LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE ONE

INTRODUCTION

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:1-9

The arrangement of the books of the Bible is truly sovereign of the Lord. For example, Revelation is not the first book, and Genesis is not the last. Even this one example proves that the arrangement of the books of the Bible is according to God's sovereignty.

In the New Testament the four Gospels provide a record of the life of the Lord Jesus and show how He accomplished redemption through His crucifixion. From the Gospels we also know of Christ's resurrection and ascension. In the book of Acts we have the Lord's move in the heavenlies and in resurrection through His Body on earth. In this book we have not only the acts of the apostles and disciples, but also the acts of the resurrected and ascended Christ.

After the book of Acts, we have the first of the New Testament Epistles--Romans. The book of Romans gives us a full and complete sketch of both the Christian life and the church life. In Romans we have not only the teachings concerning the Christian life and the church life, but also the principles.

Immediately after Romans we have 1 Corinthians. First Corinthians gives us an illustration of the Christian life, the church life, and the Body life. Each of these lives is fully illustrated in 1 Corinthians. However, not many Christian teachers realize that what is revealed in Romans in the way of a sketch is fully illustrated in 1 Corinthians.

To repeat, in Romans we have the sketch of the Christian life and the church life, whereas in 1 Corinthians we have an illustration of the Christian life, the church life, and the Body life.

A number of books on 1 Corinthians have been written by teachers among the Brethren and also by those in the Pentecostal or charismatic movement. Some of the Brethren teachers have said that 1 Corinthians was written to solve a number of serious problems in the church. Those from a Pentecostal or charismatic background may emphasize the so-called gifts in 1 Corinthians, especially tongues-speaking and healing. However, the book of 1 Corinthians is not mainly concerned with problems in the church or with spiritual gifts or miracles. Please be impressed with the fact that this book gives us an illustration of the Christian life, church life, and Body life.

Most readers of 1 Corinthians have a negative impression of the church in Corinth. Do you like this church? If you are truthful, you will admit that you do not appreciate this church. Many years ago, I did not care very much for the church in Corinth. But now I appreciate this local church. To me, the book of 1 Corinthians is very sweet and enjoyable. I enjoy this book not because it solves problems or deals with gifts, but because it illustrates the Christian life, the church life, and the Body life.

Some may argue with the assertion that 1 Corinthians is an illustration of our Christian life. They may ask, "Are we supposed to follow the Christians in Corinth? Are we to have the kind of Christian life described in this book? Are we to follow the example of the church in Corinth and have the kind of church life they had? Should we have the Body life like what we see in Corinth? Everything in the church in Corinth was pitiful. The Christian life, the church life, and the Body life all were pitiful." However, whether or not the Corinthians were pitiful in these matters is secondary. The point here is that in a very real sense the Corinthians illustrate the usual, or typical, Christian life, church life, and Body life. Actually, the usual Christian life

is just like that of the Corinthians. The same is true of the typical church life and Body life.

Consider your own Christian life, church life, and Body life. Is your Christian life better than that of the Corinthians? Is your church life and Body life superior to theirs? If you are honest, you will answer that you are not better than the Corinthians in these matters.

Every local church is a Corinth. Do not boast of the church in your locality and think that it is special, superior to the church in Corinth. Do you have the confidence to say that your Christian life is better than that of the Corinthians, or that your church life and Body life are superior to theirs? Do not consider your local church better than the church in Corinth. The church life in Corinth is an accurate illustration of the church in every locality.

What about your experience of the Body life? Some may appreciate the Body life in a certain place and feel that it is wonderful. But is the Body life there better than what is illustrated in the book of 1 Corinthians? Certainly not. In our fiber, in our makeup, we all are the same as the believers at Corinth. It was certainly according to the wisdom of God to use the church in Corinth as a complete illustration of the Christian life, church life, and Body life found in every locality.

