are in glory.

TRANSFORMED FROM GLORY TO GLORY

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul says, "But we all, with unveiled face beholding and reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit" (Gk.). Our need today is to behold and reflect the glory of the Lord. As we behold His glory, we are transformed. Notice that Paul does not say that we are corrected, adjusted, or even changed. He points out that we are being transformed into Christ's image. We are not being transformed from behavior to behavior, from spirituality to spirituality, nor from victory to victory. Hallelujah, we are being transformed from glory to glory! The source of this transformation is not doctrine in letters; it is the Lord Spirit. The more we behold the Lord's glory and are transformed by the Lord Spirit from glory to glory, the more the Lord will gain the glorious church He desires.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY

EXPERIENCING CHRIST IN GOD'S ECONOMY

Christ is sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing us in order to present to Himself a glorious church. Contrary to the religious concept, this presentation will not take place suddenly, without any preparation, when the Lord Jesus appears in His coming back. Rather, Christ's presentation of the glorious church involves a process which began at the time of the Apostles and which has been going on throughout the centuries. Today we also are participating in the process through which Christ is presenting the glorious church to Himself. This presentation is the goal of His sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing.

Since the day we first called upon the Lord Jesus and received Him into us, He has been seeking opportunities to work Himself into our being. The more His element is worked into us, the more we are saturated with Himself and the more we are sanctified, cleansed, nourished, and cherished. The ultimate consummation of this process will be the presentation of the church to Himself in glory.

SATURATED WITH CHRIST

Christ's working Himself into us is not a matter of behavior or self-improvement. It is a matter of our being inwardly saturated with the Shekinah glory of God. Suppose a steel rod, hard, cold, and black, is thrust into fire and held there. Eventually, the fire will saturate the steel and cause it to glow. In this way the steel loses its natural color and becomes white hot. In a sense, the color of the steel is swallowed up by the fire. Now the steel is shining, glowing. However, it would be useless, even

ridiculous, for someone to teach steel to shine. What can cause the steel to shine is not teaching, but burning. It must be burned until fire has saturated its very substance. This will cause the steel rod to become a bearer of light. If this steel is to keep on glowing, however, it must remain in the fire. If it is kept out of the fire for any length of time, its natural color and darkness will return. In a similar way, what we need today is not doctrine in letters; we need to be burned by Christ and saturated with Him as the indwelling glory of God.

COMING TO CHRIST IN THE WORD

I can testify that most of the teachings I received in Christianity did not afford me very much help. They actually hindered me and frustrated me from going on with the Lord. Today to me the Bible is not mainly a book of teachings, but a book that reveals the Person of the living Christ. As I read the Word, I open to the Lord, and immediately I experience His burning within me. Since I have His burning, what need do I have for mere teachings?

In John 5:39 and 40 the Lord Jesus said to the religionists, "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." These verses indicate that religion may even help people to honor and respect the Bible, but that very respect for the holy Word may be used to keep them away from the presence of the living Christ. If we read the Word properly, it should always bring us to the Lord. Whenever we come to the Bible, we must also come to Him so that we may have life.

AN UNVEILED FACE

We have seen that God's desire is to obtain a glorious church. Only Christ who is the expression of God's glory can make the church glorious, for only He Himself is the fire of glory that burns His glory into us. Moses had an experience along this line. After Moses had spent forty days in the Lord's presence on the mountain, the skin of his face shone with God's glory (Exo. 34:29-35). The glory of God had been burned into him. This was not the result

of religious teaching; it came from directly beholding the glory of God.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul tells us that we all, with an unveiled face, need to behold and reflect as mirrors the glory of the Lord (Gk.). Pay attention to the term "unveiled face." This term indicates a face that used to be veiled and from which the veil has been removed. I am deeply concerned that many of us are still veiled by religious concepts and teachings. Oh, how we need a face unveiled to behold the Lord! Hence, we all should pray, "Lord, remove the veils from me."

How pitiful it is to be veiled. Nevertheless, many believers are covered by layers of veils they do not even realize are there. For this reason, Paul was burdened that the saints would be unveiled. Then with unveiled faces we can behold and reflect the glory of the Lord. In this way we are genuinely transformed from one degree of glory to another. Such a transformation takes place through the Lord Spirit. Therefore, we do not behold doctrines and teachings; we behold the glory of the Lord. Moreover, we are not taught or corrected, but we are transformed into the image of Christ from glory to glory.

In the Lord's ministry we are fighting to remove the veils from the saints. How subtle is the influence of religion! Its subtlety is seen in the fact that it causes the Lord's people to become veiled. Although many are sincerely seeking the Lord, they have been completely veiled by religion with its teachings and concepts. Therefore, I say once again that we are here not for doctrine in letters, but for the genuine recovery of the experience of Christ. We all need an unveiled face to behold the Lord.

Various things can be veils to us today, just as they were veils to the Jews. The Jews were veiled by the Scriptures, by the law, by the ordinances, and by Judaism as a religious system. Today Christians are veiled especially by teachings and ordinances. I am burdened that all the veils would be removed so that the saints may have an unveiled face to behold the glory of the Lord.

VEILED BY ORDINANCES

Let us consider in more detail the matter of ordinances as veils. Sometimes in our meetings we shout praises to the Lord. Visitors may be troubled by our shouting. They may even think that our enthusiasm in the meetings matches that of a crowd at a sporting event. Such a criticism of shouting comes from an ordinance regarding meetings. Others may criticize the meetings because they see no exercise of such gifts as speaking in tongues. This indicates that they have an ordinance concerning gifts. Still others may react to the way certain of the saints dress. This indicates that they have an ordinance concerning the proper way to dress for a church meeting. Let us drop all the ordinances and come back to the living Person of Christ.

In message after message we desire to do just one thing: to point out your need for the living Christ. You need to be sanctified, cleansed, nourished, and cherished by Him. Nevertheless, no matter how much we emphasize the need to experience Christ as our life and our person, many are still preoccupied with secondary matters related to our meetings or our practice of the church life, because they are still veiled by their ordinances. Therefore, we wish to declare that we are not here for any particular practice. We are here for the wonderful Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Over the years Christians have been divided by various ordinances and are still being divided by ordinances today. For example, to insist upon the practice of pray-reading is wrong. We are not a church of pray-reading. However, to reject pray-reading is also wrong. In either case, there would be an ordinance regarding pray-reading. We need to turn from all ordinances to the Christ who sanctifies, cleanses, nourishes, and cherishes us.

It is a mistake to come to Los Angeles with the intention of learning how we practice the church life. Because we are constantly changing, not even we ourselves know the way to have the church life. Prior to 1966 we did not have pray-reading, and before 1968 we did not have the

practice of calling on the name of the Lord. Perhaps after another period of time, the Lord will show us something further that we should practice. To insist that we know the way to have the church life is to cause trouble.

Christians are easily divided over practices. Some like to shout praises to the Lord, but others oppose shouting. The same is true regarding quiet meetings or speaking in tongues. If we have truly seen the church, then we shall realize that all ordinances regarding practices must be set aside, for all such ordinances are divisive. Many dear saints love the Lord and seek Him, but they do not realize the divisiveness of their ordinances.

GOD'S ECONOMY

God's economy is so simple: it is just to work Christ into us so that He may live in us and we may live by Him. If we take the way of God's economy, the church will eventually become glorious, for Christ, the glory of God, will continually burn His glory into us. We are not here for a particular practice or way of having the church life. We are here only for Christ. The church is the issue of the enjoyment of Christ. The proper church life is a matter of us all enjoying Christ and then coming together to express Him, without insisting upon any particular way of expressing Christ. What we need in the Lord's recovery today is not a particular practice--it is only the living Christ.

Concerning the living Christ, we have pointed out that in His coming back Christ will come out from within us. He will spread within us, saturate us with Himself, and swallow up every part of our inward being. Then He will come out through us. When some hear of this, they may argue that the New Testament teaches that Christ will descend from the heavens. Yes, a number of verses tell us that the Lord is in the heavens and that in His coming He will descend from the heavens. However, for many, the teaching of the Lord's coming from heaven has become a religious preoccupation. Therefore we must also pay attention to the verses which emphasize the fact that Christ is in us. For example, Colossians 3:4 says that when

Christ appears we shall appear with Him in glory, but Colossians 1:27 says that Christ in us is the hope of glory.

NO SYSTEMATIZING

Certain religious teachers attempt to systematize the revelation in the New Testament. Under the influence of such systematic teachings, some suppose that since Christ is in the third heaven He cannot be elsewhere, particularly not in us. Nevertheless, the Bible says that Christ is both in the third heaven and in us as well (Rom. 8:34, 10). Furthermore, although Christ is in us already, He is coming. This means that He is both here now and He is coming. I cannot reconcile this. I simply believe both aspects because the New Testament reveals both.

Recently a young man approached me and asked if I believed that the Lord Jesus was at the right hand of God in the heavens. I assured him that I did. Then he asked me if I believed that the Lord had been resurrected with a body. I told him that I definitely believed this also. Then I encouraged him not to systematize the truth of God's revelation in the New Testament. On the day of His resurrection, the Lord Jesus entered the room where the disciples were gathered. Although the doors were closed, He suddenly appeared in their midst. According to Luke 24:37, "They were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." The Lord 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" (v. 39). Certainly the Lord in resurrection still had a physical body. How then was He able to enter that closed room? Instead of trying to explain this or to systematize it, we should simply believe the plain word of the Bible. The New Testament says that Christ is the life-giving Spirit indwelling our spirit. As such an indwelling One, He is spreading within us and saturating us with Himself, seeking the opportunity to come out through us. But the Bible also reveals that Christ is on the throne in the third heaven and that in His coming back He will descend to the earth. Instead of trying to reconcile the

subjective aspect and the objective aspect of the Lord's coming, let us simply believe both because both are revealed in the New Testament.

EXPERIENCING THE INDWELLING CHRIST

The problem many believers have is that they have been religiously indoctrinated regarding the objective aspect of the Lord's coming, to the neglect of the subjective aspect. They pay their full attention to the Christ in heaven and firmly believe in His coming back. However, they neglect the fact of the indwelling Christ, perhaps not even realizing that Christ is now within them. As we are awaiting Christ's coming back from the heavens, we need to enjoy Him inwardly. The Lord Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). The Lord's word here indicates that He is here already. How we need to experience the living, subjective, indwelling Christ!

My burden is to minister such a Christ to the Lord's people. It is not to teach the saints how to interpret the Bible. What is the use of knowing how to rightly interpret the Bible if we do not have a direct, precious, and intimate enjoyment of the living Christ? How we must fight the battle so that all the children of God may have such an enjoyment of the Lord! This is our need in the Lord's recovery today.

Let us forget the ordinances and practices, and let us say, "O Lord Jesus, I have not realized how much I need to take You as my life and as my person. Lord, I open my being to You, and I take You as my life and as my person. I don't care about my concepts concerning the way to practice the church life. I care only to have the living, intimate, and personal enjoyment of You."

GOD'S CONCERN IN HIS ECONOMY

Regarding the church, we should have no intention of either imitating or of opposing. Our only aim should be to enjoy the living Person of Christ and to inwardly

experience Him more and more. We should not be concerned about practices, methods, or ways. Consider as an illustration the various kinds of eating utensils. The Chinese use chopsticks, the Americans use a knife and fork, and the Indonesians may use their fingers. We should not be concerned about what we eat with, but only about what we eat. As long as people take the proper food into them, we should not be concerned whether they use chopsticks, a knife and fork, or their fingers. However, some may boast that the best way is to use a knife and fork. Spiritually speaking, we may do the same thing regarding the practice of the church life. We may be proud of our way, but we may not have any food on our plate. Let us not care for spiritual table manners; let us care only for spiritual eating. Many of us were starving for years because we cared only for manners, not for food. In so many religious groups everything is well-mannered and in excellent order, but there is no food for the Lord's people to eat. Therefore, in His recovery today the Lord is recovering the food on the table, not the manner of eating the food.

In His economy God is not concerned about utensils. His concern is that we experience Christ's sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing. Only as we experience Christ in such a way will He be able to present a glorious church to Himself. Praise Him that the process of this presentation is inwardly taking place day by day. May we all see that in His economy God cares not for forms or practices, but only for His dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. May we all receive mercy to experience and enjoy Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-ONE

A SUMMARY OF THE EXHORTATION IN CHAPTER FIVE

In this message we shall present a summary of Paul's exhortation in chapter five, concentrating on love and light. We have seen that firstly we receive God in Christ as grace and realize God in Christ as truth. Then we come to enjoy God as love and light. Love and light are inward elements, whereas grace and truth are outward elements. For this reason, the exhortation in 5:1-33 is deeper than that in 4:17-32. Love is the inner substance of God that can be sensed, and light is the expressed element of God that can be seen. According to the revelation of Ephesians 5, both love and light are to be the inner source of our walk.

BASIC ELEMENTS AND BASIC FACTORS

Paul's writing in Ephesians is both profound and deep. As he was writing this Epistle, he drew upon the deep concepts that were within him. These deeper concepts are the basic elements and basic factors in each chapter. In our reading of Ephesians, we must endeavor to determine what these basic elements and basic factors are, for they are the very components of the book. We have pointed out that the basic elements in chapter four are grace and truth and that the basic elements in chapter five are love and light. Along with these basic elements, there are the basic factors. In chapters four and five Paul's intention is not simply to give a number of exhortations regarding stealing, putting off falsehood, submission, and love. Nevertheless, many pay attention to such details, but not to the basic elements and basic factors.

We have seen that in chapter four the basic factors, on

the positive side, are the life of God and the Spirit of God and, on the negative side, the Devil. Now we must go on to see that the most important basic factor in this chapter is the church as the new man. This means that the exhortation here is related to this aspect of the church. The main factor in chapter five is the church as the Bride. Therefore, just as Paul's exhortation in chapter four is related to the new man, so his exhortation in chapter five is related to the Bride.

THE KEY TO CHAPTER FOUR

Remember, the subject of the book of Ephesians is not behavior or virtue; it is the church. In giving us the long exhortation recorded in chapter four, Paul never loses sight of his main point--the church. As he presents the principle and the details, he is fully conscious of the church as the new man. Hence, the living described in chapter four must be for the church as the new man; that is, the church as the new man must be according to truth and by grace. As the new man, the church should live a life according to God's standard, according to the truth as it is in Jesus. The only way the church as the new man can have such a life is by God's all-sufficient grace. This grace supplies us so that we may live according to the mold, the model, the pattern, of the life of Jesus. This is the key to chapter four.

If we apply this key in our reading of this chapter, the entire chapter will be open to us. Keep in mind that Ephesians 4 deals with the church as the new man. If we would be the church in this aspect, we must live a life according to the standard of the truth as it is in Jesus and by God's all-sufficient grace.

LOVE AND LIGHT IN CHAPTER FIVE

In the same principle, the main point in chapter five is the church as the Bride. The main point is not Paul's exhortation regarding wives submitting to their own husbands or husbands loving their own wives. As the

Bride, the church needs something finer and deeper than truth and grace. There is the need for love and light. Truth is not as fine as light, and grace is not as deep or intimate as love. With respect to the church as the Bride, in chapter five Paul speaks of love and light.

The fact that the church as the Bride requires a living in love and in light can be proved by our own experience in married life. If a husband and wife live together merely by grace and according to truth, their married life will be very poor. If my wife were to deal with me according to grace but offer me no love, I would be extremely dissatisfied. She would feel the same if I dealt with her according to grace without love. Married life is based not upon grace, but upon love. In like manner, married life is based not upon truth, but upon light. How pitiful it would be if a husband and wife were always considering the right way to behave toward each other. For the intimate relationship between husband and wife, mere truth is not adequate. There must be light. Therefore, a proper marriage is not merely according to truth and by grace, but is in love and in light.

Is your married life according to truth and by grace, or is it in love and in light? Suppose a wife says to her husband, "Everything I do for you is according to truth and by grace. Nothing I do is wrong or false. Furthermore, everything is by the Lord's sufficient grace." This does not sound like the intimacy of a marriage, but sounds like the coldness of a law court. In married life the relationship between wife and husband should be fine, bright, and intimate.

LIVING IN THE REALM OF LIGHT

Although it is rather easy to understand the difference between love and grace, it is more difficult to understand the distinction between light and truth. Perhaps it will help if I illustrate from my own experience in married life. My wife and I have been married for a good many years. During this time, I cannot recall ever dealing with her according to what I thought was right. On the contrary, by

the Lord's enabling, I have behaved toward her always in light. When we are in the light, we are outside the realm of right and wrong. There is no need to discern what is right and what is wrong, what we should do and what we should not do. If we are in the light, we simply act and behave spontaneously in a certain way. However, when we are in darkness, we need to discern, to guess, and to grope for a way to do things. But when we are in the light, there is no need for groping, guessing, or discerning.

Suppose I am about to lose my temper with my wife. There is no need for me at such a time to ask if this is according to truth. I do not need to wonder what my children or the elders of the church will think about it. To ask such questions with respect to husband or wife is to descend from the realm of light to the realm of truth. It is to consider what is according to the standard of the pattern of the life of Jesus. If we remain on the mountaintop in the realm of light, there will be no need for such considerations. As those in the light, we shall not try to discern whether or not it is right to lose our temper at that particular time.

TWO CASES

In a foregoing message I referred to the cases of the immoral women in John 4 and 8. In both cases the word truth is used. In John 4:24 the Lord Jesus speaks of worshipping God in spirit and in truth. In John 8:32 He says that we shall know the truth and that the truth will set us free. The women in these two chapters were not yet saved. When the Lord was dealing with them, they were candidates for salvation. As such, they were in darkness and in falsehood. However, they were about to be delivered out of darkness and falsehood into the realm of truth and righteousness. I believe that both these women were saved and brought into the realm of truth. However, having entered into this realm, they were to go on to contact the Father and enter into the presence of God where all is light. Here in the realm of light we no longer consider what

is right and what is wrong, what is false and what is real. Instead of such considerations, there is simply the shining of light.

A SPONTANEOUS LIVING

If our married life is proper, we shall not consider whether our behavior with our spouse is according to truth or up to the standard. If we think in this way in relation to our husband or wife, we are quite far from the realm of light. In fact we are not even fully according to truth. If our married life is in the sphere of light, we shall not consider how to behave. Rather, we shall simply and spontaneously live in light. We shall do certain things and behave in certain ways simply because we are in the light, not because we regard such things or such behavior as according to the truth as it is in Jesus.

In the early years of my Christian life, I lived in the sphere of truth. I tried to be right in everything I did. I was afraid to do certain things because of what others might say. Therefore, I behaved in a way that others would regard as praiseworthy. This means that my behavior was according to truth. Later, by the Lord's mercy, I was brought more into His presence. I learned how to abide in His presence and to live in intimacy with Him in a relationship full of love and light. As a result, I was kept from doing things not because I had reasoned they were wrong, but simply because I was in the light. As one in the light, I acted, behaved, and spoke in certain ways without considering what was according to truth or what was right. No longer was I concerned about what others might say. I no longer thought about what kind of behavior would be appreciated or what would be criticized. I was in the light, and I no longer reasoned about what actions were according to truth.

To be the church as the new man it is necessary and appropriate to live according to truth and by grace. But this is not adequate for the aspect of the church as the Bride. As the Bride, the church must have an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus in love and in light. In

everything and in every way the church as the Bride must be bright. Therefore, in chapter five love and light are the basic elements.

THE WARRIOR

In every chapter of Ephesians different aspects of the church are revealed. Each of these aspects is related to various basic elements. For example, in chapter six we see the church as the warrior. What a warrior requires is neither grace and truth nor love and light, but strength and armor for fighting. As the warrior, the church must be strong to stand and must have the armor with which to fight.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Let us now trace the basic factors and the basic elements in chapters one, two, and three. The major factor in chapter one is the church as the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. The infinite, unlimited, eternal power that raised Christ from among the dead, uplifted Him to the third heaven, and made Him the Head over all things, is to the church which is His Body. In order for the church to be the Body, the church must have the well-speaking of the Triune God. Hence, the major factor in chapter one is the church as the Body of Christ, and the basic element is the well-speaking of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

GOD'S DWELLING PLACE

In chapter two we see various aspects of the church: the masterpiece, the new man created by Christ on the cross, the commonwealth of God, the kingdom where the citizens have civil rights and responsibilities, the household of God, and finally the dwelling place of God, God's habitation. Although all these aspects are covered, the major factor in chapter two is the church as the dwelling place of God. To be God's habitation, the church must have both resurrection and the Spirit. These are the basic elements

in this chapter. In the first part of the chapter the main concept is that of resurrection life, and in the second part the main thought is the Spirit. Both are necessary for the church to be the habitation of God.

THE FULLNESS OF GOD

In chapter three, the deepest chapter in Ephesians, the major factor is the church as the fullness of God. For the church to be the fullness of God, we need the unsearchable riches of Christ. Thus, the unsearchable riches of Christ are the basic element in this chapter.

THE CHURCH LIFE ACCORDING TO GOD'S DESIRE

Let us review the major factors and the basic elements in the six chapters of Ephesians. In chapter one the major factor is the church as the Body of Christ, and the basic element is the well-speaking of the Triune God. In chapter two the major factor is the church as the habitation of God, and the basic elements are resurrection and the Spirit. In chapter three the major factor is the church as the fullness of God, and the basic element is the unsearchable riches of Christ. In chapter four the major factor is the church as the new man, and the basic elements are grace and truth. In chapter five the major factor is the church as the Bride, and the basic elements are love and light. Finally, in chapter six the major factor is the church as the warrior, and the basic elements are might and the armor.

Because the church life as the Bride in love and light requires something fine and intimate, Paul uses married life as an illustration. In married life there is no place for might or for armor. Neither are such things characteristic of the church as the Bride. With the church as the Bride there is no emphasis on grace, truth, nor even the riches of Christ. Furthermore, there is no mention of resurrection, the Spirit, nor the well-speaking of the Triune God. Specifically what is required here is God Himself as love and light. As we have pointed out, love is the inner essence

of God, and light is the element of God expressed visibly. When we get into God to touch His inner substance, we experience Him as love and light. The proper church life should be in this realm.

Why then does Paul include chapter six? This chapter is necessary because God's enemy remains to be dealt with. If there were no enemy, we could stop with the church as the Bride in chapter five.

According to Revelation 19, the warrior who fights with Christ in the battle against the enemy is firstly the Bride of Christ. This means that firstly we must be the Bride in love and in light, and then we can go forth as the warrior with Christ to war against the enemy. Thus, a couple, Christ and His Bride, will defeat the enemy.

May we all be impressed that the church life according to God's desire must be in love and in light, both of which are the very elements of God Himself. In the inner substance of God we have love and light. Here we have the top church life, the church as the Bride. The goal of the book of Ephesians is to bring us into God's inner substance to know Him as love and light. Here we are to live in intimate fellowship as we enjoy the shining light and love in its sweetness.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-TWO

THE BELIEVERS' LIVING IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN AND FATHERS AND BETWEEN SLAVES AND MASTERS

Through the sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing Christ will gain a glorious church as His Bride. Just as Eve came out of Adam and went back to Adam to be one flesh with him, so the church comes out of Christ and will go back to Christ to be one spirit with Him. God's desire is that the church which comes out of Christ and returns to Christ will be a glorious church, a church that expresses God and manifests Him. By the sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing the church is being saturated with the essence of God. In this way the church is becoming the Bride to express Christ. Every local church today must be such an expression of God.

The glorious church, the church that expresses God, must also be holy and without blemish. As such a holy church, she must be first separated from everything common and then permeated and saturated with the element of God.

In order to be without blemish, the church must be without mixture. To be unclean is one thing, and to have some mixture within us is another. We need to be both pure and without mixture. To be without mixture means that in our being we have nothing other than God. For example, we are like precious stone that has no foreign element or substance within it. One day the church will not only be clean and pure, but also without blemish, without mixture. She will be altogether the mingling of the Triune God with a resurrected, uplifted, and transformed humanity. In order that Christ may gain such a church, we

are presently undergoing His sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing.

The first four chapters of Ephesians cover the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. For the fulfillment of His purpose, God needs the universal new man, the church as the full-grown man in chapter four. In this respect, the new man is the highest aspect of the church. From the church as the assembly we proceed to the church as the household of God, then to the church as the Body, and finally to the church as the full-grown man.

Along with the need for God's purpose to be fulfilled, there is also the need for Christ to be satisfied. Within Christ there is the longing, the deep desire, for satisfaction. Only the church as the Bride can satisfy the longing in Christ's heart.

Even in the relationship between husband and wife, the wife should care for her husband's satisfaction and not merely do certain things for her husband. Before the creation of Eve, the Bible says, "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Therefore, the woman was created to fulfill the man's need for satisfaction. According to the Bible, the satisfaction of a man depends upon the woman. In Ephesians 5 Paul presents the church as the Bride for Christ's satisfaction. As we have seen, what is required for the church to be the Bride is not just truth and grace, but light and love.

The church, who is the new man for the fulfillment of God's purpose and the Bride for the satisfaction of the longing in Christ's heart, is also the warrior for the defeat of God's enemy. Through the spiritual warfare of the church as the warrior, God's problem with the enemy is solved. If the church is to be the warrior to defeat the enemy, she must have both might and the whole armor of God. Therefore, the church is the new man for the fulfillment of God's purpose, the Bride for Christ's satisfaction, and the warrior for the defeat of God's enemy.

Between the section on the church as the Bride (5:22-33) and the church as the warrior (6:10-20), we have 6:1-9,

which deals with the relationship between children and fathers and between slaves and masters. If we neglect this portion of the Word, we can not be a proper Bride or a proper warrior.

I. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDREN AND FATHERS

A. Children

Verse 1 says, "The children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." In exhorting the children and the parents, the apostle deals with the children first, since trouble comes mostly from them.

In this verse Paul does not simply speak of children, but of *the* children. By using the definite article before children Paul indicates that the children of believers are not common. They are different from the children of people in the world. Therefore, the particular children, those in the families of believers, are exhorted to obey their parents in the Lord.

The phrase "in the Lord" indicates obedience to the parents by being one with the Lord. It also indicates that this should be done not by self-effort, but by the Lord, and not according to the natural concept, but according to the Lord's word. The children of believers should realize that they are to obey their parents by being one with the Lord. Moreover, they are to obey their parents not by their own strength, but by the Lord Himself. Their obedience is to be according to the Lord's word, according to the Scriptures.

In this verse Paul says that for the children to obey their parents in the Lord is right. The Greek word may also be rendered just. To obey the parents is both right and just.

In verses 2 and 3 Paul goes on to say, "Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with a promise, that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth." This is not only the first commandment with a promise, but also the first

commandment concerning man's relationship with man (Exo. 20:12). The promise, mentioned in verse 3, is that it may be well with the children and that they may live long on the earth. The first part of the promise is related to prosperity in material blessing; it also refers to living in a peaceful situation. The second part is to have longevity. According to this commandment, prosperity and longevity are God's blessings in this life to those who honor their parents.

Honoring is different from obeying. Obedience refers to an action, whereas honor denotes an attitude. It is possible for the children to obey their parents without honoring them. In order to honor their parents, the children need a certain attitude, a certain spirit. All the children need to learn to obey their parents with honor.

If we would live long on the earth, we need to honor our parents. Those who fail to honor their parents commit suicide in a gradual way. They actually shorten their life on earth. If you wish to prolong your days, learn to obey your parents with honor. In the Bible this is the unique condition for having a long life. Anyone who desires a long life needs to fulfill this condition.

B. Fathers

In verse 4 Paul turns to the fathers: "And the fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but nurture them in the discipline and admonition of the Lord." Provoking to anger damages the children by stirring up their flesh. It is always destructive for parents to be angry with their children. For this reason, I counsel the parents not to lose their temper when dealing with their children. Not provoking the children's anger requires the fathers' anger to be dealt with by remaining under the cross. The only way we can keep from losing our temper is to stay on the cross. In dealing with your children's wrongdoings or misbehavior, you must firstly go to the cross and stay there. Otherwise, you will lose your temper, and this loss of temper will provoke your children's anger.

Instead of provoking the children to anger, the fathers

are to nurture them in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. To nurture children means to bring them up, to raise them, by nourishing them. Raising children requires that the parents give them the needed instruction related to human life, family life, and social life. The word admonition here includes instruction. Paul was probably referring to the Old Testament requirement that parents instruct their children with the word of God (Deut. 6:7). This means that we are to teach our children with the Bible. Along with this instruction, we sometimes must discipline them, chastise them. It is crucial that parents learn to nurture the children in the discipline and admonition of the Lord.

As parents, we must do our duty with respect to our children. This means that we should not only teach them, but also set up an example for them to follow. Just as the Lord Jesus sanctified Himself for the sake of His disciples (John 17:19), so parents should sanctify themselves for the sake of their children. Those who do not have children may be free to do certain things, such as sleep late in the morning. But those with children do not have the liberty to do these things. For the sake of their children, they must be restricted. Children always imitate their parents. Therefore, it is the parents' responsibility to set up a high standard and a proper pattern and example for their children to follow.

However, no matter how good an example is set by the parents, how the children develop depends on God's mercy. On the one hand, the parents must keep a high standard, but on the other hand, they need to trust in the Lord. Day by day we should tell Him, "Lord, these children are not mine; they are Your possession placed in my custody for a period of time. Lord, what I am doing with them is simply fulfilling my responsibility. How they will turn out, Lord, depends absolutely on Your mercy."

It is possible for parents to be selfish concerning the spiritual welfare of their children. If their children get saved and become spiritual, they are very happy. However,

these parents may not be happy to see the children of other families becoming more spiritual than their children. Most parents in the church hope that their children will become the future apostles, elders, and deacons. Thus, even in this matter, we are selfish.

I once read of a certain woman who prayed desperately for her child to be saved. Although she prayed daily for years, still her child was not saved. One day she inquired of the Lord why He did not answer her prayers and keep His promise. The Lord told her that He would surely keep His promise and answer her prayers. However, she was too selfish. If she would stop praying so much for her child and begin to pray for the children of others, she would see His faithfulness. From that time onward, she began to pray for other children to be saved. After a short while, her child was saved.

This story illustrates the fact that we may be selfish even in praying for the salvation of our children. Not to pray for our children is wrong, but to be fully occupied with prayer for them in a selfish way is also wrong. Hence, the matter of the salvation of our children and their spiritual welfare is also a test to us.

II. BETWEEN SLAVES AND MASTERS

A. Slaves

In 6:5-9 Paul deals with the relationship between slaves and masters. Concerning this relationship, he exhorts the slaves first because the source of trouble is mostly with them. Verse 5 says, "The slaves, obey your masters according to flesh with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as to Christ." In the apostle's time, slaves were purchased by their masters, and the masters had the right over their lives. Some slaves and some masters became brothers in the church. As brothers in the church, they were equal. But in their homes those who were slaves still had to obey the brothers who were their masters according to flesh.

Paul exhorts the slaves to obey with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ. Fear is the inward motive, and trembling is the outward attitude. Singleness means to be pure in motive, with only a single purpose. The slaves are to be single; they are not to have a double purpose. That is, they are not to serve their masters with the intention of receiving some gain for themselves.

The slaves are to be in obedience to their masters as to Christ. This means that the slaves are to regard their masters as if they were the Lord. The relationship between slaves and masters is a type of our relationship with Christ, our Master. We should obey Him as a slave, in singleness of heart.

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, "Not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the soul." If a brother in slavery stands in his position and obeys his master, he is in the eyes of the Lord a slave of Christ, doing the will of God, and his service is as to the Lord and not to men (v. 7). Such a slave is to do the will of God from the soul. The words "from the soul" here equal from the heart, from the inner being. This means to serve not only with the physical body, but with the heart. The slaves were to serve "as to the Lord and not to men." This indicates that Paul's intention was to direct the slaves to the Lord. His desire was that they would learn to serve their masters as the Lord.

Concerning the slaves, Paul concludes in verse 8, "Knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he shall receive from the Lord, whether a slave or a freeman." The word this refers to the good thing. Whatever good thing we do, we shall receive the same from the Lord. If the slaves do something good, the Lord will return to them that same good thing. This means that the good thing they do will become a reward to them.

B. Masters

In verse 9 Paul says, "And the masters, do the same things toward them, giving up threatening, knowing that

both their Master and yours is in the heavens, and there is no respect of persons with Him." The masters who had the right over the lives of their purchased slaves should give up threatening, because the Lord in the heavens is the real Master of both them and the slaves. In the flesh, some may be slaves, and others may be masters. But in the eyes of the Lord, there is no difference between slaves and masters. According to Colossians 3:11, in the new man there is no slave or freeman. In the church, we all are brothers. However, in the flesh there still is the distinction between slaves and masters.

Regarding all these exhortations, Paul is making one key point: For the sake of the church life, we need to have a proper human living in this present age. This is an extremely important lesson for us all to learn.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-THREE

WARFARE TO DEAL WITH THE SPIRITUAL ENEMY

In this message we come to 6:10-20, a strategic section of this book dealing with spiritual warfare. As we have seen, in Ephesians Paul covers various aspects of the church. The Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, denotes a gathering, an assembly, of called ones. For example, when city officials in ancient times called the people of the city together for a meeting, that meeting was known as an *ekklesia*. The church is such an assembly of God's called people. In Ephesians 1 Paul reveals that the church is the Body of Christ. Just as a person's body is his stature and expression, so the church as the Body of Christ is the stature and expression of Christ. As Christ's Body, the church is the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

In 2:10 Paul indicates that the church is God's poem, His masterpiece, a poetic writing that expresses the desire of the writer's heart. In this chapter Paul goes on to point out that the church is the corporate new man created in Christ Jesus, the commonwealth of God, and the household of God. Furthermore, in this chapter the church is also the dwelling place of God (v. 22).

In 3:4 Paul speaks of the mystery of Christ. The mystery of God is Christ, and the mystery of Christ is the church. As the mystery of God, Christ is the definition of God. In the same principle, as the mystery of Christ, the church is the definition of Christ.

In 3:19 Paul uses the term the fullness of God. This term is similar to the expression "the fullness of the One Who fills all in all" (1:23). The fullness of God refers mainly to the source, and the fullness of the One who fills all in all refers mainly to the outcome. For example, the

fullness of

God is like a fountain, and the fullness of the One who fills all in all is like the stream that flows forth from the fountain. The church is both the fullness of God and the fullness of Christ as the One who fills all in all.

In chapter four Paul again speaks of the new man (v. 24). Chapter two covers the creation of the new man, but not the living of the new man. The new man is composed of two peoples, the believing Jews and the believing Gentiles. Concerning the living of the new man, chapter four covers both the principle and the details. The principle is related to the truth as it is in Jesus, the mold established by the living of Jesus on earth. The details are related to God's grace. By grace the new man carries out God's eternal purpose.

In chapters five and six we see two further aspects of the church: the Bride to satisfy the desire of Christ and the warrior to defeat God's enemy. As the Bride, the church needs love and light. As the warrior, the church needs might and the whole armor of God.

I. THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY

Of the twelve aspects of the church covered in Ephesians, the main aspects are the new man, the Bride, and the warrior. The new man includes the aspect of the Body, and the Body includes the fullness and the dwelling place. Therefore, the first ten aspects of the church are all included in the new man who fulfills God's eternal purpose and carries out His economy. This new man is used by the Triune God to accomplish what He planned in eternity past for eternity future. Nevertheless, although God's plan is fulfilled with the new man, Christ's desire still needs to be satisfied, and God's enemy still must be defeated. Hence, there is the need for the church to be both the Bride and the warrior.

The passage from 1:1 to 6:9 completes the revelation on the positive side concerning the church for the fulfilling of God's eternal purpose. Yet on the negative side, that is, for

dealing with God's enemy, something still remains to be covered. In the first five chapters the church is portrayed in many ways, on the positive side, to fulfill God's eternal purpose. On the negative side, the church is seen in chapter six as a warrior to defeat God's enemy, the Devil. To do this, the church must put on the whole armor of God.

In 1928 brother Nee held his first overcomer conference on spiritual warfare. In that conference Satan, the evil one, was exposed to the uttermost. Brother Nee pointed out that in the universe there are three wills: the divine will, the satanic will, and the human will. If we would know how the church can be God's warrior to engage in spiritual warfare, we must know these three wills, these three intentions. God's will, being self-existing, is eternal, uncreated. As created beings, the angels also have a will. One of these angels, an archangel, was appointed by God to rule the universe that existed before the creation of Adam. Because of his high position and his beauty, this archangel became proud. This pride gave rise to an evil intention, which became the satanic will. Therefore, in addition to God's intention, God's will, there is a second intention. a second will, for now the satanic will is set against God's will.

All warfare has its source in this conflict of wills. Before the satanic will rose up to contradict the divine will, there was no war in the universe. The controversy in the universe began with the rebellion of the archangel against God. That rebellion was the beginning of all the fighting that is now taking place among nations, in society, in the family, and in individuals. Throughout history there have been wars between nations, groups, persons, and even within individuals. For example, you may experience an inner warfare between your reason and your lust. All the different kinds of warfare have their source in the controversy between the divine will and the satanic will.

We do not know how much time elapsed between the rebellion of Satan and the creation of Adam. We simply know that at a particular time, God created man and endowed him with a human will that was free. It is

because

of God's greatness that He gave man a free will. A great person will never compel anyone to follow him. By giving man a free will, God was indicating that He would not force man to obey Him. When I was young, I thought that God was not wise in creating man with a free will. If I had been God, I would have made it impossible for man to have had a choice. I would have created man in such a way that all he could do was follow God. But in His greatness God gave man freedom of choice.

In Genesis 2 we see that man was free to exercise his will to eat either of the tree of life or of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. These two trees represent the divine will and the satanic will, respectively. Hence, in the garden there was a triangular situation, with the tree of life representing the divine will, the tree of knowledge representing the satanic will, and Adam representing the human will. Actually, the tree of life denotes God Himself, and the tree of knowledge denotes Satan. Therefore, there were three persons--God, Satan, and man--each one with a will.

Although there were three wills, the controversy involved just two parties--God and Satan. The crucial issue was whether man would choose the divine will or the satanic will. If the human will stood with the divine will, then God's will would be accomplished. But if the human will took sides with the satanic will, Satan's will would be carried out, at least temporarily. As we all know, the human will took sides with the satanic will. This means that man chose to follow Satan and sided with the satanic will. Therefore, Satan was victorious temporarily.

However, through repentance man can turn from the satanic will to the divine will, from Satan's side to God's side. The first commandment in the gospel is to repent. The next two commandments are to believe and to be baptized. Any sinner who desires to be saved must obey these three commandments. He must repent to God, believe in the Lord Jesus, and be baptized in water. To repent is to have a turn from the satanic will to the divine

will. Since birth our will has stood on the side of the satanic will. The reason for this is that we were in Adam when he chose Satan's will above God's will.

Many Christians do not know the true significance of the preaching of the gospel. The Bible says that we must repent for the kingdom (Matt. 4:17). The kingdom of God is actually the exercise of the divine will. When sinners repent for the kingdom of God, they turn from the side of Satan to the side of God, which is the kingdom of God, the will of God. After a person turns from the satanic will to the divine will, he must believe in the Lord Jesus and be baptized. Through baptism he is brought out of the authority of darkness, the satanic will, and is transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love (Col. 1:13).

From the day we were saved, our Christian life has been a life of warfare. The same was true of the children of Israel after they made their exodus from Egypt. After eating the Passover, they marched like an army out of the land of Egypt. This indicates that their eating of the Passover lamb was a preparation for war. They were saved in an atmosphere of warfare. As soon as they came out of Egypt, the fighting began. Pharaoh and his chariots pursued the children of Israel, but God came in to fight for them. After the children of Israel had passed through the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army had been overthrown, God's people triumphantly praised Him for His victory over the enemy. The Israelites proceeded to fight their way through the wilderness, and they continued fighting in the good land. Their history thus reveals that the life of a saved one is a life of warfare.

We have seen that as the new man the church should walk according to truth and by grace and that as the Bride the church should live in love and in light. However, not only must God's eternal purpose be fulfilled and the desire of Christ's heart be satisfied, but God's enemy must be defeated. For this, the church must be a warrior. Even in the Song of Songs we see that as the seeking one enjoys the Lord's presence, the fighting is going on. Therefore, we

walk according to truth and by grace, we live in love and light, and we fight to subdue the satanic will. Our walk is for the fulfillment of God's purpose, our living is for the satisfaction of Christ, and our fighting is for the defeat of God's enemy. Hence, for these three things the church must be the new man, the Bride, and the warrior.

II. EMPOWERED

Ephesians 6:10 says, "For the rest, be empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength." The Greek word here rendered empowered has the same root as the word power in 1:19. To deal with God's enemy, to fight against the evil force of darkness, we need to be empowered with the greatness of the power that raised up Christ from the dead and seated Him in the heavens, far above all the evil spirits in the air. The fact that we are to be empowered in the Lord indicates that in the spiritual warfare against Satan and his evil kingdom, we can fight only in the Lord, not in ourselves. Whenever we are in ourselves, we are defeated.

The charge to be empowered implies the need to exercise our will. If we would be empowered for spiritual warfare, our will must be strong and exercised. We should not be like jellyfish, those who are weak-willed and vacillating. Actually, it is those with a strong will who are most able to repent. Consider Saul of Tarsus as an example. As he was traveling to Damascus with the intention of arresting all those who called on the name of the Lord Jesus, he was apprehended by the Lord. Because Saul had such a strong will, he could have a strong repentance.

In addition to preserving our conscience, God has sovereignly preserved our will. If He had not done so, the preaching of the gospel could have no effect on people. We may mistakenly think that it is difficult to preach the gospel to one with a strong will. According to my experience, most of those who were saved through my gospel preaching were those with a strong will and a definite intention. Such a will is able to function positively in repentance. Repentance requires the exercise of the

will. In like manner, to be empowered also involves our will.

On the day of Pentecost Peter told the people to be saved from that crooked generation (Acts 2:40, Gk.). This command seems to be both active and passive, with the word be implying something active and the word saved, something passive. The same is true of Paul's command in 6:10 to be empowered. An active element--be--is combined with a passive element--empowered. We need to exercise our will to be empowered in the Lord.

In chapter four we see that we must be renewed (v. 23) and in chapter five, that we must be submissive (5:21). For the new man, we need to be renewed; for the Bride, we need to be submissive; and for the warrior, we need to be empowered. As the warrior, we must go into battle not as a gentleman or as a lovely Bride, but as a lion. Therefore, for the new man, the Bride, and the warrior, let us be renewed, submissive, and empowered.

The fact that we need to be empowered in the Lord indicates that we cannot fight the spiritual warfare in ourselves; we can fight only in the Lord and in the might of His strength. In 6:10 Paul refers to power, might, and strength. Firstly, we are empowered by the power that raised Christ from among the dead and made Him to be the Head over all things. Then we know God's might and strength.

III. PUTTING ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD

Verse 11 opens with the words, "Put on the whole armor of God." To fight the spiritual warfare, we need not only the power of the Lord, but also the armor of God. Our weapons do not avail, but God's armor, even the whole armor of God, does.

The whole armor of God is for the entire Body, not for any individual member of the Body. The church is a corporate warrior, and the believers together make up this unique warrior. Only the corporate warrior can wear the

whole armor of God; no individual believer can. We must fight the spiritual warfare in the Body, not individually.

The charge to put on the whole armor of God is an imperative, a command. God has provided the armor for us, but He does not put it on for us. Rather, we ourselves must put on the armor God has provided. For this, we need to be empowered. Although God can empower us, we still must exercise our will to cooperate with Him. In the same principle, we must cooperate with God's command to put on the armor.

IV. ABLE TO STAND AGAINST THE STRATAGEMS OF THE DEVIL

We need to put on the whole armor of God so that we "may be able to stand" (v. 11). In chapter six the word stand is crucial. In chapter two we sit with Christ in the heavenlies (v. 6), and in chapters four and five we walk in His Body on the earth (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). Then in chapter six we stand in His power in the heavenlies. To sit with Christ is to participate in all His accomplishments; to walk in His Body is to fulfill God's eternal purpose; and to stand in His power is to fight against God's enemy.

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

V. OUR WRESTLING

A. Not against Blood and Flesh

In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, "For our wrestling is not against blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies." "Blood and flesh" refers to men. Behind men of blood and flesh are the evil forces of the Devil, fighting against God's

purpose. Hence, our wrestling, our fighting, must not be against men, but against the evil spiritual forces in the heavenlies.

We in the Lord's recovery should realize that spiritual warfare is not a matter of fighting against men. Even if men cause damage to the recovery, we should not fight against them. Behind them and over them is the evil power. For example, when Saul of Tarsus was desolating the church, he was under the influence of the power of darkness. The reason certain people and religious organizations oppose the Lord's recovery is that they also are being utilized by the evil power that is over them and behind them.

B. Against the Rulers, the Authorities, the World-rulers, and Spiritual Forces of Evil

The principalities, the authorities, and the world-rulers of this darkness are the rebellious angels who followed Satan in his rebellion against God and who now rule in the heavenlies over the nations of the world, such as the prince of Persia and the prince of Grecia in Daniel 10:20. This indicates that the Devil, Satan, has his kingdom of darkness (Matt. 12:26; Col. 1:13). In this kingdom, Satan is at the top, and under him are the rebellious angels.

"This darkness" refers to today's world, which is fully under the dark ruling of the Devil through his evil angels. The world-rulers of this darkness are the princes Satan has set up to rule the various nations. According to the book of Daniel, the Jewish nation was the only nation that was not under Satan's power. This nation was ruled over by Michael, the archangel who fought on behalf of Israel. All the Gentile nations, however, are ruled by devilish, rebellious angels under the administration of Satan. Therefore, in the eyes of God, darkness covers the earth and fills the atmosphere around the earth. Only God Himself remains in the light. Because of the working of Satan, who is the authority of darkness, the earth and its atmosphere have become "this darkness."

In verse 12 Paul also speaks of "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenlies." The heavenlies here refer to the air (2:2). Satan and his spiritual forces of evil are in the air. But we are seated in the third heaven above them (2:6). In fighting a battle, the position above the enemy is strategic. Satan and his evil forces are under us, and it is their fate to be defeated by us.

We need to be reminded again and again that our warfare is not against human beings, but against the evil spirits, the spiritual powers in the heavenlies. The rebellious angels are the evil spirits in Satan's kingdom. Thus, the warfare between the church and Satan is a battle between us who love the Lord and who are in His church and the evil powers in the heavenlies. Apparently it is people of flesh and blood who damage the church. Actually it is Satan and his evil angels working behind them who cause the damage. Therefore, we must fight against these spiritual forces.

VI. ABLE TO STAND IN THE EVIL DAY

Verse 13 says, "Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day." In verse 11 we are told to put on the armor of God, and in verse 13 we are charged to take it up. We have seen that the armor of God is prepared and provided by God for us. But we need to take it up and put it on; we need to use and apply God's provision. Some items of the armor, such as the sword and the shield, we take up. But other items, such as the breastplate, the helmet, and the shoes, we put on. Whether we put on the whole armor of God or take it up, we must exercise our will in a strong way.

Paul specifically mentions "the whole armor of God," not just a part or some parts of it. In order to wage the spiritual warfare, we need the whole armor. This requires the Body of Christ, not only individual believers, to take it up.

By taking up the whole armor of God, we shall be able to withstand in the evil day. To withstand is to stand

against. In fighting the most important thing is to stand. In 5:16 Paul says that the days are evil. In this evil age (Gal. 1:14), every day is an evil day because Satan is at work every day.

VII. HAVING DONE ALL, TO STAND

Paul concludes verse 13 with the words, "Having done all, to stand." In fighting we need to stand to the end. Having done all, we still must stand. As we shall see in the next two messages, verses 14 through 16 are a modifier describing how to stand.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-FOUR

THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD

(1)

In this message and in the message following we shall consider the items that make up the whole armor of God. The first three items--the girdle, the breastplate, and the shoes--form a group. By means of these three things we are able to stand. Along with these three items, we need to take up the shield of faith and receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit (6:16-17).

Soldiers in ancient times fought with a shield in one hand and a sword in the other. A shield is a defensive weapon, whereas a sword is an offensive weapon. Actually, of the six items of the whole armor of God, only the sword is an offensive weapon. All the other aspects of the armor are for defense. Let us first consider the girdle, the breastplate, and the shoes.

I. THE GIRDLE OF TRUTH

The first part of 6:14 says, "Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth." For us to gird our loins is to strengthen our entire being. Our whole being needs to be strengthened with truth. This strengthening is not for sitting, but for standing.

According to the way the word truth is used in chapter four (vv. 15, 21, 24, 25), truth here refers to God in Christ as reality in our living, that is, God realized and experienced by us as our living. This is actually Christ Himself lived out by us (John 14:6). Such truth, such reality, is the girdle that strengthens our whole being for spiritual warfare. Our living must have a principle and a

standard. This is nothing less than God Himself expressed in our living in a practical way. When such a truth girds our loins, we are made strong for the purpose of standing.

Suppose, however, that your daily living is far below the standard of the truth as it is in Jesus. Instead of being able to stand and to withstand in the evil day, you will flee. Because in your daily walk there is no testimony and no expression of God, you do not have the strength to stand against the stratagems of the Devil. If our daily living is loose, we are not able to stand against the powers of darkness. In order for us to stand, our daily living must be according to the principle of the truth and up to the standard of the truth. As we have pointed out, this truth is God Himself expressed as the principle of our daily walk, as the standard of our daily living, and as the pattern of our life.

Those who have such a living certainly have their loins girded with truth. These are the ones who are able to face attack and opposition. Because they are girded with truth, they can stand before the opposers. But if God is not expressed in our daily life and walk, we shall not have a girdle about our loins, and we shall have no strength to stand against the enemy. We shall not have the power to face opposition or controversy.

The truth with which we are girded for spiritual warfare is actually the very Christ we experience. In Philippians 1:21 Paul says, "To me to live is Christ." This Christ whom Paul lived was his girdle of truth. This Christ was God expressed and revealed in Paul's daily walk. Because Paul's daily living was conformed to the pattern of Christ, he had the strength to face all opposition and adverse circumstances. Because Paul had been girded about with truth, he had the strength to stand.

II. THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

In verse 14 Paul goes on to say, "Having put on the breastplate of righteousness." The breastplate of righteousness covers our conscience, signified by the breast. Satan is our accuser. In fighting against him we

need a conscience void of offense. But no matter how good we may feel our conscience is, we need to have it covered with the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness is to be right with both God and man. If we have just a little problem with either God or man, Satan will accuse us, and there will be holes in our conscience through which all of our faith and boldness will leak out. Hence, we need the covering of righteousness to protect us from the enemy's accusation. Such righteousness is Christ (1 Cor. 1:30).

If in any thing we are not righteous, our conscience will be a conscience with offense. But if we are to engage in spiritual warfare, we must have a conscience void of offense, a conscience without holes. When our conscience has holes in it, our faith will leak out through the holes. If accusations and offenses remain on our conscience, faith will disappear. Therefore, we need to deal with our conscience in order to have a good conscience, a conscience void of offense. In addition, we need to put on the breastplate of righteousness to cover our conscience.

Whenever we are about to fight the spiritual warfare, Satan, the accuser, attacks our conscience. He does not trouble us so much in this way at other times, Satan knows when there are offenses on our conscience. When he accuses us with respect to these offenses, we are immediately weakened.

Revelation 12:11 says, "They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb." To be covered by the blood of the Lamb is mainly to have upon us the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness is in the blood, and the covering of the blood is the breastplate. Although this may be difficult to explain doctrinally, we can understand it experientially. Whenever we intend to fight against the powers of darkness, Satan, through his accusations, causes our conscience to become very sensitive. These feelings actually are not the sensitivity of the conscience, but the result of Satan's accusations. Immediately our response should be, "I overcome Satan, the accuser, not by my perfection and not even by a conscience void of offense, but

by the blood of the Lamb. I am defended against his accusations by the breastplate of righteousness."

The righteousness that covers our conscience and that guards us from Satan's accusations is Christ Himself. He is our righteousness. Thus, Christ is the truth that girds our loins and also the breastplate of righteousness that covers our conscience. We are covered not by our own righteousness, but by Christ as our righteousness. Some may wonder how the breastplate of righteousness can be related both to Christ and to the blood. In experience we cannot separate the blood from Christ. Apart from His blood, Christ could not cover us. Under the cleansing of His blood, He becomes our righteousness. Whenever we are about to take part in the spiritual warfare, we need to pray, "Lord, cover me with Yourself as my righteousness. Lord, I hide under Your blood." Furthermore, we must tell the accuser, "Satan, I overcome you, not by my merit, but by the prevailing blood of the Lamb."