We have pointed out that certain Bible teachers, especially those among the Brethren, say that 1 Corinthians deals with serious problems in the church. The book of 1 Corinthians does in fact cover many problems. The first of these problems is the problem of division. In 1:11 and 12 Paul says, "For it was made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of the household of Chloe, that there are strifes among you. Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." Just as there were divisions among the saints in Corinth, so there are divisions among believers in the churches today. What local church does not have any divisions? Do you have the assurance to say that there are no divisions in the church in your locality? By

divisions I do not mean denominations; I mean the kind of divisions illustrated by the Corinthians, who said, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos." It is common in a local church for brothers to say that they are for a certain thing or a certain person and for others to declare that they are for something else or someone else. This is what I mean by division. None of us dares to say that in our local church there is not this kind of division.

Often there is division even between a brother and his wife. As a brother and sister in Christ, they come together to the Lord's table and partake of the one loaf. However, the sister may not be truly one with her husband. For example, she may speak to him in a divisive way, or inwardly find fault with him or disagree with him without saying anything. This is divisiveness. To be sure, none of us can say that there is no division in our church life or family life. In this we are the same as the church in Corinth.

I mention this matter of division not to show that 1 Corinthians is a book concerned with problems, but to emphasize the fact that it is a book illustrating the Christian life, the church life, and the Body life. This book is concerned with individual Christians, the church, and the Body. Hence, it illustrates three categories of spiritual life: the individual Christian life, the corporate church life, and the organic Body life. It is crucial that we have such a view when we read this book. Then we shall understand that it was written not to solve problems or to emphasize gifts, but to illustrate the practical and actual Christian life, church life, and Body life.

It may seem that the illustrations in 1 Corinthians are negative. Yes, they are negative, but they are practical. Furthermore, the actual situation among the believers and in the churches, both at Paul's time and today, has many negative elements. It certainly is difficult to find any local church where the situation is entirely free from negative elements. Some may wonder about the church life described in Acts 2 and 4. But what could be more negative

than the case of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5? The murmuring in chapter six also indicates that a negative situation existed. Even when the Lord Jesus was on earth with His disciples, there were many negative situations. The disciples strove among themselves concerning who was the greatest. Of course, 1 Corinthians is not an illustration of the New Jerusalem. Rather, it is an illustration of the Christian life, the church life, and the Body life in this age. Because we are living in this age, the church age, we need to take 1 Corinthians as our illustration. This book is a photograph of the church in our locality. May we all see clearly that 1 Corinthians is an illustration of our own Christian life, church life, and Body life.

On the one hand, our church life is illustrated by that in Corinth; on the other hand, we are the same as the Corinthians concerning our individual Christian lives. We know from this Epistle that the believers in Corinth were in the soul and acted in a fleshly way. Have you never been in the soul? Have you never lived according to the flesh? In particular, can you say that today you have not spent any time in the flesh? If we answer these questions honestly, we shall see that, spiritually speaking, we all are Corinthians. We are all from a region where people live in the soul and in the flesh. But we praise the Lord that, also like the Corinthians, sometimes we live in the spirit.

A second crucial point is that the book of 1 Corinthians emphasizes Christ. In 2:2 Paul says a strong word: "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified." Here Paul speaks not of the resurrected or ascended Christ, nor of the Christ who bestows all manner of gifts upon us, but of the crucified Christ, a Christ who was put to death. Paul's emphasis in this book is on the Christ who was executed, crucified. In this book of illustration, the focus is on Christ, but not first on Christ as the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, but on Christ crucified. If we see that 1 Corinthians is a book of illustration and that it emphasizes the crucified Christ, we are prepared to consider this Epistle in detail.

In 1:1-9 Paul covers a number of important points. In these verses we first have a proper realization concerning the apostle. Then we have a clear view of the church and of the believers, the saints. As we shall see, Paul then covers something which we may term the initial gifts. If we would understand 1 Corinthians, we must know what are the initial gifts and what are the developed gifts. In chapter one we do not see the developed gifts, gifts which come from the growth of life, but only the initial gifts. Verse 9 is crucial. Here Paul says, "God is faithful, through Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Here Paul speaks of the fellowship of Christ into which God has called us. Thus, the main points in 1:1-9 are the apostle, the church, the saints, the initial gifts, and the fellowship of Christ.