III. THE FIRM FOUNDATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

Verse 15 says, "And having shod your feet with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace." Our feet must be shod in order to strengthen our stand in the battle. This is not for walking a way or running a course, but for fighting the battle.

The phrase "the firm foundation of the gospel of peace" means the establishment of the gospel of peace. Christ has made peace for us on the cross, both with God and with man, and this peace has become our gospel (2:13-17). This has been established as a firm foundation, as a readiness for our feet to be shod with. Thus, we shall have a firm footing that we may stand to fight the spiritual warfare. The peace for such a firm foundation is also Christ (2:14).

Most translations render the Greek here as readiness or preparation rather than firm foundation. Readiness or preparation indicates preparedness to put on shoes. Many

readers of Ephesians think that in verse 15 Paul is charging us to be always ready and prepared to put on the shoes of the gospel. But this is an incorrect understanding derived from an inaccurate translation.

In order to understand Paul's thought in this verse, we need to see that here the gospel is not the gospel of grace, nor the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, nor even the gospel of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Here the gospel is the gospel of peace. According to 2:15 and 16, on the cross Christ accomplished peace so that the Gentiles can contact the Jewish believers and so that we all can contact God. This peace is glad tidings, good news. In other words, it is the gospel. For this reason, 2:17 says that Christ preached the gospel of peace.

We also must preach this peace as the gospel. The gospel of peace spoken of in 6:15 is the peace accomplished by Christ on the cross for us to be one with God and for the Gentile believers to be one with the Jewish believers. This peace is our gospel. With this peace there is preparation, readiness. The Greek word actually means a firm foundation. This firm foundation is a secure footing for our standing. Therefore, the peace accomplished by Christ on the cross is a firm footing, a firm foundation. As we fight against the evil powers, the peace Christ has accomplished is a firm foundation for our feet. To take part in the spiritual warfare, our feet must be shod with this firm foundation.

In the past most of us thought that the shoes of the gospel were for us to walk or to run in our preaching of the gospel. However, the firm foundation of the gospel of peace is not for running, but for standing. For running we may have a pair of lightweight shoes, but for standing we need a pair of sturdy shoes.

In fighting, the crucial thing is to stand. We must be able to stand and to withstand the attacks of the enemy. Those who are defeated will run, but those who are victorious will stand. As we wrestle against the enemy, we shall find that Satan does not run away. Even when we are

victorious over him, he keeps on wrestling with us. Therefore we need to be able to stand. Spiritual warfare is not a boxing match, but a wrestling match. If we would wrestle against the enemy, we need a firm footing. Hallelujah, in the Lord's recovery we have such a foundation! Because there are those who have their feet shod with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace, they can withstand any attack of the enemy. Because they have such a firm footing, nothing can shake them. No matter what happens, they can stand and withstand in the evil day.

Usually peace is the opposite of warfare. When we have peace, we do not fight, and when we fight, we do not have peace. But here we fight with peace and in peace. We fight by standing in peace. If we lose the peace between us and God or between us and other believers, we lose the standing. Christ is the peace for us to be one with God and to be one with the saints. This peace is the firm foundation that enables us to stand fast against the enemy.

The three aspects of the armor of God covered in this message--the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the firm foundation of the gospel of peace--are all Christ. He is our truth, our righteousness, and our peace. Christ is God expressed and revealed, Christ is the righteous element that covers us, and Christ is the peace that enables us to stand. Therefore, we can stand in peace to fight the spiritual warfare. If we would be victorious in the spiritual warfare, we need Christ as our girdle of truth, as our breastplate of righteousness, and as our peace. By means of such a Christ we have the strength, the covering, and the firm footing. Then we are able to fight against the enemy.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-FIVE

THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD

(2)

In the foregoing message we considered the first three items of the armor of God: the girdle, the breastplate, and the shoes. The girdle is related to truth, the breastplate is related to righteousness, and the shoes are related to peace. We have seen that truth is God expressed in our living as our standard, pattern, and principle. Righteousness is Christ in our enjoyment and experience as the covering of our conscience. If we have truth in our living, we shall certainly have righteousness as our covering. The Bible reveals that righteousness issues in peace. This is peace both with God and with man. It is the very peace Christ accomplished on the cross for us. Therefore, to have the girdle, the breastplate, and the shoes is to have truth, righteousness, and peace. When we live out God in our daily living, we are covered with Christ as our righteousness, and we have peace as our firm foundation. Then we are prepared to fight against the enemy.

I. THE SHIELD OF FAITH

Verse 16 says, "With all these, having taken up the shield of faith, with which you shall be able to quench all the flaming darts of the evil one." We need truth to gird our loins, righteousness to cover our conscience, peace as the standing for our feet, and faith to shield our entire being. If we live by God as truth, we have righteousness (4:24), and righteousness issues in peace (Heb. 12:11; Isa. 32:17). With all these, we can easily have faith as a shield against the flaming darts of the evil one. Christ is the Author and

Perfector of such faith (Heb. 12:2). For us to stand firmly in the battle we need to be equipped with these four items of God's armor.

The shield of faith is not something that we put on, but something that we take up in order to protect ourselves against the attacks of the enemy. Faith comes after truth, righteousness, and peace. If we have truth in our living, righteousness as our covering, and peace as our standing, we shall spontaneously have faith. This faith is a safeguard against the fiery darts, the attacks, of the enemy.

We need now to consider the shield of faith in detail. We certainly are not to have faith in our own ability, strength, merit, or virtue. Our faith must be in God (Mark 11:22). God is real, living, present, and available. We need to have faith in Him.

We also should have faith in God's heart. Every Christian must know both God and the heart of God. God's heart toward us is always good. No matter what may happen to us or what kind of sufferings we may undergo, we must always believe in the goodness of God's heart. God has no intention to punish us, to injure us, or to cause us to suffer loss.

Along with faith in God's heart, we should have faith in God's faithfulness. We may change, but God does not change. As James 1:17 says, there is no shadow of turning with Him. Furthermore, He cannot lie (Titus 1:2), but is always faithful to His word.

God is not only faithful, but also able. Therefore, we need to have faith in God's ability. In 3:20 Paul declares that God "is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think."

Still another aspect of our faith is faith in God's word. God is bound to fulfill all that He has spoken. The more He speaks, the more responsible He becomes to fulfill His own word. We can tell Him, "God, You have spoken, and Your written Word is in our hand. Lord, You are bound to fulfill Your word." Hallelujah for God's faithful word!

We also need to have faith in God's will. Because God is

a God of purpose, He has a will. His will with respect to us is always positive. Hence, no matter what befalls us, we should care not for our happiness or our environment, but for God's will. Our environment may change, but God's will never changes.

Furthermore, we must have faith in God's sovereignty. Because God is sovereign, God could never make a mistake. Under His sovereignty, even our mistakes work for good. If God did not sovereignly allow us to make mistakes, we could not possibly make them. (However, this does not mean that we should deliberately make mistakes.) When we are wrong, we need to repent. But there is no need for us to regret, for that means we are lacking in faith. After we repent for a mistake or shortcoming, we must still exercise faith in God's sovereignty. We could not have made that mistake if He had not sovereignly allowed us to do so. Hence, there is no need for regret.

We all need to have a full faith in God, in God's heart, in God's faithfulness, in God's ability, in God's word, in God's will, and in God's sovereignty. If we have such a faith, Satan's flaming darts will not be able to damage us.

The flaming darts are Satan's temptations, proposals, doubts, questions, lies, and attacks. Flaming darts were used by warriors in the apostle's time, and the apostle used this as an illustration of Satan's attacks on us. Every temptation is a deceit, a false promise. The flaming darts include the Devil's proposals that come to us. As we are waking up in the morning, often Satan will make proposals to us. For this reason, we need to get into the Word the first thing in the morning. If we are not in the Word, we shall have no covering against the Devil's proposals. Doubts and questions are also flaming darts of Satan. Have you ever noticed that a question mark looks very much like a serpent? It was Satan who asked Eve, "Hath God said?" (Gen. 3:1). When the Devil questions us in this way, our response should be to flee, without even talking to him. Many times Satan attacks us with lies. But the shield of faith also guards us against these flaming darts.

The Devil's flaming darts come as thoughts injected into our mind. These thoughts may seem to be our own thoughts, but they are actually Satan's. I used to believe that such thoughts were my own. Later I began to realize that they came from Satan. I discovered this after such thoughts persisted in coming after I had decided not to entertain them. I saw that these thoughts were not mine, but Satan's. Prior to that time, my practice was to confess all these thoughts to the Lord. Now I refuse to confess them. However, some may think that even though these thoughts come from Satan, they are injected into us because we are evil. Do not believe this. Rather, you should say, "Lord, I am fallen, but I am under Your cleansing. Satan, this thought is yours, and you must bear the responsibility for it. I will not share this responsibility." Nevertheless, due to an overly sensitive conscience some continually confess things that are caused by Satan. Never confess thoughts injected into you by Satan in his subtlety.

In order to have the faith to be defended against Satan's flaming darts, we need a proper spirit with a conscience void of offense. However, faith is not mainly in our spirit nor in our conscience, but in our will, the strongest part of our heart. The New Testament says that we believe with our heart (Rom. 10:10). According to our experience, this faith in our heart is related mainly to the exercise of our will. No one with a will like a jellyfish can have strong faith. In James 1:6 we are told that he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven by the wind. Such a person has a vacillating will. Hence, if we would have faith, we need to exercise our will.

II. THE HELMET OF SALVATION

In the first part of verse 17 Paul goes on to say, "And receive the helmet of salvation." This is for covering our mind, our mentality, against the negative thoughts directed at us by the evil one. Such a helmet, such a covering, is God's salvation. Satan injects into our mind threats, worries, anxieties, and other weakening thoughts.

God's salvation is the covering we take up against all these. Such a salvation is the saving Christ we experience in our daily life (John 16:33).

Satan's darts come to us through our mind. Therefore, just as our conscience needs the breastplate of righteousness and our will needs the shield of faith, so our mind needs the helmet of salvation. We need truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and then salvation. Righteousness issues in peace, and peace gives us the ground to have faith. Then faith brings in salvation. Do not separate the helmet of salvation from the shield of faith. The shield protects the front of our being, but the helmet protects our head. The shield and the helmet work together.

III. THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

In verse 17 Paul also speaks of "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God." Among the six items of God's armor, this is the only one for attacking the enemy. With the sword we cut the enemy to pieces. However, we do not take up the sword first. Rather, we must firstly put on the girdle, the breastplate, and the shoes, and then take up the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation. Then, when we are entirely protected and have salvation as our portion, we may receive the sword of the Spirit.

In verse 17 the antecedent of the word "which" is Spirit, not sword. This indicates that the Spirit is the word of God, both of which are Christ (2 Cor. 3:17; Rev. 19:13). If I were writing this verse, I would say, "the sword of the word of God." But Paul speaks of "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God." Is the sword here the sword of the Spirit or the sword of the word? Most readers consider that Paul was saying that the sword is the word and that the Spirit wields the sword. I understood the verse this way for years. I thought that it was the Spirit, not I, who used the sword. In other words, according to this understanding, the sword is the word, and the One who uses the sword to slay the enemy is the Spirit. From my youth I was taught that the Spirit helps us to use the word of God as the sword. But

this is not the meaning here. The correct meaning is that the Spirit is the sword itself, not the one who uses the sword. The Word of God is also a sword. The sword is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Word. Here we have three that are one: the sword, the Spirit, and the Word.

My main burden in this message is on this matter. The Word is the Bible. But if this Word is only printed letters, it is neither the Spirit nor the sword. The Greek for word in verse 17 is *rhema*, the instant word spoken at the moment by the Spirit in any situation. When the *logos*, the constant word in the Bible, becomes the instant *rhema*, this *rhema* will be the Spirit. This *rhema*, which becomes the Spirit, is the sword that cuts the enemy to pieces. For example, we may read a particular verse again and again, only to have it remain the *logos*, a word in letters. Such a word cannot kill anything. But one day this verse becomes the *rhema* to us, the present, instant, living speaking. At that time this *rhema* becomes the Spirit. For this reason, in John 6:63 the Lord Jesus said, "The words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." Here the Greek text also uses *rhema*. The instant, present word is the Spirit. This kind of word is the sword. Therefore, the sword, the Spirit, and the word are three that are one. Furthermore, we, not the Spirit, are the ones to use this sword to kill the enemy.

In our Christian experience, the Word and the Spirit must always be one. It is an utter falsehood to say that we take the Spirit without taking the Word. Without taking the Word, we cannot have the Spirit. In my experience, I receive the Spirit mostly through the Word. As I contact the Word in a living way, it becomes the Spirit to me. However, some take the Bible without the Spirit. This also is wrong. Those who wish to grow flowers need both the seeds and the life contained in the seeds. It is impossible to separate the life within the seeds from the seeds themselves. In order to have the life, we must take the seeds. The relationship between the Word and the Spirit is like that between the seeds and the life. We must have

both. The Lord Jesus is both the Spirit and the Word. He is not the Spirit without being the Word, nor the Word without being the Spirit.

Because He is both the Word and the Spirit, He created us with a mind to understand and a spirit to receive. When we come to the Bible, we should exercise both our mind and our spirit. We exercise our mind by reading and our spirit by praying. Since we need both to read and to pray, we should pray-read the Word. I can testify that through pray-reading my spirit becomes strong and ready to devour the enemy. I not only exercise my spirit, but I also exercise my mind to consider the Word. For example, I may ask why grace and truth are mentioned in chapter four, whereas love and light are mentioned in chapter five. I also pray concerning this. The more my spirit is strengthened by pray-reading the Word, the more eager I am to use the sword of the Spirit to slay the enemy. In my speaking I have a sword with which to cut the enemy to pieces.

With the whole armor of God we have truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation. Finally, we have the *rhema*, the Spirit, the sword. This is our offensive weapon to use in attacking the enemy. When we have the whole armor of God, including the sword, we are not only protected, but also prepared to wrestle against the enemy. By having truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation we are equipped, qualified, strengthened, and empowered to use the sword in spiritual warfare. Then the enemy is subject to the cutting of our sword, and he is slaughtered by us.

As we engage in spiritual warfare against the enemy, we do not use gimmicks, skills, or politics. Our only weapon is the Spirit-Word, which is the sword. We do not employ cunning craftiness--we wield the sword of the Spirit. Our loins are girded with truth, and our conscience is covered by Christ as our righteousness. Then we have peace as our firm foundation. We can boast to the whole universe that we have no problems with God or man, for we are standing on the peace accomplished by Christ on the cross.

Furthermore, we are protected by the shield of faith and guarded by the helmet of salvation. Therefore, when we pray-read the Word, every word becomes the *rhema*, the sword that cuts the enemy. In this way the victory is ours. We not only subdue the enemy and defeat him, but slay him and even cut him into pieces. This is what it means to fight the spiritual warfare with the whole armor of God. The church must be such an equipped, fighting, and victorious church to slay God's enemy.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-SIX

THE APPLICATION BY PRAYER

In this message we come to 6:18-20, which in particular covers the matter of prayer.

I. PRAYER AS THE APPLICATION OF THE ITEMS OF GOD'S ARMOR

We have seen that the armor of God is composed of six items: the girdle of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the firm foundation of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. When we are equipped with such a full armor, we can stand against the attack of the enemy and even take the offensive against him. After these items of the armor of God, Paul turns to prayer.

Verse 18 says, "By means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit, and watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints." The phrase "by means of all prayer and petition" modifies the word receive in verse 17. By prayer we receive both the helmet of salvation and the word of God. This indicates that we need to receive the word of God by means of all prayer and petition. We need to pray as we are receiving the word of God. We have seen that the whole armor of God is composed of six items. Prayer may be considered the seventh. It is the means by which we apply the other items.

The modifier "by means of all prayer and petition" in verse 18 is related to all six items of the armor covered in verses 14 through 17. It is by means of all prayer and petition that we gird our loins with truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, and have our feet shod with the firm foundation of the gospel of peace. Furthermore, it

is by prayer that we take up the shield of faith and receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Whenever we are about to put on the armor or to take up any item of the armor, we need to pray. We cannot and we should not attempt to use any part of God's armor without prayer. Prayer is the unique way to apply the armor of God. It is prayer that makes the armor available to us in a practical way. For example, we may have the helmet of salvation, but it is prayer that makes this helmet available and prevailing. Therefore, prayer is crucial and vital.

II. PRAYING

In verse 18 Paul speaks not just of one kind of prayer, but of all prayer and petition. Prayer is general, whereas petition is particular. We should pray both in an ordinary way and, when necessary, in an extraordinary way, perhaps giving up sleep or food in order to petition the Lord concerning a certain situation.

A. At Every Time

In verse 18 Paul speaks of "praying at every time." Some think the phrase "at every time" means simply every time we pray. To others it means all the time. To pray all the time corresponds to Paul's word in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray without ceasing.

B. In Spirit

In verse 18 Paul says specifically that we are to pray in spirit. This refers to our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. It may be considered the mingled spirit--our spirit mingled with God's Spirit. Whenever we are in our spirit, we are also in the Holy Spirit, for our spirit is one with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). Therefore, Paul's charge to pray in spirit implies that we must also pray in the Spirit of God, for these two spirits are mingled in us.

In prayer, the main faculty we should use is our spirit. If our mind is overactive or if our emotion is not under

control, we shall find it difficult to pray. When we pray, our mind should be at rest, and our emotion should be regulated, neither too hot nor too cold. According to my experience, I easily become distracted in prayer when my mind is preoccupied with other things. Likewise, when my emotion is not properly regulated, I find it difficult to utter something from my spirit in prayer. Hence, in order to pray in spirit, we need to be adjusted in our mind and balanced in our emotion. This requires a great deal of inward exercise.

Furthermore, if we would pray at every time in spirit, our will must be strong. A person with a will like a jellyfish cannot pray. It may seem that prayer is easy, but actually it is difficult. It is very easy to talk or read, but it is not easy to pray. This is the reason that prayer requires the exercise of our will.

A Christian must be a praying person. It is a sin not to pray. If you fail to pray for others, the saints or those in your family, you are sinning. However, not many Christians regard the lack of prayer as sin. We need to exercise our will to be people of prayer. For the sake of a proper prayer life, our mind must be sober, our emotion must be regulated, and our will must be strengthened. Then we shall be able to pray at every time in spirit.

III. WATCHING

A. For This Prayer

In verse 18 Paul goes on to speak of "watching unto this in all perseverance and petition concerning all the saints." This indicates that we need to be watchful, on the alert, for this prayer life. We need to be on guard lest we be robbed of time that should be devoted to prayer. To be watchful in a practical way, many in the churches set aside specific times to pray.

To watch unto prayer implies that we exercise our will, calm our mind, and regulate our emotion in order to pray properly. It takes a considerable amount of exercise to

make our mind, emotion, and will submissive and obedient. Because many do not practice this, their mind is rebellious. When they tell the mind to calm down, it becomes all the more active. Others have trouble with the emotion. We need to be those who exercise ourselves to such a degree that as soon as we have finished a long conversation we are able to pray. The need for such an exercise is implied in Paul's word about watching unto prayer.

If we do not watch unto our prayer life, we shall lose time. Here and there throughout the day, our time will be wasted. We may lose time because our time is neither scheduled nor controlled. When we are at work, our time may be closely regulated. But when it comes to prayer, many do not schedule their time. As a result, much time which could be devoted to prayer is lost. If we do not redeem our time and grasp every available opportunity, much time will be needlessly lost. Although you may be very busy, do not use this as an excuse for not praying. If you place a high value on your prayer life, you will watch unto it and arrange time for it. No matter how busy you may be, you will still have time to pray.

According to the examples in the Bible, it is better to have more than one time set aside for prayer daily. For example, Daniel prayed three times a day (Dan. 6:10). Also the psalmist spoke of praying in the morning, at noon, and in the evening (Psa. 55:17). If we build up the habit of praying at regular times every day, great blessing will be brought in. This blessing will affect not only our personal lives, but also the church, our neighborhood, and even our nation.

B. In All Perseverance

Paul charges us to watch unto prayer in all perseverance. To keep a prayer life we need all perseverance, a constant, persistent care. If you have set aside a certain time in the morning for prayer, then you need to persistently watch regarding this time. Do not

allow any distractions. You may want to take the telephone off the hook for that period of time. If we are not persistent in watching unto prayer, the enemy will send in many distractions.

C. In All Petition

1. Concerning the Saints

In verse 18 Paul also speaks of "petition concerning all the saints." This indicates that we need to pray for the saints. In order to watch unto our prayer life, we need to pray in a particular way. This means that we should pray particularly for our watching unto prayer, that is, pray for our prayer life, for our prayer time. We also need to make petition concerning all the saints. Consider how much time is required to pray for the saints in your locality and for the saints in other cities and countries.

2. Concerning the Apostle

a. That Utterance May Be Given to Him

In verse 19 Paul continues, "And on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known in boldness the mystery of the gospel." The Greek word rendered utterance also means word, speech, expression. Paul was asking the believers to pray that the word would be given to him. He desired to open his mouth with boldness to make known the mystery of the gospel. Paul needed both the word and the boldness to declare it.

The mystery of the gospel is Christ and the church for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. Some Christians preach a gospel in which there is no mystery. But Paul declared the mystery of the gospel. This mystery implies the entire New Testament economy. Christ is the mystery of God, and the church is the mystery of Christ. Both Christ and the church are for God's economy, which also is a mystery. All these mysteries are related to the gospel.

I believe that the Lord intends for a gospel preaching atmosphere to be developed in all the local churches. Pray for such an atmosphere to become prevailing. In our gospel

meetings we must do more than sing and tell others that Christ can meet their need for satisfaction. On the contrary, we need to give full messages on the high things concerning God's economy. Let us tell the unbelievers of God's eternal intention. Do not underestimate their ability to understand. They may understand much more than you expect. Surely this kind of gospel preaching will draw unbelievers to the Lord.

In our gospel meetings we need to both preach and teach. We should teach in a preaching atmosphere. Surely the saints will want to bring their relatives and friends to this kind of meeting. Our burden is to make known the mystery of the gospel. Pray about this. Pray that the Lord will give us utterance and open our mouths with boldness to teach and to preach the mystery of the gospel. We all need to declare the gospel in this uplifted way.

b. That He May Speak Boldly

In verse 20 Paul goes on to say, "On the behalf of which I am an ambassador in a chain, that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." Paul was an ambassador on behalf of the gospel. An ambassador is one sent by a particular authority to contact certain people. Paul considered himself an ambassador sent by God; he was one sent by the highest authority in the universe. However, he was an ambassador in a chain. The Greek word for chain is a term for the coupling chain, a chain which bound the prisoner to his guard. Paul's desire was that in this coupling chain he might speak boldly. Although Paul was chained to the one who guarded him, he nevertheless desired to speak boldly, as he ought to speak.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-SEVEN

CONCLUSION

In this message we come to the conclusion of Ephesians, 6:21-24.

I. RECOMMENDING TYCHICUS

In verses 19 and 20 Paul asks the saints to pray on his behalf. Then in verse 21 he goes on to say, "But that you also may know what concerns me, what I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make all things known to you." This indicates that, on the one hand, Paul needed the saints to pray for him, but, on the other hand, he had a real concern for the saints and sent Tychicus to them both to bring them information regarding him and also to comfort their hearts (v. 22).

This indicates that there was an excellent relationship with good fellowship between Paul and the saints in Ephesus. It also points out the need for a go-between such as Tychicus. The apostle, the believers, and Tychicus were one. Firstly, Paul set an example by asking the believers to pray for him. Then he sent Tychicus to them to bring them information concerning him and to comfort them. How sweet and beautiful this is! Although we rarely practice this today, we should endeavor to have such a practice. We need this kind of fellowship.

Tychicus was not sent to carry on a great work. On the contrary, his task was to inform the saints about Paul's situation and to comfort their hearts. Although in the time of Paul, there were no modern means of transportation, such as steamers or airplanes, he had Tychicus make the long journey from Rome to Asia Minor just to visit the

saints on his behalf. The goal of this long journey was fellowship between the apostle and the saints. This is so important that it is recorded in the Word of God. The apostle was concerned for the church, and the church was concerned for the apostle. Therefore, Tychicus was sent from Rome to Asia Minor for the purpose of fellowship. In the Lord's recovery today, such a loving concern between the apostles and the churches needs to be restored. We need this concern, not to carry out a commission or do a work, but to have the necessary and proper fellowship. Today there also is the need for messengers to visit the churches to relay information and to encourage the saints.

In the Body of Christ we need much more traffic. The sending of Tychicus by the Apostle Paul to a local church created a kind of traffic. Traffic strengthens a country. Consider the impact of all the highways the federal government has built. These are the veins of the prosperity of the United States. Traffic, even across great stretches of open land, results in mutual supply and improvement. When I was growing up, just to travel the distance from our little village to Chefoo was a whole day's journey on foot. We had to make preparations the day before, then leave very early in the morning to get there by evening. It was such an effort to go just that distance that many people spent their whole lives in that village without ever going to Chefoo. It is traffic that has made the United States prosperous. In addition to the highways, the airlines with so many cross-country flights have increased the prosperity of this nation.

The more traffic among the churches, the better. Whenever we meet together, there is traffic. Without it, the churches are isolated. If we stay away from the meetings and meet together with just a few in our homes, the traffic is cut off. This is a subtlety of the enemy to cut the veins. When the blood flow is cut off, the result is death. However, by the proper traffic among the saints and between the churches, life multiplies. Therefore, we need to pay attention to Paul's word concerning this matter in the last chapter of Ephesians.

In speaking of Tychicus, Paul recommends him as a "beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord." As a faithful servant in the Lord, Tychicus was a ministering servant. We have pointed out that he was sent to make all things known to the saints and to comfort their hearts. Once again I say that this reveals a sweet fellowship and intimate concern that need to be restored fully in the Lord's recovery today.

II. BLESSING

A. Peace and Love

Verses 23 and 24 are Paul's blessing: "Peace to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption." In the opening of the book, the apostle's greeting is with grace first as the enjoyment and then peace as the result of the enjoyment (1:2). But at the conclusion it is the other way around, from the result, which is in peace, to the enjoyment of grace.

In his opening word Paul spoke only of grace and peace. In his concluding word, he not only changes the order of grace and peace, but also mentions "love with faith." It is important to see why grace and peace are reversed and why love with faith was included. We have seen that grace is the enjoyment of the Lord and that peace is the result of this enjoyment. This book opens with grace, with the enjoyment of the Lord Himself as our life, life supply, and everything to us. But eventually this Epistle brings us into peace. However, after we have come into peace, we still need grace. We enter into peace through grace. Now as we are enjoying peace, we need more grace. This is grace upon grace. It also indicates that our experience is from grace to grace.

But why is love inserted between peace and grace? No other epistle written by Paul has such an insertion The reason for this insertion is that the only way we can be kept in a situation of peace is by continually enjoying the

Lord in love. The phrase "in love" is used six times in this book (1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2). This connects this Epistle to Christ's word to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7. There the Lord rebukes the church because she left her first love (v. 4). The problem with the church at Ephesus was not the lack of works or knowledge, but the loss of the first love. Because Paul realized that love is crucial, he spoke of love in relation to peace and grace, indicating thereby that love is needed to preserve us in a condition of peace.

This love is from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This indicates that love does not originate with us; it originates with God. Eventually, however, God's love becomes our love. This is the reason Paul speaks, in verse 24, of those who love our Lord Jesus Christ. God's love to us becomes our love for Him. Peace is maintained by this kind of love. By living in the intimacy of God's presence, love comes to us. Then this love returns to the Lord and becomes our love for Him. By this traffic of love, peace is maintained, and we are preserved in the enjoyment of grace. This is the reason Paul speaks of peace, love, and grace.

Notice that in verse 23 Paul uses the phrase "love with faith." Here, in contrast to 1 Timothy 1:14, he does not speak of love and faith. Love and faith are the two means by which we partake of Christ and experience Him. Faith is related to our receiving of Christ (John 1:12), and love is related to our enjoying Him (John 14:23). In the Gospel of John we are firstly told to believe in the Son in order to have eternal life (3:15). To believe in the Lord Jesus is to receive Him. The Gospel of John also emphasizes love. In chapter twenty-one the Lord asks Peter concerning his love for Him (vv. 15-17). Furthermore, in John 14:23 the Lord speaks of the Father and the Son making an abode with the one who loves the Lord Jesus. Therefore, by faith we receive the Lord Jesus and by love we enjoy Him. For this reason, in 1 Timothy 1:14 Paul puts faith and love together.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:8 Paul also speaks of faith and love. In this verse he encourages the saints to put on "the breastplate of faith and love." Comparing this verse to Ephesians 6:14, we see that there are two kinds of breastplates, the one for our daily living and the other for fighting. For our daily living we need the breastplate of faith and love. Faith and love are both tender; they are signified in the Bible by the breasts. Such tender parts of our being, our spiritual breasts, need to be covered with the breastplate. By means of the breastplate, our faith and love, which are necessary for a proper Christian life, are preserved. The breastplate of righteousness in 6:14, on the contrary, is for fighting. Whenever we take part in spiritual warfare, our conscience must be protected from Satan's accusation by the breastplate of righteousness.

The verses concerning faith and love in the Gospel of John, 1 Thessalonians, and 1 Timothy indicate that faith and love go together. But in 6:23 Paul does not say faith and love, nor love and faith, but love *with* faith. This indicates that we need faith to match, support, and serve our love. According to Galatians 5:6, faith operates through love. This operation is very delicate. In Galatians, a book that emphasizes justification by faith, we are told in 5:6 that "in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." Have you ever realized that believing in the Lord Jesus is a matter of love? Do you know that your faith operates through love? A person who hears the gospel, repents, and then comes to appreciate the Lord Jesus and feel that He is altogether lovable, will have a strong faith. This faith operates through his love for the Lord. The more we love the Lord, the stronger will be our faith in Him. This is Paul's thought in Galatians.

Ephesians, however, emphasizes love, not faith. According to Galatians, the more we appreciate the Lord Jesus and love Him, the more we shall believe in Him. This is for salvation. But in Ephesians Paul's concern is not salvation, but continuation and fellowship. This requires

love with faith. If our faith is weakened because we accept doubts and questions, we shall find it difficult to love the Lord. Whenever faith is damaged, love will be damaged also. In order to continue in fellowship with the Lord through loving Him, we need a strong faith. Therefore, we need both the faith that operates through love and the love that is with faith.

We have pointed out that love is from God. This means that love is on God's side. Faith, on the contrary, is on our side. Hence, the phrase "love with faith" implies traffic between God and us and between us and God. Love is from God to us, and faith is from us to God. God gives us love, and we respond with faith. This is the traffic between love and faith. Through this traffic peace remains our portion. We are kept in peace by God's love coming to us and by our faith going to Him.

B. Grace with All Those Who Love Our Lord Jesus Christ in Incorruption

This traffic will also keep us in grace, in the enjoyment of the Lord. In verse 24 Paul says, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption." Grace is needed for us to live a church life that fulfills God's eternal purpose and solves God's problem with His enemy. The enjoyment of the Lord as grace is to those who love Him. For the proper church life we need to love the Lord in incorruption, that is, in a condition which is incorruptible. Our love for the Lord must be incorruptible, immortal, and imperishable. Such a love is genuine and sincere.

The way Paul composed the writing of the blessing in these verses is significant. Here, at the conclusion of this Epistle, we have been brought into peace. We remain in this condition of peace by the love which is from God with the faith which is from us. By this traffic of love with faith we have a continual supply of grace. Hallelujah for peace, for love with faith, and for grace!

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-EIGHT

THE CHURCH AS A HYBRID LIFE

God's eternal purpose is to have the church. His purpose is not just to create man, to rescue him from his fallen condition, and to bring him to heaven. Furthermore, God's purpose is not simply to have us be holy, spiritual, and victorious. Creation, salvation, sanctification, spirituality, and victory are all part of God's procedure to reach His goal, but they are not the goal itself.

GOD'S PURPOSE IN THE BEGINNING

In order to share in the recovery of the proper church life, we need to see what God's purpose was in the beginning. We need to understand that there are three different beginnings. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word." The beginning here is the beginning in eternity. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Heb.). In this verse the beginning denotes the time of creation. Finally, the beginning also refers to the start of the church life. Therefore, to go back to the beginning is to go back to the beginning in eternity, to the beginning in God's creation, or to the beginning of the church.

The book of Ephesians reveals that the church came into existence according to the eternal purpose which God purposed in Christ. Ephesians 3:11 says, "According to the purpose of the ages which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord." The purpose of the ages is the purpose of eternity, the eternal purpose, the eternal plan of God made in eternity past. This is the purpose made by God in eternity past for eternity future. God is a God of purpose. Before creation, before the foundation of the world, He made a

plan. This plan is the purpose of the ages, or the eternal purpose.

In 1:9 Paul says, "Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself." This verse also speaks of God's purpose, but here Paul uses the word purpose as a verb instead of as a noun. A good pleasure according to God's will has been purposed by God in Himself. This will which He has purposed is a mystery. It was hidden in God; it was not revealed to the saints in the Old Testament. In 1:11 Paul also speaks of God's purpose: "In Whom also we were made an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One Who operates all things according to the counsel of His will." God's purpose in these verses refers to what God planned in the beginning, in eternity past.

In the beginning God planned to have the church. The Bible definitely reveals that this is God's intention. God created the heavens, the earth, and billions of items because He desired to have the church. The first two chapters of Genesis are apparently a record of God's creation. Actually these chapters reveal God's intention. The minerals are for the plants, the plants are for the animals, the animals are for man, and man is for God. In other words, all things are for us, and we are for God in order that He may fulfill His desire to have the church. Therefore, God created all things so that He could have the church.

Furthermore, God's redemption, regeneration, and calling are also for the church. God accomplished redemption so He could have the church. He also came to you, called you, and regenerated you for the church. Moreover, He dwells in you today for the sake of the church.

A DEFINITION OF THE CHURCH

Now we come to the crucial and difficult matter of giving a definition of the church. The church may be called

a hybrid, because it is one entity produced by the mingling together of two lives. The two lives that are mingled to produce the church are the divine life and the human life. Therefore, the church is an entity constituted not just of the divine life or merely of the human life, but of the divine-human life. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He lived a divine-human life. The church also has a divine-human life. We thank the Lord that although this has been hidden from the saints for centuries, He has revealed it to us in His recovery.

It is vital to see that the church is a hybrid produced by the mingling of the divine life with the human life. God desires to dispense Himself into man and to work Himself into man. In his book, *The Spirit of Christ*, Andrew Murray says that the divine life is interwoven with the human life. Although interwoven is a very good term, it is still not adequate. The divine life is not only interwoven with the human life, but the divine life and the human life are mingled to form one entity. Paul's word in Galatians 2:20 illustrates this. Here he says, "I have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gk.). Paul says that it is he who lives; yet it is not he, but Christ. This indicates the mingling of Christ with Paul. The church is the product of such a mingling.

CHRISTIANS FOR THE CHURCH

Just as the members of our body are for the body, not for the members themselves, so we have become Christians for the church. Without the body, the members have no meaning. In the same principle, without the church, we Christians have no purpose. Therefore, as Christians we must be for the church.

ONE IN THE TRIUNE GOD

In Galatians 3:27 and 28 Paul says that as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ and that we are all one in Christ Jesus. This oneness is the church.

The church is the oneness in the Triune God of all those who are mingled with God.

The oneness in the Triune God is revealed in a full way in John 17. In John 17:21 the Lord Jesus prayed, "That they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us." Here in this oneness there is no place for the flesh, sin, naturalness, or worldliness. In this oneness there is room only for the proper humanity mingled with the Triune God.

Some may say that we do not have the proper humanity because of the fall. I agree. But through the redemption of Christ God has recovered us and uplifted our fallen humanity. In Christ's resurrection our humanity has been uplifted. This resurrected and uplifted humanity is now mingled with the Triune God. This mingling is the very element of the church. In the proper church life there is no culture, religion, or worldliness. The church, on the contrary, is composed of the proper humanity, the humanity created by God and uplifted by Christ, mingled with the Triune God. This is the entity God planned to have in eternity past for eternity future.

A MINIATURE OF THE BIBLE

God's Creation

The book of Ephesians, which deals especially with the church, is a miniature of the whole Bible. This is proved by what this book includes. Firstly, as we have seen, this book speaks of the purpose of the ages, the eternal purpose of God. Secondly, it mentions God's creation. Ephesians 3:9 speaks of the "dispensation of the mystery, which from the ages has been hidden in God, Who created all things." There is a relationship between creation and the church, for God created all things for the church.

God's intention in His creation of all things, including man, was that man would be mingled with God to produce the church. Zechariah 12:1 says that the Lord stretched forth the heavens, laid the foundation of the earth, and

formed the spirit of man within him. This indicates that the heavens are for the earth, that the earth is for man, and that man with the human spirit is for God. God's marvelous creation, focused on man, is for the purpose of producing the church. Therefore, Ephesians speaks of the creation of all things.

The Human Spirit

This book also refers a number of times to the human spirit. In 1:17, Paul prays that the Father of glory would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him. What is needed for the church life is not a mind that is naturally keen, but a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

In 2:22 Paul speaks of the human spirit again: "In Whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." This verse indicates that God's dwelling place is in our spirit. This dwelling place is God's building, the Body of Christ. Hence, the spirit is the very place to have the church life. If we would be in the church as God's building, we must be in our spirit.

In 3:5 Paul points out that the mystery of Christ "has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit." The hidden mystery is revealed to the apostles and prophets, not in the mind, but in their spirit, which has been regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. The inner man in verse 16 refers to this spirit. Our inner man, our spirit regenerated by the Spirit of God and indwelt by Him, needs to be strengthened with power through the Spirit so that Christ may make His home in our hearts.

In 4:23 Paul goes on to speak further about the human spirit: "And are renewed in the spirit of your mind." The spirit here is the human spirit mingled with the Holy Spirit. When this mingled spirit spreads into our mind, it becomes the spirit of our mind. Then our mind is under the control of our spirit. This renewing spirit is necessary for

us to put off the old man and to put on the new man, which is the church life.

In 5:18 Paul gives the exhortation, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled in spirit." In our regenerated spirit we need to be filled with Christ unto all the fullness of God (3:19).

Finally, in 6:18 Paul speaks of "praying at every time in spirit." Whenever we pray, we need to pray in our spirit.

In every chapter of Ephesians there is mention of the human spirit. This indicates that the human spirit is needed for the church life. The reason there is virtually no church life in Christianity today is that most Christians do not know the human spirit. Rather, most of today's Christian teachings are concerned with the mind. The book of Ephesians, however, is not focused on the mind, but on the spirit. Our spirit must be a spirit of wisdom and revelation, the place of God's building, the organ in which God reveals His mystery to us, and the inner man strengthened by the Spirit of God. Furthermore, we need to be renewed in the spirit of our mind and to pray in spirit. Through proper exercise, our spirit will eventually be filled unto all the fullness of God. This is the mingling of God and man that produces the church life.

Revealing the Triune God

Furthermore, the book of Ephesians reveals the Triune God more fully than any other book in the Bible. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." This verse speaks of God the Father and Christ the Son. The Spirit is not explicitly mentioned; however, the Spirit is implied in the spiritual blessings. These blessings are blessings of the Spirit and in the Spirit. Hence, in one verse we have the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In 2:18 it says that through Him, the Son, we have access in one Spirit unto the Father. Here again we have in one verse the Triune God, the Son, the Spirit, and the Father. Through the Son and in the Spirit

we have access to the Father. This is the experience of the Triune God for the church life.

In chapter three we also see the Triune God. Paul prayed to the Father to grant us to be strengthened through His Spirit into the inner man so that Christ may make His home in our hearts. Here we have the Father, the Spirit, and Christ the Son. Eventually, according to verse 19, we are filled unto all the fullness of God. Therefore, we have the Spirit strengthening us and Christ making His home in us; then we are filled unto the fullness of God. Such a revelation of the Triune God is not found elsewhere in the Scriptures.

In 4:4-6 we also find the Triune God: the Spirit (v. 4), the Lord (v. 5), and God the Father (v. 6). The sequence here is significant. Firstly we have the Spirit, then the Son, and then the Father. In the Body life, the first Person of the Godhead we touch is the Spirit. When we touch the Spirit, we touch the Son. Then, by having the Son, we have the Father who is the origin and source of all. The Father is the source, the Son is the course, and the Spirit is the flow in the course. When we touch the flow, we are in the course, and when we are in the course, we are brought to the source. Here we have the reality of the one Body with the one Spirit, the one Lord, and the one God and Father.

The reason that Ephesians unfolds the Triune God to such a degree is that this book is on the church, the entity composed through the dispensing of the Triune God into humanity. The church comes into being only as the Triune God dispenses Himself into us and mingles Himself with us. In Ephesians we have not only the doctrine of the Trinity, but the practicality of the Trinity for the dispensing of God into man. The Triune God is not for teaching, but for imparting Himself into our being.

CHRIST MAKING HIS HOME IN OUR HEARTS

We have pointed out that, as the processed God, the Triune God today is the life-giving Spirit. As the Spirit, He can dispense Himself into our being. This makes it possible

for us to be filled in our spirit unto all the fullness of God and for Christ to make His home in our heart. Christ is not simply dwelling within us, but is seeking the opportunity to make His home in our heart. This is to mingle Himself with every part of our being. Christ, the Son of God and the very embodiment of God, is the life-giving Spirit indwelling our spirit to spread into all of our inward parts. The result of this is not only holiness, spirituality, and victory, but the marvelous mingling of divinity with humanity to produce the church.

THE BODY AND THE NEW MAN

The church that is produced by the mingling of divinity with humanity is the Body of Christ. Certain Christian teachers think that the Body of Christ is merely an illustration. But this is not just an illustration--it is the very expression of Christ. Just as my physical body is the expression of myself, so Christ's spiritual Body is the expression of Himself. Hence, the church as the Body of Christ is a reality.

Furthermore, the church is the new man with Christ as the life and the person. A body must have life, but a man must have both life and a person. Trees have life, but they do not have a person with a mind, will, and emotion. Since the church is the Body and the new man, the church has Christ as both the life and the person. This understanding of the church is basic.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-NINE

THE MINGLED SPIRIT FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

In the foregoing message we pointed out that God's purpose is to obtain the church by dispensing Himself into man and making Himself one with man. In order to dispense Himself into man, God must be triune, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Furthermore, man must be in God's image and have a spirit to receive God and assimilate Him. One day, the Son of God, the embodiment of the Father, became a man. Passing through human living, crucifixion, and resurrection, He became the life-giving Spirit. As the Spirit, He comes into us and mingles with our spirit. Through this process there is brought into being a hybrid life, an entity composed of the mingling of the divine life with the human life. This is the church.

God is no longer the unprocessed God, but the processed God. He has accomplished everything necessary to come into us as the life-giving Spirit. Now we must believe in Him and call on the name of the Lord Jesus. When we do this, the life-giving Spirit comes into our spirit, and the mingling of the divine life and the human life takes place within us. This mingling produces the church.

THE FULLNESS OF GOD AND THE RICHES OF CHRIST

The book of Ephesians contains the fullest revelation of the Triune God in the Scriptures. For example, in chapter three Paul speaks of the fullness of God (v. 19), the riches of Christ (v. 8), and the power of the Spirit (v. 16). The fullness implies that the riches of all that God is become His expression. Colossians 2:9 says that the fullness of God dwells in Christ bodily. This means that Christ is the embodiment of the fullness of God, the embodiment of all

that God is. When the fullness of God is embodied in Christ, there are the riches of Christ. The riches of Christ are realized through the power of the Spirit. Hence, Christ is the embodiment of God's fullness, and the Spirit is the realization of Christ's riches. To have the fullness of God, we must have Christ. Furthermore, to enjoy the riches of Christ, we must have the Spirit.

In the Gospel of John, the Spirit is called the Spirit of reality. The Spirit of reality makes real to the believers all that the Son is and has. Embodied in the Son is all that the Father is and has, and all that the Son is and has is revealed as reality to the believers through the Spirit (John 16:14-15). For example, Christ is life. However, if we do not touch the Spirit, we cannot have this life. But as we touch the Spirit, we experience the reality of Christ as life. In like manner, Christ is light. But if we do not contact the Spirit, we cannot be enlightened by Christ. When we contact the Spirit, we enjoy the reality of Christ as light.

Today our Triune God is the all-inclusive Spirit. Do not regard the Spirit as something other than Christ, nor think of Christ as separate from God the Father. No, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one. This is the reason that we refer to God as triune, as three in one. No one can adequately define the Trinity. God the Father is in God the Son, and God the Son has become the Spirit who gives life. For the sake of the church, the fullness of God is embodied in Christ that the riches of Christ may be made real to us through the Spirit. The more we contact the Spirit, the more we enjoy Christ's riches. Eventually we shall be filled unto all the fullness of God and be fully mingled with the Triune God.

ACCESS UNTO THE FATHER

In 2:18 all Three of the Triune God are mentioned: "For through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father." Through Christ the Son we have access in one Spirit unto the Father. How wonderful! Notice that this verse does not say that we have access unto the Spirit. It

speaks of access unto the Father. The Spirit is unto us, whereas we are unto the Father. The Father came to us in the Son, and the Son came into us as the Spirit. Now through the Son the Spirit brings us unto the Father. This is for the dispensing of the Triune God into us so that the church may come into existence. Once again we see that the church is produced by the mingling of the Triune God with humanity.

RESPONDING TO THE SPIRIT

The dispensing of the Triune God into man is altogether related to the Spirit. The processed God as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit is waiting for our spirit to respond to Him and to cooperate with Him. To be saved is not merely to understand the gospel. It is to open ourselves from the depths of our being to respond to the Spirit. When we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we must call from our spirit, from the depths of our being. If we do this, we shall be saved, even if we do not adequately understand the gospel.

Consider the case of Saul of Tarsus on the way to Damascus (Acts 9). He was saved by saying the words, "Who art Thou, Lord?" At the time he was saved, Saul was not so clear about the gospel, nor even about the Lord Jesus. However, simply by saying the words, "Who art Thou, Lord?" he was captured by the Lord. This shows that to be saved is not mainly a matter of understanding the gospel, but of contacting the life-giving Spirit, who is the processed God waiting for an opportunity to come into us. Contacting the life-giving Spirit is much like breathing. The important thing is not to understand the air, but to breathe the air into us. By breathing in the air, we receive all the benefits of the air.

This principle applies to our whole Christian life. Take holiness as an example. We become holy not by learning the doctrine of holiness, but by contacting the Spirit who Himself is the essence of holiness. The doctrine of holiness is not holiness itself. Holiness is a living Person, the

processed God as the life-giving Spirit. It is possible to know the doctrine of holiness without having the reality of holiness. The way to be holy is to contact the life-giving Spirit. We may read a book on holiness, but have nothing of holiness as a result of our reading. However, if we spend the same amount of time calling on the name of the Lord as we would reading that book, we shall certainly experience God's holiness.

A SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION

In the book of Ephesians there is great emphasis on the mingled spirit, the human spirit mingled with the divine Spirit. Ephesians 1:17 says, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him." There is disagreement among scholars concerning the translation of the Greek word for spirit in this verse. Some insist on capitalizing the word spirit, because they think that the spirit here is the Holy Spirit. Others believe that the spirit here must refer to the human spirit. Actually, the spirit in this verse is our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. It is the human spirit mingled with the Holy Spirit. Such a spirit is given to us by God so that we may have wisdom and revelation to know Him and His economy. Without the Holy Spirit, our spirit cannot be a spirit of wisdom and revelation. But as soon as the Holy Spirit is mingled with our spirit, our spirit becomes a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

GOD'S DWELLING PLACE IN OUR SPIRIT

In 2:22 Paul again refers to the mingled spirit: "In Whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." Translators differ about this verse also, with some arguing that the spirit here is the divine Spirit and others, that it is the human spirit. Actually, it is the mingled spirit, the believers' human spirit indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is the indwelling One, not the dwelling place. The dwelling place is our spirit. God's

Spirit dwells in our spirit. The Holy Spirit is, therefore, the indwelling One, not the indwelt One. The dwelling place of God is in our spirit, the human spirit mingled with the Holy Spirit.

THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST REVEALED IN SPIRIT

In 3:5 Paul says that the mystery of Christ "has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit." The spirit here is once again the mingled spirit. When our spirit is mingled with the divine Spirit, our spirit becomes the organ in which the mystery of Christ is revealed.

THE INNER MAN

In 3:16 Paul speaks of the inner man. The inner man is our regenerated spirit. The only way man's spirit can be regenerated is through having the Spirit of God come into it. Hence, the inner man in this verse also denotes the human spirit mingled with the Holy Spirit.

THE SPIRIT OF OUR MIND

Ephesians 4:23 says, "And are renewed in the spirit of your mind." Some say that the spirit here cannot be the human spirit because this is the renewing spirit. However, the spirit here must be the human spirit because it is the spirit of the mind. The spirit in this verse is the regenerated spirit of the believers mingled with the indwelling Spirit of God. Such a mingled spirit spreads into our mind and thus becomes the spirit of our mind. The human spirit can be the renewing spirit only by being mingled with the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, the spirit here is the spirit of the mind, but, on the other hand, it is the renewing spirit. This indicates that it is a matter of the mingled spirit. The human spirit, not the Holy Spirit, is the base.

FILLED IN SPIRIT

In 5:18 Paul exhorts us to be filled in spirit. Certainly he means that we should be filled in our spirit with the Holy Spirit.

PRAYING IN SPIRIT

In 6:18 Paul charges us to pray at every time in spirit. According to the context, the spirit here also refers to the human spirit mingled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Word which we are to take in spirit by prayer.

NEAR, PRESENT, AND AVAILABLE

The Triune God has been fully processed to become the life-giving Spirit. As such a Spirit, He is near, present, and available. But He is holy, and we are sinful. How can this holy God be close to us? The answer is found in the fact that the element of redemption is included in the all-inclusive Spirit. The enemy, Satan, realizes this. If Satan would tell God that He has no right to be near sinful people, the blood of Jesus Christ would immediately testify against him. Before Christ's incarnation, the Spirit of God could not be so close to fallen mankind as now because there was not yet the element of redemption in the Spirit. The effectiveness of Christ's redemptive death, typified by the offerings in the Old Testament, is now in the life-giving Spirit. Perhaps not until we are in the New Jerusalem shall we fully understand what this Spirit means to us. Praise Him that this Spirit is the processed God, near, present, available, and ready for us to enjoy. Whenever we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we receive the Spirit. The reason for this is that the Spirit is the reality of Christ.

THE SEAL AND THE PLEDGE

In 1:13 Paul says, "In Whom you also, hearing the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in Whom also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise." The seal here is the life-giving Spirit. By coming into us, the Spirit sealed us. According to 1:14, this seal is the pledge, the earnest, the guarantee, the foretaste, of our inheritance. The full taste will simply be the full portion of the Triune God. Today the life-giving Spirit gives us a foretaste of the Triune God as our portion.

NOT GRIEVING THE SPIRIT

In 4:30 we see that the crucial matter is for us not to grieve the Spirit. Rather, we must always please Him. If the Spirit in us is not happy, we shall have difficulty. The most important thing in our Christian life is to take care that we do not grieve the Spirit. If you are faithful in this matter, you will be an outstanding Christian.

ONENESS IN THE TRIUNE GOD

According to 2:18, through Christ we have access in one Spirit unto the Father. When the Spirit comes into us, He spontaneously brings us back to the Father. In this Spirit we are truly one. This oneness is the proper church life. Hence, the church is the oneness in the Triune God of all those who have been mingled with the Triune God.

The depth of the book of Ephesians is in these verses that speak of the mingled spirit. The church is the mingling of the Holy Spirit as the processed God with humanity. This is greater than spirituality, holiness, or victory. As long as we are in this oneness, we are surely spiritual, holy, and victorious. Our goal should be nothing less than this oneness. If we are in this oneness, what need have we to seek spirituality or holiness or victory? By being in this marvelous oneness we have all this and much more.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTY

ORDINANCES AND DOCTRINE

We have seen that the divine Spirit has been mingled with the human spirit to produce one entity. This oneness of the divine Spirit with the human spirit is the church life. Because the church is produced by the mingling of divinity with humanity, we may say that the church is a hybrid.

The book of Ephesians also deals with certain negative things that damage or hinder the church life. The reason these things are covered in this book is that Ephesians is focused on the church.

ABOLISHING THE ORDINANCES TO CREATE ONE NEW MAN

Those who have been Christians for years know that on the cross Christ died as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Furthermore, on the cross Christ crucified the old man, destroyed Satan, and dealt with the world. This means that on the cross Christ dealt with sin, with the old man including the old nature, with Satan, and with the world. However, not many Christians realize that on the cross Christ also dealt with the ordinances. Christ dealt with sins and with sin so that we might be saved. He dealt with our old nature in order to set us free from the old man. Moreover, Christ dealt with Satan so that we may be victorious and overcome the evil one. Finally, Christ dealt with the world, so that we may be holy, sanctified, separated from the world. But why did He deal with the ordinances? He dealt with them in order to create one new man. Christians do not see this point because they concentrate on personal salvation, sanctification, or victory, and pay no attention to the church. Even many Bible teachers fail to point out that in

Ephesians Christ abolished the ordinances in order that the church might be produced. This is one of the most important revelations the Lord has given to the church in recent days. Christ's death was not only for our salvation, liberation, sanctification, and victory. His death was also to abolish the ordinances in order to create the church as the one new man.

Ordinances, commandments, and the law are in the same category. Apart from the law, we would not have any commandments. These commandments give rise to ordinances. On the cross Christ abolished the law of commandments in ordinances.

Ordinances are related both to religion and to culture and also to human nature. According to our nature, we have a strong tendency toward ordinances. Our ordinances match our culture. The more cultured we are, the more ordinances we have.

Christ abolished the ordinances in order to create in Himself one new man. He did not abolish them so that we may be holy, spiritual, or victorious. In a sense, He did not abolish the ordinances even that we may be saved. He abolished them so that the church might come into being.

DROPPING THE ORDINANCES FOR THE PROPER CHURCH LIFE

If we know the church, we shall reject all ordinances. The church is the mingling of the processed God with the proper humanity. Here in this mingling there are no ordinances, commandments, rules, or regulations. The more we are in the mingled spirit, in the mingling of the divine Spirit with the human spirit, the more we shall be set free from ordinances.

However, if we cling to ordinances, we shall be divisive. Christians have been divided mainly because of ordinances. Some denominations have been established because of ordinances. Do you have the confidence to say that you have no ordinances? Few of us can say this. The young people have their particular ordinances, and the older

saints have theirs. Most of the problems among the leading ones in the churches are caused by ordinances.

Some Christians have an ordinance, for example, regarding speaking in tongues. After one meeting, a brother came to me very happy because he had not been bothered by a sister who had spoken in tongues in that meeting. I told this brother that even his happiness proved that he still had feelings about speaking in tongues. Hence, his reaction was not altogether positive. If he could be surrounded by those who spoke in tongues without having any feeling about it, that would prove that he had no ordinances concerning this matter.

If we would have the proper church life, we must drop all ordinances and concentrate on the mingling of the divine Spirit with the human spirit. Only in this mingling can we enjoy the genuine church life.

Ordinances are particularly related to religion. Without ordinances, it is impossible to have religion, for religion is composed of ordinances. But Christ does not want a religion. What He wants is the new man. Therefore, He abolished the ordinances on the cross. Some may prefer shouting in the meeting, whereas others prefer silence. But to be either for shouting or for silence is to have an ordinance. We should not be for either one or the other, but for the Spirit. However, according to our nature and upbringing, we are prone to have ordinances of one kind or another. But as long as there are ordinances, we do not have the reality of the church life. The church life does not consist of ordinances, but of the living Spirit.

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN ORDINANCES AND THE SPIRIT

In 2:13-22 we see a contrast between ordinances and the Spirit. Christ on the cross abolished the ordinances in order to produce the church. Now that the ordinances have been abolished, the Spirit comes in to replace them. If we have ordinances, we do not have the Spirit. But if we have the Spirit, we shall not have ordinances. The cross abolished the ordinances in order to give place to the Spirit

in whom we have access unto the Father. Hence, the Spirit is the replacement of all ordinances. In the meetings we should not have an ordinance regarding shouting or quietness. As long as we are not in the Spirit, anything we do is an ordinance.

The church is neither an organization nor a religion, but the Body of Christ produced by the mingling of the divine Spirit with the human spirit. In the meetings we should not have rules and regulations; we should simply care to be in the Spirit. Do not be concerned about the arrangement of the chairs or about whether or not the sisters wear a head covering. To arrange the chairs in a particular way or to wear a head covering may be fine when done in the spirit. But to insist on these things is to make them ordinances. Anything we do in the meetings becomes an ordinance if we are not in the Spirit.

When Christ abolished the ordinances, He broke down the middle wall of partition (2:14). Now the separating wall of ordinances no longer exists. When I was young, I was strong in the matter of ordinances. But today I realize that God cares only for the divine Spirit in our human spirit. In 2:18 Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit and in verse 22, of the human spirit.

CARING FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY

Ephesians 2:22 says that God's dwelling place is in our spirit. For God to have such a dwelling place, there must be the practical building up of the Body. But if we still hold to certain ordinances, we cannot be built up with other believers. Ordinances are always divisive. If some sisters make an ordinance out of head coverings, they will be divided from the sisters who do not wear a head covering. Those who advocate head covering may be very strong, using 1 Corinthians 11 as their scriptural ground. But if they are strong in the way of ordinances, they will be divided from other sisters. However, if all the sisters are in the Spirit, not caring for ordinances about head covering, they will be built up together.

In today's Christianity seldom is a message given on

the building. What most Christians care for is individual edification, not the building up of the Body. To edify someone usually means to educate him, to give him a spiritual education. Although many care for such education, they are not concerned about the building up of the Body of Christ. In the Lord's recovery we are not for personal edification, but for corporate building up. In 2:22 Paul says, "In Whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." How can we be built up together in our locality if we still hold on to ordinances? It is impossible. Just as we all have different faces, so we all have different ordinances. We praise the Lord that no matter how different our background may be, we have one life and one Spirit! Therefore, in the church life today we do not care for ordinances, but we focus on the mingled spirit.

DOCTRINE AS A DAMAGE TO THE CHURCH LIFE

In 4:14 Paul speaks of a second negative thing that causes damage to the church life: "That we may be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error." Here Paul speaks of teaching or doctrine. In any religion there are not only ordinances, but also doctrines. Notice that in verse 14 Paul does not speak of heresy, but of doctrine, of teaching. Although doctrine seems good, it can cause us to be carried away from Christ and the church. No matter how positive a particular doctrine may seem to be, if it distracts you from Christ and the church, you must be careful about it and not take it in. Do not accept even the best doctrine if it distracts you from Christ and the church. It is the Spirit, not doctrine, that produces the church. Nevertheless, in today's Christianity there is doctrine upon doctrine. There sermon upon sermon is given on doctrine. However, the mere doctrine without life in the Spirit damages the church life.

In chapter four of Ephesians there is a contrast between doctrine and the reality of Christ. The reality of Christ is the Spirit of reality. If you cling to doctrine, you

will automatically let go of the Spirit of reality. But if you take care of the Spirit of reality, you will let go of doctrine.

Christians today are divided either by ordinances or by doctrines. The denominations are established according to ordinances or doctrines. Without ordinances or doctrines, there would be no divisions. If ordinances and doctrines were removed, all genuine Christians would be one. We thank the Lord that no matter how diverse our backgrounds may be, we in the Lord's recovery are truly one. Even the evil angels recognize our oneness. The divisive elements of our backgrounds have been set aside, and we have come together to be one in the Lord.

Throughout the years we have learned to drop our opinions in order to keep the oneness. A number of times we have held different opinions, but by the Lord's mercy we have been willing to drop them for the sake of the oneness. The Body comes out of the Spirit. Certainly doctrinal dissension could never build up the Body. When we hold on to our doctrinal opinion, we are through with the reality of Christ, which is nothing less than the life-giving Spirit.

TAKING THE WORD AS NOURISHMENT

Since we emphasize the need to set aside doctrine for the building up of the church, you may wonder what we do with the Bible. We should not approach the Scriptures mainly for the purpose of gaining knowledge. On the contrary, we should use the Bible for spiritual nourishment. According to 6:17 and 18, we should take the Word of God by means of all prayer. In Matthew 4:4 the Lord Jesus said to the Devil who was tempting Him, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God." This indicates that the Lord Jesus took the word of God in the Scriptures as His bread and lived on it. The word that proceeds out through the mouth of God is for nourishment, not primarily for knowledge. Therefore, when we contact the Word, we should exercise not only our mind but especially our spirit to take in the Word as nourishment.

Recently I turned once again to the book of Isaiah. In the past I acquired a good deal of knowledge of this book. But as I read Isaiah this time, I did not do so mainly for knowledge, but for nourishment. Isaiah 1:3 says, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." The fact that a crib is related to eating indicates that the book of Isaiah has the concept of nourishment. Once again I say that we should not take the Word of God just as knowledge; we should take it as food to nourish us. The best way to take the Word as nourishment is by pray-reading.

CARING FOR THE REALITY OF CHRIST

If we care for doctrine, we shall be divided. We in the Lord's recovery need to be clear that we are not for ordinances or for doctrine, but for the living Spirit, who is the reality of Christ. If we are faithful to care for the reality of Christ and not for doctrines or ordinances, we shall not be divided.

In the past certain divisive ones have been among us. They stayed for a while, but then began to insist on a particular doctrine. Because we refused to give place to their doctrine, they left. We have been and still are standing only for Christ and the church, not for any particular doctrine.

When we say that we are for the living Spirit and not for doctrine, this does not mean that we do not believe in the Bible. We believe the Bible at least as much as other Christians do, if not more. But we do not take the Bible as dead letters. To us, the Word is living. If through 1 Corinthians 11 some sisters are touched by the Lord to put on a head covering, we are thankful and appreciative, but we would not make this into a doctrine of head covering. In the same principle, if certain brothers and sisters feel that they are old and desire to be buried, we are willing to accommodate them. But we do not make a doctrine of being baptized more than once. The same holds true regarding the burning of things that are worldly or improper. If some are led of the Lord to burn certain articles, they are free to do so. But they should not make

this matter of burning into

a doctrine. In fact, not even Christ and the church are mere doctrines to us. Rather, Christ and the church are a marvelous reality.

A CHARGE TO THE YOUNG PEOPLE

I realize that more and more the going on of the Lord in His recovery will be with the young people. No doubt the spread of the recovery in this country and elsewhere will be mainly with them. Therefore, in the presence of the Lord, I would charge the young people with the importance of realizing that in the recovery we are not for ordinances or for doctrine, but only for the life-giving Spirit as the reality of Christ. We do not take the Bible as a book of doctrine in letters. Rather, we take the Word as spirit and life. In Ephesians 2 there is the contrast between ordinances and the Spirit, and in chapter four there is the contrast between doctrine and the reality of Christ that produces the growth in life for the building up of the Body. Ordinances are a wall that separates, whereas doctrine is a wind that carries people away from the building up of the Body. In both chapter two and chapter four Paul is concerned with the building up of the church. When we are for the Spirit, we shall be built up as God's habitation in our spirit. In like manner, if we are for the reality of Christ, we shall have the growth in life for the building up of the Body in love. Therefore, we in the Lord's recovery must proclaim that we do not care for ordinances or for doctrine. We take the Word as revelation and nourishment, but we do not care for doctrine. We know that through the past several centuries God's people have been divided and even denominated by doctrine and ordinances. Therefore, we care only for the Spirit and for the reality of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-ONE

THE OLD MAN AND THE NEW MAN

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:22-24, 30; 5:18-21, 26-27; 6:17-18

Before we consider the matter of putting off the old man and putting on the new man, the church (4:22-24), we need to see that the abolishing of the ordinances for the creation of the new man is part of the gospel. Not many Christians realize that this matter must be proclaimed as part of the gospel. Speaking of Christ, 2:17 says, "He preached the gospel of peace." This indicates that what is covered by Paul in 2:12-22 is related to the gospel.

THE WHOLE GOSPEL

According to verse 12, we once were apart from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, without hope, and without God in the world. But in Christ Jesus we have become near in the blood of Christ (v. 13). The context proves that we have been brought near to one another. The Gentiles were far off from the Jews, and the Jews were far off from the Gentiles. But on the cross Christ broke down the middle wall of partition between them. Therefore, now in the blood of Christ the Jews and the Gentiles are made near to one another. It is true that the blood has brought us to God. But in verse 13 Paul is not saying that we are brought near to God; he is saying that we are brought near to one another. This is part of the gospel.

Verse 14 says that Christ is our peace. The peace here is not that between us and God, but that between us and other believers. In particular, it is the peace between the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers. Christ, our

peace, has made the Jews and the Gentiles one, having broken down the middle wall of partition that separated them. In His flesh He abolished the enmity, the law of commandments in ordinances, in order to create the two in Himself into one new man (vv. 14-15). In this way He made peace between the Gentiles and the Jews.

In verse 16 Paul goes on to say, "And might reconcile both in one Body to God through the cross, slaying the enmity by it." Christ reconciled the Jews and the Gentiles to God in one Body. This indicates that reconciliation is a corporate matter.

Verse 17 continues, "And coming, He preached the gospel of peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near." The subject of this verse is Christ. On the day we heard the gospel, Christ came as the Spirit to preach to us the good news of the peace which He had accomplished on the cross.

In verses 18 through 22 we see that we now have access unto the Father, that we are fellow-citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, that we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, that the whole building is growing together into a holy temple in the Lord, and that we also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit. All these verses indicate that the abolishing of the ordinances for the producing of the church is part of the gospel.

Many of us can testify that without the church life our human life has no meaning. Although we have been saved and regenerated to become children of God, our daily life is meaningless without the church. Can you be satisfied simply with eating, sleeping, working, spending some time to pray and read the Bible, and then sometimes telling others about Christ? From my experience I can testify that if I do not have the church life, I have no desire to live. This indicates that even though we may be saved, we are lacking something vital if we do not have the church life in a practical way. The whole gospel, the perfect and ultimate gospel, must include the church life. Most Christians,

however, do not have a complete gospel because they do not see that the gospel includes the abolishing of the ordinances for the creation of the new man. Today we in the Lord's recovery must preach not a partial gospel, but one that is complete, a whole gospel.

Many Christians preach only the first aspect of the gospel, redemption by the blood of Christ. Some also preach the second aspect, the matter of being saved by Christ's life (Rom. 5:10). Another aspect of the gospel is the enjoyment of the riches of Christ. In Ephesians 3:8 Paul said that grace had been given to him "to preach to the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel." The final aspect of the gospel is what we have seen in Ephesians 2--the abolishing of the ordinances for the creation of the one new man, the church. Redemption, life, and the enjoyment of the riches of Christ are all for the church. Thus, the ultimate goal of the gospel is the church, the new man. We praise the Lord for showing us that, according to the book of Ephesians, the gospel includes the creation of the new man.

PUTTING OFF THE OLD MAN

We have considered two negative things that damage the church life: ordinances and doctrine. Now we come to a third negative thing--the old man. Some Christians interpret the old man in 4:22 as the old nature. It is true that the old man includes the old nature, but it also includes a great deal more. Ephesians 4:22 indicates that the old man is all-inclusive: "That you have put off, as regards your former manner of life, the old man, which is being corrupted according to the lusts of the deceit." Here Paul speaks of putting off, as regards our former manner of life, the old man. The former manner of life includes everything related to us: what we are, what we have, our family life, and our social life. Paul's meaning here is that we must put off whatever we are, whatever we do, and whatever we have. We are to put off our very way of living.

The old man with all it includes is a damage to the

church life. Wherever the old man is, there can be no church. This means that what we are, what we have, and what we do make the church life an impossibility.

Ordinances, doctrine, and the old man are the three main negative things that damage the church life. If we have ordinances, the church life is gone. If we are occupied with doctrine, it will not be possible to have the proper church life. In addition, if we continue to live according to the old man, the church life will be seriously damaged, even terminated. However, if we have no ordinances or doctrines and if we put off the old man with his former manner of life, we shall have a marvelous church life, a church life that will be a miniature of the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. In such a church life it is impossible to have division.

I wish to say once again that in the Lord's recovery we are not for ordinances or for doctrine. However, we have deep respect for the Word of God. By the Lord's mercy, we would never break His Word. But we do not take the Bible as mere doctrine. To keep the Word in a living way is one thing, but to turn the revelations in the Word into doctrine is another. We need to take the Word as nourishment for growth in life. We should not take it as a book of doctrine and ordinances. Although I prefer to kneel down when I pray, I do not make this a formality or an ordinance that others are expected to follow. Rather, when I kneel to pray, I do so in spirit.

FLEXIBILITY FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

For the church life, we must have no ordinances, we must not be occupied with doctrine, and we must not have any oldness. If we would be free from oldness, we must lay aside what we are, what we do, and the way we live. Those who are released from oldness in this way are very flexible. When Paul was on the way to Damascus, he was altogether in the old man. He had strongly opposed Stephen and consented to his death. Being strong in the old man, Paul was for the temple, the priests, and for the religion of

Judaism. He strongly reacted against those who opposed these things. However, after he came to the Lord and had been dealt with by Him, he became flexible, seemingly without opinion. In 1 Corinthians 9 he said that he could be all things to all men (v. 22). He could be flexible because he had put aside his old man.

During the early years of my ministry, I had much to say to those who came to me for advice. For example, if a brother consulted me about marriage, I had many points to share with him concerning married life. But now when the saints come to me for counsel, I do not have much to say. Mainly, I encourage them to contact the Lord in prayer. My desire is to be like Paul, to be one who has given up the old man and who has become flexible in dealing with people.

If we have truly put off the old man, others will have a difficult time describing us. However, if we can be described easily, we probably have not put off the old man. We should not be proud, and we should not be humble. Actually, we should be nothing. Then we shall be useful in the church life.

PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN

For the church life, we must not only put off the old man, but also put on the new man. The new man is the practical church life, which is Christ as the life-giving Spirit mingled with our spirit in a corporate way. To put on the church life as the new man is to put on this entity produced by the mingling of the divine Spirit with the human spirit. In this marvelous entity, the new man, there are no ordinances and there is nothing of the old man. There is only Christ as the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit mingled with our spirit.

NOT GRIEVING THE SPIRIT

In 4:30 Paul charges us not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Not caring for the church life is one of the main ways we grieve the Spirit. For example, if you do not attend the

meetings of the church, you may grieve the Spirit. Many grieve the Spirit by refusing to function in the meetings. Often they have the sense in their spirit to speak or to call

on the name of the Lord, but they refuse to do so. At such times they grieve the Holy Spirit of God. Furthermore, we may grieve the Spirit in many ways in our daily life. Our daily living should be part of the new man, part of the church life. We are not to pretend that we are humble or well-behaved, but to put on the church life in a practical way. How marvelous it would be if day by day we all experienced Christ as the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit mingling Himself with our spirit in a corporate way!

THE OVERFLOW OF THE INNER FILLING

In 5:18 Paul says, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled in spirit." In our regenerated spirit we need to be filled with the Triune God unto all the fullness of God. This will cause us to overflow with speaking, singing, praising, and submitting. This will not be the result of our efforts; it will come as the spontaneous overflow of the inner filling. If we are filled in spirit with all that God is, we shall certainly experience such an overflow.

THE WASHING OF WATER IN THE WORD

In 5:26 Paul goes on to speak of the cleansing that is by the washing of the water in the Word. Today the Lord Jesus is cleansing, purging, and purifying His church by the water in the Word. The water in the Word is the living Word with the divine life energized by the Spirit. The water in the Word is actually the life-giving Spirit Himself. In our experience the Word of God must not be letters, but spirit and life. In John 6:63 the Lord Jesus said, "The words which I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." The Word as spirit and life is the water that cleanses us.

This cleansing does not wash away uncleanness; rather, it washes away all the spots and wrinkles. Wrinkles come from oldness, and spots come from wounds. The church

needs to be washed both from oldness and from wounds. For this washing what is effective is not the blood of Christ, but the water in the Word. The blood deals with sin and uncleanness, whereas the water in the Word deals with wrinkles and spots, with oldness and hurts.

The way to have the washing of the water in the Word is presented in 6:17 and 18. In these verses Paul tells us to receive "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, by means of all prayer and petition, praying at every time in spirit." This indicates that we need to pray-read the Word. We need to take the living Word into the depths of our being by praying in spirit. This is to exercise our spirit to pray the Word into us. If we do this, the Word will not only be food to nourish us, but also water to wash us and to cleanse us from all oldness and wounds.

In the church life it is necessary to have frequent contact with one another. However, the more we contact one another, the more we hurt one another. If a brother would stay with me for several days, no doubt he would be hurt by me, and I would be hurt by him. The only way to remove the spots caused by this mutual wounding is to experience the washing of the water in the Word. If you are not cleansed of your wounds by the water in the Word, you may be offended and discouraged and even consider giving up the church life. However, if you exercise your spirit to pray-read the Word and thereby take the Word into the depths of your being, you will experience the washing of the water in the Word and you will be cleansed of all spots. Furthermore, the washing of water in the Word will cause you to grow, and by this growth you will be built up with others.

The entire book of Ephesians reveals in a consistent way that the church is the mingling of the divine Spirit with the human spirit. Today the divine Spirit is the Triune God in the holy Word. The Triune God is the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit, and this Spirit is within the Word. Therefore, we should not only exercise our mind to study the Word, but also exercise our spirit to pray the

Word. By pray-reading, we touch not only the Word, but also the Spirit. Then the Spirit will nourish us, water us, and wash us so that we may be purged of all wrinkles and spots. Eventually, through this washing, we shall be fully sanctified in a practical way. This is what the Lord is doing in the church today.

THE LIVING CHRIST WITH THE LIVING WORD

In the Lord's recovery, there is no place for ordinances, doctrines, or the old man. If we still hold on to these negative things, we shall be finished with the church life. We are here only for the living Christ with the living Word. Our way to approach the Word is not just to exercise our mind to study it and to gain knowledge of it, but also to exercise our spirit to pray the Word and to take it in as the life-giving Spirit for nourishment and washing. In this way we shall grow in a corporate way and be built up together. It is by this process that the Lord Jesus will fulfill the prophecy He uttered in Matthew 16:18: "I will build My church." Then we shall have the reality and the enjoyment of the full gospel, the gospel of Christ and the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-TWO

GOD'S ACCOMPLISHED WORK CONCERNING THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:4-5, 7, 13-14, 17-18; 2:4-6, 8, 10, 13, 16; 3:16-17, 19; 4:4, 7, 12-13, 15-16, 23; 5:26, 29, 6:11-13

In this message we shall consider more than thirty points related to God's accomplished work concerning the church. Most of these points are expressed as verbs in various verses throughout the book of Ephesians.

CHOSEN

In 1:4 Paul says, "According as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before Him, in love." God chose us in eternity past, when He was forming His plan to have the church. The fact that we were chosen in eternity means that our salvation began before the foundation of the world and before time. The word chosen implies that some were selected and that others were not selected. Praise the Lord that we are among the chosen ones! If we turn to our spirit and contact the Lord regarding this matter, we shall realize that just as God is eternal, so His choosing of us was also related to eternity.

PREDESTINATED

Ephesians 1:5 says that we have been predestinated unto sonship. The Greek word rendered predestinated means to be pre-marked, to be marked out beforehand. In eternity God, through His foresight, marked us out from among a vast number of people. Because we were marked out before the creation of the universe, we cannot escape

from God. We may want to give Him up, but He will not give us up. What God is doing with us was not initiated by us in time; it was initiated by God in eternity.

LOVED

After choosing and predestinating us, God created us in Adam. But the man created by God became fallen. Nevertheless, God still loved us. In 2:4 Paul speaks of the great love with which God loved us. He loved us even when we were dead in offenses and sins, when we were walking according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air (2:1-2). In 5:25 Paul says that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. Therefore, we are not only the chosen and predestinated ones, but also the loved ones.

The Bible emphasizes God's love for us after the fall, not before the fall. Ephesians 2 is proof of this. Even after we had become sons of disobedience, God nevertheless loved us. Our fall gave opportunity for God's love.

CALLED

In 4:4 Paul says that we were called in one hope of our calling. Many of us know the exact time and place of our calling. I can still remember the afternoon I was called by God. God came to me and granted me a gracious visitation, and He called me. From the time I was called, I was caught by the Lord. As those who have been caught by Him, we cannot run away from Him. Try as we may, we simply cannot do this. If we run from Him temporarily, He will eventually bring us back to Himself. The fact that we cannot run from the Lord proves that we have been called by Him.

REDEEMED

In 1:7 Paul speaks of redemption, saying, "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offenses, according to the riches of His grace." As God was

accomplishing His work concerning the church, He redeemed us.

RECONCILED

God has also reconciled us to Himself (2:16). We needed to be reconciled because we were God's enemies and were in rebellion against Him. There was enmity between us and God. But through the Lord's death on the cross, we have been saved from our fallen situation and reconciled to God. Praise the Lord that now there is nothing separating us from Him! We may still be weak, but we are in a reconciled condition. When we are in fellowship with the Lord, we are happy. But when we lose touch with the Lord, we are sad. But whatever our feelings, we nevertheless have been reconciled to Him.

SAVED

In 2:8 Paul tells us that "by grace you have been saved through faith." Before we were saved, we could enjoy certain worldly entertainments. But after we were saved, our tastes spontaneously changed. If you go back to those things you enjoyed before you were saved, you will find them very different. What a tremendous difference God's salvation makes!

GRACED

Using a verbal form of the Greek word for grace, in 1:6 Paul says that God has "graced us in the Beloved." He has put us into the position of grace that we may be the object of His grace and favor, that we may enjoy all that God is to us. Some versions say that God has favored us. We have been graced, favored, in the Beloved.

MADE ALIVE

In 2:5 we see that God has made us alive together with Christ. As those who were God's enemies, we needed to be reconciled. As those who were lost, we needed to be saved. Moreover, as those who were dead in trespasses and sins,

we needed to be made alive. When we called on the name of the Lord Jesus, we were enlivened by receiving the Spirit of life. When Christ came into us, He came with the divine life. In this way, He made us alive. He enlivens us by being the life within us. The life with which we are enlivened includes the law of life, the sense of life, the fellowship of life, and every other aspect of the experience of life.

RAISED UP

In 2:6 we see that we have been raised up together in Christ. We were not only dead, but also buried. Therefore, God not only made us alive; He also raised us up from among the dead. Praise Him, we have been raised up from the grave!

SEATED

In 2:6 we also see that God has "seated us together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus." Many Christians are waiting to go to heaven, but we are already in heaven. In Christ God has seated us all together, once for all, in the heavenlies. This was accomplished when Christ ascended to the heavens, and it is applied to us by the Spirit of Christ. Today we realize in experience this reality in our spirit through faith in the accomplished fact. If we exercise our spirit in a genuine way, we shall have the sense that we are sitting in the heavenlies looking down at the situation on earth. However, if we exercise our natural reason instead of our spirit, we shall have the sense that we are on earth. Nevertheless, according to the revelation of the Scriptures, we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies.

PURCHASED

In 1:14 Paul speaks of the redemption of the acquired or purchased possession. The New Testament reveals that God has purchased us with a great price, the precious blood of Christ. In order to acquire us, God had to pay such a high price.

SEALED

Ephesians 1:13 says that we "were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise." This verse indicates that God has sealed us; He has put His seal upon us. This seal is the Holy Spirit Himself. After we were purchased with the blood of Christ, God sealed us. Because we have been sealed, we bear a mark, the image of God. Although we may fail and become unclean, this seal, this mark, cannot he removed.

POSSESSED

In 1:14 Paul says that we have become God's possession, His acquired possession. God possesses us. We should have the realization that we belong to Him.

On the one hand, we are God's. On the other hand, He is ours. Because we are His, we are sealed and possessed by Him. Because He is ours, we have received the guarantee that He is our portion, our inheritance. Our inheritance has nothing to do with material things; it is God Himself. We have the Holy Spirit as the guarantee, pledge, down payment, deposit, foretaste, and sample, of our inheritance.

CREATED

Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." This verse does not speak of the first creation, but of the second creation, the creation of the new man. We all have been created together as God's masterpiece, God's poem. The Greek word rendered masterpiece means something which has been made, a handiwork, or something which has been written or composed as a poem. The church is a poem written by God. In the universe nothing is more meaningful than the church. The church, the corporate new man, is God's masterpiece.

Concerning the church, the word created is used three times in Ephesians. In addition to 2:10, it is used in 2:15,

which says that Christ abolished the law of the commandments in ordinances in order to create one new man. In 4:24 we are told that the new man was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth. From a human point of view, there are many deficiencies and shortcomings in the church. But from God's perspective in eternity, the church is a finished product, something already accomplished by God. God is happy and can boast to His enemy, "Satan, no matter how much you try to do, I have already accomplished My work. I have created the one new man." In the eyes of God the church has already been built up.

BECOME NEAR

Ephesians 2:13 says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near in the blood of Christ." Once we were far off from God and from one another, but in Christ Jesus God has caused us to become near. Before we were saved and brought near, we could not speak of one another as brothers and sisters. But now we have the deep sense that in Christ we are closer to one another than we are to our brothers and sisters in the flesh.

ENLIGHTENED

Now let us go on to consider certain items which from God's point of view have been accomplished, but from the standpoint of our experience are still in the process of being accomplished. The first is the matter of being enlightened. In 1:18 Paul speaks of the eyes of our heart being enlightened, and in 5:14, of Christ shining on us. In a sense, God has already enlightened us. But in another sense, we still need to be enlightened. We may be covered, veiled, by certain things, and need to turn to the light so that the light may shine on us.

If we would be enlightened, we need to turn to the spirit. According to 1:17 and 18, enlightenment is related to receiving a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of God. If we stay in our natural mind, we shall

be in darkness. But if we turn to our regenerated spirit, we shall be enlightened.

I am concerned for those who do not open themselves up in the meetings. To be closed in this way is to be in darkness. We need to open ourselves by uttering something for the Lord in the meetings. When we turn from our reasonings to the spirit, we are enlightened. We rise up, and Christ shines on us. As we stand up to speak, the light shines on us, and we are enlightened. The more we are enlightened, the more we experience the work God has accomplished concerning us.

STRENGTHENED

In chapter three Paul prayed that our inner man, our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit, would be strengthened with power (v. 16). When we are enlightened, we realize the need for our inner man to be strengthened.

INDWELT

Our inner man needs to be strengthened so that Christ may make His home in our hearts (3:17). For Christ to make His home in us means that we are indwelt by Him. Christ, the living Person, desires to dwell in us, to fill every part of our inward being with Himself. All of our inward parts need to be a home for Christ so that we may be fully occupied by Him.

ROOTED AND GROUNDED

When Christ makes His home in us, we shall enjoy Him as unlimited love. In the words of 3:17, we shall be "rooted and grounded in love." We are rooted in Christ for growth, and we are grounded in Him for building.

FILLED

When we are strengthened into our inner man, when Christ makes His home in our hearts, and when we are rooted and grounded in love, we are filled unto all the

fullness of God (3:19). It is in our spirit that we are filled unto all the fullness of the Triune God to become His expression.

GIFTED

In 4:7 Paul says, "But to each one of us was given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Because every member has received grace, every member is a gift to the Body of Christ. No matter how insignificant we may be, we all are gifted. Do not think that Peter, James, John, and Paul were gifted and that you are not. Since we all are gifted, we should all function in the meetings. Many times it is not as helpful for an elder to say a certain thing as it is for one of the other saints to say the same thing. God has accomplished a complete work for us. In view of such a work, we should learn to function. All the points we have covered thus far leave us without any excuse for not functioning. Is it not true that all these wonderful things have been accomplished for us? We have been chosen, predestinated, loved, called, redeemed, reconciled, saved, graced, made alive, raised up, seated, purchased, sealed, possessed, guaranteed, created, made near, enlightened, strengthened, indwelt, rooted, grounded, and filled. Is it possible to have all this without being gifted? Surely it is not possible. Praise the Lord, we all are gifted!

We have pointed out a number of times that the Lord hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6). This means that He hates the clergy-laity system, which is an abomination in His sight. Nevertheless, because of the influence of degraded Christianity, many still do not function in the meetings. In order to cast off this influence, we all must learn to function.

PERFECTED

In 4:12 Paul goes on to speak of the perfecting of the saints. The Greek word translated perfecting may also be rendered equipping. As those who are gifted, we perfect and equip one another with our gifts. Some may argue that

only the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers can perfect the saints. Verse 16, however, speaks of every joint of supply and of the operation in the measure of each part. We all are parts of the Body. If we function, we shall help others to be perfected. In addition, as we function, we are the first to be perfected. Every time I minister the Word, I am the first to receive the benefit of my ministry. We all need to perfect others and to be perfected by functioning. If you have the sense that you have been perfected through functioning, that is an indication that others have been perfected also. May we all perfect one another.

GROWING UP

The result of being perfected is that we grow up into Christ (4:15-16). We perfect one another by helping one another grow in life. To perfect the saints is to nourish them by feeding them. I can testify that I have received much nourishment from the saints. This nourishment has helped me to grow.

FITTED TOGETHER

According to 4:16, the Body is fitted together. This is for building. How much we have been fitted together with others depends on our perfection and growth. Through nourishment we grow, and through growth we are fitted together with the saints.

KNIT TOGETHER

Furthermore, in 4:16 we see that we are knit together. This is closely related to the matter of fitting. However, it emphasizes the aspect of attachment. We need to be attached to one another. As we are fitted and knit together, we are built up. Once we have been built up in the church life, it will be very difficult for us to leave the church. This is altogether different from joining a denomination. We do not join the church; we are built into it. Those who have

been built into the church can be neither pulled out nor pushed out.

RENEWED

Ephesians 4:23 speaks of being "renewed in the spirit of your mind." We all need to be renewed. We need to have the old element discharged, and a new element wrought into us. The old element, the element of Adam, is discharged, and the eternal element, the element of Christ, is added to take its place.

SANCTIFIED

According to 5:26, Christ is sanctifying the church. To be sanctified is to have the divine nature wrought into our human nature. Once again we may use the illustration of making tea. When tea is added to water, the water is "tea-ified." In the same principle, when the divine element is added to us, we are sanctified. Christ as the heavenly "tea" is wrought into us. To be sanctified does not mean that we wear certain kinds of clothes or style our hair in a particular way. That is mere outward correction or adjustment. I am not for long hair or for short hair, but for sanctified hair. When the element of God is worked into our being, we are truly sanctified.

CLEANSED

In 5:26 we see that Christ is cleansing the church by the washing of the water in the Word. Such a washing cleanses us from wrinkles caused by oldness and from spots caused by wounds. This cleansing is a metabolic cleansing, a cleansing in which a new element is added to replace the old element that is being discharged.

NOURISHED AND CHERISHED

In 5:29 Paul points out that Christ is also nourishing and cherishing the church. To nourish is to feed, and to cherish is to nurture with tender love and foster with tender care. A mother nourishes her child by feeding the

child healthy food. She also cherishes her child by embracing the little one in love. As we are cherished by Christ, we are warmed, softened, and comforted, just as a child is soothed by the loving embrace of the mother.

ARMORED

Finally, according to 6:11 and 13, we need to be armored. This means that we put on the armor of God in order to stand against the stratagems of the Devil. To be armored is to be armed for warfare. As we are armed with the whole armor of God, we become God's army to fight the battle for God's purpose and for His kingdom.

If we would have the proper church life, we need to experience every aspect of God's work covered in this message. We need to pray concerning all these items, pray-reading the verses that speak of them, until they become our reality. May we exercise our spirit to apply all the aspects of God's work concerning the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-THREE

THREE ITEMS THAT DAMAGE THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:5-7, 13, 17, 22-23; 2:4, 5, 15, 18, 22; 3:8, 16-17, 19, 21; 4:4-6, 15; 5:18, 26-27; 6:11, 18

In this message we shall consider how the church became degraded. Before we do this, let us look at some of the key verses in each chapter of Ephesians.

GOD'S ULTIMATE GOAL

In 1:5 Paul says that we have been predestinated to sonship, that is, predestinated to become sons of God. In creation, God is our Creator, not our Father. None of us were born of Him in creation. The fact that God has predestinated us, or marked us out beforehand, to be His sons means that we have been predestinated to be born of Him. This implies that God must come into us and that we must receive His life and have a relationship with Him in life. Therefore, to be predestinated to sonship is to be predestinated to be born of God so that He may become our Father and that we may become His sons.

In 1:6 and 7 we see that God has graced us in the Beloved and redeemed us in Him. Having become the object of God's grace, we have been favored in Christ, and we have redemption through the blood of Christ.

Ephesians 1:13 says that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise. On the day we believed in the Lord Jesus, God sealed us with Himself as the Spirit.

In 1:17 Paul speaks of our need for a spirit of wisdom and revelation. This spirit denotes our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God.

The closing word in the first chapter of Ephesians

concerns the church, which is Christ's Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 22-23).

By putting these verses together we can see Ephesians 1 in a new way. We have been predestinated, we have been sealed, and we have received a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know the Body. Selection, predestination, redemption, and sealing are not ends in themselves. All this is for the Body. We were chosen, predestinated, favored, graced, redeemed, and sealed for the Body. Furthermore, for the Body we have been given a spirit of wisdom and revelation. In Ephesians 1 the Body is God's ultimate goal.

In the past many of us heard sermons on predestination and redemption. We have also heard about being graced and sealed with the Spirit. But had you ever heard that God's selection, predestination, favor, redemption, and sealing are all for the Body?

THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD

In 2:4 and 5 we see that even when we were dead in offenses, God made us alive together with Christ. Not only were we sinful, we were also dead. But God came in to enliven us. If He had redeemed us and forgiven us without enlivening us, God would have had a great many redeemed ones who were still in death. Praise Him that in addition to redeeming us He made us alive!

He also created us into one new man (2:15). Furthermore, we have been given access to the Father in the Spirit (v. 18). Finally, we are being built up into a dwelling place of God in our spirit (v. 22). Just as chapter one ends with the Body, so chapter two concludes with the building up of God's dwelling place. This indicates that we have been enlivened not just for the sake of being enlivened, but for the building up of God's dwelling place. In other words, God made us alive for the church. His final word both in chapter one and in chapter two concerns the church. At the end of chapter one, we have the church as Christ's Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. At the

end of chapter two, we have the church as the dwelling place of God in our spirit.

NOT INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUALITY, BUT THE CHURCH

In 3:8 Paul said that he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel. Paul did not preach doctrine, not even the doctrine of the riches of Christ. What he preached was the riches of Christ themselves. Furthermore, in this chapter Paul prayed that we would be strengthened by the Spirit into our inner man so that Christ may make His home in our hearts (vv. 16-17). The goal of this strengthening and indwelling is that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God (v. 19). The result of this is glory to God in the church (v. 21). Therefore, chapter three, like the preceding chapters, ends with the church. This means that the preaching of the unsearchable riches of Christ, the strengthening of our inner man, Christ making His home in our heart, and being filled unto all the fullness of God are not for our individual spirituality, but for the church.

GROWING FOR THE BODY

In 4:4-6 we have the Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--with the Body. According to 4:15, we need to grow up into Christ in all things. This growth is for the sake of the Body, the church.

FILLED AND WASHED FOR THE CHURCH

In 5:18 Paul charges us to be filled in spirit. This filling surely is related to being filled unto all the fullness of God. Through the infilling we have the water in the Word to wash away our spots and wrinkles (vv. 26-27). The result of this washing is that we are corporately sanctified. Sanctification is not primarily an individual matter, but a corporate matter, a matter for the Body. Moreover, in this chapter we see that Christ is nourishing and cherishing the Body (v. 29).

PUTTING ON THE ARMOR TO BE GOD'S WARRIOR

Finally, in chapter six Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God (v. 11). We need to receive the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, by means of all prayer, praying at every time in spirit (v. 18). This is for the church to be God's warrior.

SEEING THE VISION OF THE CHURCH

As we consider all these verses, we see that in the genuine church there is no religion, tradition, regulations, forms, or rituals. Instead, there is just the Triune God as the all-inclusive Spirit working in our spirit to produce the Body, the new man. I hope that we all shall pray-read these verses until we see this vision of the church. Then we shall realize that God has predestinated us for this. We have been made alive for God's dwelling place, and we enjoy the riches of Christ that we may be part of the church. The church is produced by the mingling of the Triune God with redeemed mankind. The church life is thus the corporate mingling of the divine Spirit with the human spirit. If we have Christ as our reality, we shall not have ordinances or forms, but we shall have only the experience of the living Christ in our spirit.

JUDAISM AS A CAUSE OF DEGRADATION

If we study church history, we can learn how the church became degraded. Firstly, Satan used Judaism, a religion founded and formed according to God's oracle, to corrupt the church. In his subtlety, Satan caused Judaism to creep into the church. We have seen that the church is an entity produced by the mingling of the Holy Spirit with the human spirit. In this entity there is no room for regulations, organization, forms, or doctrines. There is room only for the Triune God as the all-inclusive Spirit mingled with our spirit in a corporate way. The church on the day of Pentecost was like this. At that time, there were no so-called services or methods of worship. The saints

were not preoccupied with doctrinal knowledge, and they were not under any kind of organization. On the day of Pentecost, there was no religion. There was only a group of people living in the mingled spirit and experiencing the genuine church life.

Later, however, Judaism crept in with its forms and ordinances, especially the ordinances concerning circumcision, the Sabbath, and eating. Paul wrote the book of Galatians in order to deal with the damage caused by Judaism, by religion.

KNOWLEDGE AS A SOURCE OF CORRUPTION

Secondly, Satan used philosophy, especially a mixture of various philosophies called Gnosticism, to damage the church. Certain forms of Gnosticism included elements of Judaism and Christianity. The point here is that Satan used knowledge and the exercise of the natural mind to corrupt the church. The Epistle to the Colossians was written to deal with this, just as Galatians was written to deal with religion. The subtlety of the enemy is to turn the church from the mingled spirit to the natural mind, that is, to turn the saints from the tree of life to the tree of knowledge. In the beginning, those in the church life were feeding on the tree of life. Then Satan came in to distract the saints from the tree of life to the tree of knowledge. William Law, a contemporary of John Wesley, saw this. In a book entitled *The Power of the Spirit* Law is quoted as saying the following:

> ...A trust in the wisdom of men and the letter of Scripture has caused the church to fall from its first gospel state in much the way that Adam fell through eating of the same tree of knowledge. The Bible teacher and religious leader who gain and hold a church position through intellectual attainments and oratorical skills can be said to differ from lesser men only as the serpent differed from the other beasts of the field--in that it was more subtle.

Furthermore, speaking of the turn from the tree of life to the tree of knowledge, Law said:

> In the first apostolic church, the wisdom of words was no more sought after than friendship with the world which is enmity with God. In that new-born church, the tree of life, which grew in the midst of Paradise, took root and grew up again, spreading glory and virtue as men fed upon it. In the present church, the tree of life is hissed at as the visionary food of extremists, and the tree of death, called the tree of knowledge, has the eyes and hearts of priests and people, and is thought to do as much good to Christians as it did evil to the first inhabitants of Paradise.

At the end of Genesis 3, the way to the tree of life was closed to fallen man. But through the redemption of Christ, the church was brought back to the tree of life. However Satan intervened and turned the church from the tree of life to the tree of knowledge.

THE DISPUTES CONCERNING THE PERSON OF CHRIST

This turn to the tree of knowledge was expressed in the controversies concerning Christology that were common during the first several centuries in the history of the church. These debates and disputations were related to the Person of Christ. Much of this debate was brought about by the threat of Gnosticism, which taught heresy concerning the Person of Christ, saying that He was not actually God incarnated as a man. A number of sound Christian teachers rose up to refute the Gnostic heresy. However, the result was that various opinions concerning Christ were put forth and debated. Some said that Christ was only God and not man, whereas others argued that Christ was only a man and not God. Others taught that Christ had a human nature, but that this nature was not real or complete. Some who held this view said that Christ had a soul and a body, but not a spirit. Still others taught that Christ was a man who eventually became God. Others claimed that Christ had not only two natures, but also two persons. Another view was that Christ's natures were mingled together in such a way as to produce a third nature. All these different opinions caused considerable argument

among the early church fathers. It was largely due to these debates that the church was divided. This is an illustration of how the enemy in his subtlety turned the saints from the spirit to the exercise of the natural mind to analyze doctrine and to systematize it.

We need to learn from this simply to take the pure Word of God without any attempt to systematize it. We should believe whatever the Bible says and say amen to it. For example, John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This verse says that the Word was with God; it also says that the Word was God. We say amen to both statements. The New Testament also reveals that Christ is both the Son of God and the Son of man. We believe both of these facts and say amen.

NOT DISPUTATION BUT ENJOYMENT

How foolish it is to presume to analyze Christ! We cannot even adequately or thoroughly analyze ourselves, much less the Lord Jesus Christ. If Christ were altogether understandable to us, He would not be Christ. We simply cannot fully comprehend who Christ is and what Christ is. Instead of engaging in disputes over the Person of Christ, let us receive in simplicity whatever the Scriptures reveal concerning Him. For us, the age of disputation is over. We just care to enjoy the wonderful Christ.

Today's Christianity is preoccupied with doctrine, but is short of the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ. Nearly every sect or denomination has been established according to a particular doctrine. For example, the Baptist denomination is built upon the doctrine of baptism by immersion. Certain Baptist groups go so far as to insist that people be baptized only in their water. No other baptism is recognized. Hence, the Baptist denomination is a division caused by adhering to a teaching concerning baptism. By this we see that even today the church is being corrupted and damaged by knowledge. Many who care for a particular doctrine have no concern for the Body.

KEEPING THE ONENESS

Because Satan has used religion and knowledge to damage the church, we in the Lord's recovery must strongly testify that we are not for religion or for knowledge. Satan is subtle. Firstly he used the tree of knowledge to corrupt the old creation. Then he used the same tree to corrupt the church as God's new creation. Today his work is the same. Therefore, we must not take the way of knowledge, not even of biblical knowledge in letters. If we are distracted from the tree of life to doctrinal knowledge, we shall lose the oneness.

Many who have visited the church in Los Angeles have been impressed with the oneness. To them this has been the most convincing aspect of the church life. The reason for the oneness among us is that we condemn and despise the tree of knowledge. From the very beginning, when the foundation of the church life was laid in this locality, we had nothing to do with the tree of knowledge. This is the reason we have been kept and preserved in oneness.

ORGANIZATION AS A CAUSE OF DAMAGE

The third item that has damaged the church throughout its history is organization. This damaging and corrupting element began to appear in the second century, largely through the influence of a certain spiritual leader, Ignatius, who taught that bishops were different from elders. According to the Scriptures, however, elders and bishops refer to the same people. The term elder denotes the person, whereas the term bishop, or overseer, denotes the function. In the New Testament the elders oversee the various aspects of the church life. The teaching that bishops are above elders prepared the way for the development of a hierarchy, with an elaborate organization that included bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and the pope. The result was that the Holy Spirit was given no place in the so-called church. In order for organization to be

maintained, there is the need for regulations, forms, and rituals. This is the reason these things have been prevailing in the so-called church.

Religion, knowledge, and organization have surely damaged the church. Even nominal Christians have some form of religion, although they have no experience of the living Christ. Furthermore, nearly all Christians, whether genuine believers or false professors, have some knowledge of doctrine. Moreover, organization abounds in today's Christianity. But very few Christians know the life-giving Spirit or the reality of the Body of Christ. It seems that the lexicon used by most Christians does not include these terms, but includes only terms related to religion, knowledge, organization, regulations, forms, and rituals.

Praise the Lord that we have escaped from all this! If we are clear about the factors that have damaged and corrupted the church, we shall be kept from taking the old way of Christianity. We shall give no place to religion, the tree of knowledge, or organization.

THE SEVENFOLD SPIRIT

In the church life in the Lord's recovery we are not for organization with its emphasis on position or rank. It is not wrong to speak of elders and deacons. However, in the book of Revelation there is no mention of these terms. This book speaks, on the contrary, of the seven Spirits, the sevenfold intensified Spirit that deals with the fallen, degraded church. We are not for doctrines, rituals, or rank--we are for the sevenfold Spirit. Everything apart from this all-inclusive Spirit is dung (Phil. 3:8).

Recently, in a time of fellowship with the Lord, I had the sense that I was immersed in the Spirit. Inwardly I was filled with the Spirit, and outwardly I was clothed with Him. The church life consists in the corporate experience of the mingled Spirit, not in religion, doctrine, or organization with its titles, ranks, and positions. Like Paul in Philippians 3, we count as dung everything other than Christ, who is the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

UNLOADED AND RELEASED

Before the Lord, I know what my burden is today. I am not interested in teaching the saints. My burden is that we all be "wrecked" for Christ and the church, and that we be unloaded of the old things of Christianity. In the Lord's recovery we must go all the way back to the beginning, where there was the eating of the tree of life. In the beginning there was just the Word to feed us; there was no religion. no tree of knowledge, and no organization. How we need to be unloaded of these three devilish factors of corruption and damage in the church! By the Lord's mercy, many of us have been unloaded, and others are being unloaded meeting after meeting. As I contact the saints, I realize that many have been fully released from religion, knowledge, and organization. Because we have been unloaded and released, we can be living and aggressive for Christ and the church wherever we may go. Having been unloaded, we are one, and we have brotherly love not as a doctrine, but as a reality.

Sometimes people ask us if we speak in tongues or if we exercise the gifts of the Spirit. We can testify that we are filled, saturated, and possessed by the Spirit. In this experience of the Spirit we have the church life.

THE CHURCH LIFE IN THE ALL-INCLUSIVE SPIRIT

May we all be deeply impressed that the church life has nothing to do with religion, knowledge, or organization. In the church there is no room for regulations, forms, or rituals. We do not care even for the knowledge of the Bible in mere letters. To us, every word of the Bible must be spirit and life (John 6:63). Then the church will be living and preserved in the oneness. The life-giving Spirit is our oneness. Everything we need for the church life is in the all-inclusive Spirit. As we come to the Holy Word, we need to exercise our spirit to pray. Then the Word will become the Spirit in our experience, and we shall have the genuine and proper church life. As long as we have the church life,

we have everything: salvation, redemption, sanctification, the overcoming life, the rapture, and the kingdom. In the church life everything in time and eternity is ours.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-FOUR

SEVEN ASPECTS OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:23; 2:15-16, 19, 21-22; 4:4, 12-13, 16, 24; 5:5, 25, 31-32; 6:11, 13

Throughout history, Satan has damaged the church by religion, knowledge, and organization. Satan's goal is to divide the Body of Christ through knowledge and doctrine and to destroy the functions of the members of the Body through organization, especially organization that issues in the clergy-laity system. This system has replaced the functions of the members of the Body. If Satan cannot keep people from the Lord, then he will seek to damage and corrupt the Body of Christ. God's intention is not simply to save millions of people and then transport them into heaven. God's intention in His eternal purpose is to have the Body to express Christ. He desires to have a number of genuine believers built up together in the life of Christ.

THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH TODAY

Due to the subtlety of Satan, many think that such a building can take place only in the future. According to this concept, all we can do today is preach the gospel, bring people to the Lord, and help them to know the Bible, to love the Lord, and to seek spirituality. Some Christian teachers say that, according to the type in the Old Testament, we are living in the age of David, in the time of fighting the battle and of making preparations for the building of the temple. Later, in the age of Solomon, the temple will be built up. However, this teaching annuls the book of Ephesians. In 2:22 Paul says, "In Whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." This verse does not say that we shall be built up

some day in the future; it says plainly that we are being built even today. Hence, the building of the church is for today.

In 4:11 and 12 we see that the Lord has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers for the perfecting of the saints unto the building up of the Body of Christ. This also indicates that the building of the church is taking place today.

Ephesians 4:16 offers further proof of this. Here we see the growth that is unto the building up of the Body. The operation in the measure of each part causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. Paul's word clearly indicates that the growth which is unto building is taking place today.

Certain Christian teachers evade the issue of the present building up of the Body because they know that they are in a situation in which it is impossible to have the church life. They are in division. They can merely shake hands over the denominational fences and say to one another that they are one in Christ. This, however, is a false oneness, a oneness in pretense. Therefore, they excuse their situation by saying that it is impossible for the church to be built up today. They follow the teaching that the building of the church will be only in the future. This is the subtlety of Satan.

THE LORD'S PROMISE TO BUILD HIS CHURCH

No matter how many souls we may bring to the Lord, how many saints we may edify, and how much we help others to study the Bible and to be spiritual, God's purpose is not fulfilled. I believe that the main reason for the delay of the Lord's coming back is that His church has not yet been built up. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord Jesus promised and prophesied, "I will build My church." This word must be fulfilled before the Lord comes back. Otherwise, concerning the building of the church, He would be put to shame. Satan would be able to boast of defeating the Lord. Then Satan would be able to say to the Lord Jesus, "For

nearly two thousand years You have been trying to build the church, but You have not been successful. Your work on the cross, in resurrection, in ascension, and as the life-giving Spirit has not been sufficient to defeat me. You have not reached Your goal." The Lord Jesus will not allow Satan to boast in this way. He will put him to shame through the building up of the church, even in the midst of this dark age. Then the Lord will be able to boast to Satan, "Satan, even in such a dark and evil age, I have built My church."