I. THE WRITERS AND THE RECEIVERS

A. The Writers

1. Paul, a Called Apostle of Christ

First Corinthians 1:1 says, "Paul, a called apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Sosthenes the brother." An apostle is a sent one. Paul was such a one, not self-appointed but called by the Lord. His apostleship was authentic (9:1-5; 2 Cor. 12:11-12; see also 2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2), having the authority of God's New Testament government (2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). Based upon this position with this authority, the apostle wrote this Epistle, not only to nourish and build the saints in Corinth, but also to regulate and adjust the church there.

It is worthwhile to compare the way Paul refers to his apostleship in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus with what he says in 1 Corinthians. In 1 Timothy 1:1 Paul says that he was an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the command of God and of Christ Jesus. In 2 Timothy 1:1 he speaks of himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus. In Titus 1:1 and 2 Paul says that he was an apostle

of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God's chosen ones, and the full knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, and in the hope of eternal life. First Corinthians 1:1 emphasizes two matters pertaining to Paul's apostleship, that Paul was a called apostle of Christ Jesus and that he became an apostle through the will of God.

That Paul was a called apostle indicates that he was not self-selected or self-appointed, that his apostleship was not initiated from himself. Since Brother Nee's book *The Normal Christian Church Life* has appeared in print, many have begun to regard themselves as apostles who are actually self-chosen ones. Paul, on the contrary, was a genuine apostle, a called apostle. He certainly did not have the intention to be a sent one of Christ Jesus. Instead, as one devoted to Judaism, he intended to persecute those who called on the name of the Lord. But one day, on the way to Damascus, the Lord appeared to him, and he received God's calling. He was called to be an apostle by the ascended Christ. Hence, his apostleship was initiated not from himself, but from the Christ in the heavens.

In 1:1 Paul says that he was an apostle through the will of God. The will of God is His determination for the carrying out of His purpose. Through this will Paul was called to be an apostle of Christ. This assertion strengthens his apostolic position and authority. In other Epistles Paul also tells us that he was an apostle through the will of God (2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1). The will of God here is related to God's administration, to God's government. Paul was called according to God's will and under God's administration to carry out God's New Testament economy. This is a matter of great significance. Paul was appointed and called according to God's will to carry out His administration.

Because Paul was called to be an apostle according to Christ's initiative and through the will of God for the carrying out of His administration, Paul had both the position and authority of God's sent one. Thus, he had the ground to write this Epistle. First Corinthians, therefore,

is not simply a book of teaching; it is also a book of authority. For example, in 4:21 Paul asks the Corinthians, "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness?" As a called apostle through the will of God, Paul had the position and authority of an apostle.

2. Sosthenes the Brother

In 1:1 Paul not only refers to himself but also mentions Sosthenes the brother. Probably this Sosthenes was not the same person as the Sosthenes in Acts 18:17. That Sosthenes was a ruler of the synagogue in Corinth when Paul was persecuted there. This Epistle was written in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:8) not long after the apostle left Corinth. This Sosthenes, as a brother in the Lord, must have joined the apostle in his traveling ministry. The mention of him here strengthens Paul's apostleship and indicates the principle of the Body.

B. The Receivers

1. The Church of God in Corinth, Those Sanctified in Christ, Called Saints

In 1:2 we have the receivers of this Epistle. It was written to "the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints." The church of God! What an expression! It is not the church of Cephas, of Apollos, of Paul, nor of any practice or doctrine, but of God. In spite of all the division, sin, confusion, abuse of gifts, and heretical teaching in the church in Corinth, the apostle still called it the church of God, because the divine and spiritual essence which makes the assembled believers the church of God was actually there. Such a spiritual address by the apostle was based on his spiritual view in looking upon the church in Christ. Such a simple address alone should eliminate all division and confusion both in practice and in doctrine.