The Lord is doing a marvelous work of recovery. He will show His enemy that He is well able to build His church. No matter what the situation may be on earth, we have the assurance that the Lord is carrying on the work of His recovery.

STANDING AGAINST DEGRADATION

Today's Christianity is filled with religion, doctrine, organization, forms, rituals, and regulations. People are helped to be saved, to become religious, to pursue spirituality, and to desire a closer walk with the Lord. But where is the Body? It seems that so many Christians do not see that in the book of Ephesians the church is emphasized. In his subtlety the enemy, Satan, has used various good things such as fundamental doctrine to damage the church. We must stand against the degradation of today's Christianity. In doing this, we do not fight against people, but against the Devil, the subtle one.

Because the Lord is sovereign, He cannot be defeated. Even today He is fulfilling His purpose. In the Lord's recovery we are not for religion, knowledge, organization, rituals, forms, or regulations; we are only for the all-inclusive Christ as the life-giving Spirit in our spirit. As we enjoy the mingled spirit in a corporate way, we have the church life.

The book of Ephesians reveals various aspects of the church. In this message we shall consider seven of these aspects: the Body, the new man, the Bride, the family, the kingdom, the dwelling place of God, and the warrior.

THE BODY

According to 1:22 and 23, the church is Christ's Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. It was in this one Body that both the Jews and the Gentiles were reconciled to God through the cross (2:16). We, the believers, were reconciled not only *for* the Body of Christ, but also *in* the Body of Christ. We all have been reconciled in the one Body. As we have seen, the gifted persons are for the building up of the Body, and the Body is growing unto the building up of itself in love.

THE NEW MAN

In 2:15 we see that Christ created the Jews and the Gentiles in Himself into one new man. This new man is corporate and universal. There are many believers, but there is only one new man in the universe. All the believers are components of this corporate and universal new man. According to 4:13, we are to grow up until we arrive at a full-grown man, and in 4:24 we see that, in a practical way, we need to put on the new man.

THE BRIDE

In Ephesians 5 we see the church as the Bride of Christ. This aspect reveals that the church comes out of Christ, as Eve came out of Adam (Gen. 2:21-22). The church has the same life and nature as Christ and becomes one with Him to be His counterpart, as Eve became one flesh with Adam (Gen. 2:24). Eventually, as Eve went back to Adam and was presented to him, so the church will go back to Christ and be presented to Him as His Bride.

THE FAMILY

In 2:19 Paul says, "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow-citizens of the saints and members of the household of God." As members of the household of God, we are God's family, even God's house. Both the Jewish and Gentile believers are members of

God's house, which is a matter of life and enjoyment. All believers were born of God into His house to enjoy His riches.

THE KINGDOM

The house of God leads to the kingdom of God, indicated by the term "fellow-citizens of the saints." All the believers are citizens in God's kingdom. His kingdom is a sphere for Him to exercise His authority. In 5:5 Paul says that "every fornicator or unclean person or person of unbridled greedy lust, who is an idolator, has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." This refers not only to the millennium, but also to the church life today. The believers have been regenerated into the kingdom of God (John 3:5) and are in the church life, living in the kingdom of God today (Rom. 14:17).

THE DWELLING PLACE

In 2:22 we see that the church is God's dwelling place. God's Spirit dwells in our spirit. Therefore, the dwelling place of God is in our spirit.

THE WARRIOR

Finally, in chapter six we see that the church is a warrior to defeat God's enemy, the Devil. In order to fight the spiritual warfare, we need both the power of the Lord and also the whole armor of God. The church is a corporate warrior, and the believers are parts of this unique warrior. We must fight the spiritual warfare in the Body, not individually .

In his subtlety, Satan will allow Christians to do things that are scriptural and spiritual, as long as they do not have the Body or the new man. Most Christians do not even realize that the church is the new man, a corporate man. They may speak a little regarding the church as the Bride of Christ or as God's family, but they have no concept that the church is God's present kingdom or God's dwelling place.

WHY WE ARE HERE

Can you find these seven aspects of the church in Christianity? Concerning the church, Christianity has missed the mark. We in the Lord's recovery are not here for soul-winning, for Bible study, or for spirituality. We are here for the expression of the Body on earth. We are also here to be the new man and the Bride.

At present, Christ is preparing us to be His Bride. One day the wedding will come. That will be the fulfillment of Revelation 19. As we are preparing for that day, we are the church in the aspects of the family, the kingdom, the dwelling place, and the warrior. Praise the Lord that we are His family! When we came into the church life, we had the sense that we had come home. Furthermore, the church is God's kingdom, for here we are under God's authority. Moreover, as God's warrior we are fighting against His enemy. We are here for the Body, the new man, the Bride, the family, the kingdom, and the warrior.

EXPRESSING CHRIST AS LIFE

As the Body, the church needs life. Without life, our physical body would become a corpse. The same is true of the Body of Christ.

Some opposers argue that the Body is just a symbol, a figure, not a divine reality. It is utterly wrong to say that the Body of Christ is merely a symbol. Our body is a symbol and a figure, but the Body of Christ is a reality, for our body symbolizes Christ's Body. To say that the Body of Christ is merely a symbol indicates a lack of a proper understanding of the church. Those who hold this view do not see that the church is actually the Body of Christ. Surely Christ is real. How can such a real One be expressed through a symbolic Body? How ridiculous! In order for Christ to be expressed, He must have a real and living Body.

We do not express Christ by endeavoring to correct or improve ourselves. Through such efforts we can express only our own character. If we would express Christ, we

need the life of Christ. We need Christ as the living Spirit to live Himself out from within us. This is not outward correction or improvement; it is the experience of Christ as our inner life. Christ is the life-giving Spirit living within us and lived out from within us. This makes us His Body for His expression. What we express as the Body of Christ is not our character, but Christ Himself as life.

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON

As the new man, the church needs not only life, but also Christ as the person. A tree has only life, not a person. But a man must have a person as well as life. The church not only possesses Christ as life, but also holds Christ as the person. Hence, today the Lord Jesus is not only the life of the church, but also the person of the church. In order to have the church life, we all must take Christ as our person. But if we each hold to our own person, we shall be through with the church life.

Colossians 3:10 and 11 reveal 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." This indicates that in the new man there is just one person--Christ. There is no room for Chinese, Japanese, American, British, German, or any other nationality. This should not be a mere doctrine, but should be our practical experience in the spirit. As a part of the new man, we all have Christ as our person. We need to pray, "Lord, make this real to us. We cannot be satisfied with knowledge or with the doctrine that the church is the new man with Christ as the person. We want this to be experienced in our daily life. O Lord, help us to take You as our person." If we do this, the church will be truly one, and the enemy will be subdued. Whoever comes into the meetings of the church will see a number of people who take Christ as their person. How marvelous!

A MATTER OF LOVE

Eve typifies the church as Christ's Bride. Eve was built

with a rib taken out of Adam. After building this rib into a woman, God presented her to Adam. What came out of Adam went back to him and became one with him. In the same principle, the church comes out of Christ and will go back to Christ to be one with Him.

The aspect of the church as the Bride implies love. Marriage is a matter of love, and the life of a marriage depends on love. If a husband and wife do not love each other, it will be very difficult for them to remain together. No doubt, Adam and Eve loved each other. Because of this love, they became one. Today there is a mutual love between Christ and the church. Not only do we have Him as our life and as our person, but we also enjoy this mutual love. Christ desires to make known His love to the church, and the church responds by telling the Lord how much she loves Him. Whatever we do for the Lord we do joyfully and willingly out of love for Him. When you love someone, you are happy to serve him. You serve not out of necessity, but out of love. As the church, we must bear the testimony that we love the Lord. Whoever contacts us should receive an impression that we love the Lord and, out of our love for Him, serve Him willingly. This is the aspect of the church as Christ's Bride.

OUR REAL FAMILY

If we have a genuine love for the Lord, we shall spontaneously be the church in the aspect of God's family. So many worldly people today are either orphans or wanderers. They are homeless. We in the church life are members of God's family. Therefore, we are at home. The church is our real family. We appreciate the natural family life created by God. But we can testify that this family life is not as sweet as the family life in the church. How pleasant is the church as God's family! If you stay away from the church life for a period of time, you will realize how precious the church is in the aspect of God's family. Oh, we in the church are God's family!

UNDER GOD'S RULE

As we have pointed out, we are also God's kingdom. In the church we all are under God's government, God's

authority and rule. We are not lawless. On the contrary, we are governed spontaneously in a pleasant and loving way. Although there are elders in the churches, they do not exercise control over the saints. Rather, all the saints are willingly under God's rule. This is the church as the kingdom of God. If all the people in this country lived like this, the enemy would be completely subdued.

In the church we are under divine government. Because of an inward ruling, we cannot cheat others or take advantage of them. This inner ruling is the reality of the kingdom. Today in the church Jesus Christ is King. He is the King on the throne within us and among us.

GOD'S DWELLING PLACE IN OUR SPIRIT

Furthermore, the church is the dwelling place of God in spirit. When we are not in our spirit, we do not have the church as God's dwelling place in a practical way. But whenever we turn to our spirit, we sense that God has a dwelling place in our spirit. This dwelling place is for God's rest.

DEFEATING THE ENEMY AND PREPARING THE WAY FOR THE LORD TO COME BACK

Not only is the church the Body, the new man, the Bride, the family, the kingdom, and the dwelling place; the church is also the warrior to fight against God's enemy. God's enemy, Satan, is terrified of such a church. Satan is not afraid of individualistic Christians, not even if they number in the thousands. But whenever the believers come together as the church in the aspect of the Body and in these other aspects, Satan trembles. By the church in these seven aspects Christ is expressed, the Father has rest, and the enemy is defeated. May we all see the vision that the church is not a matter of individual holiness or spirituality. On the contrary, it is a matter of being built up together as

the Body, the new man, the Bride, the family, the kingdom, the dwelling place, and the warrior. As such a church, we defeat the enemy and prepare the way for the Lord Jesus to come back.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-FIVE

GOD'S ECONOMY--CHRIST WITH THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:5, 9-11, 22-23; 3:2-4, 9-11; John 15:1, 5

God's economy is Christ with the church. As we consider God's economy as revealed in the book of Ephesians, we need to pray that the Lord will give us an open heaven with a clear sky. If we would know God's economy, not only must we have the knowledge of the book of Ephesians; we must also touch the reality contained in this book. We are not for mere knowledge--we are for reality. The reality in the book of Ephesians is God's economy concerning Christ with the church.

SOME IMPORTANT TERMS

Economy

In relation to God's purpose, the word economy is unfamiliar to many Christians. The Greek word for economy, *oikonomia*, is used three times in Ephesians. In 1:10 Paul speaks of a dispensation, or economy, of the fullness of the times, in which all things will be headed up in Christ. In 3:2 he speaks of the stewardship of the grace of God, and in 3:9, of the dispensation of the mystery. The English word economy is an anglicized form of *oikonomia*, which means administration, stewardship, arrangement, or dispensation. In particular, in this sense economy denotes dispensing. God's economy is to dispense Himself into His chosen people. Apart from Himself, God has nothing to dispense into His chosen ones. Hence, His economy is to dispense Himself into us. This is altogether related to Christ with the church.

Will

Besides the term economy, a number of other important terms are used by Paul in Ephesians. Three times in chapter one Paul mentions God's will: the good pleasure of His will (v. 5), the mystery of His will (v. 9), and the counsel of His will (v. 11). God has an economy because He has a will. In eternity God planned a will. This will was hidden in Him. Hence, it was a mystery. In His wisdom and prudence He has made this hidden mystery known to us through His revelation in Christ, that is, through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

Good Pleasure

Another important term is "good pleasure" (1:5, 9). God has a will in which is His good pleasure. This good pleasure refers to the delight of God's heart. The book of Ephesians speaks from the standpoint of the good pleasure of God's heart. According to 1:9 and 10, God's good pleasure is what He has purposed in Himself for an administration. In human terms, God's good pleasure is that which makes Him happy. There is something within God's heart that pleases Him and makes Him happy. This is God's good pleasure. Do not think that the term "good pleasure" is insignificant. On the contrary, it is a very important term in Ephesians.

Purpose

In Ephesians the word purpose is used three times, twice as a noun and once as a verb. In 1:11 Paul says that we have been predestinated according to the purpose of the One who operates all things according to the counsel of His will. In 3:11 Paul speaks of the purpose of the ages. The purpose of the ages is the purpose of eternity, the eternal purpose, the eternal plan of God made in eternity past. In 1:9 the word purpose is used as a verb: "Having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself." God has a

purpose. Here the word purpose is the equivalent of the English word plan. God has a plan which He made in eternity. God has a plan because He has a will, a good pleasure, and an economy. According to His economy, He made a plan, a purpose.

Counsel

In 1:11 Paul uses the word counsel, saying that God operates all things according to the counsel of His will. When God created man, a conference was held within the Godhead. For this reason, Genesis 1:26 says, "And God said, Let us make man in our image." God took counsel with Himself. This counsel is related to His will.

Mystery

Still another crucial word in Ephesians is mystery. As we have seen, 1:9 mentions the mystery of God's will. In 3:3 Paul says, "That by revelation the mystery was made known to me." God's hidden purpose is the mystery, and the unveiling of this mystery is revelation. In 3:4 Paul goes on to speak of the "mystery of Christ." The mystery of God in Colossians 2:2 is Christ, whereas the mystery of Christ here is the church. God is a mystery, and Christ, as the embodiment of God to express Him, is the mystery of God. Christ is also a mystery, and the church, as the Body of Christ to express Him, is the mystery of Christ.

In 3:9 Paul speaks of bringing to light the "dispensation of the mystery." God's mystery is His hidden purpose. His purpose is to dispense Himself into His chosen people. Hence, there is a dispensation of the mystery of God. This mystery was hidden in God from the ages (that is, from eternity) and through all past ages, but now it has been brought to light to the New Testament believers. God's intention is to make known the dispensation, the economy, of His mystery.

Ephesians 5:32 and 6:19 also use the term mystery. In 5:32 Paul says, "This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church." The fact that Christ and

the church are one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), as typified by the husband and wife who are one flesh, is the great mystery. In 6:19 Paul speaks of making known in boldness the "mystery of the gospel." This mystery is Christ and the church for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

A SECRET

It is important that we remember these crucial terms: will, good pleasure, purpose, counsel, economy, and mystery. On the one hand, these terms are deep and profound, and it would take years to understand them adequately. On the other hand, there is a simple secret to grasping their significance. This secret is Christ with the church. God's will is to have Christ with the church. Likewise, God's good pleasure and God's purpose are to have Christ with the church. We have already pointed out that Christ with the church is God's economy. Furthermore, God counseled with Himself to have Christ with the church. God's mystery is also related to Christ with the church. Therefore, Christ with the church is the secret to understanding these crucial terms. What is God's will? It is Christ with the church. What is God's good pleasure? Christ with the church is His good pleasure, the delight of His heart. Furthermore, God's purpose in eternity and for eternity is Christ with the church. Likewise, God's counsel, economy, and mystery are all related to Christ with the church.

HOW GOD FULFILLS HIS ECONOMY

Since God's economy is Christ with the church, we need to consider how He carries out this economy and fulfills it. Oh, may the Lord blow away all the clouds and give us a clear sky concerning this! Regarding the accomplishment of God's economy, the sky over all the saints in all the local churches needs to be crystal clear.

Selection

The first step in the working out of God's economy was God's selection. Ephesians 1:4 says, "According as He chose

us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blemish before Him, in love." In eternity past, before the foundation of the world, God selected us. His choosing is His selection. From among innumerable people, He selected us. This He did in Christ. Christ was the sphere in which we were selected by God. Outside of Christ we are not God's choice. This took place in eternity past. God chose us according to His infinite foresight before He created us.

Have you ever been impressed with the fact that God chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world? Whenever I think of God choosing me in eternity past, I am filled with worship and praise to Him. I do not need to be chosen by man, for I have been chosen by the Triune God.

Christians often say to the Lord, "O Lord, we did not first love You. You were the One who first loved us." However, concerning God's selection, we need to say. "Lord, we didn't choose You--You chose us." We all need to thank the Lord for His eternal selection, the selection made in eternity past for eternity future. We have been selected not to occupy a position of prominence in the world, but to be in the church. God's selection was for the church.

Predestination

The second step God took in working out His economy was predestination. Ephesians 1:5 says, "Having predestinated us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." The Greek word rendered predestinated can also be translated "marked out beforehand." Marking out beforehand is the process, while predestination is the purpose to determine a destiny beforehand. God firstly selected us and then marked us out beforehand, that is, before the foundation of the world, unto a certain destiny. This destiny is sonship. We were predestinated to be sons of God even before we were created. Hence, as God's creatures we need to be regenerated by Him that we may participate in His life to be His sons. Sonship implies not only the life, but also the

position of the son. God's marked-out ones have the life to be His sons and the position to inherit God Himself.

We all need to have the realization that we have been marked out by God for the accomplishment of His economy. Because God has put His mark on us, we cannot run away from Him. We were marked out by God before we were born, even before the foundation of the world. Since we have been pre-marked, we have no choice except to give ourselves to the Lord for His recovery and even to be beside ourselves for the church life.

Other human beings cannot see God's mark on us, but all the beings in the spiritual world can see it. The angels, the demons, and Satan himself know that we have been marked out by God.

This mark is not merely outward, but something very inward. Because of this inward mark, we have no peace unless we give ourselves to the church life. We are a selected and marked-out people. This was accomplished by God in eternity past.

Redemption

In 1:7 Paul speaks of redemption through the blood of Christ. We were chosen and predestinated. But after creation we became fallen. Hence, we need redemption, which God has accomplished for us in Christ through His blood. Redemption is the third step God took in carrying out His economy.

Redemption is not only for our personal and individual salvation; it is for the church. In fact, God did not redeem us individually; He redeemed us corporately. This means that He redeemed His chosen church. Therefore, selection, predestination, and redemption are all for the church.

Salvation

The fourth step, closely related to redemption, is God's salvation. When Paul speaks of salvation in 2:5 and 8, he speaks of a corporate salvation. We have been saved not as individuals, but as a corporate entity. Consider the type of

the children of Israel in the Old Testament. They were not saved from the tyranny of the Egyptians one by one. On the contrary, the entire nation of Israel was saved at the same time. Yes, each of the children of Israel had an individual experience of this salvation, but they were saved corporately, all at the same time. This indicates that God's salvation is not for individuals, but for the church.

Sanctification

In chapter five Paul deals with sanctification, another step in the carrying out of God's economy concerning Christ with the church. Although we have been redeemed, we are still in the process of sanctification. This process involves a change both of our position and of our disposition. As this change takes place, we are transformed.

Growth

Still another step in the carrying out of God's economy is growth. We need to grow up into Christ, the Head, in all things until we arrive at a full-grown man (4:15, 13). I can testify that many who have been with us for some years have truly grown in the Lord. I praise Him that the saints are growing. This growth is for the accomplishment of God's economy.

Building Up

Along with the growth, we have the building up. In 2:22 Paul says that we are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit. In 4:12 he speaks of the building up of the Body of Christ, and in 4:16 he indicates that, according to the operation in the measure of each part, the Body grows and builds itself up in love.

We have been selected, predestinated, redeemed, and saved. Now we are being sanctified and are gradually growing in Christ. As we grow, we are being built up as the Body of Christ. These are the steps God takes in carrying out His economy.

THE VINE WITH THE BRANCHES

God's economy is revealed not only in Ephesians, but also in chapter fifteen of John. This chapter is the unique chapter in the Gospels revealing God's economy. John 15:1 says, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman," and in verse 5 the Lord says, "I am the vine, you are the branches." This true vine, which is the Son, with its branches, which are the believers in the Son, is the organism of the Triune God in God's economy to grow with His riches and to express His divine life. The Father as the husbandman is the source, the author, the planner, the planter, the life, the substance, the soil, the water, the air, the sunshine, and everything to the vine. The Son as the vine is the center of God's economy and the embodiment of all the riches of the Father. The Father, by cultivating the Son, works Himself with all His riches into the vine. Eventually, the vine expresses the Father through its branches in a corporate way. This is the Father's economy in the universe.

God's economy is the vine with the branches, Christ with the church. God's intention is to care for this vine and the branches until we grow to maturity. Regarding His economy, may God bless us and grant us a clear vision.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-SIX

GOD'S ECONOMY--TO WORK CHRIST INTO US

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:19-20; 2:10; 3:8; 4:13-15; 5:29-30, 32

We have seen that God's economy is Christ with the church and that the word economy denotes a dispensation. God's intention is to dispense Himself into His chosen people. To be saved is not merely to have our sins forgiven, to be justified, and to be made ready for heaven. To be saved is for God to begin dispensing Himself into us.

WHAT GOD IS SEEKING TODAY

God's dispensation is altogether related to Christ. According to the natural concept, we think that after salvation we need to improve our behavior, seek power, or carry on a fruitful work for the Lord. Some Christians believe that they need to pursue such gifts as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. Others feel that the most important thing for a saved one is to gain the proper knowledge of the Bible. However, if we view salvation from the perspective of God's economy, we shall see the Christian life in a different way.

The New Testament does speak of proper conduct, power, gifts, and knowledge. Nevertheless, the crucial point is how much of Christ has been wrought into us. God is seeking to work Christ into us. We all need to be enlightened to see what God is doing today. God's intention is not to improve us. Whatever we are in ourselves means nothing to God. What matters to Him is that Christ is wrought into us.

In 1:19 and 20 Paul speaks of the "surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." This power was wrought in Christ when God raised Him from among

the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies. Today God's main activity is to work this Christ into us.

OUR NEED FOR CHRIST TO LIVE IN US

Suppose one day you are unpleasant with another brother or sister. Surely you would repent and ask the Lord to forgive you for your poor attitude. You may even pray that the Lord will make you better. Even if you do not make this request specifically, deep within this is your feeling as you pray about your failure. This kind of prayer is religious. You may have read the book *Christ versus Religion*, but you are still very religious in your daily practice. If you see God's economy, you will pray like this, "Lord, the Devil within me caused me to behave in that way. But, Lord, even if my behavior had been good, it still would not have been You living within me. Lord, You do not want me to be good--You want to live in me. Lord, in one sense, I do repent and ask You to forgive me. But I also put the blame on Satan and command him to get away from me. Lord, I will not try to be better. I just need You to live in me."

Galatians 2:20 says that we have been crucified with Christ and that Christ now lives within us. We may have some knowledge of this verse and declare, "It is no longer I, but Christ." However, in our daily living it is no longer Christ, but I. To recite Galatians 2:20 is one thing, but to live out Christ in a practical way is another.

Suppose you are very kind to the brothers and sisters. You may not sense any need to repent or ask the Lord to forgive you. Nevertheless, according to God's evaluation, it makes little difference whether you are kind or unkind toward others as long as you are the one living and not Christ. Whether our behavior is good or bad, we still do not live out Christ. God's economy is focused on Christ. His economy is not a matter of ethics, morality, or good character. In His economy God desires to work Christ into us. In our relationships with the brothers and sisters in the church, we need to live out Christ.

Some books have been written about Christ as life.

However, it is difficult to find a group of Christians who genuinely live by Christ. God's intention is not to improve us; it is to work the living Christ into us, into our mind, emotion, and will. God's desire is to replace us with Christ. He wants to see that Christ is being lived out of the brothers and sisters in the churches. Oh, may the Father of glory give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may be enlightened to know what God is seeking to accomplish today. I repeat, God is not seeking to improve us--He is endeavoring to work Christ into us.

The Christ God is seeking to work into us is the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ. Satan put Christ on the cross. But God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies. Now God intends to work this crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ into us. There is a great difference between ethics, conduct, and behavior, on the one hand, and such a Christ wrought into our being, on the other.

GOD'S CONCERN

Throughout the centuries, Christians have argued about doctrines and practices. For example, there has been much disputation about baptism, head covering, foot-washing, and about loudness or quietness in Christian meetings. In Galatians 6:15 Paul says, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gk.). Forms and regulations do not avail anything, because they are not Christ. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is the new creation that is in Christ Jesus. The new creation that Paul refers to is Christ wrought into our being. When Christ is wrought into us, a new creation takes place within us. Furthermore, this new creation is not merely an individual matter; it is a corporate matter involving the corporate entity of the new man, the Body of Christ.

God's concern is not foot-washing, the length of our hair, or how many times we have been baptized. God cares about how much of Christ has been wrought into us. God is

not concerned whether or not we are humble or proud, crude or gentle. He cares only that Christ is wrought into our being. Again and again I wish to proclaim that God cares only for Christ. Morality, ethics, forms, and regulations cannot produce a church that matches Christ. Only Christ Himself wrought into us can produce a church to match Himself.

The church is the Body of Christ. Only what comes out of Christ can be part of the Body of Christ. This means that mere gifts, teachings, and power cannot produce the Body. Nothing other than Christ wrought into the saints can produce the Body of Christ. Our eyes need to be enlightened to see this vision. In Ephesians 1 Paul prayed in a specific way, asking that our inner eyes be enlightened so that we may see that God's intention is to work Christ into us. God does not desire to adjust us or to improve us. His intention is to work Christ into us.

In a very real sense, we need to repent more of our goodness than of our evil. When you are good to your wife in a natural way, you need to repent and say, "Lord, forgive me. This is not Christ. In myself I may be good, but I am not living by Christ. Lord, I am good in a natural way, but I do not give You the opportunity to live out of me." We all are full of regret when we do things that are bad, but we may not realize that we need to be even more repentant when we do good things apart from Christ.

GOD'S WORKMANSHIP

In 2:10 Paul says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God before prepared that we should walk in them." We should not think that we are able to work for God or to do God's work. We are God's workmanship. This indicates that God does not expect us to work for Him. On the contrary, He is seeking the opportunity to work upon us. If we consider our situation, we shall realize how much work remains to be done on us. God does not need us to work for Him. Rather, He will work on us until we become His masterpiece. We, the church, are the masterpiece of God's work, expressing

God's infinite wisdom and divine design. The reason we are God's masterpiece is that Christ is being wrought into us. We can boast to God's creation that we have Christ in us. The more Christ is wrought into us, the more we become part of God's workmanship, God's masterpiece.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NATURAL GOODNESS AND CHRIST

In 1934 I met a certain brother in Shanghai. Before I met him, I heard many good things about him. At that time, I was not able to discern between Christ and good behavior. Eventually, through the help of Brother Nee, I realized that although this particular brother was good, not much of Christ was lived out of him. We all need to learn the difference between natural goodness and Christ. A person may be good in certain aspects, but these good things may have nothing to do with Christ. Our desire should not be to become a good brother or sister; we should desire to become a "Christ" brother or a "Christ" sister. If we would be God's masterpiece, Christ must be wrought into us. This should be not only a revelation, but also a revolution that takes place within our being. Oh, may we all see clearly that God does not desire us to be good Christians, but to be "Christ" Christians, those who have Christ wrought into them and lived out of them.

THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

In 3:8 Paul says that he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel. What Paul preached was not doctrine, gifts, knowledge, or power. He preached the riches of Christ. This means that Paul ministered these riches to others. The unsearchable riches of Christ include all the aspects of what Christ is to us. In a gradual way, Christ's riches need to be wrought into us. For example, we are not the ones who should be patient, kind, gentle, or loving. Rather, Christ must be wrought into us to be our patience, kindness, gentleness, and love. This means that we need to participate in the riches of Christ and to have these riches daily, even hourly, wrought into us in a

specific way. In our daily experience we should be able to itemize Christ's riches. Christ must become our patience, our love, our everything.

CHRIST MAKING HIS HOME IN OUR HEARTS

Christ must be wrought into our being to such an extent that He makes His home in our hearts (3:17). I am concerned that for many of us the matter of Christ making His home in our hearts is simply a doctrine. Is Christ actually making His home in your heart? Who is presently at home in your heart--you or Christ? If you are honest, you will have to say that, for the most part, your heart is your home, not Christ's home. You are the one living there, not Christ. We may hear a message about Christ making His home in us and shout that our heart is Christ's home. But there may be no reality to support what we proclaim. In order for Christ to make His home in our heart, we need to take Him both as our person and as our life. In such a case, we shall be able to testify that the person living in our heart is no longer the self, but Christ.

The crucial issue is not whether we are humble or proud, weak or powerful, gifted or not gifted. The question concerns who is living in our heart. Who is the person taking up residence in your heart? You may be unusually gifted, but your heart may not yet be Christ's home. Rather, it may be the home of the self, as long as you are still the person living in your heart.

Today's Christianity is a religion of behavior, doctrine, work, power, gifts, and knowledge. However, it is virtually devoid of the reality of Christ. Most Christians are veiled by natural and religious concepts. This is the reason that we need a heavenly vision to know what is in God's heart and to see what He planned in eternity.

God desires to have a people who care only for Christ. He wants a people who are not occupied with knowledge, work, behavior, or power, but who simply care for Christ in a very practical way. The experience of the riches of Christ and the reality of Christ making His home in our hearts

should not be mere doctrines. They must be the reality of our daily Christian experience.

In the past, quite often husbands and wives have come to me with problems. Usually the husband would accuse the wife, and then the wife would accuse the husband. Then they would say, "Since you are a servant of the Lord and have spiritual understanding, you can discern who is right and render a fair judgment." My practice was not to judge according to right and wrong. Instead, I would ask them whether or not Christ was making His home in their hearts. I would then go on to ask if Christ was living in them while they were accusing each other. Usually, they had nothing further to say, and eventually the word went out not to bring such problems to me.

Sometimes people come to me with the intention to argue about doctrine. But instead of answering them in a doctrinal way, I ask them to what extent Christ is making His home in their heart. What good does it do to be right in doctrine if we do not have Christ living in us? The Pharisees were apparently correct as far as doctrine was concerned. However, the Lord Jesus still rebuked them because they did not have any reality.

In a very practical way, our hearts need to become Christ's home. He must be able to live in us and to settle down in us. He, not the self, must be the One who occupies our hearts. This is our need today.

Apart from this, it does not matter very much whether husbands love their wives or wives submit to their husbands. In the book of Ephesians the matter of Christ making His home in our hearts is more strategic than love for wives or submission to husbands. However, I am fully assured that if a brother allows Christ to make His home in his heart, he will certainly love his wife in a proper way. Moreover, if a wife allows Christ to dwell in her heart, she will no doubt be submissive to her husband.

What we need more than anything else is for Christ to make His home in our hearts. The Lord's recovery is not a matter of doctrine, biblical interpretation, or conduct.

Furthermore, it is not a matter of knowledge, gifts, power, or work. In contrast to all this, the Lord's recovery is altogether a matter of Christ wrought into us and making His home in our hearts.

ARRIVING AT A FULL-GROWN MAN

In 4:13 Paul says that we all need to arrive "at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." We need to become not only a perfect man, complete man, or whole man, but a full-grown man, one who has the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Christ is the Body of Christ (1:23), which has the stature with the measure.

In 4:15 Paul goes on to say that we need to hold to truth in love so that we may grow up into Christ in all things. To grow up into Christ in all things is to have Christ increase in us in all things until we attain to a full-grown man.

PARTS OF CHRIST

In 5:30 Paul says that we are members of Christ's Body. This indicates that we are members of Christ, parts of Christ. According to our natural constitution, we cannot be members of Christ's Body. Christ Himself is the element, the factor, that makes us part of Him. Hence, in order to be parts of Christ as members of His Body, we must have Christ wrought into our very being.

In 5:32 Paul says that the great mystery is Christ and the church. In the Lord's recovery we should devote our attention to the matter of Christ being wrought into us to make us a proper church for the expression of Christ. This is God's economy.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-SEVEN

CHRIST IN GOD'S ECONOMY

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:20-23; 3:8, 16-19; 4:8-10

God's economy is Christ with the church. May the Lord grant us a clear sky so that we may see the vision of Christ and the church. Although Ephesians is a short book, no other book in the Bible reveals Christ in His all-inclusiveness, both vertically and horizontally, as the book of Ephesians does.

FAR ABOVE ALL AND FILLING ALL

Many students of the Word realize that Colossians reveals Christ as the Head and Ephesians reveals the church as the Body. However, not even the book of Colossians reveals Christ in such a vertical and horizontal way as He is revealed in Ephesians. Ephesians 1:21 says that Christ is "far above all." Such a word cannot be found in Colossians. Colossians says that Christ must have the preeminence, the first place, in all things, but it does not say that Christ is far above all. Some may regard the third heaven as the highest point in the universe. But in 4:10 Paul says that Christ has "ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things."

Ephesians 1:23 says that Christ "fills all in all." Colossians 3:11 says that Christ is all and in all. However, Christ's filling all in all in Ephesians 1:23 surpasses His being all and in all in Colossians 3:11. Colossians 3:11 refers to the sphere of the new man. Hence, in the new man Christ is all and in all. But Ephesians 1:23 refers to the universe, which includes time and space. Christ is not only all and in all with respect to the new man, but He fills

all in all with respect to the universe. Universally, Christ is above all and fills all in all.

In 3:8 Paul refers to the unsearchable riches of Christ. This term is not found in Colossians. The riches of Christ are what Christ is to us, such as light, life, righteousness, and holiness. These riches are unsearchable and past our tracing out.

In 3:18 Paul speaks of the "breadth and length and height and depth." The breadth, length, height, and depth are the dimensions of Christ. Christ is not only higher than all things--He is the height. He is not only deeper and broader and longer than all things--He is the breadth, the length, and the depth.

This very Christ who is all-inclusive both vertically and horizontally is making His home in our hearts in a very intimate way. Oh, may we see that the all-inclusive Christ is now making His home in our hearts!

RAISED FROM AMONG THE DEAD

Christ is far above all because He has been raised from among the dead (1:20-21). Apart from Christ, no one has been able to overcome death and come out from among the dead. For Christ to be raised up out of death indicates that nothing can hold Him down. When death comes to visit us, we cannot refuse it, for death has the power to hold us. But it did not have the power to hold Christ (Acts 2:24). After visiting the realm of the dead for three days, Christ came forth in resurrection. Although death did everything possible to hold Him, Christ could have said, "Death, is this all you can do to Me? If this is all, then it is time for Me to walk away from you in resurrection."

Just as nothing can hold Christ down, so nothing negative can hold us down, because we have Christ in us. We who believe in Christ must be the raised-up ones. Christ has been raised from the dead, and nothing can hold Him down. This is the reason that He is now far above all. He has been resurrected to be far above all. This is our Christ.

All Christians know that Christ is the Redeemer and

the Savior. Some realize that Christ is the Giver of all gifts and that He Himself is our life. But Christ is even more than this. In Ephesians, a book concerned with God's economy, we see that Christ is far above all. I can testify that the Christ I enjoy is the One who is far above all.

A DIFFERENT CHRIST

In a number of respects the Christ we enjoy in the Lord's recovery is different from the Christ in Christianity. When some hear this, they may accuse us of heresy. But consider the typology in the book of Leviticus. In this book five main offerings are described: the burnt offering, the meal offering, the peace offering, the sin offering, and the trespass offering. These offerings typify Christ in various aspects. Even with one kind of offering, such as the burnt offering, there are different types of sacrifices. One could offer as a burnt offering a bullock, a lamb, or a bird. All these are types of Christ. This gives us the ground to say that in our experience the Christ we enjoy may be different from the Christ enjoyed by others. The Christ I experience may be different from the Christ you experience, and the Christ you enjoy may differ from the Christ enjoyed by others.

THE IMMEASURABLE CHRIST MAKING HIS HOME IN OUR HEARTS

Chapter three of Ephesians reveals three important things regarding Christ: that His riches are unsearchable, that He is making His home in our heart, and that His dimensions are universal. As we have pointed out, Christ is the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth. Who can say how broad is the breadth or how high is the height? Oh, we may experience the unsearchable riches of the immeasurable Christ! Christ is the breadth, length, height, and depth of the universe. Hallelujah for Christ in His immeasurable dimensions! We need to ask ourselves whether or not we know such a Christ.

Although Christ is immeasurable, He is still making

His home in our hearts. The immeasurable Christ is a wonderful Person who makes His home in our hearts in a very intimate way. In order for Christ to make His home in our hearts, we need to be strengthened with power through the Spirit into our inner man. Then we shall be filled unto all the fullness of God (v. 19).

The immeasurable Christ who is making home in us is the Spirit, on the one hand, and the very God of fullness, on the other hand. If we are strengthened by the Spirit and Christ makes His home in us, we shall be filled unto all the fullness of God. Do not say that Christ is only the Son, but not the Spirit and not God the Father. Be careful that you are not under the influence of the systematized doctrine of Christianity. Christ is too wonderful to be systematized in doctrine. When He makes His home in us, the Spirit is strengthening us, and we are being filled unto the fullness of God.

Have you noticed that in Ephesians 3 Paul speaks of the Spirit, Christ, and God? The Spirit strengthens us, Christ makes home in us, and we are filled unto the fullness of God. Christ is the all-inclusive One. He is the Spirit who strengthens us, the Christ who makes His home in us, and the God who fills us unto His fullness. Many of us have read the book of Ephesians without ever seeing the vision of such a Christ. May we all see that the Christ whom we have received is the Spirit who strengthens and the God who fills us unto His fullness. I can testify that the Christ I enjoy is such a wonderful One.

THE DESCENDING AND ASCENDING CHRIST

In 4:9 and 10 Paul says, "Now this, He ascended, what is it except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He Who descended is the same Who also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things." Christ has done a great deal of traveling in the universe. Firstly, He descended from heaven to earth in His incarnation. Then He descended further, from earth to Hades, the lower parts of the earth, in His death.

Eventually, He ascended from Hades to earth in His resurrection, and from earth to heaven in His ascension. Through such a journey, He cut the way that He might fill all things. When Christ ascended up on high, to the third heaven, that was not the end of His traveling. After He ascended, He descended into our spirit. Therefore, Christ is the One who descends, ascends, travels, and comes to us in gracious visitations.

Today Christ is still traveling. He is still ascending and descending. However, His traveling takes place mainly within us. In our experience we may be up or down. When we are down, Christ comes down to where we are and brings us up to God. Many times during the course of a day we may be brought by Christ into the heavens. From our experience we can testify that within us Christ descends and ascends; He goes up and down. Although He is always steady, He does not stand still. On the contrary, He does a great deal of traveling within us.

It is difficult to say where Christ is. Is He in heaven or on earth? If you say that He is on earth, you may have the sense that He is in heaven. But if you say that He is in heaven, you may soon realize that He is on earth. Actually, Christ is everywhere. According to 4:9 and 10, He descended and ascended in order to fill all things. Do you think that Christ will fill all things in the universe without also filling you? Through His descending and ascending, Christ will fill us with Himself.

CONSTITUTED GIFTS

It is by His descending and ascending that Christ constitutes us gifts to the Body. The more He descends and ascends within us, the more we become gifts. Many brothers and sisters have very little function in the church because they have not yet been constituted as gifts. They may be good brothers and sisters, but they are not gifts to the church. But as Christ descends and ascends within them, He captures them, vanquishes them, and constitutes them into gifts to His Body. As a result of Christ's

traveling, they become useful gifts. I am concerned, however, that within some of the saints Christ's traveling may have ceased. He no longer goes up and down within them.

I can testify that I have been constituted as a gift to the church through Christ's descending and ascending within me. Christ has had many ups and downs within me. If we try to hold Christ as the Head without allowing Him to descend and ascend within us, we damage the process by which we are constituted gifts. The Lord will constitute us as gifts only through His descending and ascending within us. After such experiences of Christ's inward traveling over a period of time, we become useful in the church.

Allow me to give a word of testimony on behalf of a certain brother whom I met more than twenty years ago. At that time, he had not experienced very much of Christ's descending and ascending. But this brother's situation is much different today. Through Christ's descending and ascending within him, he has been constituted into a useful gift to the Lord's recovery. He could tell you that especially on the days he is used by the Lord, Christ goes down and up within him. Christ comes down to where he is and ascends with him into the heavenlies. Christ truly is a descending and ascending Christ.

OUR CHRIST

If you consider the verses we have covered in this message, you will see that the Christ we experience in the Lord's recovery is different from the Christ we heard about in religion. What a Christ we have! He is the embodiment of God and the content of the church. Our Christ is the all-inclusive, universal Christ. He is far above all, He is unsearchable and immeasurable, and yet He is intimately making His home in our hearts. Furthermore, our Christ is continually descending and ascending within us. Because all the fullness of God is in Him, He is the very embodiment of God. Therefore, as He makes home in our heart, we are filled unto all the fullness of God. This Christ who is the embodiment of God is also the very content of

the church. Furthermore, through His descending and ascending He fills all things, universally, vertically, and horizontally.

We should not focus our attention on ourselves, but on the all-inclusive Christ. Do not consider how weak or how poor you are. Rather, think of Christ, speak of Christ, and look away to Christ. Praise the Lord for the revelation of Christ in God's economy found in the book of Ephesians! This book says little of Christ as the Redeemer or Savior. But it does reveal that Christ is far above all and that He is now filling all in all. Nevertheless, this Christ is available to us. He is making His home in our heart, and He is imparting into us His unsearchable riches so that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God. Eventually, we as the church shall have Christ fully wrought into us as our unique content.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-EIGHT

TAKING CHRIST AS OUR PERSON FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:15-16; 3:17a; 4:13-15, 22-24

The book of Ephesians reveals that the church is not only the Body, but also the new man. As the new man, the church must have Christ both as the life and as the person. Only in recent years has the aspect of the church as the new man been recovered. We thank the Lord that He has shown us clearly through the book of Ephesians that the church is the new man.

During the past two centuries, many Christians have seen that the church is the Body of Christ. In particular, the Brethren speak of this aspect of the church. Furthermore, since the end of World War II, many in this country have begun to talk about the Body. Today it is common to hear terms such as Body ministry. However, although the church is the Body of Christ, this is not the highest revelation of the church. We must go on to see the church as the new man.

ABOLISHING THE ORDINANCES FOR THE CREATION OF THE NEW MAN

Ephesians 2:15 says that Christ abolished in His flesh the law of commandments in ordinances in order to create the Jews and the Gentiles into one new man. Through His death on the cross, not only did Christ deal with sin, the old man, the flesh, the world, and the Devil; He also dealt with the law of the commandments in ordinances. Many good messages have been given on how the cross of Christ has dealt with sin, the old man, the flesh, the world, and the Devil. But have you ever heard that on the cross Christ

abolished the law of commandments in ordinances? Christ did this not for salvation, sanctification, or even victory. He abolished the ordinances in order to create the new man. We freely admit that sin, the old man, the flesh, the world, and the Devil all needed the dealing of the cross, and we praise the Lord that all these negative things have been crucified. But we must go on to see the crucial importance of Christ's abolishing the law of the commandments in ordinances in order to create us into one new man.

The fact that the Jews and the Gentiles have been created into one new man indicates that the new man is an entity that is corporate and universal. There are many believers, but there is just one new man. All the believers are part of this one corporate and universal new man. The highest revelation of the church given in the book of Ephesians is that of the new man.

To be regenerated is not only to be saved; it is also to be created anew. On the cross Christ abolished the ordinances so that a re-creation could take place. The Jews and the Gentiles were separated by ordinances. But the two peoples have been created in Christ with the divine essence into one new entity, the corporate new man.

Ordinances are the various forms or ways of living and worship. For example, the Jews have their particular way of worshipping God. Based upon this way of worship, they have ordinances that govern their daily living. Other peoples also have their own ways of living and worship. This is true among the denominations in today's Christianity. The Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Lutherans, and Episcopalians all have different ways of worship. How widespread is this matter of ordinances, and how all-pervading!

God's intention is not to have a certain kind of worship. His desire is to have the one new man. However, in his subtlety, Satan, the enemy of God, uses ordinances to damage the new man and to keep believers from realizing the new man in a practical way. Satan's goal is not to keep Christians from heaven or from pursuing spirituality; it is

to keep them from seeing and experiencing the church as the one new man.

We thank the Lord that He has made us very clear regarding the ground of the church. But it is not adequate simply to know the church ground. Although the ground of the church is necessary, God's desire is not merely to have the church ground. He desires to have the church as the new man. Ordinances are the main obstacles to the fulfillment of this desire of God. If we would have the church in the aspect of the new man, we need to lay aside our ways of living. On the cross, Christ abolished all the ordinances. However, He did so not merely for the purpose of eliminating ordinances; He abolished the ordinances in order to create the one new man.

In His wisdom God has chosen us out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev. 5:9). In the local churches today there are believers from many races and nationalities. Surely the greatest test of whether or not we take Christ as our life and as our person is related to ordinances. For example, it is difficult for the Chinese who have moved to this country from the Far East to realize the church as the new man because it is not easy to set aside their Chinese way of living. When certain Chinese brothers and sisters were in the Far East, they were more useful in the church life than they are now because now they hold on to their Chinese ordinances. To be fair, we need to point out that all of us have the problem of holding on to our ordinances. In the new man there is no room for Jew, Greek, barbarian, Scythian, circumcision or uncircumcision. This means that in the church as the new man there can be no Chinese, American, British, German, or any other nationality. There is room only for Christ. It is crucial for us all to see that more than nineteen hundred years ago all our ordinances were abolished by Christ on the cross.

THE NEED FOR PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

If we sincerely desire to take Christ as our life and as our person, we must let go of our ordinances. For example, we should not have an ordinance about hair styles. Rather,

we should contact the Lord concerning this and pray, "Lord Jesus, I am one of Your members. What kind of haircut do You want to have? I don't care for any way of worship or living, and I am not concerned about customs or habits. Lord, I only care that You be my life and my person." Spontaneously the living Lord Jesus will let you know how you should cut your hair. Then you simply act according to what He shows you. This is not an ordinance; it is a practical experience of taking Christ as your person.

Our need today is not doctrinal knowledge, but the practical and daily experience of taking Christ as our person. In 1970 we first began to speak of the church as the new man. At that time we pointed out that in order to have the church in the aspect of the new man, we need to take Christ as our person. Since that time, there has been much talk about the new man and about taking Christ as our person. Even some good hymns have been written along this line. But according to my observation, there is little reality among us of actually taking Christ as our person. We should not be satisfied if others regard us as good people. We must be those who take Christ as our person. May we all go to the Lord and have a thorough transaction with Him concerning all the details of our daily living.

RECEIVING CHRIST

In many respects we are still quite religious. Even the way we preach the gospel and help others to be saved may be carried out in a religious way. We may tell people that they are sinful and that Christ died on the cross for their sins. We may go on to say that if they believe in Him, they will be forgiven, justified, saved, and made ready for heaven. In a sense such gospel preaching is good, fundamental, and even scriptural. However, it may be religious. The important factor in the preaching of the gospel is to help people open to the Lord Jesus and take Him into them. Even if a person has no concept of forgiveness, justification, or heaven, he will have the reality of all these if he takes Christ into him. When we

have Christ, we have forgiveness, redemption, justification, salvation, and sanctification.

God's purpose is not simply to forgive our sins, to justify us, and then to carry us away to heaven. His intention is to work Christ into us. Before the foundation of the world, He chose us in Christ and put a mark on us. Then, in time, He called us. When God called us, His desire was that we focus our attention not on forgiveness or justification, but on receiving His dear Son into us. As long as Christ is living in us, we shall have no problem with forgiveness, justification, salvation, or heaven.

Only by having Christ in us can we become part of the Body of Christ. It is Christ alone who constitutes us a part of Himself. For this, forgiveness, justification, and sanctification are not sufficient. May the Lord grant that we may see that we have not only been forgiven, justified, saved, and sanctified, but also re-created in Christ and with Christ.

Because I have had experience with various kinds of Christianity, including fundamental, Pentecostal, and inner life Christianity, I am familiar with many different religious practices. I can testify that today I am not for any practice, but only for taking Christ as my person in a genuine and living way. My desire is to help others receive and experience the living Christ. He is not a form, religion, regulation, ordinance, or practice--He is the living Spirit. Our need is simply to open to Him and to take Him into us.

ALLOWING CHRIST TO MAKE HIS HOME IN OUR HEARTS

Without Ephesians 3, Ephesians 2 would only be doctrine to us. It is a fact that Christ has abolished the ordinances in order to create the Jews and the Gentiles into one new man. But for this to be practical in our daily experience, we must allow Christ to make His home in our hearts (3:17). One way to tell whether or not you still have ordinances is to check whether or not Christ is making His home in your heart. Are you allowing Him to make His

home in your heart? If we are honest, most of us would have to say that we do not give Him much opportunity to do this. The reason for this is that we do not care firstly for Christ, but for our own way.

Consider the experience of Peter in Acts 10. As he was praying on the housetop, he "saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth" (v. 11). In this sheet were "all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air" (v. 12). Then a voice said to Peter, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat" (v. 13). However, Peter's response was, "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean" (v. 14). On this occasion, Peter did not take Christ as His person. Instead, Peter was his own person.

We should not think that we are more spiritual than Peter. Most of the time we also fail to take Christ as our person. When the Lord speaks something to us, we often respond, "Not so, Lord." We may say, "Lord, I don't believe that You would ask me to do such a thing." Our experience testifies that whenever we refuse to go along with the Lord, we lose His presence and His anointing. However, when we agree with the Lord, we enjoy His presence and experience the inner anointing in a fresh way. We may even be beside ourselves with joy in the Lord.

Let us forget religion, regulations, ordinances, all the different practices of worshipping God, and our own ways of living in order that we may simply allow Christ to make His home in our hearts. Christ has come into us to be our life and our person, and He will not be satisfied until we take Him as our person in a practical way. If we do not take Him as our person, we shall have the sense deep within that, no matter how much we love Christ and the church and no matter how much we are for the Lord's recovery, we are lacking something. This sense of lack comes from the shortage of Christ as our person.

Our heart should not be the dwelling place of the self, but the dwelling place of Christ. Again I ask, who is the

person living within you, you or Christ? In this matter I do not care for doctrine; I care only for reality. Christ has not abolished the ordinances so that we may have other kinds of ordinances. His intention is to make His home in our hearts.

Many married sisters are reluctant to read Ephesians 5 because it speaks about wives submitting to their own husbands. When they read this chapter, they are exposed and realize that they are not submissive. Some may blame their husband or environment for their lack of submission. They may even blame the Lord and tell Him that if He had given them a different husband, they would surely be submissive to him. Sisters, do not try to submit to your husband but let Christ make His home in your heart. If you take Him as your person and allow Him to make His home in your heart, you will surely submit to your husband.

We need to forget about everything religious and simply take Christ as our person. If we do this, we shall have the growth spoken of in chapter four, and we shall put on the new man. This is the proper church life.

God does not want us to try in a religious way to submit to our husbands or to love our wives. His concern is that we take Christ as our person and set aside all ordinances. God wants a people in whose heart Christ is making His home. This is our need in the church life today.

THE UNIQUE FACTOR IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

The Lord's recovery is not a recovery of teaching. In the recovery the unique factor is Christ. To be sure, we honor, respect, and apply the Bible. We keep the Word as much as other Christians do, if not more. Nevertheless, we must be clear that the Lord's recovery is not simply a matter of following the teaching of the Bible. It is altogether a matter of Christ living and making His home in our hearts, so that in all things we may grow up into Him as the Head. The more we grow up into Christ, the more we put on the

new man, the proper and practical church life. Our unique need today is to take Christ as our person for the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTY-NINE

FIVE ASPECTS OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Eph. 5:25-27; 2:15-16; 1:20-23; 4:7-8, 11 12; 3:17a

Christ is the embodiment of God and the content of the church. Although all genuine Christians recognize that Christ is the Son of God, not many have an adequate realization that He is the embodiment of God. To say that Christ is the embodiment of God means that in Christ is embodied all that God is. In eternity past, God in Christ made a plan, selected us, and predestinated us, or marked us out. Then in Christ and through Christ God created all things. Eventually, Christ was incarnated, accomplished redemption through crucifixion, was buried, resurrected, and then ascended to the third heaven. Furthermore, He has descended as the Spirit upon His Body. Now He is waiting for people to open to Him and call upon Him so that He may come into them, regenerate them, and make His home in their hearts. One day, He will come back from the heavens by coming out from within His people. Then He will be the King over all the earth, and His chosen people will be co-kings with Him in His kingdom. For eternity, He will be the centrality of the New Jerusalem. It is impossible to exhaust all that God is and all that He has done and will do in Christ.

When I was young, I heard about Jesus, but what I was told was far short of the revelation of Christ as the embodiment of God. Many of us can testify that, before coming into the Lord's recovery, we did not know Christ adequately as the embodiment of God. However, after we came into the church life, we began to realize that our Christ is the embodiment of all that God is.

THE CONTENT OF THE CHURCH

As the embodiment of God, Christ is the content of the church. Ephesians 3 says that the Spirit strengthens us into our inner man so that Christ can make His home in our hearts (vv. 16-17). Eventually, we shall be filled unto all the fullness of God (v. 19). This indicates that the content of the church is the embodiment of God.

The church is not simply a group of people who have been saved out of hell, who are waiting to go to heaven, and who beg the Lord to give them peace, joy, and a good life. The church in the Lord's recovery does not beg God for things. Rather, we in the local churches praise the Lord for all He is to us. Praise Him that the church has the embodiment of God as her content! How we thank the Lord for revealing this to us!

The church is the one new man with Christ as the person. As the person of the new man, Christ is the embodiment of God. Do you realize that the One you are to take as your person is the very embodiment of God? If we see this vision, we shall be beside ourselves with joy. Oh, what a Person we have within us! It is crucial for us all to see that the church is a vessel with the living Christ as its unique content.

SEEING CHRIST IN A FULL WAY

In this message we shall consider five aspects of Christ. If we would see these five aspects clearly, we need to ask the Lord to blow away all the clouds that for centuries have kept Christians from seeing Christ in a full way. In previous messages we have pointed out that Christ is unlimited, immeasurable, and unsearchable. He is the all-inclusive One that fills all in all (1:23). He is even the very dimensions of the universe: the breadth, and length, and height, and depth (3:18). What a Christ He is!

THE CHURCH-LOVING CHRIST

Ephesians 5:25 says that Christ "loved the church and

gave Himself up for her." This verse indicates that Christ is a church-loving Christ. Galatians 2:20 says that Christ loved me and gave Himself for me. Although Christians pay attention to this verse, they may not also pay attention to Ephesians 5:25, where we are told that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for the church.

Sanctifying the Church

In 5:25-27 we see that Christ gave Himself up for the church, not merely to save the church from hell and bring her into heaven, but to sanctify her and to cleanse her by the washing of the water in the Word. Through this washing He will present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The church Christ will present to Himself will be holy and without blemish.

Christ's purpose in giving Himself up for the church was to sanctify her. He will not only separate the church to Himself from everything common, but will also saturate her with Himself so that she may be His counterpart. This is accomplished by the washing of water in the Word. How Christ loves the church! The Christ who dwells within us is the Christ who loves the church. Having given Himself up for the church and to the church, He is now sanctifying her. In His love for the church, He is cleansing and purifying her to make her holy and without blemish.

According to 5:27, the day is coming when the church will not have spot or wrinkle. Spots come from wounds, and wrinkles come from oldness. Through Christ's sanctifying work, the church will eventually be without spot or wrinkle. She will be holy and without blemish. To be holy is to be saturated and transformed with Christ, and to be without blemish is to be spotless and without wrinkle. One day the church will be fully transformed. Only Christ can bring the church to such a condition. The Christ who is the embodiment of God is the Christ who loves the church and is cleansing her by the washing of the water in the Word.

A Full Recovery of the Church Life

I have the assurance that before the Lord comes back, He will fully recover the proper church life. Many Christian teachers, however, do not believe that this is possible. According to them, we cannot have the church life in this age; they say the church life is possible only in the age to come. Those who hold this view say that we should not talk about the church, but simply love the Lord, preach the gospel, and help the believers to be spiritual. Many of those who take such a position are opposed to the Lord's present recovery. But in spite of all opposition, we have the assurance that the church life will be recovered in full in this age, not in the age to come.

It is contrary to the Scriptures to say that the church life will be in the coming age. The next age will not be the age of the church; it will be the age of the kingdom. In this present age, before His coming back, the Lord must have the church life to shame the enemy. I believe that for centuries Satan, the enemy of God, has been challenging Christ concerning the church. Perhaps Satan has said to Him, "Where is Your church? Show me the church You have promised to build. Some of Your servants even teach that it is not possible to have the church life in this age." Perhaps Christ is saying to Satan, "Satan, look at the local churches on earth today. Consider how many of My people are testifying that it is possible to have the church life in this age. They are not only for the church life, but are in the church life in a practical way."

Back to Jerusalem

I believe that in the coming years the Lord will spread the church life to England, Germany, France, and Italy. Furthermore, I believe that one day there will be a church in Rome and even in Jerusalem, where the church life began more than nineteen centuries ago. Acts 1:9-12 tells us that Christ ascended from the Mount of Olives, and Zechariah 14:4 reveals that Christ will return also to the

Mount of Olives. In the same principle, the Lord began His church in Jerusalem and, I believe, will send the recovery of His church back to Jerusalem.

For years I was deeply troubled by the loss of mainland China. After more than twenty years of labor, in 1948 there were churches in all the leading cities of China. Then suddenly everything was lost. One day, after many years had passed, I saw something encouraging about this. I realized that in the 1920s the Lord desired to have the proper church life. However, because Europe and the United States had been spoiled by religion, the Lord was forced to go to a heathen country in the Far East for the recovery of the church life. Brother Nee once told us that the Lord went to China because it was virgin soil for the cultivation of the church life. However, the Lord knew that, primarily because of language, China was not the best place for the spread of His recovery. Much of what the Lord had revealed to us was buried in the Chinese language. Nevertheless, God used the virgin soil of China as a nursery. Watchman Nee was sown as a seed into this soil, and the church life began to grow. Then, through the loss of mainland China, the recovery was transplanted to the United States. However, the United States is not the goal; it is a stepping-stone for the spread of the recovery to Europe and eventually to Jerusalem. The Lord began from Jerusalem and then spread the church to Greece and Italy. I believe that He will also go back to Jerusalem by way of Italy and Greece. I long for there to be a church in Jerusalem waiting for the Lord Jesus when He returns.

Concerning the recovery of the church life, the Lord Jesus cannot be defeated. When the Japanese army took over the Philippines during World War II, General MacArthur was forced to withdraw. But he vowed to return. As we all know, General MacArthur did return to the Philippines. In like manner, no matter what Satan does to damage the church, the Lord Jesus will return, and His church will be waiting for Him. There may be a church in the city of Jerusalem. Perhaps the meeting hall will not

be far from the Mount of Olives, the place from which He ascended and to which He will descend in His coming back. It would be a shame to the Lord Jesus to come back without having a church in Jerusalem ready for Him. The Lord will not suffer such a shame. For this reason, He is waiting for His recovery to spread to Europe and, ultimately, to Jerusalem.

May the Lord inspire us concerning His move in His recovery! May He spread the church life throughout Europe, the Middle East, and to Jerusalem. Perhaps one day we shall hold a prayer meeting in the garden of Gethsemane, which is located at the foot of the Mount of Olives, and pray fervently to the Lord for His coming back!

We all need to enjoy Christ and to experience Him as the church-loving Christ. Because we also love the church, we are one with Him for the spread of His recovery throughout the world and back to Jerusalem. Oh, how Christ loves the church! He is in us as the church-loving Christ. His love for the church makes us willing to give our all for the recovery of the church life.

THE NEW-MAN-CREATING CHRIST

In 2:15 and 16 we see that Christ is also the new-man-creating Christ. For centuries, Christians have spoken about Christ's death on the cross without seeing the consummate point that He died for the creation of the new man. He abolished in His flesh the ordinances in order to create in Himself one new man. The cross is not only for salvation, release, and victory; it is also for the creation of the new man. The creation of the new man required that all ordinances be abolished. Praise the Lord that He is the new-man-creating Christ! By abolishing the ordinances on the cross, He has created the Jews and the Gentiles into one new man.

THE ALL-THINGS-HEADING-UP CHRIST

In 1:20-23 we see that Christ is also the all-things-

heading-up Christ. God has seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies and has subjected all things under His feet. Furthermore, Christ has been made Head over all things to the church. The headship over all things has been given to Christ as a gift from God.

THE GIFT-MAKING AND GIFT-GIVING CHRIST

Chapter four reveals that Christ is the gift-making and gift-giving Christ (4:7-8, 11-12). Because Christ is the Head over all things to the church, He is able to make gifts and to present them to the church. Ephesians 1:22 says that Christ is the Head over all things *to* the church. The little word *to* is crucial. It implies transmission. Whatever Christ, the Head, attained and obtained is transmitted to the church, His Body. In this transmission the church shares with Christ in all His attainments. Because all that Christ is and has is transmitted to the church, He is able to constitute us as gifts to the Body.

We have pointed out that it is through His descending and ascending that Christ constitutes us into gifts to the church. By His traveling, by His descending and ascending within us, we are made useful gifts to the church.

When the church life first began in Los Angeles, we all had the sense that we were weak and useless. We wondered how we could possibly take care of the church. However, by Christ's descending and ascending, many have been constituted into useful gifts. The leadership needed for the spread of the church life is produced in this way. As brothers experience the descending and ascending Christ, they become proper leaders to take care of the churches that are raised up by the Lord. This leadership is not produced by man's education or training; it is constituted by the descending and ascending Christ. We need to praise the Lord for His traveling, for the marvelous two-way traffic between heaven and earth and between earth and heaven. It is through such traffic that the gift-making and gift-giving Christ produces gifts for His Body.

THE HOME-MAKING CHRIST

Finally, as 3:17 reveals, Christ is the home-making Christ. He is no longer homeless, for He is making His home in our hearts. The more Christ settles down in our hearts, the more He can boast to Satan that He has a home in His believers.

May we all be impressed with these five aspects of Christ. He is the church-loving Christ, the new-man-creating Christ, the all-things-heading-up-Christ, the gift-making and gift-giving Christ, and the home-making Christ. What a Christ we have!

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTY

PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN BY GROWING UP INTO CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:12-16, 22-24

We have pointed out that the church is not only the Body, but also the new man. As the Body, the church needs Christ as life. But as the new man, the church needs Christ as the person. For example, trees have life, but they do not have a person and therefore have no personality. As human beings, however, we have both life and personality, for we are persons.

CHRIST BECOMING THE PERSON IN OUR HEARTS

Because the church is not only the Body with Christ as life but also the new man with Christ as the person, Paul in 3:17 emphasizes the importance of Christ making His home in our hearts. Although our spirit is a vessel to contain God, the spirit is not the center of personality. The center of personality is the heart. The various functions of our personality--our mind, emotion, and will--are directly related to our heart, not to our spirit. Because all the functions of personality are concentrated in the heart, it is the place where Christ desires to make His home. Christ as the life-giving Spirit is now in our spirit. However, He wants to spread into our hearts and make His home there.

Through regeneration we have Christ as the Spirit in our spirit. But through transformation Christ will spread from our spirit into our heart. Every regenerated person has Christ in his spirit, but not many have allowed Christ to spread into their hearts. This is the reason Paul prayed that we would be strengthened into our inner man so that Christ may make His home in our hearts (3:16). It seems

as if Paul wanted to tell the Ephesians, "Because you have been saved and regenerated, you have Christ in your spirit. But I'm concerned that you have not allowed Christ to spread into your hearts. Therefore, I pray for you that you may be strengthened in your spirit by the Spirit so that Christ may make His home in your hearts."

We need to take Christ not only as the life in our spirit, but also as the person in our heart. When Christ is in our spirit, He is our life. However, when He spreads into our heart, He also becomes our person. We all have Christ in our spirit, but I wonder how much Christ has spread into our heart.

Sisters, do you take Christ as your person when you go shopping? Do you allow Him to make home in your heart as you are deciding what to buy? For the most part, you are the one who makes these decisions, not Christ. You have Christ in your spirit as life. The problem is that you confine Him to your spirit. Deep within I am afraid that you say, "Lord Jesus, You are my life in my spirit. But when it comes to shopping, I want You to stay in my spirit. Let me shop according to what is in my heart. I want to buy the things I like. Lord, my spirit is Your sphere. But my heart is reserved for me." When you pray, you may contact the Lord in your spirit, only to leave Him and go shopping according to your own desire and choice. Of course, the sisters may not put this into words, but this may be their attitude. I doubt that many sisters consult the Lord about their shopping. This indicates that in the practical matter of shopping they do not take Christ as their person in their hearts.

Simply having Christ as life does not produce the church life. In order to have the proper church life, we must take Christ as our person. Remember that the church is the new man as well as the Body. As the new man, the church needs Christ as the person. The main problem is not with the life, but with the person. There is no need to adjust the life, but there is the need for a change of person. Our mind, emotion, and will all need to be adjusted. With

the church life, the problem is not only with our taking Christ as life; it is also with our taking Christ as our person. Very few saints take Christ as their person in an adequate way. To have Christ as our person is deeper, higher, and fuller than to have Him as our life. In Ephesians 3 Paul did not pray that the saints would have Christ as life. He prayed that they would take Him as their person by allowing Him to make His home in their hearts. This is our need today.

Whatever we do, we should do by taking Christ as our person. The question is not what we do, but who is doing it. Are we the ones, or is it Christ? Concerning shopping, it is not a matter of what we intend to buy; it is a matter of who is buying that particular item. Are we the ones buying it, or is it Christ? If we do not take Christ as our person, it may even be wrong in the eyes of the Lord to purchase a Bible. Hence, the question is not what we do or what we buy; it is who is doing that thing or buying that item.

CHRIST EXPRESSED IN THE CHURCH

The only way for Christ to be our person is for Him to make His home in our hearts. The need in all the local churches is for the saints to take Christ both as their life and as their person by allowing Him to make His home in their hearts. The churches are the Lord's testimony on earth. But this testimony must have an inward reality. I am sorry to say that it is possible for the church to be an empty shell, a shell without content. The content of the church must be the very Christ whom we take as life and as our person. If we take Christ as our person, then as we come together in the meetings Christ will be expressed from our spirit and through our heart. All those who come will sense that Christ is present both as our life and as our person.

The meetings of a local church must be the expression of Christ. Christ is not only the victorious and prevailing life, but also a practical, present, living Person. Whenever we testify in the meetings, others will be able to tell whether or not we have been taking Christ as our person.

If we are faithful to take Christ as our person, we shall enjoy the presence of the Lord Jesus in the meetings. In fact, the meetings will even be His presence, for He will be expressed from within us.

We need to pray for ourselves and for others to have the reality of taking Christ as our person in our daily living. Everything we do should be done not by the self, but by Christ. His tastes and preferences need to become ours. Then Christ will be not only our life, but also our person. The Lord will thus expand in our heart, take possession of our heart, and make His home in our heart in a full way. Eventually, He will saturate our whole being with Himself, and we shall live no longer by the self, but by Christ. The more this becomes our experience, the more the meetings of the church will be the presence of the Lord Jesus. In such meetings there is little need for preaching, teaching, or the exercise of gifts, because Christ is expressed through the saints. Because Christ is so rich, available, present, and practical in the experience of the saints, they will be able to share Christ with one another. What a difference between such meetings and the "services" in today's Christianity!

CONSTITUTED INTO GIFTS

In Ephesians 4 we see that when the victorious Christ ascended, He led a train of vanquished foes and constituted them into gifts to His Body. We have pointed out that we become gifts through experiencing Christ's descending and ascending within us.

Paul is the most useful gift given by Christ to His Body. Before being constituted a gift to the church, Paul was an enemy of Christ and a persecutor of the church. Nevertheless, when the Lord Jesus appeared to him, Paul was defeated. He fell to the ground, and said, "Who art thou, Lord?" By calling on the name of the Lord Jesus, he was saved, and the Lord came into him. At that moment, Saul of Tarsus became a vanquished foe. In the years to follow, he went on to experience Christ's descending and

ascending within him. Eventually, through this experience of the traveling Christ, Paul became an outstanding gift to the Body.

The principle is the same with us. Although we were once enemies of the Lord, one day He met us, perhaps as we were on our road to Damascus. The Lord vanquished us, captured us, and put us in His train of vanquished foes. Now, by descending and ascending within us, He is constituting us into gifts to His Body.

Many Christians think only the leading apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers are gifts to the church. However, if we read 4:7 in context, we shall see that every member, including every one of us, is a gift to the Body. In 4:16 Paul speaks of every part, that is, every member. Every member of the Body may be a gift if he is constituted by the descending and ascending Christ.

PERFECTING THE SAINTS THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

Ephesians 4:12 speaks of the perfecting of the saints. To perfect the saints is not mainly to teach them; it is to minister Christ to them. What the saints need is not the knowledge of doctrine, but the ministering of Christ. Whenever someone ministers Christ to us, we spontaneously have the sense that we are fed and nourished, that we have received Christ as our food supply. Through this supply we are strengthened and enlightened.

However, it is altogether different when someone comes to us with enticing questions. When the serpent contacted Eve in the garden, he asked, "Has God said?" In like manner, negative ones often raise tempting questions. We need to realize immediately that such questions do not come from the Lord. Those who contact us in this way do not minister Christ. They do not supply us with food, they do not water us, and they do not strengthen, enlighten, or equip us. The effect of their questions is darkness and death. As soon as we are aware of this kind of speaking, we must close ourselves to it and refuse to take it in.

What the saints need is to have Christ ministered into them. This is necessary for the church life. In all our contact with the saints there should be the ministry of Christ as the life supply. The leading gifts are to perfect the saints through such a ministry of Christ. The more the saints are supplied with the living Christ, the more they are perfected.

GROWING IN PARTICULAR MATTERS

As the saints are perfected through the ministry of Christ, they will grow up into Christ. We have Christ within us, but in many matters we are still in the self. Hence, we need the growth that will bring us out of ourselves and into Christ. Teaching cannot do this. This can be done only through the ministry of Christ as food and nourishment.

The growth into Christ in 4:15 is equal to the putting on of the new man in verse 24. The only way to put on the new man is to grow up into Christ. The more we grow into Christ, the more we put on the new man. To put on the new man is to be in the proper church life. We cannot be in the church life if we do not grow into Christ. We need to grow up into Christ in all the details of our daily living, for example, in shopping and in talking. Often our talk is natural and devoid of Christ. The only way to be free from such a natural way of speaking is to grow out of it by growing up into Christ. If we grow in Christ in the matter of talking, our talk will eventually be in Christ. By growing up into Christ in this particular matter, we spontaneously put on more of the new man.

In some localities the saints love the Lord very much; however, they are quite natural. Nearly everything about them--their behavior, their virtues, their way of speaking--is natural. With them there is no sign of having grown up into Christ. This is disturbing to the indwelling Spirit, who longs for the church to be realized as the new man. In order to put on the church life as the expression of the one new man, we need to grow out of everything natural by growing up into Christ. If we have the perfection with the

growth spoken of in 4:13 and 15, surely we shall put on the new man.

THE PROPER COMMUNITY LIFE

As we grow into Christ, we shall also put off the old man, especially regarding the former manner of life. The manner of life of the old man is the old social life, the old community life. By creation, every human being needs a community life. Before we were saved, we had a certain kind of social life. Now that we are saved our social life needs a change. This means that we need a change of community. The church life is the best "social life." We can testify that in the church life our former social life has been exchanged for the best community life. Praise the Lord for the "social life" in the church!

A STABLE CHURCH LIFE

However, if we proclaim that the church is our community life but we do not grow into Christ, we shall not be stable in the church life. Some say that they are for the church life. However, when they are disappointed with something in the church, they leave. This indicates that they have not truly put on the church life by growing up into Christ. The only way to put on the church life is to grow up into Christ in all things. Suppose a sister does not grow up into Christ in her shopping. As long as she lacks growth in this matter, her church life will not be altogether secure. The security of our church life depends upon our growing up into Christ in particular matters. If we do not grow up into Christ, we may be in the church life one day and gone the next. For a steady church life, we need to grow up into Christ in particular ways. Once again we see that to put on the new man is to grow.

What we need is not growth in a general way, but in particular ways. For example, a brother may need to grow up into Christ in the way he cuts his hair or in the way he deals with his wife. If we do not show any growth in such aspects of our daily life, others may rightfully question the

security of our life in the church. Only by growing in particular things will our church life become steady, stable, and secure. The more we grow in Christ, the more of the church life we put on.

The church life is not a matter of good character or good works. It is altogether a matter of growth into Christ in particular things. By growing day by day in Christ, we gradually put off the old social life and put on the church the new man as the new community life. As we grow, we take Christ both as our life and as our person. Growth depends upon Christ making His home in our hearts. If we do not give Christ the opportunity to make His home in us, we can neither take Him as our person nor have the genuine growth in Christ. We grow in Christ only by taking Him as our person. The more we take Christ as our person, the more we grow up into Christ in particular things. The result is that we put on more of the church life.

It is possible to be in the church life merely in an outward way. However, if we do not grow in Christ by taking Him as our person, we are not in the church life in reality. The reality and practicality of the church life consists in growing up into Christ, which in turn is based upon taking Christ as our person in particular matters. As we take Christ as our person and grow up into Him, the church life is constituted into our being, and we become part of the church. This is the proper church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-ONE

THE CHURCH--THE EXPRESSION OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:23; 3:8b, 17a, 19b; 4:13; 5:18b

The church is the expression of Christ. It is not the expression of such things as doctrine, gifts, or power. Nevertheless, subconsciously or unconsciously, many think that the church should be characterized by the manifestation of spiritual gifts. Some believe that whenever Christians meet together there should be the exercise and demonstration of the so-called charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, the book of Ephesians, a book on the church, does not mention this kind of gift. There is not a word in this Epistle about speaking in tongues or healing. When Paul speaks of gifts in Ephesians 4, he is referring to persons who are made gifts to the Body. For example, the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers are gifts. As we have pointed out elsewhere, every member of the Body is a gift to the church. Hence, in Ephesians a gift is not what we have or what we do; it is what we are. To be such a gift is to be constituted with Christ as life. This causes our very being to become a gift to the Body.

INDIVIDUALISM AND DIVISIVENESS

We thank the Lord for the many Christians who have been helped through the experience of charismatic gifts. However, we cannot agree with the claim that all Christians will become one if they have certain charismatic experiences. According to my experience and observation, those who emphasize the Pentecostal or charismatic experiences are the most divisive. The more certain believers exercise their spiritual gifts, the more

individualistic and divisive they become. This is the reason that there have been so many divisions among those who stress spiritual gifts. In Christian meetings they may not care much for the edification of others, but care primarily for the manifestation of their own gifts. Some excuse their individualism by saying that they take heed only to God, not to man, and claiming that everything they do is of the Spirit's inspiration.

FILLED IN SPIRIT UNTO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD

In 1:22 and 23 Paul indicates that the church is the Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. The church is the fullness of Christ. In 3:8 Paul says that he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Paul does not say here that he preached doctrine or gifts.) We need to know the difference between the riches of Christ and the fullness of Christ. Most Christians confuse these terms, thinking that the riches of Christ are the same as the fullness of Christ.

In chapter three Paul goes on to speak of Christ making His home in our heart, with the result that we are filled unto all the fullness of God. Furthermore, in 4:13 he says that we need to arrive "at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." In 5:18 he says that we should be filled in our spirit. Surely this is related to being filled unto all the fullness of God. Such a filling takes place in our spirit, not in the mind. In 5:18 Paul is not saying that we are filled with the Holy Spirit; he is emphasizing the fact that we need to be filled in our spirit, even filled unto all the fullness of God.

In 5:18 Paul presents a contrast between being drunk with wine and being filled in spirit. To be drunk with wine is to be filled in the body, whereas to be filled in our regenerated spirit is to be filled with Christ unto all the fullness of God. To be drunk with wine in the body causes us to be dissipated, but to be filled with Christ, the fullness of God, causes us to overflow with Him in speaking, singing, psalming, and giving thanks to God (vv. 19-20) and

to subject ourselves one to another (v. 21). How important it is for us to be filled in spirit unto all the fullness of God!

THE RICHES OF CHRIST AND THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

Let us now consider the difference between the riches of Christ and the fullness of Christ. The riches of Christ are what Christ is to us in all His divine attributes and human virtues. These riches are unsearchable. The fullness of Christ? the Body, issues from the enjoyment of the riches of Christ. Through the enjoyment of Christ's riches, we become His fullness to express Him. Christ, who is the infinite God without limitation of any kind, is so great that He fills all things in all things. Such a Christ needs the church to be His fullness for His complete expression.

We have pointed out that the riches of Christ are unsearchable. Included in these riches is Christ's divinity. He is the very God. Since Christ is the Son of God, another aspect of His riches is sonship. Furthermore, according to Isaiah 9:6, the Son is even called the eternal Father. This indicates that He has not only the sonship, but also the fatherhood. Second Corinthians 3:17 says that Christ the Lord is the Spirit. This is another item of Christ's unsearchable riches. Other items include Christ as light, life, love, righteousness, holiness, humility, patience, and submission. How long the list would be if anyone could enumerate all the aspects of the riches of Christ!

Christ's riches need an expression. When these riches come forth to be expressed, that expression is the fullness of Christ. When Christ was incarnated, God's riches were expressed. However, the incarnation by no means exhausted these riches. Rather, it was the overflow, the fullness, of the riches of God. Christ came forth from the bosom of the Father (John 1:18). But His coming forth did not at all exhaust the divine riches in the Father's bosom. On the contrary, the more that came forth, the more there was to come forth. Therefore, with Christ there were not only the riches, but also the fullness. For this reason, John

1:16 says, "For of His fullness we all received, and grace upon grace." Christ is the fullness of the Godhead. When He came to earth, He was the overflow of the riches of God. Hence, He became the fullness of God. Not only were the riches within Him, but the very fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Him bodily (Col. 2:9).

Christ is the fullness of God, and the church is the fullness of Christ. Christ's riches are so extensive that not only is Christ Himself filled with them, but these riches also fill up the members of His Body, the church. As we are filled with Christ's riches, we become His fullness. In this way the church becomes the fullness of Christ.

THE UNLIMITED EXPRESSION OF THE UNLIMITED CHRIST

The fullness of Christ comes out of the enjoyment of the riches of Christ. For the church to have the riches of Christ and not the fullness of Christ would be an indication that Christ is limited. But the fact that the church not only has Christ's riches but also is His fullness indicates that the Christ experienced and enjoyed by the church is unlimited. Limited riches cannot produce fullness. Only unlimited riches are capable of producing the fullness. As the expression of the unsearchably rich Christ, the church is the unlimited expression of the unlimited Christ. This means that the church is the fullness of Christ who is Himself the embodiment of the fullness of God. My burden in this message is simply to point out that the church must be such an expression of Christ.

BACK TO CHRIST

The church is not the expression of anything other than Christ. We have seen that many Christians are occupied with spiritual gifts. These gifts, however, are not Christ Himself. In like manner, doctrine and power are not Christ. Not even the Bible itself is Christ. Christ, a living and wonderful Person, is the embodiment of God. We should not allow anything to take the place of Christ. Spiritual gifts may be a means to partake of Christ, power

may help us to realize Christ, and doctrines may be instruments used to impart Christ. However, many Christians allow gifts, power, teachings, and even the Bible to become substitutes for Christ. Instead of taking Christ and experiencing Christ directly, many devote their attention to gifts, power, and doctrine. This indicates that the means and the instruments that God intends to be used to gain Christ are actually used to replace Christ. The situation must be altogether different in the Lord's recovery. In the recovery, the Lord intends to bring us back to Himself, not to the various means or instruments. We thank the Lord for the gifts, the power, the teachings, and, in particular, for the holy Word. But most of all, we thank God for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God's intention is to bring us back to Christ, back from everything that has become a substitute for Him or has distracted us from Him. Therefore, when we Christians meet together, we should pay our attention not to the manifestation of gifts or even to the teaching of the Word, but to the expression of the living Christ. In the meetings we should not be concerned about the way of meeting, but with the expression of the living Christ.

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

In the Lord's recovery we are fighting a battle. Primarily we must fight against the use of good things as substitutes for Christ. In his subtlety, the enemy, Satan, uses many things to attract people away from Christ. Some are distracted from Christ by teachings or by their concept of what is correct Bible doctrine. For this reason, some condemn the practice of calling on the name of the Lord. They claim that this is not according to Scripture. Some have accused us of inventing new ways of worship. Others have asked us why we cannot go along with the methods of worship that have been practiced by Christians for centuries. What is wrong with calling on the name of the Lord? It is not my intention to cause other Christians trouble. But the Lord has charged me to tell His people of the need to call on Him. This is not a new teaching. Such a

practice is first spoken of in Genesis 4:26. This verse says, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord." This verse and dozens of other verses as well indicate that to call on the name of the Lord is certainly a scriptural teaching and practice. Verse after verse in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament encourages us to call on the name of the Lord.

PRAY-READING

Others are offended by pray-reading and criticize us for this practice. According to them, this is our invention. It is not my desire to argue with anyone about things such as this. However, I wish to point out that Ephesians 6:17 and 18 speak of taking the word of God by means of all prayer. Hence, if we are truly scriptural, we will take the Word not only by reading, studying, and searching, but also by praying. With verses such as Ephesians 6:17 and 18 before us, who can say that to pray-read the Word is not according to the Bible? How much we need to turn from the traditional understanding and come back to Christ Himself and to the pure Word of God! This is the Lord's recovery.

EXPRESSING CHRIST IN THE MEETINGS

As Christians who live by Christ, whenever we come together we should follow the indwelling Spirit to express Christ. There is no need to have a set way in the meetings. The Spirit knows how to express Christ. In each meeting we should simply open to Him and follow Him. It is not always necessary to open the meeting with a hymn. Perhaps someone will stand and offer living praises to God. We should not come to the meeting according to our concept, for it is too much under the influence of religious tradition. However, if we would express Christ in the meeting, we need to experience Him in our daily life. Some have very little of Christ with which to function and to minister because they have little experience of Him. Hence, they are "pew members." In the meetings of the recovered

church life, the saints who live by Christ need to express Christ in a living way. Only the Spirit knows the way to do this.

In some of the coming messages we shall consider the matter of speaking Christ to one another. Ephesians 5:18 and 19 exhort us to be filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We need to stand up to declare what Christ is to us and how we have experienced Him. In this way we shall speak Christ to one another, and Christ will be richly expressed in the meetings. Then in a very practical way the church will be filled unto all the fullness of God, with the overflow of all that God is. The church life will be not the expression of gifts, knowledge, or power, but the expression of the living Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-TWO

THE CHURCH--THE OVERFLOW OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:23; 3:19b; 4:13; John 1:16

We have seen that the church is the expression of Christ. In Ephesians 1 we are told that the church is the Body and that this Body is the fullness of the One who fills all in all. The church is the Body of Christ, and this Body is the fullness of the Person who fills all in all.

THE FULLNESS OF THE VAST CHRIST

The words "all in all" in 1:23 refer to the universe. Christ fills the entire universe. This is proved by 4:10 which says, "He Who descended is the same Who also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things." For Christ to fill all things is for Him to fill the universe. Christ is so universally vast that He fills all things. This vast Christ needs a Body to be His fullness.

The fullness of Christ is the overflow of Christ. Christ is so unsearchably rich that He has an overflow, a fullness, a surplus. As His Body, the church is Christ's fullness, His surplus. This is a matter of great significance.

The Lord's recovery is not concerned mainly with the recovery of outward things. In God's economy outward things have relatively little value. God's economy is Christ with the church. The church comes into existence as we inwardly experience the riches of Christ and thus become His fullness.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND A SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

There is a big difference between the church and a social organization. The church may seem to be a social

group composed of different kinds of people. Worldly people view the church in such a way, as just another social organization. We need to see the difference between the church and a social club. Social clubs may have high requirements for their members. They may insist on superior standards of dress, behavior, and character. Outwardly, the members of such clubs may be better than the saints in the churches. However, no matter how good a club may be, it is merely a human organization. In contrast to the church, it has nothing of Christ. But the church is the overflow, the surplus, of Christ.

The members of a club may be regulated outwardly according to certain requirements. Those who fulfill these requirements may have a very good appearance in the eyes of man. In certain respects, they may seem better than those in the churches. However, in the eyes of God the best of human standards and behavior is nothing but dung. In the church we do not need outward improvement or correction. On the contrary, we need Christ to swallow up all our shortcomings with Himself. If the members of the church are short in certain respects, this indicates that they need more of Christ. We must resist the temptation to change the church into a social club with standards and regulations. This has nothing to do with the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is constituted solely of Christ wrought into the saints.

THE FOCAL POINT OF GOD'S ECONOMY

I am fully aware that in Ephesians, a book concerned with the church, Paul speaks about such things as wives submitting to their husbands, husbands loving their wives, children obeying their parents, and slaves obeying their masters. These things, however, are not the focal point of God's eternal economy. God's economy is not to have a good family life; it is to have a Body for Christ. If we are in the Body of Christ in a proper and practical way, we shall no doubt have a proper family life. However, we may have an outstanding family life and yet have nothing to do with

the Body of Christ. I have known unbelievers whose family life was better than that of many Christians. Although the family life of these unbelievers was good, it had nothing to do with Christ or with God's economy. It is crucial for us to see that the focal point of God's economy is not a standard of character or behavior; it is Christ with the church.

In his subtlety, Satan, the enemy of God, has used such things as Bible knowledge, spiritual gifts, and evangelism to keep believers from seeing God's economy. During the time of the Lord Jesus on the earth and of the Apostle Paul, Satan utilized the Old Testament to veil the Jewish people. When the Lord Jesus appeared to them as the very incarnation of God, they were not able to recognize Him. On the contrary, with the Scriptures in their hands, they sentenced the Lord Jesus to death. According to their concept, they were serving God in so doing.

Christians today should not regard themselves as superior to those Jewish religionists. It is entirely possible for Christians today to be deceived just as the Jews were. The enemy still uses the knowledge of the Bible to keep people from seeing Christ. Furthermore, he will use almost anything as a substitute for Christ and to keep people from seeing the revelation of God's economy concerning Christ and the church.

TRANSFORMED TO BECOME CHRIST'S OVERFLOW

We have pointed out that the church is the overflow of Christ. In order to be in reality the overflow of Christ, we need to be transformed. Second Corinthians 3:18 says that as we behold and reflect the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face, we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. Yes, the saints still have their shortcomings and failures, but they are nonetheless undergoing the process of transformation. The more we are transformed, the more we become the overflow of Christ.

It is easy to adjust people outwardly by asking them to conform to certain regulations. But it takes time for the divine life to grow within us. For example, in a very short

period of time you can make an artificial flower. But to produce a real flower, a flower that has life and fragrance, may take several months. If we regulate others outwardly, we shall only delay the process of the growth in life. Therefore, we should be patient and allow the Lord to grow in the saints. Eventually, the growth in life will produce the desired change. This is the difference between the church and a social club.

As the Body of Christ, the church is a living organism constituted of the divine life. The divine life came into us at the time of regeneration, and now it is working within us to saturate every part of our being and to swallow up all our negative element. By this process the church becomes the Body in a practical way.

EXPERIENCING CHRIST FOR THE CHURCH LIFE

In the recovery the Lord is not working mainly to recover teachings, gifts, or practices. On the contrary, the recovery is a matter of experiencing Christ as life for the church life. If some feel that the goal of the Lord's recovery is the recovery of certain teachings and gifts, I would say that time will prove that this is a false expectation. More than ten years ago certain ones claimed that the Lord desires to recover the vast field of Pentecostal gifts. Those who made this claim were living in a dream, and they are no longer in the Lord's recovery. At the time I told them that they were dreaming and that if they would not wake up from their dream, they would suffer loss. They would be deceived by their dream. Those who did not give up that dream have in fact suffered loss spiritually. Today many of them are apart from the Lord's presence and grace.

The indwelling Christ can keep us safely in the way of the Lord. It is crucial that we all know the indwelling Christ and allow Him to make His home in our hearts. We should not desire to do a great work. Instead, we should be satisfied to allow Christ to live in us and for Him to use us to impart His element into others. If this is our situation, it

is not we who work for the Lord, but Christ who does the work from within us. If we experience Christ in this way, then in reality and in practicality the church will be the Body of Christ. The church as the Body comes out of Christ Himself, for it is His overflow, His surplus.

Some years ago I spent ten hours talking to a certain brother. He did not believe that the Lord's work could be accomplished by the indwelling Christ. Rather, his full confidence was in the recovery of Pentecostal gifts. I told this brother that the Lord does not intend to have a great movement. On the contrary, His move will be on a relatively small scale, perhaps, as it often is, in a hidden way. The Lord will not do anything that is out of proportion to His Body.

NO FOREIGN ELEMENT IN THE BODY

Furthermore, anything that is of the Body of Christ must be of the life of Christ. For example, nothing artificial can truly be part of our physical bodies. Not even the best dentures are part of our bodies because they do not have the life of our bodies. Only what is produced by the life of our bodies can be part of our bodies. If you lose an arm, it may be replaced by an artificial limb, but that limb will not be a genuine part of your body. In the same principle, the Body of Christ must be of the life of Christ. There can be no foreign element in the Body. However, in today's Christianity there are many foreign elements or artificial things. None of these has anything to do with Christ as life. However, as we have pointed out, the church as the Body of Christ is the very fullness of Christ.

THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

In 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." According to this verse, we need to arrive at three things: at the oneness of the faith and of the

full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Christ, which is the Body, has a stature, for Paul speaks of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The stature of the fullness of Christ is equal to the stature of the Body of Christ. Chapter one reveals that the Body of Christ is the fullness of Christ, and chapter four, that the fullness of Christ has a stature. Therefore, the stature of the fullness of Christ is the stature of the Body of Christ.

In 4:13 Paul speaks not only of the stature of the fullness of Christ, but of the measure of that stature. As the Body of Christ, the church has stature. Because this stature grows, 4:13 speaks of its measure. This measure is the full-grown man.

In many believers the stature of the fullness of Christ has not grown very much. For this reason, with them there is very little measure. But as Christ grows within them, they will gradually increase unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. We need to press on until we all arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Presently we are on the way toward a full-grown man, toward the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The day is coming when we shall all arrive at a full-grown man. Until then, we are still in the process. Because we are in the process, Paul speaks of the time when we shall "be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching" (4:14).

As the Body of Christ, the church is the fullness that is daily growing within us. It is vital for us all to see that the church is an organism that comes out of Christ. Anything that is not of Christ cannot be part of the church. No matter how disciplined, regulated, or improved we may be, none of this is of the church if it does not issue out of Christ. Self-regulation, self-discipline, and self-improvement may produce an excellent society, but it cannot produce the church. As far as the Body of Christ is concerned, nothing that we have in ourselves has any

significance. In relation to the Body, natural goodness is of no advantage. Whether we are good or evil, we still need Christ. Those who are evil surely need Christ. But those who are very good need Christ just as much. No matter what kind of disposition we may have, our natural being needs to be swallowed up and even consumed by the indwelling Christ. Then in reality we shall be the Body of Christ, His fullness.

RECEIVING OF HIS FULLNESS

John 1:16 says, "For of His fullness we all received, and grace upon grace." What is important is not that we merely learn about Christ or that we imitate Christ, but that we receive of His fullness. Christ is so rich that He has an overflow called the fullness. Of this fullness we may all receive grace upon grace. If we daily receive of His fullness, we shall eventually become His fullness, for we shall be constituted according to what we have received. This means that the more we receive of His fullness, the more we shall be constituted of His fullness and become His fullness. If we see this, we shall say, "Lord, save me from anything that is not Your fullness. Lord, I am willing to pay any price to enjoy You and to partake of Your fullness." May the Lord be merciful to us that we may daily experience Him and enjoy Him and thereby become the church that is His very fullness, His overflow.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-THREE

EXPERIENCING THE RICHES OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Eph. 3:8b, 17a; 2 Cor. 2:10; 10:1; 11:10; 8:9; 12:9; 13:14

Ephesians 3:8 speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ, and 3:17, of Christ making His home in our hearts. This indicates that the very Christ who is making His home in us is the Christ with the unsearchable riches. The unsearchable riches of Christ are for our enjoyment. Day by day and even hour by hour we need to enjoy these marvelous, wonderful, immeasurable, unlimited, and all-inclusive riches.

It is difficult to list all the items of the riches of Christ. If these items were few in number, it would be easy for us to point them out. But Christ's riches are beyond our ability to speak of them or to enumerate them. In order to get into the riches of Christ in Ephesians, it will be helpful to consider Paul's experience of these riches as revealed in the book of 2 Corinthians.

GIFTS, GRACE, AND TRANSFORMATION

The book of 2 Corinthians deals with grace, in contrast to 1 Corinthians, which deals with gifts. Paul concludes 2 Corinthians with the words, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (13:14, Gk.). Because 2 Corinthians is a book of grace, in the concluding verse Paul mentions grace first. Grace is deeper and more subjective than gifts. Gifts are outward, but grace is inward. Furthermore, gifts are related to what we do, but grace is related to inward enjoyment.

It is significant that it is in 2 Corinthians, not in 1 Corinthians, that Paul says that we are transformed as we

behold the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face (2 Cor. 3:18). To be gifted is one thing, but to be transformed is another. Although many Christians pay attention to gifts, not many concentrate on transformation.

Do you prefer to be gifted or to be transformed? Before you answer this question, consider the example of Balaam's donkey (Num. 22:23-33). Suddenly this donkey spoke to Balaam. How miraculous for a donkey to speak a human language! However, the donkey was not transformed into a human being. There was the gift of speaking, but there was not any transformation.

Transformation takes place slowly through the growth in life. It transpires so slowly that it may seem as if nothing is happening. For example, to a mother, her young child may look the same every day. Actually, the child is gradually growing.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7 Paul says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." The treasure in the earthen vessels does not refer to gifts. Rather, it denotes something precious that is hidden. The vessel is outward, but the treasure is inward. Through the process of transformation over a period of time, the treasure takes over the vessel and swallows it up.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

Another difference between 2 Corinthians and 1 Corinthians is that 2 Corinthians speaks a great deal about suffering, but there is no need for suffering in order to have spiritual gifts. It was not necessary for Balaam's donkey to suffer to have the ability to speak a human language. Transformation, on the contrary, requires a certain amount of suffering. For this reason, 2 Corinthians speaks not only of the grace of Christ, but also of the sufferings of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 1:5 Paul says that "the sufferings of Christ abound in us." The grace of Christ with the sufferings of Christ produces transformation. Transformation is not a matter of our gifts or abilities; it is a matter of what we are in our inward being.

In 2 Corinthians 4:5 Paul declared, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." Although Paul did not preach himself or write an autobiography, occasionally he found it necessary to disclose certain aspects of his experience of Christ. In 2 Corinthians there are a number of such disclosures by which we can see how Paul enjoyed particular aspects of the riches of Christ. Later on in this message we shall consider these particular aspects.

Certain aspects of the riches of Christ are very great. Some of these are the fact that Christ is God, the Creator, the Son of God, the Redeemer, the Savior, the Father, and the life-giving Spirit. Other major aspects are related to incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, descension, and indwelling. Furthermore, there are the aspects of Christ as life, love, power, holiness, and righteousness. All these are great items, and, to some degree at least. Christians do know them. However, Christians may have just a doctrinal knowledge of these riches of Christ without the experience of them. May the Lord have mercy on us so that we may not only know the various aspects of the riches of Christ, but also experience them and enjoy them.

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

Romans 10:12 gives us a clue as to how we may enjoy the unsearchable riches of Christ. In this verse Paul says, "The same Lord of all is rich to all who call upon Him." The riches of Christ should not just be studied--they should be enjoyed. We do not enjoy them by meditating upon them. To meditate is to exercise the mind. In the New Testament we are not told to meditate. (The use of the word meditate by the King James Version in 1 Timothy 4:15 is not an accurate translation; the Greek word is better rendered "attend to.") If we desire to experience the riches of Christ, we should call on the name of the Lord Jesus. Many of us can testify that such calling is much sweeter and more enjoyable than meditating. The more we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, the more we taste His sweetness.

Some criticize our practice of calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. According to them, it is merely a psychological phenomenon with no spiritual value. If calling on the Lord's name simply produces a temporary psychological experience, then the same experience could be achieved by calling on the name of some other person. However, such is not the case. When we call on the dear name of the Lord Jesus, we enjoy His reality and taste His sweetness. Remember, the Lord's name is backed up by His Person. Thus, when we call on the name, we contact the Person, the reality of whom is the Spirit. For this reason, when we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we receive the Spirit.

The name of the Lord Jesus is often associated with the Spirit in the Bible. For example, 1 Corinthians 6:11 says, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Jesus is the name, and the Spirit is the Person. Whenever we call on the name of Jesus, we experience the Person of the Spirit. Because this Person is real, living, near, and available, we experience Him and enjoy Him when we call on Him. The Lord Jesus is rich to all who call upon Him. What a wonderful way to enjoy the unsearchable riches of Christ!

LIVING IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST

The book of 2 Corinthians reveals the kind of life lived by the Apostle Paul. Paul lived by taking Christ as his life and person. He was constantly enjoying Christ and experiencing Him. In 2 Corinthians 2:10 he says that he forgave "in the person of Christ." Paul did not forgive in himself, that is, in his own person. When he forgave something, he forgave it in the person of Christ. This reveals that Paul lived in the person of Christ.

Everything we do should be done in the person of Christ. This means that when a brother loves his wife, he should love her in the person of Christ. Moreover, when a sister goes shopping, she should shop in the person of Christ. As long as we do a particular thing in the person of Christ, there is no problem.

It is rather difficult to render accurately the Greek word for person in 2 Corinthians 2:10. It may be rendered face or presence. The Greek signifies the area of the face around the eyes. This part of a person's face is the index of his feeling and inward being. By looking at this part of a person's face, we know how he feels about a certain thing. When Paul said that he forgave in the person of Christ, he was saying that he forgave in the index of the Lord's inward being.

We may experience something of this with our husband or wife. For example, someone may invite me to his home for dinner. By looking at my wife's eyes, I can tell by the expression through the index of her eyes whether or not she agrees with accepting this invitation. At other times, my wife may check the expression that I convey through my eyes. This is what the Apostle Paul was doing in 2 Corinthians 2:10 as he forgave in the index of the Lord's inner being. He did not care for himself or for his own feeling. He cared only for the Lord's thought and feeling as made known through the index of His eyes. What a living the Apostle Paul had! He was a person always living in the presence of the Lord, always looking at the index of His eyes. Hence, whatever he did was the Lord's doing, and whatever he said was the Lord's speaking. Paul was a person who lived by taking Christ as his person. Paul's old person had been nullified. It was no longer he who lived--Christ was the person living in him. This was the reason Paul said he forgave in the person of Christ.

Many Christians talk about spiritual gifts, but they know nothing about living in the person of Christ. How different are these Christians from the Apostle Paul! In 2 Corinthians 2:10 Paul seemed to be saying, "I do not forgive according to my personal feeling or preference. I forgive according to the index of Christ's inner being. I know that the Lord wants me to forgive. By looking at the index of His eyes I know what is in His heart. Therefore, I forgive in the person of Christ."

This is the kind of life that builds up the Body of Christ. We may do some great work, but we may not accomplish anything as far as the building up of the Body

is concerned. Only those who live in the person of Christ can build up the Body. Such a living is not a matter of power or behavior. It is altogether a matter of life, of living in the person of Christ. This is one way in which Paul experienced the riches of Christ.

THE MEEKNESS AND GENTLENESS OF CHRIST

In 2 Corinthians 10:1 Paul says, "Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Paul did not say that he imitated the meekness and gentleness of Christ. To imitate Christ is one thing, but to live in Christ's meekness and gentleness is another. Paul enjoyed these aspects of Christ's unsearchable riches and they also should be our enjoyment today. As we contact others, we should not try to imitate Christ. Rather, we should contact them in the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

In order to enjoy the meekness and gentleness of Christ, we need to be in the Spirit, for all the riches of Christ are in the all-inclusive Spirit. When we turn to our spirit, contact Christ as the all-inclusive Spirit, and take Him as our person, His meekness and gentleness become our food, nourishment, strength, and satisfaction. There is no need for us to desperately attempt to restrain ourselves or to manufacture meekness or gentleness. The meekness and gentleness of Christ are our spontaneous enjoyment. We can actually feed on these aspects of Christ's riches. When we take Him as our person, we spontaneously enjoy His meekness and gentleness. Instead of self-effort, we simply enjoy whatever Christ is. This was the living of the Apostle Paul.

THE TRUTH OF CHRIST

In 2 Corinthians 11:10 Paul says, "The truth of Christ is in me." Within Paul there was something true and real of Christ. Because he enjoyed the truth of Christ, His reality, he knew that what he was relating to the Corinthians was of the truth of Christ. This is a further indication that Paul lived not by the self, but by taking Christ as his person.

Paul did not boast that he had any truth of himself. On the contrary, he boasted of the truth of Christ. We should learn from this never to boast of ourselves. We need to forget what we are and not speak of ourselves. Instead, we need to live according to Christ and behave by the truth of Christ. As we contact others in the meekness and gentleness of Christ, we need to speak as the truth of Christ is in us.

THE GRACE OF CHRIST

In 2 Corinthians a number of verses speak of the grace of Christ. For example, 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." By grace, Christ lowered Himself and left His position for our sake. He gave up His riches so that we may become rich. We can do such a thing only through the grace of Christ. If we take His grace as our enjoyment, spontaneously we shall do the same thing Christ did. Actually, we shall not he the ones who do this, but it will be Christ living in us.

In chapter twelve Paul asked the Lord three times that the "thorn in the flesh" might depart from him (vv. 7-8). However, the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9). Therefore, Paul could say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather boast in my weaknesses so that the power of Christ might overshadow me" (v. 9, Gk.). The Lord told Paul not to care about the thorn or about his sufferings, but to enjoy His sufficient grace. Paul realized in his experience that Christ's strength was made perfect in his weakness.

Today many complain of their weakness or lack of ability. However, they need to see that in their weakness Christ's strength is made perfect. Their weakness gives them an opportunity to enjoy the strength of Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 12:10 Paul went on to say, "Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (Gk.). Paul was

strong because Christ's strength was made perfect in his weakness.

PAUL'S BLESSING

We have pointed out that the book of 2 Corinthians ends with a blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (13:14, Gk.). Today many pastors pronounce these words as a formal benediction. Paul here was not giving such a benediction. Rather, he was telling the saints that they could partake of the riches of Christ and enjoy them.

The grace of Christ issues out of the love of God. This means that the love of God is the source of the grace of Christ, and that the grace of Christ is the expression of the love of God. Furthermore, this grace is in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the grace of Christ with the love of God becomes our enjoyment. This enjoyment is just what we need today.

If we all experience and enjoy the riches of Christ, we shall have much to speak concerning Christ whenever we come together. As we fellowship with others in the Lord, we shall speak of what Christ is to us. We shall not speak about doctrine or gifts, but about the genuine experience of Christ and the real enjoyment of the riches of Christ. The more the riches of Christ are dispensed into us, the more we shall be sanctified and metabolically transformed. As a new element discharges the old element, we shall be nourished, cherished, and, eventually. glorified. The goal of the Lord in His recovery is to bring His people into this experience. After the time of Paul, the enjoyment of the unsearchable riches of Christ was lost to a large extent. Praise the Lord that this experience is being recovered!

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-FOUR

OVERFLOWING TO SPEAK

Scripture Reading: Eph. 5:18b-19; 1 Cor. 14:1, 5, 23-24, 31-32

In 5:18 Paul charges us to "be filled in spirit." As members of the Body of Christ, we need to be filled in our spirit unto all the fullness of God. If we are filled in spirit, that with which we are filled will overflow from within us.

Verse 19 refers to this overflow: "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with your heart to the Lord." We do not overflow by meditating or by sitting silently in the meetings of the church. On the contrary, we overflow by speaking to one another. If we are filled in spirit unto all the fullness of God, we shall spontaneously speak to one another concerning Christ. Speaking, therefore, is the way to overflow.

A SPEAKING GOD AND A SPEAKING PEOPLE

Christians must be a speaking people. We should not be dumb, or silent, for the God we worship is the speaking God. Idols, on the contrary, do not speak; they are dumb. In 1 Corinthians 12:2 Paul mentions "dumb idols." Because idols cannot speak, those who worship idols are also dumb. A dumb god needs dumb worshippers. If you visit a country where there is the practice of idol worship, you can see that idol worshippers worship their gods in a dumb way. But our God is not dumb; He is the speaking God. Therefore, those who worship Him must also speak. However, many who attend the so-called services in Christianity do not speak. Instead, they worship the Lord in a dumb way. What is our situation in the meetings of the church? Are

we silent, or are we bubbling over with words about the Christ we have experienced in our daily life? In the meetings we should praise the Lord and speak of what He is to us in our experience.

Many Christians realize that their religious services should not be altogether silent. Therefore, they arrange to have soloists, quartets, and choirs to provide music. They also may hire outstanding preachers to speak. Nevertheless, most of the people sit silently in the pews, and, for the most part, are dumb worshippers.