In verse 2 Paul speaks of "the church of God which is in Corinth." The church was constituted of the universal God, but existed in Corinth, a definite locality on this earth. In

nature the church is universal in God, but in practice the church is local in a definite place. Hence, the church has two aspects: the universal and the local. Without the universal aspect, the church has no content; without the local aspect, it is impossible for the church to have any expression and practice. Hence, the New Testament stresses also the local aspect of the church (Acts 8:1; 13:1; Rev. 1:11).

Paul's description of the church is marvelous. However, Christians have not paid adequate attention to it. The church is the church of God, for it is constituted of the divine nature. The expression "the church of God" indicates that the church has the nature of God, that it is constituted of the element of God. Therefore, the church is *of* God. This is the universal aspect of the church. But the church which is of God is also local. In this case, it is the church of God in Corinth.

In this one verse we see both the universal aspect and the local aspect of the church. The universal aspect refers to the constitution, nature, and content of the church, and the local aspect refers to the expression and practicality of the church. If we have only the local aspect, but not the aspect of the church being of God, we shall have only an outward formality. We shall be lacking the inward reality. But if we have only the universal aspect, but not the local aspect of the church in a particular locality, we shall have the reality but not the practicality. On the one hand, the church is constituted of God; on the other hand, the church is expressed in a particular locality.

Not many Christian teachers have seen these two aspects of the church. In their writings, some may speak concerning the church of God, and others may say something about the church being in Corinth. But we need to be impressed that the description of the church in 1:2 includes the two aspects of the church, the universal and the local. We also must understand that the universal aspect refers to the nature and content of the church and that the local aspect refers to the practicality and

expression of the church. We today must have both aspects. We must be the church of God in a certain locality, for example, in Anaheim, Vancouver, or Philadelphia. We should be universal as well as local, and local as well as universal. We all should be able to say that we are from the church of God in a particular place. When someone asks you to what church you belong, you should say that you belong to the church of God in your particular locality. In the Lord's recovery we have the universal church expressed and practiced in particular localities.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWO

INTRODUCTION

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:1-9

In this message we shall consider further Paul's introductory word in 1:1-9.

Verse 2 says, "To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints." According to grammar, "to the church of God" is in apposition to "to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus." This indicates that "to the church of God" equals "to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus." This strongly indicates that the church is a composition of the saints, and the saints are the constituents of the church. The two should not be considered separate entities. Individually, we are the saints; corporately, we are the church. Thus, the church is not only constituted of God, but is also composed of the saints.

To be sanctified is to be made holy, separated unto God for the fulfillment of His purpose. Saints are separated ones, those who have been set apart to God.

In this verse Paul says that we have been "sanctified in Christ Jesus." We are sanctified in the element and sphere of Christ. Christ is the element and sphere that separated us, made us holy, unto God when we believed in Him, that is, when we were brought into organic union with Him through our faith in Him.

The expression "called saints" indicates that the believers in Christ are the called saints; they are not called *to be* saints (as in KJV). This is a positional matter, a

sanctification in position with a view to sanctification in disposition.

Many readers of 1 Corinthians find it difficult to recognize that the believers in Corinth were saints. To be sure, according to the Catholic definition, they were not saints. According to Catholicism, only certain persons, such as Theresa or Francis, can rightfully be called saints. We may wonder how the fleshly believers in Corinth could be called saints. Nevertheless, it is in the Word that Paul describes them as those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus and called saints.

Do you have the boldness to say that you are holy? Some may reply, "I cannot argue with Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 1:2. According to this word, I have been sanctified. But still I don't feel that I'm holy." Concerning this, we should not look at ourselves. Paul does not say that the Corinthians were sanctified in themselves; he declares that they had been sanctified in Christ Jesus. We need to forget ourselves and see that it is in Christ that we are sanctified.