The very architecture of many places of Christian worship is conducive to silence. For example, many spontaneously become quiet when they enter Catholic cathedrals. The steep roof, the dimly-lighted atmosphere, and the stained glass windows all encourage dumbness. Some worshippers may burn candles before images or pray in front of statues. How devilish! In principle, this is the same as the idol worship practiced in pagan countries. Much of Christianity has been permeated by the concept of silent worship. In effect, many who attend the Christian services are dumb worshippers.

Since our God is a speaking God, we as His worshippers must also speak. At times, we should even make a joyful noise to the Lord, as we are charged to do in Psalm 100:1. In a number of other verses we are told to do the same thing (Psa. 66:1; 81:1; 95:2; 98:4, 6). Often when we come together we should make joyful noise to the Lord.

As we speak to one another of our experiences of Christ, we should not wait for some kind of formal beginning of the meetings. To do this is to remain under the influence of traditional Christianity. If we have been set free from tradition, we shall speak spontaneously as we come together in the meetings of the church. Some may even begin to speak on the way to the meeting. The meetings need to be filled with speaking concerning the riches of Christ.

Ephesians 5:19 also refers to "singing and psalming" to the Lord. Such singing and psalming are not only the overflow of being filled in spirit, but also the way to be

filled in spirit. Whenever we are filled in our spirit unto all the fullness of God, the first thing we shall do is speak. Then we shall sing and psalm with our heart to the Lord.

Many pride themselves on being scriptural. I wonder, however, if they are scriptural according to 5:19. This verse, found in a book that deals with the church, tells us that after we have been filled in our spirit unto all the fullness of God, we need to speak. Many who regard themselves as scriptural are scriptural only in a traditional way. They are not scriptural according to Paul's word in verse 19.

THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF PROPHECY

In 1 Corinthians 14:1 Paul says, "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy" (Gk.). Most people regard prophecy merely as a foretelling of future events. According to this understanding, someone predicts the future and concludes his speaking with the words, "Thus saith the Lord." For example, in 1963 some prophesied that a great earthquake would cause Los Angeles to fall into the ocean. Prediction, however, is not the primary meaning of prophecy in the Bible, especially in the New Testament.

In the Bible to prophesy has three meanings. First, it is to speak for someone, to speak on behalf of another person. When one prophesies in this way, he speaks not for himself, but for someone else. Hence, someone may be called upon to prophesy for the Lord, that is, to speak on the Lord's behalf. Second, to prophesy means to speak forth, to declare. In the Bible a person may not only speak for God, but he may also speak forth something of God. Third, to prophesy is to foretell, to predict. Therefore, the three meanings of prophesy are to speak for, to tell forth, and to foretell. However, the meaning of foretell is not the primary meaning.

Let us use the book of Isaiah as an example. Isaiah 1:3 says, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." What kind of prophecy is this? Certainly it is not

foretelling. Rather, it is a declaration, a speaking forth something that is of the Lord. The same is true of Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." This word is a declaration, a telling forth. It is not primarily a foretelling of a future event. Of course, in the book of Isaiah there are a number of instances of such foretellings or predictions. Nevertheless, most of the book of Isaiah is either a speaking for or a telling forth. Only a relatively small portion of the book consists of foretelling. Thus, the content of the book of Isaiah illustrates the fact that the primary meaning of prophecy is not prediction, but declaration and speaking on behalf of another, especially on behalf of the Lord.

As we preach the gospel, we may prophesy in this way. We may say to a group of unbelievers, "Friends, you must believe in the Lord Jesus. Otherwise, you will be eternally lost." To speak in this manner is to prophesy in the sense of uttering something of the Lord and on behalf of the Lord. To preach the gospel, therefore, is to declare something of the Lord and to speak on behalf of the Lord. Such preaching may contain an element of prediction--for example, the prediction of eternal loss for those who refuse to believe in Christ--but such prediction is not the main element. In a general way, we can say that whenever we speak regarding the Lord or for the Lord, we are prophesying. How different this is from the common and traditional understanding of prophecy!

If we intend to be scriptural in a comprehensive way, we need to accept the biblical understanding of prophecy. To prophesy is not to gossip or to speak for ourselves. Furthermore, it is not to speak forth something of ourselves. On the contrary, to prophesy is to speak for the Lord and to speak forth something of the Lord. As we have pointed out, such speaking may have the aspect of prediction. One who speaks for the Lord may say, "The

Lord Jesus is faithful, available, near, and dear. Whenever we call on Him, He immediately comes, and we have the deep sense of His sweetness. But if we do not practice calling on the name of the Lord, our daily living will be pitiful." To speak in this way is to prophesy.

In 1 Corinthians 14:31 Paul says, "For ye can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted" (Gk.). If prophecy were mainly a matter of predicting the future, how would it be possible for all the saints to prophesy? But we all can speak for the Lord and utter something of the Lord. Even the new ones and the young ones can prophesy like this.

THE WAY TO BE SPIRITUAL

The way to be spiritual is to speak for the Lord and concerning the Lord. The more we speak, the more we shall be filled in our spirit. However, if we remain silent, we shall find that we cannot be filled in spirit. In our daily living we need to be those who speak. We can speak concerning the Lord even when we are alone. If you speak in this way day by day, you will see that it produces in you a genuine spirituality and that it causes you to be filled in your spirit. When we have no other person to whom to speak, we can speak to our pets or even to inanimate objects. For example, you may say to a flower, "Little flower, you are very pretty. But your beauty is vanity. The real beauty is the Lord Jesus Christ." How important it is that we all learn to speak!

We especially need to speak in the meetings of the church. In 1 Corinthians 14:23 and 24 Paul says that if we all prophesy when the whole church comes together into one place, the unlearned one will be convinced of all and judged of all. In verse 25 he goes on to say, "And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is among you of a truth" (Gk.). Many believers regard 1 Corinthians 14 as a chapter that deals with speaking in

tongues. However, in this chapter more attention is given to prophesying than to tongues-speaking. In verse 3 Paul says that prophesying is for the building up, exhortation, and comfort of the saints. Furthermore, the one who prophesies builds up the church (v. 4).

The more we speak for the Lord, the more our inward being is filled with Him. Often the reason we are offended by others is that our soul is empty. We are not occupied in a proper way. But when we are filled through speaking of the Lord, our being will be properly occupied, and there will be no room for anything negative to come in to usurp us.

OUR SPIRIT SUBJECT TO US

Concerning this matter of speaking for the Lord, some believe that they should wait until the Spirit comes upon them. This was the practice in the Old Testament. But it is not the way revealed in the New Testament. In the Old Testament the Spirit of God came upon people, but the Spirit was not dwelling in them. In the New Testament age, however, as believers in Christ, we have the Spirit within us. Hence, there is no need to wait for the Spirit to come upon us. In 1 Corinthians 14:32 Paul says, "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." Since our spirit is subject to us, there is no need for us to wait for inspiration. Why should we wait for the Spirit to come upon us when we already have the Spirit in our spirit? We should take the initiative to exercise our spirit, giving our spirit the command to act. Then we should speak, not according to our thought, but according to the sense deep within. Every believer in Christ can speak in this way. This is the reason Paul tells us that we all can prophesy.

BUBBLING OVER WITH THE LORD

In the meetings of the church we all need to speak for the Lord and regarding the Lord. Everyone should be bubbling over with the Lord. If this is the experience of

every one of us, there will be no need for so much singing or preaching in the meetings. In many Christian meetings singing and preaching are used to fill up time. Without singing and preaching, there would be large gaps in those meetings. The situation among us in the Lord's recovery must be altogether different. We must be those who experience Christ, who live by Him, and who are filled in our spirit with Him. If we are filled with Christ in our spirit, we shall overflow by speaking of Christ and for Christ. Whenever we come to the meetings, we shall speak to one another of our experience and enjoyment of Christ. Of course, we shall still sing, but not because we have nothing else to do. We shall not use songs and hymns to fill the gaps caused by the shortage of speaking regarding Christ.

We need to labor on Christ day by day just as the children of Israel labored on the good land. Through their labor, they gained produce to offer to the Lord at the time of the feasts. When they came into the Lord's presence, they had something in their hands to present to Him. The principle is the same with respect to experiencing Christ. Because many Christians do not labor on Christ, they do not experience Him in their daily living. Thus, when they come to meetings, they have nothing of Christ to present to God or to share with the saints. They have nothing to speak on behalf of the Lord.

May the Lord be merciful to us in the church life that we may contact Him day by day and live according to the index of His inner being. If we live by Christ, we shall be filled in our spirit unto all the fullness of God. Then spontaneously we shall overflow by speaking for the Lord. Through this kind of speaking we shall offer Christ to God and share Him with one another. Meetings that are filled with this speaking of Christ will be the expression of the living Christ. In principle, this is the proper way to have the church meetings.

I believe that the time is coming when the meetings of the local churches will be carried out in this way. However, we can do this only through experiencing Christ in our

daily living. Only when we experience Christ do we have something to speak for Christ.

TESTIMONIES OF CHRIST

Many of the testimonies given by Christians concern miracles or material blessings. Some may testify about a good job or about a physical healing. But this is not the kind of testimony we need in the church meetings. We need testimonies of the experience of Christ. For example, we need to hear testimonies about how the saints have experienced Christ in a particular way, perhaps as their tenderness, meekness, or gentleness. Furthermore, we need testimonies about living and acting according to the index of the Lord's inward being. We must confess that as far as such testimonies are concerned, there is still a great shortage among us. May the Lord be merciful to us that we in the local churches will be rich in the experience of Christ. Day by day we need to experience Christ as our life, our person, and our everything. Then we shall be filled with Him and spontaneously speak of Him. I encourage all the saints to practice speaking for Christ and of Christ. The way to take the Lord into us is to speak of Him. The more we speak, the more we shall be filled with Him; and the more we are filled with Him, the more we shall speak of Him. May we all be filled with Christ and be overflowing with the riches of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-FIVE

ORDINANCES AND THE CHURCH LIFE

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:11-18; Gal. 6:15

The book of Ephesians reveals that God's economy is to work Christ into His chosen people to produce the church. This book also exposes certain negative things that damage the church life. According to our natural concept, we may expect Ephesians to emphasize such negative things as sin and worldliness. Although these are dealt with, they are not the main factors revealed in Ephesians as causes of damage to the church life.

We all easily recognize that sin is damaging. Without even reading the Bible, we have the knowledge that sin is a cause of corruption. Therefore, when we read about sin in the Scriptures, we readily understand, for the concept of sin is already in our natural mentality. However, it is contrary to our natural concept to say that ordinances are more damaging to the church life than sin is. The verses which speak of ordinances may make little impression on us because they do not correspond to anything already in our natural concept.

FOUR CATEGORIES OF NEGATIVE THINGS

What are the basic factors that damage the church life according to the revelation in the book of Ephesians? We have indicated that sin and worldliness, although certainly causes of damage, are not the basic negative factors in this book. In Ephesians there are four categories of negative things that damage the church life. The first of these is the ordinances. In 2:14 and 15 Paul says that Christ "has broken down the middle wall of partition, the enmity, having abolished in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances." The law of commandments

contained in ordinances is a cause of enmity. With the ordinances there are regulations, and these regulations are the law of commandments. This gives rise to enmity. Today there is enmity even among good, spiritual Christians, enmity caused by ordinances regarding certain practices. For instance, there may be enmity between those who practice baptism by immersion and those who practice baptism by sprinkling. Related to these practices there are ordinances with their law of commandments. These ordinances are the first basic category of negative things that damage the church life.

The second category is doctrine. In 4:14 Paul says that we should "be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching." The word teaching here refers to doctrine. Although Christians may regard doctrine as a positive thing, this verse clearly indicates that it can be used to carry us away from Christ. Any doctrine, even a scriptural one, that distracts the believers from Christ is a wind of teaching that carries them away from God's economy. Doctrine, therefore, can be used to destroy the Body life. If we intend to have the proper church life, we must recognize the damage doctrine has caused to the Body of Christ.

In chapter four Paul goes on to speak of the old man (v. 22), the third category of negative things that damage the church. The old man is of Adam, created by God, but fallen through sin. Because the old man causes so much damage to the church life, we must put off the old man in order to have the proper practice of the Body life.

In 5:27 we see the fourth negative category: the spots and wrinkles. Spots are related to the natural life, and the wrinkles are related to oldness. Both spots and wrinkles are capable of causing serious damage to the church life in a very subjective way. The glorious church that Christ will present to Himself will not have spot or wrinkle or any such things, but will be holy and without blemish.

Perhaps you have read the book of Ephesians a number of times without realizing that these four categories of things can cause great damage to the church life. You may

have read this book without paying attention to the matters of ordinances, doctrines, the old man, and spots and wrinkles. I myself read Ephesians for years before I began to see the seriousness of these four things with respect to the church life. In this message we shall deal in particular with the ordinances.

BABEL, ORDINANCES, AND DIVISION

The primary source of the divisions among Christians throughout the centuries has been ordinances. We may trace these ordinances all the way back to the time of Babel. God's intention in His creation of man was for mankind to be one. This was the reason that He created just one man, not a multitude of men. God's desire was to have one corporate man. However, as a result of Babel, mankind was divided into nations, into a number of different peoples. Between these nations, these peoples, there are many differences. Not only are there differences in a general way between the Jews and the Gentiles, but there are also differences among the various nationalities, for example, between the Chinese and the Japanese, and between the Germans and the French. These differences have created divisions, and divisions are related to ordinances.

From the time of Babel, mankind has been divided by ordinances concerning the ways of living and worship. The source of this dividing work is the subtlety of the enemy, Satan. Through ordinances Satan has spoiled the oneness of the humanity created by God for the fulfillment of His purpose. Humanly speaking, it is not possible for the oneness of divided mankind to be restored. Although there is such an international organization as the United Nations, it is a fact that the nations are far from united. On the contrary, they are divided by ordinances.

One of the main elements of ordinances is language. As we all know, the division of the peoples at Babel was related to differences of language. Hence, a primary element of ordinances is language. If we can overcome the difficulty presented by language, a great part of our problem with ordinances will be solved.

On the day of Pentecost God Himself did something very significant concerning language. Peoples of different languages were saved and brought into oneness. On that day the divisions caused by language were overcome, and the church as the one new man came into existence. For the church to be the new man means that the church is a new mankind, a new humanity, a new human race. The old humanity God had created for Himself had become divided by ordinances. But on the day of Pentecost the church came into being as the new man, the new humanity.

THE MAIN CAUSE OF DIVISION

However, throughout the centuries ordinances have crept in to divide Christians. Especially from the time of the Reformation Christians have been divided by ordinances concerning practices. Some Christians have made baptism by immersion an ordinance. With this ordinance as their basis, they have formed the Baptist denomination. Others have done the same thing with respect to their belief about presbytery or eldership. With an ordinance related to eldership as their basis, they have formed the Presbyterian denomination. This kind of thing has occurred again and again. The main reason Christians are divided is the ordinances concerning different religious practices.

It is possible to have an ordinance about any practice. For example, we may have an ordinance about pray-reading. Although we find pray-reading helpful, we should not make an ordinance concerning it or insist that others practice it. Either to impose pray-reading on others or to oppose the practice of pray-reading is wrong. No matter how much life supply you receive through pray-reading, do not make an ordinance about pray-reading. Furthermore, do not allow your local church to become a pray-reading church. In other words, do not insist that all who attend the meetings practice pray-reading. To insist on pray-reading in this way is to be divisive.

It is the tendency of Christians to create ordinances

related to those practices which they personally find helpful. For this reason, there are ordinances about practices such as foot-washing and about speaking in tongues. Those who advocate speaking in tongues may have an ordinance imposing it, but those who oppose speaking in tongues may have an ordinance forbidding it. It is by ordinances like these that Christians have been divided. Therefore, it is of vital importance that we receive all genuine Christians and not become divided over ordinances.

Christian groups sometimes adopt rather unusual practices. One Christian group in Taiwan has the peculiar practice of chair-shaking. In their meetings they often kneel down, take hold of the legs of chairs, and then shake the chairs. They think that this is the best way to be freed from the natural mind and to be filled with the Spirit. Simply because we may not agree with this practice does not give us the ground to criticize those who do. Many of the Christians in this chair-shaking group are noted for their prevailing preaching of the gospel among the mountain people in Taiwan. Furthermore, a number of professional people have been attracted to this group and then have received spiritual help. I certainly do not oppose this chair-shaking, but I do oppose any ordinances that may be formed regarding it.

On the one hand, we may see the error of denominations. On the other hand, we may see the truth of the ground of oneness--the truth of one church in one city. We may also have come together to meet as the church on the proper ground. However, although we may have seen the truth of the church ground and may be for this truth in a definite and practical way, we may still have our ordinances. If we do not drop these ordinances, we shall eventually have a problem concerning the oneness.

We must exercise ourselves not to have any ordinances. We must admit, however, that it is not easy for us to drop them. Some believers have ordinances about musical instruments. I know of a certain Brethren assembly that was divided over the use of a piano. Eventually, two

groups came into existence, one favoring the piano and the other opposing it. Both groups were formed because of ordinances.

In the early days of the church life in Los Angeles, some saints had a problem over the playing of tambourines in the meetings. Some had an ordinance in favor of tambourines, whereas others had an ordinance in opposition to it. I found myself having to fight against both kinds of ordinances in the attempt to preserve the proper oneness. To one brother who strongly opposed the use of tambourines I said, "Please tell me, what is the difference in the eyes of God between playing a tambourine and playing a piano?" This brother admitted that in the eyes of God there was no difference. But he was quick to point out that as far as he was concerned, there was a difference. When I said that this difference was due to his background, he agreed, but still went on to oppose the use of tambourines. Eventually, the ordinances concerning tambourines kept a number of saints from participating in the church life. This is only one of the many illustrations we could give to prove that ordinances can ruin the church life.

For the sake of the church life, we should not have any ordinances concerning the way to meet. Simply be one with the church in your locality, regardless of their way of meeting. Be one with the church simply because it is the church. Do not oppose any particular practice, and do not impose any practice. Either to impose or to oppose is to bring in ordinances.

A NEW CREATION IN CHRIST

The Apostle Paul was very clear about ordinances, and he knew the futility of debating whether certain practices are right or wrong. During his time, there was a heated debate about circumcision. No doubt many said that Paul was not scriptural because he discontinued this practice. In Galatians 6:15 Paul uttered a very significant word related to this controversy: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gk.). Paul realized that neither

nor uncircumcision had anything to do with God's economy. The only thing that avails as far as God's economy is concerned is a new creation in Christ. To be a new creation is to have Christ wrought into our being.

Applying this principle to our situation today, we see that the crucial question is not what we do about chair-shaking, tongues-speaking, or pray-reading. It is altogether a matter of Christ wrought into us and making His home in our hearts. As in the time of Paul, the only thing that avails is a new creation in Christ Jesus.

We need to recognize the fact that God uses many different ways to bring people to Himself. Some may criticize the practice of speaking in tongues, but many believers have been helped by this. In like manner, certain saints in Taiwan are helped by shaking chairs. Who are we to condemn them for this or insist that they discontinue this practice? If certain ones desire to speak in tongues, we should not stop them. The same holds true of pray-reading or of any other practice, as long as it is not sinful. The church must be all-inclusive, receiving all genuine believers in Christ. Only in this way can we preserve the oneness.

CHRIST OUR ONLY SOURCE

To see the matter of one city, one church, is good, but it is not adequate. If we do not deal with our ordinances, we shall eventually be divided by our opinions or practices. Christ should be our only source. We should not allow anything of our background or culture to be our source. Otherwise, we shall bring in different ordinances according to our various backgrounds and cultures. Christ, not our ordinances, is the source of the church life.

If we did not love the Lord, division would not present such a serious problem, for we would probably all be distracted by worldly endeavors. But because we love the Lord, we also love the Bible and care for the truth of the Bible. As a result, disputes may arise concerning doctrine. Such disputes may lead further to division. In that case, we would repeat the history of divisive Christianity.

RETURNING TO THE GENUINE ONENESS

In the Lord's recovery we need to be brought out of every kind of division and return to the genuine oneness. However, if we see only the ground of oneness but not this matter of the ordinances, our oneness will not be secure. Rather, we may be in danger of again becoming sectarian or divisive. We may attempt to impose a particular practice on others in the church. To do this is to have ordinances. The church meetings must be general; they must not specialize in certain practices. If someone desires to speak in tongues, he should be free to do so. However, he should not try to make speaking in tongues the focal point of the meeting. Our oneness does not consist in practices; it is in Christ as everything. Insistence on certain practices damages our oneness. We should give the saints liberty without insisting on any particular practice. Then the oneness will be preserved.

As long as the saints in a locality are for the Lord and are standing on the proper ground of the church, we should be one with them. Instead of imposing any practice on them, we should minister the riches of Christ. What we need is to be strengthened into our inner man and filled with the riches of Christ unto all the fullness of God. Then instead of trying to adjust others or to correct them, we shall minister Christ to them. The Holy Spirit will always honor what is of Christ. If we supply Christ to others, the Spirit will honor this, and they will be helped. In this way we shall practice the church life in a proper way, free from the damage caused by ordinances.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-SIX

SLAYING THE ORDINANCES

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:11-22

It is easy to understand those parts of the Bible that correspond to our natural concept. For example, we readily understand those verses that tell us we are sinful, that we are sinners under God's condemnation, and that we are in need of God's forgiveness. However, in 2:11-22 there are a number of matters which do not fit in with our natural concept. For this reason, they are not adequately understood by most Christians when they read Ephesians.

NEAR IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

One matter that differs from our natural concept is found in verse 13. Here we are told that in Christ Jesus we "who once were far off have become near in the blood of Christ." To whom have we become near? We have become near both to God and to one another. However, the emphasis in this verse is that the very blood of Christ through which we have been redeemed, brought back, brings us near to one another. According to verse 12, when we were apart from Christ, we were "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world." If we consider verse 13 in the light of verse 12, we shall realize that here the emphasis is upon becoming near to one another. Because we were fallen, we were far off from Christ, from the commonwealth of Israel, and from the covenants of God's promise. But the redeeming blood of Christ has brought us back. Hence, in this blood we have become near both to God and to God's people.

Another unusual expression is in verse 17: "And coming, He preached the gospel of peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near." The subject of this verse is Christ, the One who broke down the middle wall of partition, abolished the law of the commandments in ordinances, and reconciled the Jews and the Gentiles in one Body to God through the cross (vv. 15-16). This very One came to preach the gospel of peace to us who were far off. This is the coming of Christ as the Spirit to preach the good news of the peace which He has accomplished through His cross. When Paul went to Ephesus, Christ went with him. Paul's going was Christ's going. Having come as the Spirit in Paul, Christ preached the gospel of peace.

According to this verse, Christ did not mainly preach forgiveness or salvation. Rather, He preached the gospel concerning peace among the peoples. Have you ever realized that such a peace is related to the gospel? The gospel of peace involves not only the peace between man and God, but especially the peace between one man and another. For example, there is a need for peace between Germans and French, and between Chinese and Japanese. Just as there was enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles at the time of Paul, so there is enmity among peoples today. Among the different nations there is no real peace. Instead there is enmity. Hence, there is an urgent need not only for the preaching of the gospel concerning forgiveness, justification, salvation, grace, and regeneration, but also for the preaching of the gospel of peace.

Before the foundation of the world, God chose people from various nations to be part of the one Body and the one new man. Under the sovereignty of God, these different people have been brought together in the church life. According to the natural constitution, it is not possible for Chinese to be one with Japanese or French to be one with Germans. The only way for the different peoples to be one is through receiving the gospel of peace. One day the Lord

came and preached peace as the gospel to us. We realized as a result that we are now one with saints of every nationality and race. Today all who believe in Christ have one source, and this source is Christ Himself. Our source should no longer be our culture or nationality; it must be Christ and Christ alone. Once we were divided by our different sources, but now we are one in Christ as the unique source.

It is easy to talk about this matter, but it is difficult to put it into practice. On the cross Christ abolished all the ordinances, and then He came to us preaching the gospel of peace. However, after we were saved and brought into Christ as the one source, the ordinances returned.

BROUGHT BACK

In verses 11 and 12 Paul tells us to remember our situation before we were saved. He reminds us that we were Gentiles in the flesh, the ones "called uncircumcision by those who are called circumcision in the flesh made by hand." He also reminds us that we were apart from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise. We were without hope and without God in the world. Verse 13 opens with the words, "But now in Christ Jesus." These words denote a change of source. Formerly we were outside of Christ; now we are in Christ and with Christ. In Christ Jesus we who once were far off have become near in the blood of Christ.

Why does Paul mention the blood of Christ with respect to our being made near to one another? This reminds us that before we became near, we were among the fallen people. We needed to be redeemed, to be brought back by the precious blood of Christ. It was because of the fall that the human race was divided and scattered. Because we were fallen, we needed to be redeemed, to be brought back to God. Redemption has been accomplished through the blood of Christ. In this verse the blood signifies redemption. As the redeemed ones, we are now the brought-back ones. When we were fallen, we were divided

and scattered. But having been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, we have spontaneously become near not only to God but also to one another.

OUR PEACE

In verse 14 Paul goes on to say, "For He Himself is our peace." The word our refers to the different peoples, to the Jewish and Gentile believers. The peace spoken of here is not that between God and man, but that between one man and another. Having accomplished full redemption for us, Christ Himself is our peace, our harmony. After God called a chosen race out of fallen mankind, there was a separation between Israel and the nations. Through Christ's redemption, this separation has been removed. Therefore, in the redeeming Christ we all are one. For this reason Paul says that Christ "has made both one." The word both denotes the Jewish and Gentile believers.

CREATING ONE NEW MAN

In the remainder of verse 14 and in verse 15 Paul declares that Christ has broken down the middle wall of partition, the enmity, "having 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." When Christ was crucified, all the ordinances were nailed to the cross. He broke down the middle wall of partition by abolishing the law of the commandments in ordinances. His goal in doing so was to create the Jews and the Gentiles "in Himself into one new man." By Christ's abolishing the ordinances and creating the Jewish and Gentile believers into one new man, peace was made between all believers. Once again we see that the peace in this portion of the Word is the peace among those who believe in Christ.

In verse 16 Paul speaks of the Jews and the Gentiles reconciled to God in one Body through the cross. Then in verse 17 he tells us that Christ preached the gospel of peace to those who were far off, that is, to the Gentiles, and to those who were near, that is, to the Jews. The result is

that "through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father" (v. 18). All the concepts contained in these verses are not to be found in our natural understanding. For this reason, we need to be enlightened by the Lord to apprehend them.

FELLOW-CITIZENS AND MEMBERS

In verse 19 Paul continues, "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow-citizens of the saints and members of the household of God." The phrase "fellow-citizens of the saints" indicates the kingdom of God, and the phrase "members of the household of God" indicates the house, the family, of God. On the one hand, we are citizens of the kingdom; on the other hand, we are members of the household. The household is a matter of life and enjoyment, whereas the kingdom is a matter of right and responsibility.

ALL DIFFERENCES REMOVED BY THE CROSS

The point we are burdened to emphasize in this message is that on the cross Christ has slain all the ordinances. These ordinances were related to the differences between the peoples. Many Christians know that on the cross Christ dealt with sin, the flesh, the self, the old man, the world, and the Devil. But not many also realize that on the cross Christ dealt with the ordinances. Hallelujah, all the ordinances have been slain! How we thank Him for revealing this to the churches in His recovery! The cross has dealt with sin so that we may be saved; with the world, the old man, the flesh, and the self, so that we may be sanctified; and with the Devil, Satan, that we may be victorious. Now we see that the cross has also slain the ordinances so that we may be one new man.

Although we are different as far as physical characteristics are concerned, actually there should no longer be any difference among those in the one new man. According to Colossians 3:11, in the new man "there cannot

be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." Not only is there no natural person in the new man, but there is no possibility for there to be any natural person. In the new man there is only one person--Christ who is all and in all. The differences between the peoples have been removed by the cross. What a wonderful gospel this is! The ordinances that once divided the peoples have been abolished, and now we have true peace. We are no longer strangers--we are fellow-citizens of the saints. We are no longer sojourners--we are members of the household of God. We all are citizens of God's kingdom and "folks" in God's family.

This revelation is made real to us in the mingled spirit. In the spirit we are one new man in Christ. But if we consider our situation by analyzing in the mind, the natural differences will become apparent once again. Those from a certain country or region may regard themselves as superior to others. This will give all the others a sense that they are strangers. The same thing is true whenever those from a particular local church regard their church as superior. If we would be faithful to the vision in this portion of the Word, we need to remain in the spirit where we shall experience the genuine building up with others. Paul's concluding point in this chapter is that both universally and locally the church must be built up as God's dwelling place in spirit.

MINISTERING LIFE IN ALL KINDS OF MEETINGS

Concerning the meetings, we should not hold on to any ordinances. We may enjoy releasing our spirit in a particular way, but we should not insist that others follow that way. Even if the meetings in certain localities are very different from those to which we are accustomed, we should still be able to minister life and supply the riches of Christ to others. Furthermore, we should also be willing to receive help from others. In this way we shall have true fellowship and experience a mutual supply.

We should not even allow the terminology with which we are familiar to be a hindrance to fellowship. Other

Christians may not be familiar with the word economy. In such a case, it may be better for us to speak of God's will than about God's economy. We may share with others that God's will is to work Christ into us. We may prove our point by quoting Ephesians 3:17, a verse which speaks about Christ making His home in our hearts.

We should always focus our attention on Christ and not become involved in disputes over doctrines or practices. Admittedly, it takes a great deal of learning and experience to know how to minister Christ to others in this way. Nevertheless, it is important for us to learn how to adapt to meetings that differ from our own and how to function in those meetings properly. For example, if those in a certain locality have the practice of offering long prayers or giving long testimonies, we should simply follow their way, not insist on short and quick prayers and testimonies. If, however, we insist on our way of praying or testifying, we may offend others and cause them to think unnecessarily that we are strange or peculiar.

It is important for all of us to learn to minister life in all kinds of Christian meetings. We should never despise the ways of meeting that are different from ours. On the contrary, in any meeting we should be able to dispense into the saints the riches of Christ. If in our experience we have truly slain all the ordinances, we shall be able to do this. For the sake of oneness and for the ministry of life, we shall be able to adapt to the way practiced by others in their meetings.

Do not think that simply because those in a particular locality emphasize the Pentecostal gifts, they are not a proper local church. As long as they have the standing of the church, they are the church in that locality, even if the meetings are filled with the activities often associated with Pentecostalism. If they are genuine Christians who have

seen the way of the church and have begun to practice the church life, we must recognize them as the church. Their meetings may differ from ours, but that does not mean that they are not the church in that locality. If you insist that they are not a genuine local church, they may say the same thing about the church in your locality. If you are involved in arguments about the way to meet, you may claim that your way is right, but they may insist that their practice is correct. To be entangled in such arguments is to be involved in ordinances once again. If we hold on to certain ordinances and insist on certain practices, we immediately become sectarian. Therefore, for the proper church life, we must set aside all the ordinances and concentrate on ministering Christ to the saints.

THE CHURCH LIFE WITHOUT ORDINANCES

We in the Lord's recovery have no intention to form another denomination. Rather, we need to be rescued from all divisiveness and receive all genuine Christians. In the meetings we may practice pray-reading and calling on the name of the Lord, but we should not allow either of these practices to become ordinances. Perhaps in the years to come the Lord will give us something new related to the release of the spirit. Regarding our faith in Christ and our belief in the Bible, we cannot change. But as far as the way to meet, we should always be open to receive something new and better from the Lord. In this way we shall practice the church life without ordinances.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-SEVEN

THE ORDINANCES VERSUS CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:11-22

THE CROSS DEALING WITH THE ORDINANCES

Ephesians 2 is an important chapter because it reveals that Christ died on the cross in order to create in Himself one new man. For the new man to come into being, the law of the commandments in ordinances had to be abolished. Christians realize that on the cross Christ dealt with sin, the old man, the flesh, the world, and the Devil, Satan. But very few Christians have seen that on the cross Christ also dealt with the ordinances.

It is rather easy to understand that the cross of Christ deals with sin. It is also easy to realize that the old man and the flesh are problems that are dealt with by the cross. In like manner, when we read in the New Testament that the death of Christ has also dealt with the world and with Satan, we have no problem with understanding these truths. However, we may not realize that ordinances also present a serious problem.

Ordinances are related to different ways of living and worship. They do not appear to be negative. On the contrary, they seem quite good. For example, some ordinances are related to table manners. Who can say it is not good to be properly regulated when we eat? However, different peoples have different kinds of table manners. Therefore, regulations concerning table manners can be a source of division and enmity between peoples.

Ordinances are involved in the matter of worship. The Jews worship God according to their ordinances, and the

Moslems worship according to their ordinances. This is also true with the various denominations today. Because ordinances seem helpful, it is difficult to recognize that they also need to be dealt with by the cross.

REDEMPTION IN RELATION TO GOD'S PURPOSE

The fall of mankind was the source of all ordinances. If man had not fallen, there would be no ordinances today. After God created man, He did not give him a list of ordinances. But as soon as man fell, the ordinances began to come in. Then, at Babel, the man created by God for His purpose became divided and scattered into a number of races and nations which began to fight against one another. This made it impossible for God's eternal plan to be fulfilled.

If we view the redemption of Christ from the angle of God's purpose, our concept of redemption will be broadened. Most Christians view Christ's redemption only from the perspective of their personal salvation. They are not concerned with the fulfillment of God's purpose, but are concerned only with being saved from hell and assured of spending eternity in heaven. Their concept of Christ's death on the cross is extremely narrow. It is crucial for us to see that God's eternal purpose is to dispense Himself into man and to become one with man in order to express Himself through man. But Satan has sought to frustrate the fulfillment of God's purpose by damaging humanity through dividing it into different peoples who war against one another. Christ came to redeem fallen mankind in order that God's purpose may be fulfilled, not merely that we may be saved from hell and assured of heaven. In order to redeem divided mankind, Christ died on the cross to deal with all the negative things, including ordinances. On the cross Christ abolished all the regulations regarding living and worship, regulations that have divided the nations. God does not care for any ordinances. He cares only that we are one and that Christ is wrought into us. Christ abolished all the ordinances not that we may go to

heaven or that we may be spiritual or victorious. He abolished the ordinances in order to create in Himself one new corporate man. He created the new man not only within Himself as the sphere, but also with Himself as the very element. By abolishing the ordinances and creating the Jewish and Gentile believers into one new man, Christ has made peace. Now those of different nationalities have peace in Christ.

IN CHRIST

In 2:11 and 12 Paul reminds us of our situation when we were apart from Christ. We were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, we were strangers from the covenants of the promise, we had no hope, and we were without God in the world. We had no goal and no God. But one day we were called by God, and we answered His call by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. When we did this, the Triune God came into us. No matter where we may go, even if we try to run from the Lord or to stop believing in Him, He will always be with us. How wonderful that we have become involved with Christ! However, even when it does not seem so wonderful in our experience, we cannot get away from Him. We may try to leave Him, but He will never leave us.

As saved ones, we are in Christ. He is our sphere and our source. Now in Christ Jesus we who once were far off from God and from one another have become near in the blood of Christ. As verse 14 says, the very Christ who is our peace has made us one and has broken down the middle wall of partition. He has reconciled us to God in one Body, and He has come to preach to us the gospel of peace (vv. 16-17). The result is that we are no longer strangers and sojourners, but fellow-citizens of the saints and members of the household of God (v. 19).

Although Christ is our sphere, our source, and our peace and although He has abolished the ordinances, many Christians still hold to certain ordinances. In their practice, they care more for ordinances than for Christ.

Many Christians neglect Christ and pay attention to the very ordinances He abolished on the cross. What a pitiful situation!

BUILT ON CHRIST AS THE FOUNDATION

Now we are in Christ. He should be the unique foundation upon which we are built. In 2:20 Paul speaks of the foundation of the apostles and prophets. This refers to the Christ in whom the apostles believed and whom they ministered to others. The foundation of Moses was the law, and the foundation of the prophets was prophecy. But the only foundation of the apostles and prophets is Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3:11 Paul said, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The foundation in Ephesians 2 is not related to any kind of ordinances; it is Christ Himself. The foundation of Judaism is composed of the Sabbath, circumcision, and the dietary regulations. But when the apostles came forth to minister, the unique foundation laid by them was the living Christ.

The church is built on Christ, not on ordinances or regulations. Today, however, all the denominations have another foundation besides Christ. For example, the Baptist denomination has immersion as a foundation along with Christ. It seems that underneath Christ as the foundation the denominations have something other than Christ as their basic foundation. The church has been divided by the different ordinances used as foundations.

May the Lord open our eyes to see how dreadful it is to cling to ordinances. We may claim to see the church, and we may declare that we are meeting as the local church. But if we still insist on particular practices, those practices will become ordinances. Spontaneously, the ground of oneness will be damaged or even lost. Instead of meeting on the ground of oneness, we shall meet on the ground of our ordinances. If a certain ordinance becomes our ground, we cease to be the church and become a sect. Whenever we insist on a particular practice, we lose the unique ground of oneness. This is why we should not insist on things such as

pray-reading or calling on the name of the Lord, even though we may receive great benefit from them.

THINGS WE MUST OPPOSE

There are only a few things we must oppose. These include idolatry, immorality, divisiveness, and the denial of Christ's deity. In the church absolutely no ground can be given to idols. Idolatry is an insult to God. Likewise, the church cannot tolerate immorality, which damages the humanity created by God for His purpose. Furthermore, a factious, sectarian person must be rejected if he does not cease from his divisiveness after being warned. Fourthly, we cannot receive into the church anyone who refuses to recognize the deity of Christ, who denies that Christ is God incarnate. These things are leaven which must be purged out of the church life. But apart from these four things, we are not told in the New Testament to reject believers for any other reason. According to Romans 14:1, as long as a person has the faith, we must receive him, even if he is weak. Nowhere in the New Testament are we instructed to reject someone if he does not believe in immersion. Neither are we told not to receive those sisters who do not wear head coverings. Believers should not be rejected over things such as the size of cup used at the Lord's table or over the practice of foot-washing. Apart from the four things we have mentioned, there is no legality in the church life. We must receive all the saints and have nothing to do with ordinances.

The Christ who is our peace, our source, and our sphere must be our unique foundation. There must not be any other kind of foundation in addition to Christ. We need to check with ourselves concerning this. Do we have any foundation in addition to Christ? If we do not have any ordinances, then Christ will truly be our only foundation.

THE CORNERSTONE

Christ should also be our cornerstone. As the cornerstone, He joins the two walls, the one of the Jewish

believers and the other of the Gentile believers. In Ephesians 2 Christ is referred to specifically as the cornerstone (v. 20). When the Jewish builders rejected Christ, they rejected Him as the cornerstone (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:7), which would join the Gentiles to them for the building of God's house.

If we hold only to the all-inclusive Christ, not to any ordinances, He will be the cornerstone to join us together for the building of God's dwelling place.

THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

In verse 21 Paul goes on to say, "In Whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord." In Christ who is the cornerstone, all the building, including both Jewish and Gentile believers, is fitted together and is growing into a holy temple. This temple is the universal church. As we shall see, verse 22 refers to the local church.

The local churches should not have an independent attitude, and they should not be isolated from one another. If we have an independent attitude, we may become a local sect instead of a local church. Christ has just one Body in the universe. If each local church were an independent body for Christ, this would mean that Christ has a great many bodies. No matter how many local churches there may be, Christ still has just one Body. For this reason, the local churches need to be fitted together and to grow into the one universal temple. In Christ as the foundation and the cornerstone, all the building, the universal church, is fitted together and is growing in the Lord.

Some of those who have an attitude of independence concerning the church in their locality may point to the differences between the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 as a justification for their attitude. However, the seven churches as the seven golden lampstands are the same in nature, substance, and pattern. Furthermore, the New Jerusalem in eternity will have the same appearance and

the same material on each of its four sides. The local churches should not be organized. But if all the churches hold only Christ, they will be fitted together as God's universal building.

Suppose the churches in a certain place hold the attitude that, as independent local churches, they want to go on by themselves and have nothing to do with other churches. In the eyes of the Lord, they may become local sects. All the churches should hold to Christ, be fitted together, and grow together into a holy temple in the Lord. When the churches are fitted together, whatever riches are experienced by one church will be spontaneously transfused into all the other churches. For example, a doctor may inject something into a person's arm, but the injected element is soon transfused throughout the person's body. In this way the whole body receives the benefit of the injection. How foolish it would be for certain members of the body to regard the injection as only for themselves! Whatever one church receives is for the whole Body. Therefore, we should not try to confine any experience of Christ to our locality. We should realize that whatever we receive of Christ is to be transfused into the rest of the Body.

In verse 22 Paul says, "In Whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." The word "also" here indicates that the building in verse 21 is universal and that the building in this verse is local. According to the context, the holy temple in verse 21 is universal, whereas the dwelling place of God in verse 22 is local.

PUTTING OUR TRUST IN CHRIST

After all we have said about not holding to the ordinances but holding to Christ, some may still have questions about things such as the method of baptism. These questions may indicate that those who ask them still have ordinances. Nevertheless, some may persist with their questions by saying that we need to be practical and must know how to baptize new converts. Whenever we face practical problems such as this, we should remember

Paul's word in verse 18: "For through Him we both have access in one Spirit unto the Father." Instead of arguing, we should turn to our spirit, pray, and have fellowship. The Lord is near, present, and available. If we seriously seek His leading, He will certainly guide us, and we shall know how to take care of the various practical matters. I can testify that throughout the years the Lord Jesus has been very real, precious, present, and available to us. We simply need to open ourselves to Him regarding everything that concerns us. As we do so, we should be willing to set aside any concept that occupies us. Then the Lord will lead us in a living way.

In our concern for the church, we should remember that Christ nourishes and cherishes the church. He is much more concerned about the church than we are. Therefore, we should place our trust in Him. As long as we do not have anything related to idolatry, immorality, divisiveness, or the denial of the deity of Christ, none of the mistakes that may be made will be serious. Do not try to avoid mistakes by holding to ordinances. Our confidence should be in the all-inclusive Christ and in Him alone. If our trust is in anything other than Christ, that thing will become an ordinance which will damage the church life. But if we take Christ as our everything, all the local churches throughout the world will grow and go on in a healthy way.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-EIGHT

UNIVERSAL BUILDING AND LOCAL BUILDING

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:21-22

Chapter two of Ephesians concludes with the matter of the building. In verse 21 we see the universal building, and in verse 22, the local building. Verse 21 says, "In Whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord." The phrase "all the building" denotes the universal building, the church throughout the universe. The words "in Whom you also" in verse 22 denote the local building, the building among those in the city to which this Epistle was sent. The building, therefore, has a universal aspect and a local aspect. It is significant that this chapter of Ephesians concludes with the building of the church in these two aspects.

For centuries, this matter of the building has been neglected. Very few servants of the Lord have given it adequate attention. Beginning in 1938, among us the Lord began to emphasize the importance of the building. Message after message has been given on this crucial subject. Among them are the messages printed in *The Vision of God's Building*. The messages in that book cover God's building as revealed from the beginning of the Bible to the end.

FORSAKING ALL ORDINANCES

If we would be built up universally and locally, we must forsake all ordinances. To hold to certain ordinances is to build without a proper foundation, that is, without Christ as the unique foundation. Many Christians are not clear about Christ as the unique foundation, and they do not know God's building. Therefore, they have spent years

wandering from one denomination or Christian group to another. Such believers may be stones for God's building, but they have not yet been built in. Some church-traveling Christians may claim that the reason for their wandering from group to group is a sense of dissatisfaction. However, the underlying reason is ordinances.

Ordinances may be related to our natural disposition. Some have a quiet disposition and prefer Christian meetings where the believers worship in silence. They wander from group to group in quest of a meeting to match their disposition. They may think that a particular group suits their taste, only to learn that certain practices there do not match their disposition. Such Christians are not satisfied with any group. They cannot find a group that is fully in accord with their disposition.

If we have seen a clear vision of God's economy and know what the recovery is, we shall be willing to forget our disposition, to deny our taste, and to care only for the Lord's recovery. The recovery is not based on any practice; it is based on Christ who is our peace, our foundation, our cornerstone, and our everything. The vision of God's economy must control us, direct us, and restrict us. Such a vision will surely cause us to stand on Christ as the unique foundation. Then instead of being wandering stars (Jude 13), we shall be those who can be built up with others. We shall be eternally settled in God's economy. Those who have seen this vision and are governed by it can be built up with others on the unique foundation of the all-inclusive Christ. They will not allow any ordinances to become their foundation.

Once again I wish to use pray-reading as an example. We thank the Lord for pray-reading. Although we have not made pray-reading an ordinance, some have left the church life simply because they did not care for this practice. Do you think that someone who leaves the church for such a reason has truly seen what the church is? I do not think so. One who has seen the vision of the church will never leave.

Some Christians have criticized us not only for the practice of pray-reading, but also for praising the Lord loudly, for calling on the name of the Lord Jesus, and for allowing believers to be baptized again, that is, to be "buried." Others have criticized us for emphasizing the fact that Christ is versus religion. If we in the local churches have something related to idols, immorality, division, or the denial of the deity of Christ, we should be criticized. However, it is wrong to criticize us for such things as pray-reading the Word or calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. If believers are helped spiritually by these practices, what right have others to criticize them? Those who do not follow these practices should nevertheless be one with those who receive benefit by following them. Suppose a certain brother is convicted of his oldness and deadness and is led of the Lord to bury himself in the waters of baptism. After his burial, he is refreshed, renewed, and living. He may even praise the Lord in a loud, excited way. Should he be condemned because he was baptized a second time or because he praises the Lord with a loud voice? Certainly not! Nevertheless, some believers may criticize such a one because they still have ordinances related to baptism or to loud praises.

Many years ago there was a certain Presbyterian pastor who was the top theologian in China. As a Presbyterian, in his teaching he should have opposed the practice of immersion and favored sprinkling. However, as he was praying one day on a mountain, he experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As he was running down the mountainside, he saw a pool of water and threw himself into it. After that experience, he became a different person, very living in the Lord. Those who hold to ordinances may criticize him. But the Lord does not honor ordinances. In Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, only a new creation (Gal. 6:15).

CARING ONLY FOR CHRIST

Although there are millions of Christians on earth

today, very few have been built up with others. The reason for this lack of building is that so many believers still hold on to ordinances. Perhaps you were a member of a certain denomination. However, because of your ordinances, you were not one with others, and you were not able to be built up with them. Rather, you were waiting for the situation to change to fit your ordinances. When there was no change or improvement, you moved to another group, hoping to find there a situation to suit your preference. This has caused many to travel from one denomination to another. Some have testified that they were not satisfied until they came into the church life. Although it is true that we are satisfied spiritually in the church, we must be careful not to hold to any ordinances. In our experience Christ must be everything to us: our peace, our foundation, our cornerstone. We should not care for anything other than Christ. Whether the meetings are noisy or quiet makes no difference. We are not for noise or for silence--we are for Christ. By caring only for Christ, we can easily be one with others and be built up with them locally and universally on Christ as the unique foundation.

Recently I have been burdened of the Lord to give a number of messages dealing with ordinances. I believe that the Spirit of the Lord within us realizes how important it is for us to be clear about this matter. As more saints turn to the way of the Lord's recovery, it is possible for ordinances to be brought in or for dissenting opinions to be expressed. Therefore, it is crucial that we learn to care only for Christ, particularly as we visit localities where the way of meeting differs from that to which we are accustomed. We should not evaluate a meeting according to whether or not the saints practice pray-reading, exercise tongues-speaking, or pray long prayers or short ones. We should care for Christ and for Christ alone. If we care only for Christ, we shall not have any problems with oneness. The more we care for Christ and drop all manner of ordinances, the more we shall be built up in Christ locally and also universally.

NO ORGANIZATION

In speaking of the universal building, we must be careful to distinguish such building from organization. Although we are absolutely for the proper building, we are opposed to organization. The churches will be built together universally, but this does not mean that they will be universally organized.

NO ISOLATION

According to the truth of the Body, the Body is universally one. For this reason, the local churches should not be isolated from one another. Isolation is contrary to the truth concerning the oneness of the Body. Because each local church is part of the Body universally, no local church should be isolated from the others. This is especially true today with modern means of communication and transportation that permit the rapid spread of news and information around the world. Something of life may be released in Los Angeles today and be known in dozens of other places within hours. How wrong it is for a church to try to be independent! The Body is receiving a continual transfusion. If we isolate ourselves from the other churches, we cut ourselves off both from the transfusion and from the circulation of life in the Body. Such a thing violates the law of the Body. Although we must shun organization, we need to be built up universally as the one Body.

BUILT UP IN CHRIST

In 2:22 Paul speaks of the local building: "In Whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." The word "you" refers to the local saints. Furthermore, the word "also" indicates that the building in verse 22 is local. According to the context, the dwelling place of God in this verse is local, whereas the holy temple in the preceding verse is universal.

Paul is careful to point out that it is in Christ that the local saints are built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit. They are not built in ordinances, in practices, or

in opinions. We can be built up only in the all-inclusive Christ who is our peace, foundation, and cornerstone.

UNIVERSAL BUILDING ACCOMPLISHED ONLY THROUGH LOCAL BUILDING

It is important to see that the universal building can be accomplished only through the local building. If we are not built up with others in our own locality, we should not expect to be able to be built up in any other locality. All those who are burdened to migrate for the spread of the church life must firstly be built up in their own locality. If you have not yet been built up in your local church, I encourage you not to migrate. Before we can be built up universally, we must be built up in a practical way locally.

If you have been in a locality for a period of time without being built up with others, there must be a reason for this lack of building. The reason may be your natural cleverness or your reservations concerning the church life. Yes, you have stopped wandering from group to group, and you have come into the church life to stay. However, in order for you to be built up locally, your disposition, your being, must be dealt with. Nothing tests your spiritual maturity as much as this matter of building. Furthermore, the local building is a great help in your spiritual growth. If you are willing to be built into the church in your locality, you will have the abundance of the growth in life. The building must begin with the local aspect and then spread to the universal aspect. Some saints have not grown very much because they have not been built into the church locally. The reason for the lack of building is that they have too many reservations. Although they are in the local church, they have the tendency to withdraw or to hold back when certain situations arise in the church. It is this holding back that keeps them from being built up. Instead of withdrawing or holding back, we should be willing to be broken and even "wrecked" in order to be built up with others. What a difference this makes to our growth in life! If we grow in this way, the church life will spread both

through us and with us, and we shall be useful in any coming migration. However, if we are not built up locally, we shall not be a help to any future migration. Only those who have been built up locally can support the spread of the church life through migration. Any who have reservations about the church, yet who desire to participate in a migration, will be a cause of frustration.

THE SPREAD OF THE LORD'S RECOVERY

The spread of the Lord's recovery is the move of the living Christ in our spirit in a corporate way. The Lord's move is with the saints not individualistically, but corporately. As those who seek the Lord, we should not hold anything back from Him. On the contrary, we should always give in to Him and be willing to be broken so that we may be built into the church in our locality. Then wherever we may be, the recovery of the Lord will spread through us. This is altogether different from a movement of man or an organization. For the genuine move of Christ as the life-giving Spirit in His Body, we need the local building.

We thank the Lord for the many churches raised up through migration. We also thank Him for the many who have been useful in migration because they had experienced some amount of local building before they migrated. At the same time, we must admit that there has been some frustration in certain places. The reason for this frustration is that certain ones still have reservations. They still have the tendency to hold back from the church life. This underscores the fact that the success of migration depends on the degree of building. If we are built up in an absolute way, migration will proceed also in an absolute way. But if we compromise with the local building, we shall also compromise in any future migration.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize again that how much building we have universally as well as locally depends on how much we give up the ordinances and realize in a practical way that Christ is everything in God's economy.

Since He is the all-inclusive One, we should not hold on to anything in place of Him. If we hold to Christ as everything to us, we shall experience the genuine building, first locally and then universally. This will make us useful in migration for the expansion of the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTY-NINE

GROWTH BY FEEDING FOR THE BUILDING

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:11-16; Rom. 14:1-3, 5-6; 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; Titus 3:10; 2 John 7, 9-11

God created mankind for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. However, through the fall, mankind was divided and scattered. When Christ died on the cross to accomplish redemption, He slew all the ordinances in order to bring His chosen people back into oneness and to create in Himself one new man. However, the enemy, Satan, has used ordinances to divide the new man Christ has created. The divisions, denominations, and sects in Christianity have their source in these ordinances.

THE CAUSE OF DIVISION

Today the Lord is seeking to recover His church by bringing His people out of the divisions. To be brought out of division is to be brought out of ordinances as the source of division. Therefore, in order to recover the church, the Lord must cause His people to set aside the ordinances that have been the cause of division. If we are not clear about this matter of ordinances, we may bring ordinances into the church life and cause a repetition of the divisiveness that has occurred in the history of Christianity. We do not want the history of Christianity to be repeated among us in the Lord's recovery.

Certain dear ones who love the Lord's recovery may not be clear about ordinances. If they insist on practices that correspond to their ordinances, they will cause problems in the churches. Although we may see the ground of the church, we cannot be in the church life in a secure way until we have a thorough understanding of ordinances. It

is not sufficient simply to forsake divisions. We also need to recognize that ordinances are the source of division.

As the Lord's recovery spreads throughout the world, people with different backgrounds will be brought in. Since there is no organization nor human control in the recovery, it is possible in certain places for saints to insist on various practices. If this should happen, the church life would be seriously damaged through division. Therefore, I encourage you all to bring this matter of ordinances to the Lord. Ask Him to make you crystal clear about the seriousness of having ordinances in the church life. No ground whatever can be given to the insistence upon any practice. For the building up of the church we must be willing to drop all ordinances.

ORDINANCES AND DOCTRINE

We have pointed out that in Ephesians, a book concerned not with personal salvation but with the church in a corporate way, there are at least four categories of things that damage the church life: ordinances, doctrine, the old man, and the spots and wrinkles. After a number of messages concerning ordinances, we come now to the subject of doctrine. Most doctrines are based on ordinances, and ordinances are produced from doctrines. It is difficult to say which comes first, doctrines or ordinances. On the one hand, doctrines produce ordinances, but, on the other hand, ordinances provide the basis for doctrine. Nevertheless, we can be clear that these two matters are intimately related and cannot be separated.

THE NEED FOR HUMAN COOPERATION

Chapter one of Ephesians speaks of the Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. Chapter two speaks of the one new man and concludes with a word about God's building. For the sake of the new man, God is dispensing Himself into His chosen people, as revealed in chapter three. All Three of the Godhead are involved in this dispensation. We are strengthened by the Spirit into the

inner man, so that Christ may make His home in our hearts, with the result that we are filled unto all the fullness of God. In 3:8 Paul speaks of the riches of Christ. If the new man is to be built up as the habitation of God in spirit, surely the riches of Christ need to be dispensed into every part of this new man. In order for such a dispensation to take place, the inner man of all those who make up the one new man must be strengthened by the Spirit. Then Christ with all His riches will be able to make His home in our hearts. Eventually, the new man will be filled unto all the fullness of God. This indicates that the new man will be a God-filled man, a corporate entity mingled with the Triune God.

Chapter three of Ephesians ends with the new man filled unto all the fullness of God. This, however, is not the end of the book. There is still the need for human cooperation. Although Christ has abolished all the ordinances in order to create the new man, the church as the new man still needs to be built up. Christ does not build the church directly. Rather, He uses the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers to perfect the saints to carry out the direct building up of the church. As the Head, Christ presents certain gifts to His Body for the perfecting of the saints. Having been perfected through the ministry of these gifts, the saints build the church directly. Hence, the church is not directly built by Christ or by the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers; it is built directly by the perfected saints. This indicates that the building of the church requires the cooperation of God's people.

Some readers of Ephesians may think that Paul should have stopped at the end of chapter three. According to their opinion, the end of this chapter is the high point and completion of the book. They see only the fact that Christ has accomplished everything. Yes, Christ has been incarnated, has passed through human life, and has died on the cross to accomplish redemption and to deal with all negative things, including ordinances. After His all-inclusive death, He rested in the tomb. This rest was a true

Sabbath. Then on the first day of the week He was resurrected from among the dead, and a new age with a new humanity came into being. On God's side, everything has been accomplished. But in His economy God requires human cooperation. His economy is based on the principle of incarnation, that is, of God and man mingled and working together to accomplish God's goal. In John 15 the Lord Jesus said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (v. 5). However, it is also true that apart from us Christ can do nothing. We can tell the Lord, "Lord Jesus, just as I need You, You also need me. We can do nothing without You, and You can do nothing without us." If we would speak to the Lord in this way, He would agree. The very fact that Christ was incarnated indicates that God's economy has both the divine aspect and the human aspect.

This principle applies to the book of Ephesians. The first three chapters emphasize the divine aspect. These chapters reveal that Christ has accomplished everything and that the new man has been filled with the riches of Christ unto all the fullness of God. Then in chapters four through six we see the human aspect, the aspect of our cooperation with the Lord. Hallelujah, we need God, and God needs us! If we fail to cooperate with Him, we cause a serious problem. Therefore, it is crucial that we fulfill our responsibility to cooperate with God in the carrying out of His economy.

NOT MERE TEACHING, BUT GROWTH

Many Christians think that what is mainly needed on the human side is teaching. Yes, in chapter four Paul does mention shepherds and teachers. However, the concept here is altogether different from the religious concept in today's Christianity. Christianity has become a religion of doctrine. No other religion in the world has as many doctrines as Christianity has. Consider how many books are put out by Christian writers every year. Surely no other religion can equal it in the number of books

published annually. Most of these books merely feed the desire for doctrinal talk. Furthermore, most of these books are related to ordinances. Because someone favors a particular practice, he writes a book in order to advocate it.

Paul's concept in Ephesians 4 is absolutely different from the concept in today's Christianity. The basic concept in this chapter is that of growth until we all arrive at a full-grown man. As all mothers know, growth of children comes by feeding, not mainly by teaching. When we all arrive at a full-grown man, we shall no longer be children spiritually. On the human side the main need is not doctrine; it is growth. We need to grow until we arrive at a full-grown man.

We need to become a full-grown man so that "we may be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error" (4:14). Notice that here Paul does not speak of every wind of heresy or false doctrine, but of every wind of teaching. Such teaching may include sound, fundamental, scriptural doctrine. However, even this kind of doctrine may be used by the sleight of men in craftiness with a view to a system of error. Any teaching, even a scriptural one, that distracts believers from Christ and the church is a wind that carries them away from God's central purpose. Teachings that distract us from God's economy are instigated by Satan in his subtlety with the sleight of men, in order to frustrate the building up of the Body of Christ. The teachings systematized by Satan cause serious error and thus damage the practical oneness of the Body life. If this matter were not serious, Paul would not use so many strong terms to describe it.

Doctrine may be likened to a baited hook used to catch fish. Ignorant of the hook, the fish go for the bait and are caught. In like manner, many Christians have been lured by the "bait" of doctrine, only to be caught on the "hook" concealed within it. Because many of the Lord's people are ignorant of the "hook" inside an enticing doctrine, they

have been systematized by the enemy in a very subtle way.

In verse 15 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." Paul does not say that we shall grow up into the knowledge of Bible doctrine. On the contrary, he says that we shall grow up into Christ as the Head. This indicates that what is needed on the human side for the fulfillment of God's economy is growth. Only by growth shall we be no longer children who are carried about by every wind of teaching.

FEEDING, EATING, AND DRINKING

Growth comes through feeding and through eating and drinking. Apart from this process, it is impossible for anyone to grow. Therefore, what we need today is not the mere teaching of doctrine; it is the feeding with processed spiritual food. We need to feed others with the riches of Christ that we have "cooked" and processed in our experience. In this way others will receive nourishment and be able to grow. According to the religious concept, the members of the church need to be regulated through teaching. But the concept in God's economy is that God's people mainly need to be fed by having the riches of Christ ministered to them.

Daily my wife serves me nourishing food. For this reason, I am strong, healthy, and full of energy. I do not need my wife to teach me; I need her to feed me. It is the same in the church life. What we need is not more teaching, but more of the riches of Christ dispensed into us. I can testify that throughout the years the saints have grown through being fed.

Growth takes time. Change produced through regulation, on the contrary, comes very quickly. For example, a new believer may be taught how he should dress or cut his hair. This, however, would produce mere outward change, change without any growth in life. The change produced by genuine growth needs time. For example, you can make an artificial flower in an hour, but

it takes months to grow a real flower. What the church needs is the feeding that produces the genuine growth in life. Such feeding does not come from mere doctrine.

We have pointed out that Christianity is a religion of doctrine. The so-called Sunday morning services in Christianity are filled with the teaching of doctrine. The meetings in the Lord's recovery must be completely different. Instead of teaching doctrine, we need to minister nourishment to the saints. We need to feed them with the riches of Christ. In this way the saints will gradually grow in life.

I thank the Lord for all the feeding that has taken place in the church in Los Angeles. Only in a few instances have certain ones become preoccupied with doctrine. This preoccupation has caused great loss both to them and to others. Most of the saints have not been interested in acquiring mere doctrinal knowledge. Instead, they have appreciated the feeding which has nourished them and made them strong. In all the churches in the Lord's recovery we need more feeding with the riches of Christ and less teaching of doctrine.

I can testify that I have no interest in doctrinal discussion and no appetite for it. When some ask me questions about things such as absolute grace, eternal security, the mode of baptism, speaking in tongues, or various views of the rapture, I simply have no desire to talk about these things in a doctrinal way. My only desire is to minister the riches of Christ to the saints so that they may grow in Him.

A BOOK OF LIFE

Have you ever noticed that in the book of Revelation there is no emphasis on doctrine? By contrast, this book speaks of the sevenfold, intensified Spirit, that is, of the seven Spirits burning before the throne of God. Revelation also speaks of the seven stars, the seven lampstands, the tree of life, and the river of water of life. There is nothing about absolute grace or eternal security. Actually, the Bible as a whole is not primarily a book of doctrine; it is a

book of life. We should come to the Scriptures not primarily to learn doctrine, but mainly to be nourished by the living bread. We need to be like the prophet Jeremiah who said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them" (Jer. 15:16). Let us drop the doctrines and the ordinances and concentrate on nourishment. If we do this, we shall eventually arrive at a full-grown man and no longer be those carried about by winds of teaching. If someone comes to you with doctrinal questions, perhaps you should read him Ephesians 4:14. Those who want to discuss doctrine under the guise of having fellowship may be influenced by the cunning craftiness of Satan. Remember to beware of the "hook" concealed within the "bait."

PROPER NOURISHMENT AND GENUINE GROWTH

We should try our best not to become involved in discussions over doctrine, especially as we contact new ones or visit Christian meetings in other places. Furthermore, we should certainly not criticize others according to a doctrinal standard. Instead of talking about doctrine, we should enjoy Christ and minister Christ to others. This is the Lord's way in His recovery. In the recovery what we need is not doctrine, but the proper nourishment that leads to genuine growth. Let us beware of Satan's subtle use of doctrine to distract us from God's economy, and let us pay attention to feeding, nourishment, and growth. This is the need in the Lord's recovery today.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE NINETY

DROPPING DOCTRINES BY THE GROWTH OF LIFE

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:11-14; 1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 6:12a; 2 Tim. 4:7; Titus 1:13b; Jude 3

We have pointed out that doctrine is included among the four categories of negative things that damage the church life. The other three categories are ordinances, the old man, and the spots and wrinkles. Because in our natural, religious concept, doctrine is positive and is viewed positively by most Christians, it is difficult to speak about doctrine in a negative way. Doctrine, however, can frustrate the building up of the Body of Christ. In 4:14 Paul speaks of the negative effect of doctrine: "That we may be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error." Not many Christians have paid adequate attention to this verse, a verse which indicates that doctrine can damage the Body of Christ.

According to the four Gospels, the Lord Jesus had a difficult time with those religious people who were steeped in doctrine. The scribes, Pharisees, elders, and chief priests argued with Him over doctrine. Little did they realize that they were actually arguing with God, the One who inspired the Old Testament on which their doctrines were based. In their blindness they used the Scriptures to argue with the One who inspired the Scriptures and whose coming the Scriptures foretold. Those who were occupied with doctrine missed the opportunity to gain Christ. They did not realize that when the Lord Jesus was on earth, God was not concerned for doctrine, but for Christ.

DAMAGED BY DOCTRINE AND PHILOSOPHY

After the church had been established and had begun to spread, problems in the churches were caused by doctrine. Romans 14 indicates this. The doctrines concerning eating and observing days were derived from Judaism, not from heathen philosophy. Although the Roman Empire did persecute the church, this persecution did not damage the church life. However, damage was caused by religious doctrine. The situation that made it necessary to call the conference described in Acts 15 was caused by doctrine. Just as doctrine caused damage to the church life in the first century, it can damage the church life in the Lord's recovery today.

The church life has also been damaged by philosophy, especially by Gnosticism with all its concepts. If we bring in concepts derived from our cultural background, we shall cause problems in the church life. The church life in the Lord's recovery can still be damaged by doctrine and philosophy.

Most Christians appreciate those who are knowledgeable in the Scriptures. But, in a sense, it may be a dreadful thing to acquire a vast knowledge of the Bible, if our Bible knowledge causes us to miss Christ. Remember that it was those who knew the Scriptures--the Pharisees and the scribes--who persecuted the Lord Jesus and the apostles. The principle is the same today. The ones who are most opposed to the Lord's recovery are those with a certain amount of Bible knowledge.

GOD'S CONCERN

God's concern is with Christ and the church, not with doctrine or Bible knowledge. However, many Christians care more for doctrine than for Christ and the church. God's economy is not to have a group of people who know the Bible. It is to work Christ into His chosen people for the building up of the Body. We must condemn any doctrine that distracts us from Christ or that hinders us from being built up in the Body. Even doctrines that are scriptural or fundamental may be used by the enemy to

distract us from Christ and the church. Satan hates to see God's people built up in the Body. Although God's goal is to produce the Body by working Christ into us, most of His people have been distracted from God's economy and from His eternal purpose. Doctrines are among the good things utilized by Satan in his subtlety to distract God's people from God's will. The reason God has put His seal upon the recovery of the church is that in the recovery we are pursuing God's goal, not mere doctrinal knowledge.

THE SUBJECTIVE HOLD OF DOCTRINE

Deep within, even unconsciously, some of us may still be holding on to certain doctrines. These doctrines hidden within us may cause us one day to become dissenting. This can happen to sisters as well as to brothers. Actually, doctrines often have a stronger hold on sisters than on brothers. According to my experience, it is much harder for a sister to let go of a doctrine than it is for a brother. The reason is that, as far as doctrine is concerned, sisters are subjective, whereas the brothers are objective. Hence, it is difficult for sisters to change their doctrine. The trouble in the church life caused by doctrine is often backed, supported, and strengthened by sisters. This tendency for sisters to hold on to doctrine can frustrate, damage, and even destroy the church life.

We have pointed out that although Christ has done everything necessary to produce the church, there is still the need for the church to be built up in a practical way. This involves our cooperation. The last three chapters of Ephesians emphasize human cooperation for the building up of the Body.

PERFECTED THROUGH GROWTH

Ephesians 2:22 speaks of the building up of the church, but it gives only the principles; it does not give the details. However, the details are found in 4:16. "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." By growing up into the Head, the members of the Body have something to share with one another. Furthermore, there will be the operation in the measure of each part, and the result will be the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. In order to have the reality of this verse, we must be perfected by the gifts given to the Body by the Head. The saints are not perfected merely by learning doctrine. On the contrary, they are perfected through being fed. This feeding causes them to grow. For example, an infant does not need anything to be added on to his body to perfect him. As he grows, the members of his body develop and begin to function normally. A mother does not perfect her baby by teaching him to use the various parts of his body; she perfects him by feeding him. The more a child grows through receiving proper nourishment, the more the members of his body will come into their function. In the same principle, the members of the Body are perfected not by teaching, but through the feeding that causes them to grow.

THE ONENESS OF THE FAITH AND OF THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE SON OF GOD

According to 4:13, the saints need to be perfected until they arrive at three things: at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Then we shall be no longer babes tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching (v. 14). Instead, we shall hold to truth in love so that we may "grow up into Him in all things, Who is the Head, Christ" (v. 15). The more we grow, the more we shall drop our doctrines. After someone is saved, he needs to have Christ ministered to him as his spiritual food and drink. This will cause him to grow. As he grows, he will gradually lay aside his doctrinal concepts. Eventually he will realize that nothing is more important than having Christ wrought into him.

As we grow in life, we arrive at the oneness of the faith. However, if we hold to our different doctrinal concepts, we

shall not have this oneness. The emphasis on doctrine has destroyed the oneness among Christians. If we are nourished with the element of Christ and gradually lay aside our doctrinal concepts, we shall arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. The more we grow, the more we arrive at such a oneness.

This aspect of oneness is of two things: the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. The faith here does not refer to the act of believing; it refers to those things in which we believe, such as the divine Person of Christ and His redemptive work for our salvation. This is the faith spoken of in Jude 3; 2 Timothy 4:7; and 1 Timothy 6:21. The full knowledge of the Son of God is the realization of the revelation concerning the Son of God for our experience. The more we grow in life, the more we shall cleave to the faith and to the realization of Christ, and the more we shall drop all the minor doctrinal concepts which cause division.

In the New Testament faith has both an objective meaning and a subjective meaning. When used in a subjective sense, faith denotes our action of believing. Used in an objective sense, it denotes the object of our belief. In 1 Timothy 1:19 the word faith is used in both a subjective and an objective sense. Here Paul says, "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away, concerning the faith have made shipwreck" (Gk.). The first reference to faith in this verse is subjective; it denotes our capacity to believe. The second use of faith is objective; it denotes the object of our belief.

Faith in Ephesians 4:13 refers to those things which all Christians believe. We all believe in the Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We believe that Christ, the Son of God, was incarnated, was crucified for our redemption, was resurrected from among the dead both physically and spiritually, that He has ascended to the right hand of God, and that He is coming again. Furthermore, we believe that the Bible is God's Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit word by word. This is our faith, the "common faith" (Titus 1:4), the "faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

We must be careful to distinguish the faith from doctrines related to such things as the keeping of days, dietary regulations, the method of baptism, speaking in tongues, and foot-washing. Remember that our faith consists of those things which a person must believe in order to be saved. To be a genuine Christian it is necessary to believe in the Triune God and in Christ, the Son of God, our living Savior, who died on the cross for our sins and was raised bodily from among the dead. However, it is possible to be saved and not believe in foot-washing or in tongues-speaking.

Although Paul in Ephesians 4 makes a clear distinction between the faith and doctrine, many Christians confuse these two things. Instead of contending for the faith, they contend for their particular doctrine. Nowhere in the Scriptures are we told to fight for doctrine. However, we must contend for the faith that is related to our "common salvation" (Jude 3). Our common salvation comes from the common faith. Although all genuine Christians have the faith and salvation in common, we may not have all doctrines in common. The different denominations emphasize different doctrines and hold on to them. Although we are not to fight for doctrine, we must be willing to fight for the faith. In 1 Timothy 6:12 Paul charges Timothy, "Fight the good fight of the faith" (Gk.). Therefore, we should contend for our faith, but we should not fight for our doctrine.

In Romans 14 Paul shows us that as long as someone has the faith, we should receive him, even though he may differ from us with respect to doctrine. We should not dispute over matters such as eating and the observing of days. If someone regards a particular day as special, he is free to do so. But if someone else views every day as the same, he is also free. As far as doctrines are concerned, we must be liberal toward others, because doctrines have nothing to do with our common salvation.

If someone comes to you denying that Jesus is the Son of God, you must earnestly contend for the faith. You must be ready to fight for the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son

of God incarnated. However, you should not argue over things such as foot-washing. If someone comes advocating this practice, you may tell him that you care only for Christ and do not want to be involved in discussion about doctrine. How pitiful it is that so many Christians are under the dominion of doctrine and are preoccupied with it!

LAYING ASIDE DOCTRINAL TOYS

Many Christians play with doctrines just as children play with toys. From my experience with my grandchildren, I have learned that the best way to get a child to drop his toys is to offer him something good to eat. The same is true with helping Christians to drop the doctrines that preoccupy them. The more we enjoy Christ and are nourished by the ministry of Christ, the more willing we shall become to lay aside our doctrines. Years ago, the saints in a certain place were preoccupied with their doctrinal toys. But as the years have gone by and they have enjoyed the ministry of Christ, they have gradually dropped these toys. The more they have grown in Christ, the less they care for toys.

The only way we can drop our doctrines is by the growth in life. We need to grow until we arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. Although we all are saved, we have come into the church life from different backgrounds. Because of these different backgrounds, we have different doctrines and philosophies. We may say that we care only for Christ and the church, but we may still be occupied with doctrine. Do not try to teach others to set aside their doctrines. Just as children will play with their toys until they grow up, so the believers will be occupied with doctrine until they grow more in Christ. If the saints grow in the Lord, eventually they will lay aside the doctrines which preoccupy them.

As we grow, we shall arrive not at the oneness of doctrine, but at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God. This is the kind of oneness we desire in the local churches. Our oneness is not a oneness

of Bible knowledge; it is a oneness in the knowledge of the living Christ, a oneness constituted of the common faith and of the knowledge of Christ. Our main concern is not that the saints acquire the knowledge of the Bible. It is that they know the Lord Jesus in a living way. In the meetings of the church our emphasis is not on Bible teaching; it is on helping the saints to know the living Christ and to grow in Him. Only by growing in this way shall we be no longer children tossed by waves and carried about by winds of doctrine.

THE PROCESS OF GROWTH

Through the growth of life, we shall also arrive at a full-grown man and at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The fullness of Christ is the Body of Christ, Christ's expression. With this Body there is a stature with a measure. When the Lord's work in His recovery began in this country a number of years ago, we could see very little of the measure of this stature. Praise the Lord that over the years the measure of the stature has increased! This increase is the result of the perfecting of the saints through the ministry of Christ. However, as we all admit, we are still in the process of growth. The more we grow, the more we shall be able to function and to have the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love. This is our need today.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE NINETY-ONE

FAITH BUT NOT DOCTRINE

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:13-14; Jude 3; 1 Tim. 1:19; 3:9; 6:12a; 2 Tim. 4:7; Titus 1:4, 13b

In 4:13 Paul speaks of the oneness of the faith, and in 4:14 he refers to the winds of teaching, of doctrine. This indicates that we need to distinguish between the faith and doctrine. Regarding the faith--what we must believe in order to be saved--the New Testament is strong, strict, and consistent. In Jude 3 we are even told that we "should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Concerning the faith, we must be ready to fight. We should not merely insist on the faith and stand for it, but fight for it at any cost, even at the cost of our life. The faith for which we must fight is the common faith, the Christian faith, the faith that saves us.

LIBERAL WITH OTHERS REGARDING DOCTRINE

In contrast, in the New Testament we are never charged to fight for doctrine. As far as doctrine is concerned, the New Testament is liberal. Take the example of eating what has been sacrificed to idols. If you read what Paul says about this in Romans and in 1 Corinthians, you may be puzzled. In some places Paul indicates that it is permissible to eat what has been offered to idols. However, in other places he strongly advises against this practice. Years ago, I spent a great deal of time trying to understand this. Troubled by what seemed to be an inconsistency in Paul's writings, I wondered why he did not tell us in a straightforward way whether or not we should eat things that have been sacrificed to idols. Only after I had been delivered from preoccupation with doctrine did I come to

understand that Paul wrote different things on different occasions about eating because he was liberal with respect to doctrine. He knew that under certain circumstances it was permissible to eat, whereas in other circumstances it was not. Only when you have been delivered from preoccupation with doctrine will you be able to understand that certain matters pertaining to doctrine are relative to the situation. This is why Paul could say one thing on one occasion and something else on a different occasion.

FOUR NEGATIVE THINGS

Concerning the eating of meat or the observing of certain days, Paul did not take a definite stand. On the contrary, in these matters he was liberal. But in Romans 16:17 he said strongly, "Now I beg you, brothers, keep a watchful eye on those who make divisions and causes of falling contrary to the teaching which you have learned, and turn away from them." As far as doctrines go, Paul was liberal, but as far as divisiveness was concerned, he was definite. He told us to mark out those who cause division and to avoid them.

In 1 Corinthians 5:7-11 Paul deals with fornication and idolatry. In verse 9 he charges the saints "not to company with fornicators." Fornication damages humanity, and idolatry is an insult to God. Although Paul was liberal with respect to doctrine, he would not tolerate anything related to fornication or idolatry. His word about these things is strong and definite.

In Titus 3:10 Paul says, "A man that is factious, after the first and second admonition, reject" (Gk.). A factious person is divisive and sectarian. After such a one has been admonished once or twice, he should be rejected if he continues in his divisiveness. There can be no compromise or neutrality. Therefore, regarding idolatry, fornication, and divisiveness Paul was very strict, and we must be strict also.

According to the Second Epistle of John, we see that we must also reject those who deny the incarnation of Christ.

Verse 7 says, "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." This verse indicates that even in the first century there were certain ones who called themselves Christians, but who did not confess that Christ was God come in the flesh. In other words they denied the fact that Christ was God incarnated. In verse 9 the writer goes on to say, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." The word transgress here means to go a little farther. The Bible reveals that Christ is God incarnated. Those who denied this went too far; they had given up the teaching that Christ is God incarnate. Hence, the Apostle John warned the believers concerning this kind of person: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-speed: for he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (vv. 10-11). We cannot receive those who do deny the incarnation of Christ.

According to the New Testament, there are four things which we cannot tolerate: idolatry, fornication, division, and the denial of the deity of Christ. Concerning the faith, we must be bold, strong, and definite, ready to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. However, as far as doctrines are concerned, we must be liberal with others. Nevertheless, we cannot tolerate idolatry, fornication, division, and the denial of the incarnation of Christ.

PRACTICING ROMANS 14

Apart from the four negative things mentioned above, we cannot find a fifth item in the New Testament concerning which we should be strict in accepting others. Yes, the New Testament commands us to love one another. However, it does not say that we should reject a person if he does not follow the teaching about loving others. The same is true regarding the doctrine of foot-washing. In John 13 the Lord Jesus speaks of washing one another's

feet. However, this chapter does not say that we should refuse to have fellowship with another believer because he does not practice foot-washing. In the same principle, although the New Testament speaks emphatically about baptism, we are never told to reject a believer because he has not been baptized. We should not separate ourselves from those believers who differ from us in doctrine.

We need to remember Romans 14 and practice it. Today many Christian teachers are talking about the Body in Romans 12 without paying adequate attention to Romans 14. Apart from Romans 14 we cannot practice the Body life revealed in Romans 12. Only through being liberal toward others with respect to doctrine can we have the Body life.

Among many Christians today there is no practice of the Body life. Instead, there is division after division. In fact, there is more division among earnest Christians than among those who are worldly or indifferent to the Lord and His Word. When Christians are revived and renewed in reading the Bible, they are more easily divided over doctrine. Because of the divisiveness in today's Christianity, most Christians do not have the Body life. This is especially true in the charismatic movement. Although many in this movement are fond of talking about the Body, there is more divisiveness in the charismatic movement than in any other aspect of Christianity. The reason for this is that Christians talk about Romans 12, but neglect Romans 14. I repeat, only by practicing Romans 14 do we have the reality of the Body described in Romans 12.

According to Romans 14, there is room in the church life for those with different doctrines. Some believe that they can eat everything, whereas others eat only herbs. In like manner, some observe certain days, whereas others regard every day the same. Do you realize that in the church life there can be different doctrines, and there should be? Take the example of head covering. Some sisters wear a head covering in the meetings, but many sisters do not. This indicates that among the sisters there

are different doctrines concerning head covering. It is a very positive sign that the church can include both those sisters who wear a head covering and those who do not. I have been in Christian meetings where sisters without a head covering were not welcome. Furthermore, the sisters who wear a head covering have different kinds of coverings and coverings of different colors. But I have been in meetings where the sisters were required to wear head coverings of the same size, style, and color. Praise the Lord that in the church life we are not divided over different matters such as these! How wonderful that in the church we receive those with different doctrines concerning head covering!

Although we may differ in doctrine, we are truly one. But those who are preoccupied with doctrine often argue about whether or not certain doctrines or practices are scriptural. However, we can declare that the most scriptural meeting is the meeting in which believers with different doctrines are received. As we contend for the faith and reject the four categories of negative things we have mentioned, we are liberal toward others with respect to doctrine. This is the only way to preserve the oneness. If we dispute over doctrine, we shall repeat Christianity's history of division.

ESCAPING FROM THE SNARE OF DOCTRINE

About a century and a half ago, the Brethren were raised up by the Lord and came to see many truths in the Bible. Certainly this was of the Lord. However, the Brethren eventually were snared by doctrinal knowledge and were divided again and again. In some cases they cared more for their interpretation of the Bible than for Christ. For this reason, there are hundreds of divisions among the Brethren today. If you visit certain Brethren assemblies, they may argue with you about doctrine, yet have little care for the Spirit or for the living Christ. How pitiful to care for our interpretation of the Bible but to neglect the Lord Jesus!

In the Lord's recovery we have escaped from the trap of

doctrine and are being brought back to the Lord Himself. How I praise the Lord for rescuing me from doctrinal knowledge! We in the Lord's recovery have no appetite for doctrine. At the same time, we reject idolatry, fornication, division, and the denial of Christ's deity. Although we are strict about these negative things, we are liberal toward others about doctrine. We are not for doctrines, practices, or ordinances. We care only for Christ as the Head and the church as the Body. Therefore, we are truly one.

GOD'S INTENTION

God's intention is not to gain a people who are merely moral and godly in a religious sense. His intention is to have a people who have been regenerated, sanctified, purified, transformed, and built up as the one new man. He desires to have the church as the new man with Christ as his person. Our concern is to become this new man filled and saturated with Christ. God's concern is that we be filled with Christ, nourished by Christ, and built up in Christ as a proper church.

THE LORD'S RECOVERY AND THE LORD'S COMING

Everyone in the Lord's recovery needs to be clear about the Lord's move on earth today. Do not think of the recovery as an ordinary Christian work or movement. The recovery of the church life is not merely another kind of typical Christian work. No, the recovery is unique and of tremendous significance.

The Lord's recovery is related to the Lord's coming back. According to the prophecies in the Bible, two signs of the Lord's coming back are the re-formation of the nation of Israel and the return of Jerusalem to Israel. As we all know, these two things have taken place, the re-formation of Israel in 1948 and the return of Jerusalem in 1967. According to the Lord's word in Luke 21:24, the return of Jerusalem indicates the fullness of the age of the Gentiles. Since these two signs have taken place, we believe that it will not be too long before the Lord comes back.

Furthermore, the world situation is focused on the Middle East, particularly on problems related to oil. The world situation is coming more and more into line with biblical prophecy.

The Bible also tells us that the Bride must be prepared. Consider the situation of today's Christianity, and ask yourself where the Bride is being prepared. Is the Bride being prepared in Catholicism? in the denominations? in the charismatic movement? in the independent groups? I sincerely believe that the Bride is being prepared in the Lord's recovery. We admit that we are imperfect and rather weak, but it is nevertheless a fact that no other Christians love the Lord Jesus more than those in the local churches. Recently we received a report that certain missionaries in Taiwan, although critical of the local churches, admitted that the Christians in the churches were the most mature to be found on that island. We simply cannot deny the fact that so many of the saints in the Lord's recovery love the Lord Jesus in an absolute way.

May the Lord impress us that it is not an insignificant matter to be in His recovery. The time is short, and the Lord's coming is close. Surely before He comes back the Bride must be ready for Him. There may not be time for the Lord to begin another work apart from the recovery as a preparation of the Bride. If the Bride is not being prepared in the recovery, please show me where this preparation is taking place. We in the churches must not boast, and we must not be proud. To be either boastful or proud is foolish. Nevertheless, we must admit the fact that no Christians love the Lord more than those in the churches in the Lord's recovery. We praise the Lord that however weak and imperfect we may be, He is going on among us. We believe that the church life will spread in Europe and eventually reach Jerusalem. We believe that when the Lord sets His feet on the Mount of Olives at the time of His coming back, there will be a church in Jerusalem to meet Him. What a shame it would be to Him if there were no church in Jerusalem at His coming! Oh,

may we all be clear that we are not involved in an ordinary Christian work. We are in the Lord's recovery, in His move on earth today. Praise Him, He is marching on! Let us go forth with Him to meet Him in His coming. May the Bride be made ready!

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE NINETY-TWO

THE PERFECTING OF THE NEW MAN

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:7-16

In 2:15 Paul speaks of the creation of the one new man: "Having 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." Then in 4:13 he speaks of arriving at a full-grown man, and in 4:24, of putting on the new man. The full-grown man in verse 13 is the new man in verse 24. Hence, in Ephesians the new man is referred to three times.

Some versions make a serious error in rendering 4:24. For example, the Revised Standard Version says "put on the new nature." What a poor translation! The Greek word here is *anthropos*, the same word used for man in 2:15. The New American Standard Version also makes a serious mistake by rendering this verse, "put on the new self." Very few Christian writers have recognized that the new man in 4:24 is the church. In his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W. E. Vine points out that the new man in 4:24 is the church which is Christ's Body. He clearly connects 4:24 to 2:15. No doubt the one new man in 4:24 is the new man in 2:15, for the same term is used in each case.

In 2:15 we have the creation of the new man. We may regard this creation as the birth of the new man. Just as a child is perfected through growth, so the new man created in Christ is also perfected through growth. This is the reason Paul refers to the new man in chapter four as well as in chapter two.

PERFECT ORGANICALLY AND FUNCTIONALLY

We may distinguish between something that is perfect.

or complete organically and something that is perfect according to its function. At birth, an infant is perfect organically; that is, the infant has all the necessary organs. However, a child is not functionally perfect at birth. Organically, a mother cannot help her child, for she cannot add any organs to the child. But she can help him functionally by feeding him so that he will grow normally. Although only God the Creator can produce an organism that is perfect organically, we as parents must help our children become perfect functionally. We fulfill this responsibility by nourishing our children and cherishing them. In order to develop properly and to function normally, every child needs to be nourished and cherished. This principle also applies to the church as the new man. In 2:15 we see the creation of the new man organically, but in 4:13-16 we see the perfecting of the new man in relation to his function.

In this respect, 4:16 is an extremely important verse. Here Paul says, "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." Our growth in life is to grow into the Head, Christ, but our function in the Body is to function out from Him. The phrase "each one part" refers to every member of the Body. Every member of the Body of Christ has its own measure which works for the growth of the Body. The Body causes the growth of itself through the supplying joints and working parts. The growth of the Body is the increase of Christ in the church, which results in the building up of the Body itself.

There is no verse such as 4:16 in Ephesians 2. In chapter two we have the birth of the new man, but not the function of the new man. At birth, the new man is organically perfect; however, he is not yet able to function. Just as a child needs to be perfected through nourishing and cherishing, so the organically perfect new man needs to be perfected through the growth of life in order to function in a proper way.

Our physical life portrays this. Only God can create a being that is organically perfect. However, after a child is born, God does not come in to feed him or cherish him. This is the responsibility of the parents, especially of the mother. The more the child is nourished and grows, the more he will function normally.

In the same principle, the new man created by Christ must be perfected in order to function. Through the growth spoken of in chapter four, the new man comes into function. Through the operation in the measure of each part, the Body grows unto the building up of itself in love. The creation of the new man was the responsibility of the Lord alone. We have nothing whatever to do with this. But we must fulfill our responsibility to perfect the new man through nourishing and cherishing. As the new man is perfected in this way, he grows and becomes perfect functionally.

GROWTH THROUGH FEEDING

We have pointed out that the new man can become perfect in relation to his functions only through receiving the proper nourishment. This, however, is not a superficial matter. On the contrary, it is one of the deepest concepts in the whole book of Ephesians. In Christianity today the ministers, pastors, and preachers mainly teach the people and thereby build up a religion instead of the Body. Many of those among us who formerly were ministers or missionaries can testify of this. Because those in Christianity rely on doctrine, they mainly build up something else in place of the Body. The Body does not become functionally perfect through the teaching of doctrine. Actually, in Ephesians 4, a chapter that speaks of the perfecting of the new man through the growth of life, doctrine is depreciated. Paul says that when we are no longer children, we shall no longer be carried about by winds of doctrine. What is needed for the building up of the Body and for perfecting the new man functionally is the growth of life. This comes only through feeding.

GIFTS FOR THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS

In 4:8 we are told that the ascended Christ gave gifts to men. The gifts here do not refer to abilities for service, but to the gifted persons mentioned in verse 11--apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. After conquering them and rescuing them from Satan and death through His death and resurrection, Christ in His ascension makes rescued sinners such gifts with His resurrection life and gives them to His Body for its building up. Hence, the four kinds of gifted persons mentioned in verse 11 are those who have been endued with a special gift. These gifted ones are given "for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ" (v. 12). The more the saints are perfected, the more they grow. Through growth their function comes forth, and they function according to the effectual working in their measure.

THE ASCENDED CHRIST PRODUCING GIFTS

Let us consider in more detail how Christ gave the gifts to His Body. How are the believers constituted as gifts and presented to the Body? The case of the Apostle Paul is an excellent example. Paul was not perfected by attending a theological seminary. As we all know, when he was Saul of Tarsus, he was an extremely religious person. Having been born into Judaism and raised in it, he opposed Christ and persecuted the church. He had even been authorized by the high priest to go to Damascus for the purpose of arresting and imprisoning those who called on the name of the Lord Jesus. But when he was on the way, the Lord Jesus appeared to him. In Galatians 1:13 Paul said, "For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it." Then Paul went on to say that "it pleased God...to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen" (Gal. 1:15a, 16a). God caused Christ to be wrought into Paul so that he could minister Him to

others. In this way, Christ presented Paul as a gift to the Body. By this process Christ constitutes us into gifts that are given to the Body. Firstly, Christ is wrought into us to become our life, our person, and our everything. Then we minister to others the very Christ who has been wrought into us.

Only the ascended Christ can produce gifts for the Body. Notice that in 4:8-11 the gifts are spoken of in relation to Christ's ascension. Verse 8 says, "Having ascended to the height, He led captive those taken captive and gave gifts to men." The height refers to the third heaven to which Christ has ascended. "Those taken captive" refers to the redeemed saints who had been taken captive by Satan before they were saved by Christ's death and resurrection. In His ascension Christ led them captive; that is, He rescued them from Satan's captivity and took them to Himself. Having rescued us from Satan, He constitutes us into gifts for the Body.

The ascension was the peak and the climax of Christ's work. The other basic steps of Christ's work are incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. Ascension is related to the coming of the Spirit. After Christ had accomplished redemption through His crucifixion and after He had resurrected and ascended to the heavens, He came down as the life-giving Spirit. Through the crucifixion of Christ all the enemies were conquered. Hence, the cross is the center of Christ's victory. Furthermore, by His death on the cross, Christ solved all the problems in the universe. This was the reason that after His crucifixion He could rest in the tomb and thereby enjoy a real Sabbath. Then in His resurrection He released all the divine riches. Following this, He ascended to the third heaven, and all the divine fullness was committed to Him along with all of God's chosen people. Saul of Tarsus was among these chosen ones given to the ascended Christ.

It is important to be clear concerning Christ's descension as the Spirit after His ascension. As we have pointed out, according to Ephesians 2, Christ even came to

preach the gospel of peace. This indicates the coming of the ascended Christ. When Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the churches, he did not realize that what he was persecuting was related to the heavens, that the church on earth was related to the ascended Christ. The Lord Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus, and spontaneously, even in his ignorance, Saul called upon His name, saying, "Who art thou, Lord?" Because Saul opened himself to the Lord and called on Him, the Lord with the divine fullness could enter into him and then proceed to constitute him into a gift to the Body. In this way the one who persecuted the churches became one who could perfect the saints. Paul became such a gift not through education, but by being saturated with the divine fullness. Therefore, Saul of Tarsus eventually became the Apostle Paul who could feed the saints, preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, and minister Christ to his fellow believers so that they would be nourished, grow, be perfected, and come into their function.

HOW CHRIST CONSTITUTES US INTO GIFTS

In today's Christianity there is not the proper function of the members of the Body. Hundreds, even thousands, of believers may meet together, but they sit in their pews without functioning. The reason for this is that in Christianity there is not the feeding that leads to genuine growth. Only those who have been properly nourished will be able to function.

In the Lord's recovery we need to return to what was in the beginning. In the beginning, especially with Paul, the saints were richly fed and nourished. If we would be perfected, what we need is not doctrine. Rather, we need to be constituted with Christ. Like Saul of Tarsus, we all were once enemies of Christ and persecutors of the churches. But one day the Lord Jesus came to us and captured us. I can testify that as I was on the way to my Damascus, the Lord appeared to me and interfered with my plans. Although I was ambitious to become successful in the

world, I had no choice except to follow the Lord. Many of us have had the same kind of experience. The Lord Jesus came to us, and we were caught by Him. Now we need to take Him into us more and more until we are saturated with Him. In this way we shall become functioning members of the Body, gifts constituted by the Christ who has been crucified and resurrected and who has ascended and descended.

EVERY MEMBER FUNCTIONING

We have seen that by His death Christ conquered all the enemies and solved all the problems. We have also seen that through His resurrection He released all the divine riches, and that through His ascension He received God's chosen people with the divine fullness. From the time of His ascension, Christ has been working to constitute the vanquished foes into gifts for His Body. Firstly, He comes to these vanquished foes and gets into them. Then He gradually fills them and saturates them with Himself. Eventually, those who once were His enemies are transformed and constituted into useful gifts that can be presented to the Body. These gifts will not merely teach others, but will transfuse Christ into them. In this way the members of the Body receive nourishment and are cherished. Then they will be sanctified, purified, and transformed to become functioning members. As a result, the whole Body will be fitly framed together and compacted by every joint of supply, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part. This will make growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

I believe that the day is coming when everyone in the local churches will be a functioning member. Consider how children grow by receiving nourishment. The more they grow, the more they function. The principle is the same with our spiritual growth as members of the Body. The more we grow by being nourished and cherished, the more we shall function properly in the church life. If the saints are absolute with the Lord, in a relatively short time many

will come into function. I have the full assurance in the Lord that soon this will be the situation in the Lord's recovery.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE NINETY-THREE

THE CORPORATE LIFE OF THE NEW MAN

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:17-32

We have seen that in chapter two we have the creation of the new man and in chapter four, the growth of the new man. In order for the new man to grow, we need to experience the crucified, resurrected, ascended, and descending Christ. This means that the all-inclusive Christ must be wrought into us to be our everything. Then the organically perfect new man will also become perfect functionally.

GROWING AND FUNCTIONING THROUGH THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

The new man is not perfected mainly by teaching. Teaching may actually be a frustration to our growth in life. Before the new man could be created, all the ordinances had to be abolished. Now for the new man to grow, we must be careful about doctrine. Ordinances are obstacles to the formation of the new man, and doctrines are frustrations to the growth of the new man. I hope that all those who take the lead in the local churches will realize that we should not place our trust in doctrine to produce growth in the saints. Growth only comes through the experience of Christ. The degree to which we can minister Christ is in direct proportion to our experience of Christ. The more we experience Him, the more we can minister Him to others. As we minister Christ, others will be nourished.

The very Christ who was crucified and resurrected and who has ascended to the third heaven is now working within us to constitute us into functioning members of the

Body. He carries out this work by making His home in our hearts and by saturating us with Himself. As He saturates us, we are sanctified, purified, nourished, cherished, and transformed. The result is that we become perfected functionally. In this way the Body grows and builds itself up. The Body is not built directly by the Head or by the gifts mentioned in 4:11; it is built up directly by those members who have been perfected by the gifted ones.

Concerning this crucial matter, I pray that we all shall have a clear sky. I can testify that the sky above me is crystal clear regarding the growth of the new man. In these days may the Lord make all His faithful seeking ones transparently clear about the one new man. How blessed we are to be living at a time when the Lord is recovering these things! Ephesians 4 has never been as clear to us as it is in these days.

All those who desire to migrate for the spread of the church life must realize that migration is not a movement. It is the move of the one new man, that is, the move of the all-inclusive Christ in His Body. It is the move of Christ, the heavenly Solomon, in His palanquin. If the Lord is to move among us in such a way, we should not function in an individualistic way. Rather, we should function in the Body in the way of coordination. In order to function in this way, we need to experience Christ and to grow in Him. The measure of our growth will be the sphere, the realm, of our function. If we fail to function, there will be a gap in the Body. But if we function excessively, we shall cause a cancer in the Body. As the Head of the Body, Christ thoroughly knows the situation of the Body. According to His mercy, may the Body be preserved both from any shortage and from cancer caused by overfunction.

We praise the Lord for opening His Word to us. We thank Him for showing us that the vital need is for Christ to be wrought into our being. The more we are saturated with Christ, the more we become in reality parts of the Body with a particular measure of function. Then wherever we may be we shall function properly, and the Body will

grow. This will cause Satan, the enemy of God, to tremble. It will also hasten the coming back of the Lord Jesus.

PUTTING ON THE COMMUNITY LIFE OF THE NEW MAN

Because the book of Ephesians is a book on the church, we should view everything in it from the perspective of the church. If we fail to do this, we shall wrongly apply many things in this book. As we read 4:17-32, we should apply these verses corporately, not individualistically. These verses are not written in relation to the lives of individuals, but in relation to the corporate life of the one new man. The new man must become our daily living. In verse 24 Paul speaks of putting on the new man. To put on the new man means to have the church life, which is the new life of the new mankind created by Christ in Himself. The church is a new humanity. Corporately we need to put on another humanity. It is crucial for us to have this view as we consider the second half of Ephesians 4.

To put off the old man is not merely to put off the old nature; it is to put off the old way of life, the former way of living. Our old way of living was not entirely an individualistic way of life, for it involved our social life, our community life. No human being can be altogether individualistic. Human nature is inherently social. To be a human being is to live in society and to have some kind of community life.

In the church we have the best community life. If there were no church meetings, we would feel aimless, and our existence would be meaningless. We enjoy coming together in the meetings. The fact that the saints often linger after the meetings are dismissed indicates that in the church we have a genuine community life. If we would be the one new man, we must put off the community life of the old man and put on the community life of the new man.

Visiting Chinatown is part of Chinese social life in America. It is part of the living of the old man that must be put off if we are to practice the church life as the one new

man. Many of those who go to Chinatown may discover that they have a difficult time praying after they come home. The reason for this is that, while they were in Chinatown, they were walking according to the vanity of the mind instead of being renewed in the spirit of the mind.

For the sisters to put off the old man in a practical way, they need to put off their old way of shopping. I believe that most sisters find it difficult to pray when they are in a department store because their way of shopping is according to the living of the old man. It seems that the old man who was buried in baptism is resuscitated in the department store. We need to keep the old man in the tomb in a practical way.

Sometimes in the church life those of a certain nationality may cluster together and converse in their native language instead of English. This practice shows that it is not easy to put off the old man. We automatically prefer our old community life. The reason today's Christianity is so weak is that it is permeated with the old man and his community life. In the denominations it is very difficult to see anything of the one new man. In the church life in the Lord's recovery, we should no longer live according to the former conduct of the old man. We need to be renewed in the spirit of our mind and put on the one new man.

The Lord's intention today is not simply to gather us together, but to cause us to put off the life of the old man. We must put off not only our old nature, but also our former manner of life. Our way of life must become absolutely new in nature, manner, and practice. The church life is the daily living of the new man in the new nature and manner. May we all look to the Lord and pray, "Lord, deliver my mind from vanity and fill it with the reality of the Spirit. Cause my mind to be occupied, possessed, and saturated by the reality of Jesus." If we pray in this way, the Chinese brothers and sisters will find it hard to go to Chinatown, and the sisters will find it hard to shop in the old way. Then we shall have not only the creation of the new man, but the new man growing and

functioning with a proper daily living. This is strategic to God's economy. If the Lord can have this among us, He will gain a great victory. To have personal victories over things such as our temper cannot compare to the corporate victory of putting on the living of the new man in a practical way. The church life is the life of the corporate new man with a new nature and a new manner. Everything related to the living of the one new man is new.

In 4:24 Paul says that the new man is according to God. This means that the new man is according to God Himself, with God's life and nature. Since the new man is according to God, it must have a life that is divine. Such a life will not be individualistic; it will be corporate. I believe that before long the living of the new man will be realized in the Lord's recovery. In various localities the Lord will have a people whose daily living is the corporate life of the new man. This is the church life according to God's plan.

We do not have the church life simply by coming together in the meetings to sing, pray-read, praise the Lord, and give testimonies. The church life is the daily walk of a corporate man, a walk that is absolutely new in nature and in manner. If we walk according to the spirit of our mind, we shall be those who live such a corporate life. We shall have the proper community life in which everything is new. May the Lord hasten the day when concerning this matter our sky is clear and we are fully in the light!

THE VANITY OF THE MIND

In verse 17 Paul charges us to "no longer walk as the nations also walk in the vanity of their mind." Those who walk in this way are "darkened in their understanding, estranged from the life of God because of the ignorance which is in them, because of the hardness of their heart" (v. 18). It is possible to be a saved person, one who has the life of God, yet walk in the vanity of the mind. For example, some may do their shopping in the vanity of the mind and thereby become alienated from the life of God. Others may

go to Chinatown and be estranged from the life of God. As they sit in the restaurant enjoying a Chinese meal, they may sense that, because they are living according to the former manner of life, they are cut off from the life of God. Because of the insulation within them, they do not sense the flow of the heavenly electricity. Whenever we return to the old manner of life, we shall spontaneously sense that we are darkened within and estranged from God's life. If we persist in living according to the former manner of life, we shall eventually become calloused and insensitive. We may even cease from feeling because we do not care for our conscience.

The church life is definitely a community life. But it is a community life altogether different from that of the old man. The community life of the one new man is new in every way.

Consider how many terms Paul uses to describe the life of fallen man in verses 17 through 19. He refers to vanity, darkness, estrangement, ignorance, and hardness. Whenever we live according to our old community life, we do not sense any shining or brightness within. We may reason that it is permissible to do a certain thing, but we realize that it causes us to be alienated from the life of God and to be in darkness.

A MATTER OF THE LIVING CHRIST

The church life is not a matter of right and wrong; it is a matter of the living Christ. You may argue that it is not wrong for you to go shopping at a certain department store. You may insist that such a thing is not sinful. There may in fact be nothing wrong with it, but it causes you to be darkened and estranged from the life of God. You may be right in every way, but you do not experience Christ as your life and as your person. This is the reason that after you go shopping you may not be able to pray for a period of time. The church life is higher than the standard of right and wrong; it is a living that is according to Christ. If

Christ is the One living in us, He will not allow us to do certain things. For example, He will not be pleased for us to go shopping according to our former manner of life. Such a way of living is not according to the living of Christ.

THE TRUTH IN JESUS

In 4:20 Paul speaks of learning Christ and in verse 21, of having been "taught in Him as the truth is in Jesus." In a note on 4:21 J.N. Darby points out that in Greek there is an emphatic article before Jesus. He then goes on to say that this indicates that "'Jesus' is personally brought into relief." The truth in Jesus is the real situation of the life of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels, a life filled with truth, reality. Jesus lived a life of always doing things in God, with God, and for God. God was in His life, and He was one with God. This is the truth in Jesus. Jesus lived in a way that always corresponded to God's righteousness and holiness.

In verse 24 Paul says that the new man is created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth. This truth no doubt is the very truth in Jesus. Our standard of living should not be according to the law or according to the standards of society; it must be according to the truth in Jesus, the reality lived out by Jesus when He was on earth. Hence, the life of Jesus should be our life today in the church. In other words, the living of the new man should be exactly the same as the living of Jesus. The way Jesus lived on earth is the way the new man should live today.

If we would live in such a way, we should not reason according to right or wrong. Instead, we should consider the various aspects of our daily life according to the truth as it is in Jesus. For example, if we are about to go shopping, we should ask whether the Lord Jesus is going shopping. The life of the one new man must be that of the reality of Jesus. If we all live in a way that is heavenly, divine, righteous, holy, and glorious, we shall have a wonderful community life in the church. This is the corporate life of the new man.

NOT GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

Toward the end of chapter four Paul says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in Whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption" (v. 30). I am concerned that day by day and even hour by hour many of us are grieving the indwelling Holy Spirit. We grieve Him because we do not live according to the new manner of life. Instead, we walk according to the vanity of the mind. Because we do not stay in the spirit of the mind, we grieve the Holy Spirit. This is a further indication that the new man needs not only creation and growth for function, but also the practical daily living with a new manner of life. This is the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE NINETY-FOUR

THE SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:17; 2:22; 3:5, 16; 4:23; 5:18; 6:18

In 4:17 Paul says, "This therefore I say and testify in the Lord, that you no longer walk as the nations also walk in the vanity of their mind." The nations are the fallen people, who have become vain in their reasonings (Rom. 1:21). They walk without God in the vanity of their mind, controlled and directed by their vain thoughts. Whatever they do according to their fallen mind is vanity. Hence, the basic element in the daily life of fallen mankind is the vanity of the mind.