Regarding the matter of being sanctified in Christ Jesus, a brother should not be influenced by any negative opinion his wife may have about him. Every brother is holy in the eyes of others, but not in the eyes of his wife. A wife always knows the weak points of her husband. She has a detailed knowledge of his shortcomings. This makes it difficult for any wife to admit that her husband is holy. But even if a brother is not sanctified in the eyes of his wife, he is nonetheless sanctified in Christ Jesus.

God does not look at us as we are in ourselves; rather, he looks at us in Christ. This may be illustrated by the words the prophet Balaam uttered about the children of Israel. Apparently the children of Israel were full of evil. But when Balaam prophesied concerning them, he declared, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel" (Num. 23:21). Likewise, Paul knew all the evil things about the church in Corinth. Nevertheless, in his opening word he addressed

them as those sanctified in Christ Jesus, and he called them saints.

In verse 2 Paul says, by the use of another appositive, that those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus are called saints. To us, this may seem repetitious. But without such repetition we may not receive a strong impression concerning the fact that the believers there in Corinth were truly saints, even called saints.

Every saved one is a called one. To be called is to be saved. When the Lord Jesus said to Peter, "Follow Me," that was His calling of Peter. We, the saved ones, have all been called. Once we were called, we became saints.

Do not think that only persons such as Theresa or Francis should be called saints. You and I are saints also. Do you have the boldness to declare that you are a saint? Some of us may have the confidence only to say that we are believers, but not the assurance to say that we are saints. Some may say, "I am a sinner saved by grace, and I am a believer in Christ. But I dare not say that I am a saint." The reason for this lack of assurance is that the evil influence from Catholicism still affects our understanding. Others, aware of failures like losing their temper or quarreling with their spouse, may not have the confidence to say that they are saints. But whether or not you are a saint does not depend on whether or not you lose your temper or quarrel. It depends on whether or not you have been called.

Instead of saying "called saints," the King James Version says "called to be saints." According to this translation, being a saint is pending; it is not already an accomplished fact. But Paul did not say that we are called to be saints; he says that we are called saints. If we turn away from ourselves and look at Christ, we shall be able to declare that we are saints. We shall realize that a saint is simply a called one.

To be called by God is to be separated unto Him. For example, those who have been called into military service have been separated from civilian life and drafted into the service. This illustrates God's calling. When we were called

by God, we were drafted, separated, by Him. As a result, we have been sanctified; that is, we have been separated unto a certain purpose. Because we all have been called by God unto His purpose, we are the called saints.

2. With All Those Who Call upon the Name of Our Lord in Every Place

In verse 2 Paul also says, "With all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and ours." Notice that here he does not say "*and* all those," but "*with* all those." This indicates that a local church, like the church in Corinth, is composed only of those believers in that locality, not of all believers in every place. It also indicates that this Epistle was intended not only for the believers in that one church in Corinth, but for all believers in every place. First Corinthians is for all believers of whatever place or time.

If I had been writing this Epistle, I probably would have used the word and instead of with. Paul's wording here is very important. As we have seen, it indicates that a local church includes only those in that particular locality, not all the saints on earth. Paul wrote this Epistle to the church in Corinth with all the saints on earth. Only the local saints are the components of a particular church. The saints in other localities are not components of that church. However, this greeting indicates that this book of illustrations was written not only to the saints at Corinth, but to all the saints, no matter where they may be.

When referring to the local saints at Corinth, Paul uses the expression "called saints." But when he speaks of all the saints on earth, he uses another description: "all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place." In this verse we see two callings: first, we are called saints; second, we call upon the name of the Lord. This indicates that we, the believers, the saints, have been called by God to call upon the name of the Lord. We have been called to call! To be called is a matter once for all, but

to call upon the name of the Lord is a lifelong matter. Continually we need to call on Him.

To call upon the name of the Lord implies to believe in Him (Rom. 10:14). All believers in the Lord should be His callers (Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16). We have been called to call, called by God to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

In the opening verses of this Epistle, Paul gives us the definition of an apostle, of the church, and of the saints. A saint first is one who has been called by God unto Him. Second, a saint is one who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

Calling on the name of the Lord Jesus is not a matter of praying silently. It is to call on the Lord audibly. Christians often pray silently or in a very low voice. But if we would call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we need to audibly call out to Him. I can testify that this kind of calling makes a great difference.

When you call on the name of the Lord in this way, you are the first to listen to your prayer. If you do not listen to your own prayer, how do you expect the Lord to listen to it? But if you listen to your prayer, you will have the assurance that the Lord has heard it also.

As saints in Christ Jesus, we are not machines. Our praying to the Lord, therefore, should not be mechanical. When we call on the Lord Jesus, our entire being is stirred up. Our whole inner being is exercised.

We have pointed out that a saint is a person who has been called by God and who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus. However, some Christians strongly oppose calling on the name of the Lord. But to call on the name of the Lord Jesus is not only scriptural; it is also necessary in our daily living. As Christians, we should not be dumb. We should not come to the meetings and sit silently as if we were dumb idols. We should call on the name of the Lord Jesus aloud. Sometimes we may even need to call out to Him in public places. You may think that this will cause you to lose your face. Actually, instead of being put to shame, you will be uplifted in the Lord.

You have been called by the Lord, but are you calling on Him? I am concerned that even among us there are some who do not call on the name of the Lord. They are still concerned about losing their face. The more we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, the more we are released and uplifted. Furthermore, this calling designates us as called saints.

In verse 2 Paul says that the Lord Jesus Christ is "theirs and ours." Christ as the all-inclusive One belongs to all believers. He is our portion given to us by God (Col. 1:12). The apostle added this special phrase at the end of this verse to stress the crucial fact of Christ's being the unique center of all believers in whatever place or situation. In this Epistle the apostle's intention was to solve the problems existing among the saints in Corinth. For all the problems, especially the matter of division, the only solution is the all-inclusive Christ. We have all been called into the fellowship, the participation, in Him (v. 9). All believers should be focused on Him, not distracted by any gifted person, any overemphasis on doctrine, or any particular practice.

II. GREETING

In verse 3 we have Paul's greeting to the Corinthians: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is God as our enjoyment (John 1:17; 1 Cor. 15:10), and peace is a condition which results from grace, issuing from the enjoyment of God our Father.

III. THE INITIAL GIFTS

A. Given by the Grace of God in Christ

In verse 4 Paul says, "I give thanks to God always concerning you based upon the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus." The apostle's thanksgiving to God for the Corinthian believers was based upon the grace of God given to them in Christ, not upon their condition in themselves.

B. Enriched in Christ in Everything

In verse 5 Paul continues, "That in everything you were enriched in Him, in all expression and all knowledge." The Greek word for expression in this verse is *logos*, the word that expresses the thought formed in the mind. The word of the gospel preached by the apostle conveys the thought of God to our understanding. Hence, the word is the expression of the divine thought. Knowledge is the apprehension, the realization, of what is conveyed and expressed in the word. The Corinthian believers were enriched by the grace of God in all the expression of the divine thought concerning Christ and in all apprehension and realization in knowing Christ.

C. Confirmed by the Testimony of Christ in You

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." The testimony of Christ is the preaching of Christ by the apostle, not merely with objective doctrines, but with subjective experiences, as a witness bearing a living testimony of Christ. Such a testimony of Christ was confirmed within and among the Corinthian believers by their being enriched in Christ, as mentioned in verses 4 and 5.

D. Not Lacking Any Gift

For years I was troubled by verses 4 through 7, especially by the meaning of the word gift in verse 7. I wondered how Paul could give thanks for the church in Corinth when the saints were in a poor situation, divided and confused. Also, I did not have the proper understanding of grace. Forty years ago, I did not know what grace is. As a result, I could not understand verse 4. Concerning verse 5, I wondered how the believers in Corinth could have been enriched in Christ. In like manner, I did not know what it meant for the testimony of Christ to be confirmed in them and for them not to be lacking in any gift. Regarding verse 7, I even gave messages in which I said something like this: "We see from

1 Corinthians that the gifts are not effective. From verse 7 we understand that you can have all manner of gifts and still be babyish." At that time I thought this understanding was right. But deep within I did not have peace about these verses. Eventually I began to see that in verse 7 we have what we may call the initial gifts, the gifts which came out of the grace we received when we believed in the Lord Jesus.