If you study the Bible from Genesis 6 through Revelation 20, you will see that all of fallen mankind lives in the vanity of the mind. Mankind has fallen from the spirit into the mind. God purposely created man with a spirit with the intention that man would live and walk in the spirit. But through the fall man's spirit was deadened, and man began to live according to the vanity of the mind. Those who are fallen have all their living directed by their thoughts. Every fallen person without exception is under the dominion of his thoughts. Before we were saved, our words and deeds were according to the thoughts of the fallen mentality.

WALKING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT OF THE MIND

In the church as the new man, we should live not according to the vanity of the mind, but according to the spirit of the mind (4:23). This is the key to the daily living of the corporate one new man. Formerly, our mind was filled with vanity; now it must be permeated with the

spirit. We need to walk according to the spirit that is spreading into our mind and filling it. In this way the daily walk of the new man will be in the spirit of the mind. This is the secret of the church life.

A SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION

The human spirit is mentioned in every chapter of Ephesians. Ephesians 1:17 says, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him." The spirit here is the regenerated human spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. Such a spirit is given to us by God so that we may have wisdom and revelation to know Him and to know His economy.

In relation to the church, we need a spirit of wisdom and revelation. As far as the church is concerned, a naturally keen mind is of no avail. Rather, the spirit is of primary importance. Just as we must use the proper organs to see, hear, and taste, so we must use the proper organ--the spirit--in dealing with the church.

Furthermore, our spirit must be a spirit of wisdom and revelation. Wisdom is in our spirit so that we may know the mystery of God, whereas revelation is of God's Spirit to show us the vision by opening the veil. We firstly have wisdom, the ability to understand, that we may know spiritual things. Then the Spirit of God reveals the spiritual things to our spiritual understanding. Knowing that the spirit is of crucial importance in relation to the church, Paul prayed that the Father of glory would grant us such a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

OUR SPIRIT BEING GOD'S DWELLING PLACE

In 2:22 Paul says, "In Whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit." This refers to our human spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is the dweller, whereas our spirit is His dwelling place. Therefore, the dwelling place of God is in our spirit.

If we want to practice the church life, we need to be in

the spirit. The natural mind is of no use in the church life as the one new man. In school or in business we need to rely on our mind, but in the church we must depend on the spirit, realizing that in the natural mind there is nothing but vanity. According to 2:22, God's dwelling place among His people today is in their spirit, not in their mind.

REVELATION IN SPIRIT

Speaking of the mystery of Christ, Paul says in 3:5, "Which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit." Once again the spirit here refers to the human spirit regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. Thus it can be regarded as the mingled spirit, the human spirit mingled with God's Spirit. Such a mingled spirit was the means by which the New Testament revelation concerning Christ and the church was made known to the apostles and prophets. We need the same spirit to see such a revelation today.

The "sons of men" in this verse are represented by the "holy apostles and prophets." When God revealed the mystery of Christ to these representatives of mankind, He revealed it to their spirit. By this we see that the spirit, not the mind, is the crucial organ with respect to God's economy.

THE INNER MAN

In 3:16 Paul goes on to speak of the inner man: "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man." The inner man is our regenerated spirit with God's life as its life. In order to experience Christ as the embodiment of God, we need to be strengthened into our inner man. However, by nature the brothers are strong in the mind and in the will, whereas the sisters are strong in the emotion. May the Lord cause us to become strong in the spirit, in our inner man!

We all need to be strengthened into our inner man so that Christ will be able to make His home in our hearts.

Our heart is composed of all the parts of the soul--the mind, emotion, and will--plus the conscience, the main part of our spirit. These are the inward parts of our being. Through regeneration, Christ came into our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). Subsequently, we should allow Him to spread Himself into every part of our heart. Since our heart is the totality of all our inward parts and the center of our inward being, when Christ makes His home in our heart, He is able to control our entire inner being and supplies and strengthens every inward part with Himself. The secret of Christ making His home in our heart is the strengthening of our inner man. Because Paul knew this secret, he prayed that the Father would grant us, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power into the inner man.

THE RENEWING SPIRIT

As we go on to chapter four, we see that the strengthened spirit must become the renewing spirit in our mind. In 4:23 Paul says, "And are renewed in the spirit of your mind." Once again, the spirit here is the regenerated spirit of the believers mingled with the indwelling Spirit of God. Such a mingled spirit spreads into our mind and thereby becomes the spirit of our mind. It is in such a spirit that we are renewed for our transformation (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Our strengthened spirit is the means for our entire being to be renewed. When our spirit has become strong, it will spread into our mind and cause it to be renewed. When our spirit renews our mind, it proceeds to renew our emotion and our will. By such a renewing spirit the church has the proper living as the one new man.

FILLED IN SPIRIT

In 5:18 Paul goes on to speak about being filled in spirit. This verse says, "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation, but be filled in spirit." To be drunk with wine is to be filled in the body, whereas to be filled in our

regenerated spirit is to be filled with Christ (1:23) unto all the fullness of God (3:19). To be drunk with wine in the body causes us to be dissipated, but to be filled with Christ causes us to overflow with Him in speaking, singing, psalming, and giving thanks to God (5:19-20). It also causes us to subject ourselves one to another (v. 21). What we need for the church life is not to be filled in our minds with objective knowledge, but to be filled in our spirit with the riches of Christ unto all the fullness of God.

PRAYING IN SPIRIT

The last reference in Ephesians to the regenerated human spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God is in 6:18. Here Paul charges us to pray "at every time in spirit," that is, to pray in our spirit mingled with God's Spirit. This reference to the spirit is in the context of spiritual warfare. When the church has become the new man with the normal functions and the proper daily living, and when the spots and wrinkles have been removed by the nourishing and cherishing of Christ, the church becomes a mighty warrior, a soldier to fight the battle for God's interests. In order to engage in spiritual warfare, we need to pray in the mingled spirit.

I hope that we all are impressed with the place of the human spirit in the book of Ephesians. In chapter one we have the spirit of wisdom and revelation; in chapter two, the spirit as the place of God's dwelling; in chapter three, the spirit as the means of receiving revelation and as the organ that needs to be strengthened; in chapter four, the renewing spirit that spreads into our mind to renew all our inward parts; in chapter five, the spirit being filled with Christ unto all the fullness of God; and in chapter six, the mingled spirit as the organ in which we pray to fight the battle for the Lord. As we consider all these references to the spirit in this short book, we see that the church life is altogether a matter in the spirit. In order to practice the church life, we need to turn to our spirit and remain there.

The daily living of the corporate new man is absolutely in the spirit of the mind.

A CLEAR SKY

A number of times we have spoken about the importance of having a clear sky. Actually, to have a clear sky is simply to have a clear spirit. Spiritually speaking, our spirit is our sky. Therefore, when our spirit is clear, our sky is clear as well. However, if our spirit is cloudy, our sky also will be cloudy.

In 4:17-19 Paul says that those who walk in the vanity of the mind are darkened in their understanding and estranged from the life of God because of the ignorance which is in them. He points out that their hearts are hard, that they have ceased from feeling, and that they have given themselves over to lewdness. Therefore, to be in the vanity of the mind is to be in thick darkness. By contrast, the believers, who were once darkness, are "now light in the Lord" (5:8). Therefore, we should "walk as children of light." In 5:14 Paul says, "Awake, sleeper, and arise from among the dead, and Christ shall shine on you." Whenever we are in the spirit, we are in the light, under the Lord's shining. As a result, we have a clear sky. The more clear our spirit is, the more clear our sky becomes.

If we exercise the mind instead of the spirit, the sky within us will be cloudy. The same is true if we are strong in our emotion or will instead of in our spirit. However, if we deny our natural mind, emotion, and will and take a definite stand with the Lord in our spirit, our sky will immediately and spontaneously become clear. When we hesitate in following the Lord, our sky is cloudy. But when we are definite and absolute in following Him, it is clear.

The reason we hesitate to follow the Lord is that we consider too much in the mind or care for our emotional concerns. Possibly you are afraid of offending someone. A brother may be concerned about his wife's reaction to his decision to take the way of the church. Such considerations and concerns cloud our spirit. But if we set aside our

considerations and concerns and make a firm decision to follow the Lord absolutely, our sky will be clear. There will be no clouds in our spirit. In our spirit we have no worries and no concerns, only the indwelling Holy Spirit.

If we walk according to the vanity of the mind, we shall be in darkness and estranged from the life of God. But if we turn to the spirit of the mind, Christ will shine upon us, and we shall have a clear sky. The reason certain ones who have been with us for a number of years have not improved much is that they live in the vanity of the mind. Rarely do they turn to the spirit of the mind. If such brothers and sisters turn from the vanity of the mind to the spirit of the mind, they will undergo a great change. Listening to messages is of little help unless we are in the spirit of the mind instead of in the vanity of the mind. We cannot receive spiritual help from messages if we exercise the mind rather than the spirit. We need to leap out of the vanity of the mind and walk according to the spirit of the mind.

A NEW ELEMENT WROUGHT INTO US

As we walk according to the spirit of our mind, we are renewed. To be renewed is not to be adjusted, corrected, or improved in a mere outward way. It is to have a new element, the divine element, wrought into us. This means that in the church life we should not care for outward correction or adjustment; we should care for inward renewing.

If we would be renewed, we need to put off the old man and put on the new man. Notice that Paul does not say that we should try to improve the old man. Many saints do not have the intention of putting off the old man and of putting on the new man. Instead, their intention is to improve themselves, even to perfect themselves. They may try to adjust themselves in order to adapt to the church life. This is a mistake. In the genuine church life there is no adjustment or correction; there is simply the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new man. Actually, this putting off and putting on is the renewing.

For something to be renewed means that the old element is replaced by a new element. Our spirit is a renewing spirit because it is indwelt by the living Christ as the renewing element. Because we have the element of newness in our spirit, we can be renewed in the spirit of the mind as the renewing spirit spreads into our mind. The more we turn to the spirit of the mind and walk in the spirit of the mind, the more our mind will be renewed. Then in a practical way the old element is replaced by the new element. In this way we put off the old man and put on the new man.

THE EXPRESSION OF GOD

The result of such a daily living is that we have the image of God. This means that our life becomes the expression of God. In 4:24 Paul says that the new man is according to God. This means that the church life is according to God Himself and is God's expression. God's goal is to gain a people through whom He can express Himself. In the church as the new man according to God, this divine goal is fulfilled. This is altogether different from religion, which teaches people to behave themselves outwardly. God's intention is not simply to get a people who are outwardly kind, gentle, and humble. His intention is to have a Body, the new man, for His expression. In order for this goal to be attained, the new man must firstly be created in Christ. Paul speaks of this in chapter two. Then, according to Paul's word in chapter four, the new man must grow and live by walking in the spirit of the mind and must be renewed daily. The result is that the corporate new man will become the image of God, His expression. In this way God's intention is fulfilled.

THE DIVINE CHARACTER EXPRESSED THROUGH HUMAN VIRTUE

In 4:24 Paul says that the new man was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Righteousness is a matter of being right with God

and man according to God's righteous way; holiness is a matter of being separated unto God from anything common and of being saturated with God's holy nature.

In this verse the Greek word rendered holiness is *hosiotees*. It denotes a genuine piety. Hence, some versions adopt the rendering "piety." If we consider this verse in context, we shall see that the church life is a life of genuine piety. Unfortunately, this word has been damaged by traditional use and given a religious meaning. In the New Testament, this word sometimes translated piety is virtue according to the divine character expressed through humanity. On the one hand, it involves human virtue; on the other hand, it expresses the divine nature and character. We need to have a daily walk in which the divine character is expressed through our virtue.

This kind of living is very different from mere human virtue. As human beings, we have certain virtues. But these virtues need to become the expression of the divine character. For example, the New Testament teaches wives to submit to their husbands. Confucius also taught this. Actually Confucius taught a threefold submission: to the father, to the husband, and, if the husband should die, to the son. What is the difference between submission according to the teaching of Confucius and submission according to the teaching of the Bible? The submission that is according to the teaching of Confucius is nothing more than a human virtue. In this kind of submission there is nothing of the flavor of Christ and nothing of the divine character. But if a sister in the Lord is filled in spirit and submits to her husband out of this filling, there will be in her submission some amount of the flavor of Christ. This means that in her submission there will be the expression of the divine character.

Let us take another example, the matter of honoring our parents. The Bible surely teaches us to honor our parents. Confucius taught the same thing. But the difference between the honoring of parents that is in accord with the teaching of Confucius and that which is in accord

with the Bible is that in the former there is no flavor of Christ, whereas in the latter there is both the flavor of Christ and the expression of the divine character. When we are filled in spirit unto all the fullness of God and honor our parents out of such an infilling, there will be the expression of God in our relationship to our parents. Our behavior will not be a mere human virtue; it will be a virtue with the divine character and with the flavor of Christ. As we honor our parents, there should be the sweet savor of Christ. This is the expression of God through human virtue. Suppose a young man honors his parents from a spirit filled unto all the fullness of God. In this virtue there will be the divine character. This is the expression of God in humanity.

This expression of God is absolutely different from mere ethical behavior. Although the followers of Confucius may attain a high ethical standard, there is no flavor of Christ in their virtue. I repeat, in our virtue there needs to be the character of God and the flavor and taste of Christ. Such a divine expression through human virtue is conveyed by the Greek word for holiness in 4:24. The church life must be filled with such an expression of divine character through human virtue.

In our honesty and generosity there needs to be the expression of the divine character. There are two kinds of honesty and two kinds of generosity: an honesty and a generosity that are mere human virtues, and an honesty and a generosity that express the character of God. In the church life our honesty and generosity must have the flavor of Christ. As others contact us, they should not only have the sense that we are virtuous; they should be able to sense in our virtue the flavor of Christ and see the expression of the divine character.

The key to the church life is the spirit of the mind. If we live according to the spirit of the mind, there will be in the church life the expression of the divine character. Then we shall be a corporate people with the flavor of Christ and the expression of God. If we simply give others the impression that we are good, righteous, and kind, our church life is a

failure. There must be in our goodness, righteousness, and kindness the expression of the Triune God. The church life must be filled with the aroma and flavor of Christ and with the character of God. Such a living is the living of the Triune God through our humanity. For centuries, God has been longing for such a church life. We pray that before long this kind of church life will be fully practiced among us in the Lord's recovery. May the Lord be satisfied by seeing such an expression of Himself through the corporate new man on earth!

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE NINETY-FIVE

THE BEAUTY OF THE BRIDE

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:9-11, 13b-14, 17-23; 3:16-17a, 19b; 5:25-27, 29-30, 32

SPOTS AND WRINKLES

In previous messages we have considered three categories of negative things that damage the church life: ordinances, doctrine, and the old man. Now we come to the fourth category of these negative things--the spots and wrinkles. Paul refers to this in 5:27, where he says that Christ will "present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things."

In Ephesians Paul deals with the four categories of negative things in a very good sequence. Related to the creation of the new man, we have the ordinances. Related to the growth of the new man for function, we have doctrine. Furthermore, related to the daily living of the new man, we have the old man with his old way of life. For the creation of the new man, the ordinances must be abolished and slain. For the growth of the new man, doctrine must be depreciated. For the proper daily living of the new man, the old man must be put off. However, after these three categories of negative things have been dealt with, we must still face the problem of the spots and wrinkles.

Because they are so subjective, the spots and wrinkles are more difficult to deal with than the ordinances, the doctrines, and the old man. We cannot simply abolish the spots and wrinkles or put them off, for they are in our organic tissue and natural makeup. Spots are of the natural life, and wrinkles are a matter of oldness. Humanly speaking, there is no way for us to remove such

things. However, God has a way. The water of life in the Word can metabolically wash away these defects by the transformation of life. The more Christ sanctifies the church and cleanses her through the washing of the water in the Word, the fewer spots and wrinkles there will be. Furthermore, as Christ nourishes and cherishes the church, the spots and wrinkles will be removed metabolically. Every flaw, defect, and imperfection will be removed by Christ's transforming life.

IMPARTING THE RICH ELEMENT OF CHRIST

Instead of trying to correct others or to adjust them outwardly, we need to minister to them the sanctifying, purifying, nourishing, and cherishing element of Christ. This element will produce an inward change that will take away the oldness and the defects. We should not rely on any method or way. If a particular way is prevailing, it is not because of the way itself, but because of the life contained in that way and released by it. What we should impart to others is not a method or way of doing things; we should impart the rich element of Christ that will sanctify, purify, nourish, and cherish them. If you contact Christians whose way of meeting is different from yours, do not try to change them. Instead, take the opportunity to minister the riches of Christ to them. We should not care for a way, a method, or a form. We should care only to release the riches of Christ and to impart them to others. It is Christ who sanctifies and cleanses. Through His transforming work, all the spots and wrinkles are removed and replaced by His living element.

EXPERIENCING THE SANCTIFYING ELEMENT OF CHRIST

We have pointed out that spots and wrinkles are more difficult to deal with than ordinances, doctrine, and the old man because these defects and imperfections are subjectively part of our natural being. They have been interwoven into our organic tissue. Therefore, only the

inner supply of life can deal with them. If we want the spots and wrinkles to be removed, then we must rely only on the sanctifying, purifying, nourishing, and cherishing element of Christ. It is not as difficult to deal with ordinances as it is with doctrines; doctrine is not as difficult to deal with as the old man; and the old man is not as difficult to deal with as the spots and wrinkles. Even though we may have no problems with ordinances, doctrine, or the old man, we must still inquire whether or not we are troubled by spots and wrinkles.

The spots and wrinkles must be removed in order for the Bride to be prepared for Christ. To be sure, the Bride presented to Christ will not have any spots or wrinkles. Revelation 19:7 says, "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready." Certainly the wife by this time will have been purified from all the spots and wrinkles.

We should not place our trust in mere outward change. Such change can take place suddenly without having any effect on the spots and wrinkles in our being. God's concern is not that we simply change with respect to our outward appearance; His concern is that the spots and wrinkles be washed away by the sanctifying element of Christ. Only through such a process of sanctification can we become a beautiful and glorious Bride for Christ, a Bride without blemish or imperfection. We should forget about trying to improve ourselves and concentrate instead on experiencing the sanctifying riches of Christ. We all need more experience of the purifying element of Christ. The more we experience this element, the more our defects and shortcomings will be metabolically removed. As the result of this process, we shall become a beautiful Bride ready to be presented to Christ. Only by the supply of life from Christ can our natural defects and organic blemishes be removed.

If we are clear about this, we shall realize that mere teachings can do nothing to eliminate spots and wrinkles.

To repeat, only the sanctifying element which comes through the nourishing and cherishing of Christ can deal with such things. Praise the Lord that the element of Christ is gradually eliminating our defects!

THE PREPARATION OF THE BRIDE

I believe that we are living in a day in which the Lord is preparing His Bride. Furthermore, I have the full assurance that we are presently undergoing this process of preparation. Otherwise, when, where, and with whom will Revelation 19 have its fulfillment? This chapter is in the process of being fulfilled among us in the Lord's recovery.

We need to connect Revelation 19 with Ephesians 5. Apart from Ephesians 5, there is no way for the Bride to be prepared, and hence no way for Revelation 19 to be fulfilled. It is very significant that the Lord has spoken to us about ordinances, doctrine, the old man, and the spots and wrinkles. It is crucial that we experience the nourishing, cherishing, sanctifying, and purifying riches of Christ to remove our oldness and defects. When all such things have been removed, we shall become a church that is holy, glorious, and without blemish. Then we shall be the Bride in Revelation 19. When the Bride has been prepared, Christ will come as the Bridegroom. Praise the Lord that we are in the process of becoming a holy and glorious Bride for Christ! How we praise the Lord for showing us the way to be prepared as the Bride, made ready for His coming back! Christ will have a church without ordinances, doctrines, the old man, and the spots and wrinkles. Such a church will be the beautiful Bride to satisfy the desire of His heart.

BEAUTY FOR PRESENTATION

In chapter one we have a general sketch of the church, and in chapter two, the creation, birth, and formation of the one new man. Then in chapter four we have the growth of this new man for functioning. Also in chapter four we see the daily life of the new man. Then in chapter five we come

to the presentation of the church to Christ. At the time of this presentation, the church will be the Bride, not the new man. As the new man, the church needs the functions. But as the Bride, the church needs beauty. The growth in chapter four is for the function of the new man, whereas the beauty in chapter five is for the presentation of the Bride.

The spots and wrinkles do not affect the function of the church. However, they very much detract from the beauty of the church. What a man looks for in a bride is not firstly ability; it is beauty. The church as Christ's Bride must also be beautiful. For this reason, Paul goes on from the function and daily living of the new man in chapter four to the presentation of the Bride without spot or wrinkle in chapter five. If we grow in the Lord, eventually our functions as members of the Body will come forth. However, we may function properly and have an excellent daily living according to the spirit of the mind, but still not be beautiful in the eyes of the Lord because of our spots and wrinkles. After saying so much about the church in chapters one through four, Paul goes on in chapter five to speak about the church as the Bride. In this chapter he says nothing concerning the creation of the church, the growth of the church, or the daily living of the church. Instead, he speaks of the beauty of the church. When Christ presents the church to Himself, the church will not be a strong man; she will be a beautiful Bride. Christ is the universal Man. As this universal Man, He needs the church to be His Bride to match Him. In order to be the Bride of Christ, the church must become beautiful and have all the spots and wrinkles removed.

THE WAY TO BE PREPARED

We have seen that with respect to the creation of the new man, the function of the new man, and the daily living of the new man, we face problems with ordinances, doctrine, and the old way of life. But with respect to the presentation of the church as the Bride, we have the problem of the spots and wrinkles. The crucial question is

how these blemishes can be removed. Any bride would want to have a healthy, radiant complexion on her wedding day. If she is concerned about blemishes, she should begin long beforehand to prepare herself for her wedding by eating nutritious foods that will give her a healthy complexion. In the same principle, today we must prepare ourselves to be the Bride by taking in the element of Christ's riches as our nourishment. Christ is the food for the church. Therefore, as she prepares herself to be presented to Christ, the church must eat Christ. There is no other way to be prepared. Eating Jesus is the way. By eating Him we become a beautiful and even glorious Bride.

THE REFLECTION OF CHRIST

Christ is now preparing us to be His Bride. The time is coming when He will present the Bride to Himself. Surely at the time of her presentation to Christ, the Bride will not have any wrinkles or spots. In His Bride Christ will behold nothing but beauty. This beauty will be the reflection of what He is. Do you know where the beauty of the Bride comes from? It comes from the very Christ who is wrought into the church and who is then expressed through the church. Our beauty is not our behavior. Our only beauty is the reflection of Christ, the shining out of Christ from within us. What Christ appreciates in us is the expression of Himself in us. Nothing less than this will meet His standard or win His appreciation.

Firstly, Christ must come into us and then be assimilated by us. Then He will be able to shine out of us. This shining is the glory of the Bride, the manifestation of divinity through humanity. Real beauty is the expression of the divine attributes through humanity. Nothing in the universe is as beautiful as this expression. Therefore, the beauty of the Bride is Christ shining out of us. It is a matter of divinity expressed through humanity. Through our humanity there is an expression of the divine color, the divine appearance, the divine flavor, the divine nature, and the divine character. Hallelujah for such a beauty!

On the day of his wedding, a bridegroom cares much more for the beauty of his bride than for her ability. In like manner, in the church life our beauty will eventually be much more important to the Lord than our function. At the beginning of the church life, we may emphasize ability and function. But eventually we shall place more emphasis on beauty. The Lord Jesus cares much more for our beauty than for our function. Do not pay that much attention to becoming capable, qualified, and gifted in function. At first, this may count for something in the church life. But eventually the Lord will show us that what He cares for is not our ability; He cares for the beauty of Himself expressed through our humanity. Christ does not intend to present a capable church to Himself. The church that will be presented to Him will be glorious and beautiful, a church without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing. If our blemishes and imperfections are to be removed, we need to take in more and more of Christ. He should not simply energize us for our function, but also beautify us that we may be His Bride.

BEAUTIFIED BY THE INDWELLING CHRIST

We need to go on from the function in Ephesians 4 to the beauty in Ephesians 5. In caring for their children, mothers may value strength in a boy, but they appreciate beauty in a girl. Likewise, in the church as the one new man there is strength and ability, but with the church as the Bride there is beauty and glory. We should learn somewhat to depreciate our ability and strength, for as part of the Bride, we shall be not male, but female. At the time of the wedding, what the church will need is beauty, not strength. Oh, the church is being beautified by partaking of Christ, by digesting Christ, and by assimilating Christ! The more we experience the indwelling Christ in this way, the more He will replace our spots and wrinkles with His element, and the more His riches with the divine attributes will become our beauty. Then we shall be prepared to be presented to Christ as His lovely Bride.

CLOTHED IN FINE LINEN

We have pointed out that the experience of Ephesians 5 is necessary for the fulfillment of Revelation 19. Ephesians shows how Christ prepares the Bride by sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing us with Himself. In this way we are metabolically transformed and we become beautiful and glorious, ready to be presented to Christ according to Revelation 19.

Speaking of the wife, the Bride of Christ, Revelation 19:8 says, "And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints." Because the Bride is clothed in this way, the declaration can be made that she "has made herself ready" (v. 7). This indicates that by the time of Revelation 19 the Bride will have been prepared. For the Bride to be prepared means that she has the "fine linen, bright and pure." Pure refers to nature, whereas bright refers to expression. This fine linen is "the righteousness of the saints." No doubt, these righteousnesses are related to the righteousness in Ephesians 4:24, where we are told that the new man was created in righteousness. The fact that the clothing of the Bride is pure means not only that it is without dirt, but also that it is without mixture. The fine linen which is the righteousness of the saints does not refer to the righteousness (which is Christ) for our salvation (Phil. 3:9; 1 Cor. 1:30). The righteousness we received for our salvation is objective, that we might meet the requirement of the righteous God. However, the righteousnesses of the Bride here denote the subjective righteousness, Christ as the righteousness which has been constituted into our being. The more this subjective righteousness is wrought into the church, the more she is prepared to become the Bride. Those who compose the Bride have been redeemed and regenerated. But they need to have the subjective righteousness interwoven into their very being in order to have the fine linen, bright and pure. Actually, it is this linen that is the beauty of the Bride.

THE LORD'S WORK IN HIS RECOVERY

There is no doubt that Revelation 19 will be completely fulfilled. Furthermore, we believe that the process of fulfillment is taking place today. Since Jerusalem has been restored to the nation of Israel, the coming back of the Lord Jesus should not be far off. The Bride, however, cannot be prepared quickly. This preparation is a gradual work that takes place over a period of time. Certainly the Lord must be doing a work on earth to prepare His Bride. Where is this work being carried out? With whom is it taking place? Some may say that the work of preparing the Bride is among the spiritual ones in Catholicism, the denominations, and the independent groups. According to this view, Christ will gather together all these spiritual ones and form them into His Bride at the time of His coming. However, this is not the Lord's way. He is not coming to collect those who will constitute the Bride; He is coming to present to Himself the Bride who has already been prepared. This preparation, I believe, involves the work of building corporately. Those who make up the Bride must not only be mature in life; they must also be built together as the one Bride. Therefore, I firmly believe that the Lord is preparing His Bride among those in His recovery.

I am burdened that we would all realize that the Lord's recovery is not another Christian movement or an ordinary Christian work. The work in the recovery is the Lord's genuine work to prepare His Bride. I believe that in the years to come, more of those who seek the Lord faithfully will turn to the way of His recovery. They will realize that nowhere else do they have the inward confirmation. When we turned to the way of the Lord's recovery, we had the sense deep within that the Lord had put His seal on the way we are taking. The primary work of the Lord in His recovery is not to preach the gospel throughout the earth; it is to prepare His Bride.

The Lord's intention is not to revive Christianity as a whole. In His recovery, He is calling out a remnant of those who love Him and who are faithful to Him. He is sending out the call to overcome the degradation of

Christianity so that a number of those who seek Him may be prepared as His Bride. In this matter, the Lord is moving on, and we are going on with Him. What a privilege to be alive in this age!

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE NINETY-SIX

HEAD OVER ALL TO THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:9-11, 22-23; 3:17a

The deepest chapters in Ephesians are chapters one and three. The positive things unfolded in these chapters are far beyond our ability to grasp or apprehend. For example, in 1:10, Paul says, "Unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him." I do not think that very many Christians have an adequate understanding of this verse. This word does not refer to the preeminence of Christ, to the authority of Christ, or to the expression of Christ. This verse is unique, and no other verse in the Scriptures can be compared to it. When we read about husbands loving their wives or about wives submitting to their husbands, we readily understand, for such things as love and submission fit into our natural concept. But in order to grasp the meaning of verses such as 1:10, we need a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

GOD'S ETERNAL ADMINISTRATION

As we consider 1:9 and 10, we see that the economy or dispensation which God purposed in Himself is to head up all things in Christ at the fullness of the times. The times refer to the ages. The fullness of the times will be when the new heaven and new earth come, after all the dispensations of God in all the ages have been completed. When God's economy has been completed, Christ will head up all things universally. God has made Christ the Head over all things (1:22). Through all the dispensations of God in all the ages, all things will be headed up in Christ in the

new heaven and the new earth. This will be God's eternal administration and economy.

Because our physical body has a head, it is possible for our body to stand upright. Although we stand on our feet, it is actually the head which enables us to stand erect. This indicates that our head causes our entire body to be headed up. If a person has his head cut off, his body will collapse. Because the head causes every part of the body to be headed up, all the things that are on the body--clothing, shoes, eyeglasses--are headed up also.

The entire universe is under Christ's heading up. However, some things are still in a state of collapse because the process of the heading up of all things in Christ has not yet been completed. At the economy of the fullness of times, everything will be headed up in Christ. Nothing will continue to be in a state of collapse, and nothing will fall. In Christ God will head up all things. At present many things in the universe are still falling or collapsing. But at the dispensation of the fullness of the times, nothing will fall. Not even a leaf will fall from a tree.

CHRIST'S NEED FOR THE BODY

We have pointed out that our head functions to head up every part of our physical body. In the same principle, God is using Christ to head up all things in the universe. As the universal Head of all things, Christ needs a Body. This Body is the church. Just as clothing and other items rest on a person's body, so one day everything in the universe will rest on Christ's Body, the church. We have seen that if a person has his head cut off, his body and everything on it will collapse. The principle is the same with Christ as the Head over all things to the church. If all the things in the universe are not headed up in Christ through His Body, they will remain in a state of collapse.

Scientists have their explanations for such phenomena as the falling of leaves from trees. They put forth their reasons for the various physical changes that take place in

the universe. These scientific explanations and reasons may be correct temporarily, but they will not be correct eternally. I do not know physics or biology, but I do know the process of the divine heading up of all things. Furthermore, I believe 1:10 when it says that in the dispensation of the fullness of times this process will reach its completion. From that time onward, nothing in the universe will collapse. Everything will rest on the church as the Body of Christ. Christ is the Head, and the church is the Body. Christ is heading up the Body, and all the billions of items in the universe will rest on this headed-up Body. Although we do not see a full picture of this today, we do see it in miniature. We also can enjoy a foretaste of the heading up of all things in Christ.

We should not think that a person can stand upright mainly because his legs, ankles, and feet are strong. We have pointed out that it is actually the head that enables us to stand erect. Apart from the heading up of the body by the head, the body and everything on it will fall down. This is a picture of the heading up of all things in Christ. Firstly, Christ heads up His Body. Then in the dispensation of the fullness of the times, God will head up all things in Christ through the Body.

THE INHERITANCE, THE SEAL, AND THE PLEDGE

In 1:11 Paul goes on to say, "In Whom also we were made an inheritance, having been predestinated according to the purpose of the One Who operates all things according to the counsel of His will." It is possible to render the Greek translated "were made an inheritance" as "have obtained an inheritance." Unless we have some understanding of verse 10, we shall not be able to understand verse 11. The words, "in Whom" in verse 11 refer to Christ as the Head. In Him, the universal Head, we were made God's inheritance. The Greek verb translated "were made an inheritance" means to choose or assign by lot. Hence, this clause literally means we were designated as a heritage. We were made an inheritance to

inherit God's inheritance. On the one hand, we were made God's inheritance (v. 18) for God's enjoyment; on the other hand, we were made to inherit God as our inheritance (v. 14) for our enjoyment.

In verse 13 Paul says, "In Whom you also, hearing the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in Whom also believing, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise." As verse 14 explains, the Holy Spirit of the promise is "the pledge of our inheritance, unto the redemption of the acquired possession to the praise of His glory." To be sealed with the Holy Spirit is to be marked with the Holy Spirit as a living seal.

We have been made God's inheritance. At the time we were saved, God put His Holy Spirit into us as a seal to mark us out, to indicate that we belong to God. This Spirit is the pledge, foretaste, guarantee, token payment, a part payment in advance. Since we are God's inheritance, the Holy Spirit is a seal upon us. Since God is our inheritance, the Holy Spirit is the pledge of this inheritance to us. God gives His Holy Spirit to us, not only as a guarantee of our inheritance, securing our heritage, but also as a foretaste of what we shall inherit of God, affording us a taste beforehand of the full inheritance.

We need to understand verses 13 and 14 in the light of verses 10 and 11. We have seen that in Christ God is in the process of heading up all things in heaven and on earth. However, without the church as the Body to match Christ as the Head, it will not be possible for God to head up all things in Christ. The heading up of all things is accomplished by the Head, but it cannot be accomplished without a Body for the Head. This Body is God's inheritance, God's possession. Because we were lost, we had to be redeemed, purchased back, by God. Through redemption we have become God's acquired possession. We, God's redeemed ones, the church, are God's possession, acquired by His purchase with the precious blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). In God's economy, God becomes our inheritance, and we become God's possession. As God's

inheritance and possession, we are the Body of Christ, through which all things in the universe are being headed up in Christ.

SATURATED WITH THE SPIRIT FOR THE HEADING UP OF ALL THINGS

It is important to see how God acquires His inheritance and His possession. Firstly, He purchased us by the blood of Christ. Secondly, He sealed us with His Spirit. The Spirit as the seal upon the Body is actually God Himself. This means that God put Himself as the seal upon the church purchased by the blood of Christ. The Spirit as the seal is upon the Body not simply in an objective way. On the contrary, through the process of sealing, the seal will permeate and saturate our whole being in a very subjective way. The more we, God's inheritance, are saturated with the Spirit as the living seal, the more heading up there will be in the universe. As God's inheritance and possession, we have been predestinated and purchased. Now we are in the process of being thoroughly saturated with the Spirit. When God's possession has been wholly saturated with the Spirit as the living seal, the heading up of all things in Christ will be completed.

When everything in the universe has been headed up in Christ, everything will be in order. Nothing will be out of place, and nothing will collapse or fall. During autumn, leaves fall from the trees. This indicates that something is out of order. Surely in the new heaven and the new earth leaves will no longer fall from trees, for by then everything will be in perfect order, having been headed up in Christ. As we have seen, this heading up of all things in Christ depends on God's possession, the church, being saturated with Himself.

In the church life in the Lord's recovery, we can experience a foretaste of the heading up of all things. When the church life in a particular city is strong, that city will be brought more into order. For example, policemen who work in the area of Elden Hall in Los Angeles have told us that the presence of the church has produced many

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positive

changes in that area. There has been an improvement of the neighborhood, especially with respect to the crime rate. This illustrates that it is through the church that God is heading up all things in Christ. The more the church as God's possession is saturated with the Triune God, the more heading up there will be. Firstly the church is headed up, and then the things related to the church and that rest on the church will be headed up also. If we allow Christ to saturate us thoroughly, eventually we shall see the completion of the heading up of all things in Christ.

THE TRANSMISSION FROM THE HEAD TO THE BODY

Humanity is the center of God's creation. The heading up of all things in Christ takes place as the Triune God works Himself into man as the center of His creation. According to 1:22, God has subjected all things under the feet of the resurrected and ascended Christ and "gave Him to be Head over all things to the church." The little word "to" is very important because it implies a kind of transmission. Whatever Christ, the Head, has attained and obtained is now being transmitted to His Body, the church. By means of this transmission, the church shares with Christ all His attainments. The church shares in His resurrection from among the dead, His being seated in His transcendency, the subjection of all things under His feet, and His headship over all things. As the element of Christ is transmitted into the church, all that He has accomplished, attained, and obtained is transfused into the church as well. Through this marvelous transmission we become the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. Then, as His Body, we shall become the means by which God will head up all things in Christ. The crucial factor here is the divine transmission, the transfusion of Christ into our being.

CHRIST MAKING HIS HOME IN OUR HEARTS

In Ephesians 3 we see experientially that the very Christ who is Head over all things is actually transmitted

into us. According to verse 17, Christ is making His home in our hearts. For Christ to make His home in our hearts means that He is transmitted into us in a full way. We may say that our heart is the battery and that Christ is the heavenly electricity that is being transmitted into the heart of the battery. In this way, the battery is charged with all that Christ is and with all that He has obtained and attained. By means of such an inward transmission or transfusion, Christ makes His home in our hearts. Hence it is the heavenly transmission that brings Christ into our hearts. Then, just as blood circulates from the heart throughout our physical body, so the Christ who has been transmitted into our heart spiritually will spread into every part of our inner being. Through this transmission and the spread of Christ within us God is heading up all things in Christ through the church.

ONENESS IN THE HEAVENLY TRANSMISSION

Many Christians are amazed when they behold the oneness of the saints in the church life. They are surprised that those with different racial, cultural, and national backgrounds can be truly one. In their amazement at such a oneness, some have thought that we must have set up an organization to maintain this oneness. However, we do not have such an organization, and there is no possibility that any organization could produce such a oneness. We are not one by means of organization; we are one in the divine transmission. If the heavenly transmission of Christ into our inner being should cease, our oneness will be terminated. We can be one simply because we are being headed up in Christ through the transmission of Christ into our being. This is what enables us to live together in oneness in the church life.

We believe that in the years to come God will head us up even more. As a result, the condition of the church will become much better than it is today. Eventually, in the dispensation of the fullness of times, the whole universe will be headed up in Christ through the church. We have

often spoken of the building up of the church. But the emphasis in this message is on being headed up in Christ through the divine transmission. The more Christ is transmitted into us, the more the process of heading up will advance. I have the full assurance that if the Lord delays His coming back, many more Christians will be headed up in Christ through His Body. The worldly people will be surprised at such a heading up, for the more they try to unite through such organizations as the United Nations, the more divided they are. The day is coming when the earth will see not only the uniting, nor even just the building up, but the heading up of all things in Christ. Christ is Head over all things to the church, and now He is in the process of heading up all things through the church. This is what the Lord is doing among us today.

LIFE-STUDY OF EPHESIANS

MESSAGE NINETY-SEVEN

THE CHURCH AS GOD'S WARRIOR

Scripture Reading: Eph. 6:10-18

VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE CHURCH

In Ephesians 1 we have a general view of what the church is and how the church comes into being. Then in chapter two we see that the church is the new man created by Christ in Himself. In chapter three we have a clear vision of Christ making His home in the hearts of those in the church. For Christ to make His home in the heart of the church means that He is transfused into the center of the church's inner being. Through such a transfusion, the church is filled unto all the fullness of God. In this way the church is mingled with divinity and saturated with it. Therefore, the church is humanity mingled, saturated, and permeated with divinity.

In chapter four we see the church as the new man. The new man in chapter two is organically complete, but not functionally perfect. In order to be functionally perfect, the church as the new man must grow in life. The more the new man grows, the more he will be able to function. In Ephesians 4 we also see the daily walk of the new man. As we have pointed out, fallen mankind walks according to the vanity of the mind, but the walk of the church as the new man is in the spirit of the mind.

In Ephesians 5 we see another aspect of the church--the church as the Bride prepared for Christ. In one sense, the church is the new man who needs growth, function, and a proper daily living. In another sense, the church is the Bride who must be beautified in order to be presented to

Christ at His coming. With the church as the Bride, the problem is not with ordinances, doctrine, or the old man. The problem is with the spots and wrinkles, defects that are organic and that ruin the beauty of the church. In order to be free from such defects, the church must be sanctified, purified, nourished, and cherished by having the element of Christ wrought into her metabolically. This element will cause the spots and wrinkles to disappear, and it will beautify the Bride for her presentation to Christ. Eventually, through this process of metabolic transformation the church will become glorious.

THE BRIDE AND THE WARRIOR

In Ephesians 6 we see still another aspect of the church. In this chapter the church is not the Body, the building, the family, the kingdom, the new man, or the Bride. Here the church is God's warrior. The church should be not only the Body to express Christ, the dwelling place for God's habitation, and the new man for the fulfillment of God's economy; the church must also be a warrior, a soldier, to defeat God's enemy.

According to Revelation 19, the church is both the Bride who is presented to Christ and the warrior who fights with Him against God's enemy. At His coming again, the Lord Jesus firstly will meet His Bride. After receiving the Bride, Christ and the overcomers will enter into battle against the enemy. According to Revelation 19:11, the Lord will ride on a white horse, and the armies which are in heaven will follow Him on white horses, dressed in fine linen, white and pure (v. 14). Revelation 17:14 also refers to this: "These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and they who are with Him are called and chosen and faithful."

In Revelation 19:7 and 8 we see that the Bride is clothed in "fine linen, bright and pure." Then in verse 14 we see that the armies which follow the Lord into battle

are "dressed in fine linen, white and pure." These verses indicate that the Bride's wedding garment will also be the uniform she wears as God's army to fight against His enemy. Therefore, to have the wedding garment is also to have the uniform.

In Ephesians 5 and 6 we see the church as the Bride and as the warrior. In Revelation 19 we also have these two aspects of the church. As the church, we are not only the Body, the dwelling place of God, the kingdom of God, the family of God, and the new man; we are also the Bride and the warrior. As the Bride, we must be beautiful, without spot or wrinkle, and be clothed in fine linen. As the warrior, we must be equipped to fight against God's enemy.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE--A MATTER OF THE BODY

In God's economy there is one army constituted of a corporate warrior. This means that the warrior in Ephesians 6 is a corporate entity. Only as a corporate entity, the Body, can we put on the whole armor of God. This is contrary to the concept held by many Christians that an individual believer is able to wear the entire armor. The armor in Ephesians 6 is not for Christians as individuals; it is for the church corporately as the Body. What this chapter reveals is not the believers fighting as individuals, but a corporate army fighting the battle for God's interests on earth.

Spiritual warfare is not an individual matter; it is a matter of the Body, a corporate entity to fight the battle against God's enemy. No soldier in a modern army would enter into battle by himself. Rather, he would fight as part of a well-trained and fully equipped army. After we have been formed corporately into an army, we shall be able to fight against God's enemy. God's strategy is to use the church as His army to fight against the enemy. Therefore, it is very dangerous to be isolated from the army. Only by remaining in the army will we have the necessary protection.

Years ago, the Lord's people regarded spiritual warfare as an individual matter. But through the years we have seen that it is altogether a matter of the church as God's corporate army. If you separate yourself from the church, you will be defeated. Satan's strategy is simply to isolate you from the church as God's army. It is crucial for us to realize that spiritual warfare is a Body matter. If we realize this and stay with the church, we shall be victorious. The battle is not for us as individual believers; it is for the church as God's army.

EMPOWERED IN THE LORD

As God's warrior, the church does not fight by her own strength. Ephesians 6:10 says, "For the rest, be empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength." This verse indicates clearly that we should not fight in our own strength. On the contrary, we must be empowered in the Lord and in the might of His strength. The Greek word rendered "empowered" has the same root as the word power in 1:19. To deal with God's enemy, to fight against the evil forces of darkness, we need to be empowered with the greatness of the power that raised up Christ from the dead and seated Him in the heavens, far above all the evil spirits in the air. In the spiritual warfare against Satan and his evil kingdom, we can fight only in the Lord, not in ourselves. Whenever we are in ourselves, we are defeated.

PUTTING ON CHRIST AS THE ARMOR

According to Ephesians 6, the Lord with His might is the very armor that we put on for our protection. This means that we, as the Body, need to put on Christ Himself as our armor. In order to fight in the spiritual warfare, we must have Christ as the whole armor of God.

In 6:14-17 there are six aspects of Christ as armor: the girdle of truth, or reality; the breastplate of righteousness; the firm foundation of the gospel of peace (the shoes); the shield of faith; the helmet of salvation; and the sword of the Spirit. Therefore, the whole armor of God consists of

the girdle, the breastplate, the shoes, the shield, the helmet, and the sword. The shield is for defense, whereas the sword is for offense. In fact, the sword is the only item of the armor that is for offensive warfare.

APPLYING THE ARMOR BY PRAYER

According to verse 18, we receive the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit by means of all prayer and petition. Actually, prayer is the means by which we receive all the aspects of the whole armor of God. Do you know how to apply the girdle of reality? It is by praying in spirit. Prayer is also the way to apply the breastplate, the shoes, the shield, the helmet, and the sword.

PRAY-READING THE WORD

In Greek, the antecedent of "which" in verse 17 is the Spirit, not the sword. This indicates that the Spirit is the word of God. Both the Spirit and the word are Christ (2 Cor. 3:17; Rev. 19:13).

We need to receive the word of God by means of all prayer and petition. According to verses 17 and 18, we are to take the word of God by means of all prayer. These verses indicate that we may take the word by pray-reading, that is, by praying with the words of Scripture and over them, using the words of the Bible as our prayer to God. The term pray-reading is not found in the Bible. However, the fact of pray-reading is according to the Scriptures. Just as the Bible reveals the fact that God is triune, even though the word Trinity is not found in the Scriptures, so the Bible contains the fact of pray-reading, even though this term is not actually used.

I can testify that to pray-read the word is better, higher, richer, and fuller than simply to read it. Day by day I am watered, filled, satisfied, enlivened, strengthened, nourished, and cherished through pray-reading the word of God. Furthermore, by pray-reading I am sanctified, purified, and transformed. Although I certainly would not impose pray-reading on others, I would never give it up. It

is too sweet, too good. Simply by praying over John 1:1, for example, I am nourished, filled, and satisfied in the Lord.

PRAYING AT EVERY TIME IN SPIRIT

As we receive the word by means of all prayer and petition, we should pray "at every time in spirit." The spirit in verse 18 is our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. Hence, this spirit is the mingled spirit, our spirit mingled with God's Spirit. Whenever we pray as a means of taking in the word, we need to be in spirit. The spirit is the proper organ for prayer. As we have pointed out many times, we can be in spirit simply by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus from deep within. When we call "O Lord Jesus," we turn from the vanity of the mind to the spirit of the mind. How sweet and enjoyable it is to call on the Lord Jesus in spirit!

By praying in spirit we apply Christ as the whole armor of God. As we take the word by praying in spirit, we spontaneously contact Christ as the life-giving Spirit. Immediately, our praying and reading become living, and we are empowered by Christ and covered with Him as our armor. Furthermore, we have the realization that we are in the Body and that Christ with all that He is and has is our portion. In this way we apply Him as the all-inclusive armor.

NOT FIGHTING BUT ENJOYING

When we are in the Body, we actually do not carry on the spiritual warfare; we simply enjoy it. Instead of struggling in the battle, the battle becomes an enjoyment. Because we pray in spirit to apply all the aspects of Christ as the armor, spiritual fighting becomes an enjoyment. We enjoy Christ as the reality that girds us and as the righteousness that covers and protects our conscience. Furthermore, we enjoy Him as the firm foundation of the gospel of peace and as our shield of faith. Christ Himself is faith to us. As Hebrews 12:2 says, He is the Author and Perfecter of faith. With Christ as our shield, we are defended from the flaming darts of the evil one. Moreover,

we enjoy Christ as the helmet of salvation that covers our head, and also as the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Psalm 23:5 says, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." This indicates that the battlefield is a place of feasting. We feast in the presence of the enemy, enjoying Christ as reality, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and as the living word of God. We enjoy Him and apply Him by praying in spirit.

THE KILLING POWER OF THE WORD

We have pointed out that by pray-reading we take the word of God into us. Usually when we speak of taking the word of God into us, we think of the word as nourishment. However, in Ephesians 6 the emphasis is not on the nourishing word, but on the killing word. The nourishing word is for our building up, whereas the killing word deals with the enemy. In this context, we should pray-read the word not mainly to receive nourishment, but primarily to experience the sword as the killing instrument. The more we pray-read the word, the more we should experience the killing power of the word.

THE ENEMY AND THE ADVERSARY

We have pointed out that the sword is the only aspect of the armor that is for offensive warfare; that is, it is the only item of God's armor used for attacking the enemy. Perhaps you are wondering what this has to do with our subjective experience of the killing power of the word. If we would understand this, we must see that in spiritual warfare we must deal not only with the objective enemy, but even the more with the subjective adversary. Satan is not only the enemy outside us; he is also the adversary inside us. Today we face a greater problem with the inward adversary than with the outward enemy. The attacks of the enemy from without are not as serious as those of the adversary from within. To deal with this inward adversary we need to experience the killing power of the word. Yes, the enemy is outside us, but his elements are within our

very being. Because the enemy's elements are within us, we need the killing power of the word to be applied to our being subjectively. Since the enemy has injected himself into our being, what we need is for the killing power of the word to be applied to us to deal with the elements of the enemy within us.

If you consider your spiritual experience, you will realize that much of the enemy's attack upon you comes from within. Most of the flaming darts come not from the enemy without, but from the adversary within. If you go into seclusion, you will discover that flaming darts will attack you inwardly. By this we see that we must face the adversary as well as the enemy. In our experience we eventually come to realize that the most difficult foe is the self. The self is our worst enemy. Many times we are tempted, not by an objective enemy, but by the self, our own inner being.

SLAYING THE ADVERSARY BY PRAY-READING THE WORD

Because the self is the greatest enemy, we need to experience the killing power of God's word. As we pray-read, we are nourished on the one hand, but certain elements are killed on the other hand. Perhaps you are troubled by doubts, hatred, jealousy, pride, or selfishness. Do you realize that these things can be killed through pray-reading the word? The more we take in the word with its killing power, the more our pride and all the negative elements within us are put to death. By pray-reading, the inward adversary is slain. After a time of pray-reading the word, we may discover that the adversary who was attacking us has disappeared. In a very practical sense, he has been slain by the word we have taken into us.

Do not think that the battlefield for the spiritual warfare is outside us. The battlefield is within us; in particular it is in our mind. All the elements of the adversary can be found in the mind. The way to slay them is to pray-read the word. As we pray-read God's word, the

elements of the adversary within our mind will be killed one by one. In this way we shall gain the victory.

A PRACTICAL WAY TO KILL THE NEGATIVE ELEMENTS

Christians today are often very vague or general about matters. They may talk about such things as oneness, holiness, love, or the Lord's coming. But much of the time they are not definite or specific. It is impossible to pin them down. The situation among us in the Lord's recovery must be different. We need to be definite and specific in our experience with the Lord. Many of us can testify that when we pray-read the word, we are pinned down by the Lord. For instance, a brother who is having a problem with his wife may pray-read Paul's word about husbands loving their wives. The more he pray-reads this verse, the more he senses that love for his wife is imparted into him in a practical way that swallows up the negative element of his problem.

As those who are in the Lord's recovery, we need to be practical. We should not simply have a lot of theories, but we need a way to put theory into practice. Pray-reading is a practical way to kill the negative elements within us. The more we take the word of God by means of all prayer in spirit, the more the negative things within us will be put to death. Thus, pray-reading is not only feasting; it is also a way of fighting. As we pray-read the word, the battle is raging as the negative elements in our being are slain. Eventually, the self, the worst foe of all, will be put to death. When the negative things in us are killed through pray-reading, the Lord is victorious. Because He is victorious, we are victorious also.

My concern in this message is not to present Ephesians 6 in a mere objective way. Instead, it is to help you experience Christ subjectively as all the aspects of the armor, especially as the sword of the Spirit. We have pointed out again and again that pray-reading is the way to kill the adversary within us. Every day and in every kind of

situation, you should pray-read. Whenever you are troubled by something negative within you, take the word of God by means of prayer in spirit. As you do this, the negative element will be killed.

In Ephesians 5 the word is for nourishment that leads to the beautifying of the Bride. But in Ephesians 6 the word is for killing that enables the church as the corporate warrior to engage in spiritual warfare. Through the killing word, the adversary within us is slain. Sometimes we gain the victory over the enemy objectively, but we are defeated by the adversary subjectively. Although we may rejoice that the enemy outwardly is fleeing, we are still troubled by the adversary within us who remains. For this reason, we should be more concerned for the hidden adversary within us. Let us kill the adversary by pray-reading the word.

THE BLESSING OF BEING IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

As we consider all these messages on the book of Ephesians, we need to thank the Lord that we are in His recovery. What a blessing it is to be in the Lord's recovery! Day by day, we enjoy inner satisfaction as we go forward under His blessing. The Lord will be victorious, He will gain all the ground within us, and He will prepare the way for His coming back.