In verse 7 gift refers to the inward gifts issuing from grace, such as the free gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23) and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) as the heavenly gift (Heb. 6:4), not the outward, miraculous gifts, such as healing or speaking in tongues, in chapters twelve and fourteen. All the inward gifts are parts of grace. They are the initial things of the divine life received of grace. All these need to grow (3:6-7) to their full development and maturity. The Corinthian believers were not lacking in the initial gifts in life, but they were desperately short of the growth in life. Hence, however much they were initially enriched in grace, they were still infants in Christ, soulish, fleshly, and even fleshy (2:14; 3:1, 3).

After many years, I now have the boldness to say that the gift in 1:7 is different from the gifts spoken of in chapters twelve and fourteen. In these two chapters some gifts are miraculous and others are mature. (We shall consider this more fully when we come to this portion of 1 Corinthians.) As we have pointed out, the gift in verse 7 refers to the initial gifts issuing from grace, namely eternal life and the gift of the Holy Spirit. At the time of our regeneration, we received eternal life as the gift of God. According to Acts 2:38, the Holy Spirit also is a gift. To speak of these gifts as initial gifts indicates that these gifts have not yet developed; they have not yet grown to maturity.

The growth of a plant from a seed to a mature plant illustrates the growth and development of the initial gifts. First, a seed is sown into the ground. This seed is the initial plant. As the seed grows, it develops until it reaches

maturity. The Corinthian believers all had the initial gifts; they all had the divine life and the Holy Spirit sown into them as seeds. If we understand these verses not only by the context but also in the light of our own experience and the experience of other believers, we shall see that here Paul was telling the Corinthians this: "You believers in Corinth have received the Lord Jesus. When you believed in Him, you received the initial gifts--the divine life and the Holy Spirit. The problem is that you have not allowed these gifts to grow and develop." For this reason, in chapter three Paul points out that the Corinthians need to grow. He says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow" (3:6). The Corinthians, still infants with respect to the initial gifts, desperately needed to grow.

An infant has life and also the functions of life, but no growth or development of life. This makes it impossible for him to do anything. The more a child grows, the more he is able to do. For example, my eleven-year-old grandson can do many things which his younger brother, aged seven, is not able to do. Even four years' growth makes a great difference. This does not mean that the younger boy does not have life. He has life, but does not have the same amount of the development of this life. Likewise, even though the Corinthians had received the initial gifts and had been enriched in Christ in all expression and in all knowledge, they were still infants. The initial gifts had not been developed.

The Epistle of 1 Corinthians was written to philosophical people. We should not think, however, that the ancient Greeks were more philosophical than we are today. We all are philosophical. Like the Corinthians, we philosophical ones have been enriched in our understanding concerning spiritual things. We may have the knowledge of these things, yet still be babes in Christ.

Due to their education, many saints are able to understand the expressions used to convey spiritual things. They may grasp the thought without possessing the reality. This was the situation of the Corinthian believers.

Because they were cultured, educated, and philosophical, they could understand the words which conveyed the thought of Paul's ministry. But they did not have the reality of this thought. It is entirely possible for today's college graduates to understand my ministry merely in word. They may understand the thought conveyed in words, but they may lack the reality to which the thought points. This reality is Christ Himself. Like the Corinthian believers, they are rich in expression and in knowledge, in their understanding of spiritual things, but they may not have much reality of these things.

E. Awaiting the Unveiling of the Lord

In verse 7 Paul also speaks of "awaiting the unveiling of our Lord Jesus Christ." This unveiling refers to the Lord's appearing, His second coming. To await the appearing of the Lord is a normal sign of true believers.

F. Being Confirmed till the End

In verse 8 Paul says, "Who will also confirm you till the end, unreprovable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." The relative pronoun who in this verse refers to God in verse 4. The very God who has initially given us grace will also confirm us till the end. The word confirm indicates the need for growth after the initial receiving of grace.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THREE

INTRODUCTION

(3)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:1-9

In 1:6 Paul says, "Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you." The testimony of Christ here is different from the testimony of Jesus in Revelation 1. Here Paul means the preaching of Christ. Paul's preaching of Christ was a testimony of Christ. Some may wonder why Paul did not use the word preaching, but instead spoke of a testimony. Preaching may be regarded simply as a matter of words conveying thoughts. A testimony is quite different from this. A testimony must be a living, not merely a preaching.

Many of today's Christian ministers only preach; they do not testify. In their preaching they express certain thoughts in words. However, they do not have a life to testify what they preach.

In order to help the Corinthians not only to understand his expression but also to have the reality, Paul told them that the testimony of Christ was confirmed in them. Here Paul seems to be saying, "I did much more than merely preach Christ to you. What I preached was my living. This is my testimony concerning Christ. You have been enriched in all expression and all knowledge. You have been enriched in the understanding of what I preached to you." Paul's preaching to the Corinthians was his testifying to them.

Paul's testimony of Christ was confirmed in, or among, the believers in Corinth. Paul was very careful in composing his Epistle. By saying that the testimony of

Christ was confirmed in the Corinthians, Paul meant something like this: "When I preached Christ to you, I testified to you of Christ. When you believed in Him and received Him, something happened in you. Eternal life was given to you, and the Holy Spirit came into you. These are the initial gifts which are in you. These initial gifts confirm what I testified to you."

All the matters that Paul covers here are related to being saints. A saint is a person who has been called by God and who is now calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. A saint is also a person who has the confirmation within him. Do you not have within you the confirmation Paul speaks of in verse 6? As believers in Christ, you surely have the divine life and the Holy Spirit in you. Therefore, you are confirmed with respect to your salvation. If a person does not have this confirmation within him, I would have doubts about his salvation. A saint not only has been called by God and calls on the name of the Lord, but he also has a certain inner confirmation. Something within him confirms that he belongs to the Lord and that he has the divine life and the Holy Spirit.

Early in their Christian life, some saints may lose the feeling that they are saved. They may not feel that they have the divine life or the Holy Spirit. When I was young, I also sometimes lost this feeling. Not long after I was saved, I read John Bunyan's book *Pilgrim's Progress*. At one point, the pilgrim in that book loses his certificate. When I read this, I asked myself where my certificate was. It seemed that I was not able to find it. For several days I was troubled about this, and I was unable to eat well or sleep well. Then I read a book published by Brother Nee, *The Assurance of Salvation*. In this book Brother Nee says that in the Bible God clearly tells us that as long as we believe in Christ, we are saved. When I read this, I opened my Bible to John 3:16, knelt down, and said, "I want to testify to the heavens and the earth that I believe this verse. According to this verse in the Bible, I know that I have eternal life." Although I still had some doubts after

that, eventually the strong feeling returned in me that I was in fact a child of God. This is what I mean by inward confirmation.

As believers in Christ, we all have this confirmation. We are confirmed that we are children of God with the divine life and the Holy Spirit. As Paul says, we are not lacking in any gifts. We have seen that this means we possess the initial gifts--the divine life and the Holy Spirit.

Having considered the various matters related to being a saint, we all should be clear that we are truly saints. Can you deny the fact that you are a saint? You have been called by God, you are calling on the name of the Lord Jesus, and you have the inner confirmation that you possess the divine life and the Holy Spirit.

IV. THE PARTICIPATION IN CHRIST

In verse 9 Paul says, "God is faithful, through Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." This word is a continuation of verse 8, strengthening the thought with the assurance of God's faithfulness. In His faithfulness He will confirm the believers till the end, making them unreprovable in the day of the Lord's return.

Verse 9 tells us that God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Fellowship denotes the partaking of, the participation in, God's Son. It is to partake of, participate in, the all-inclusive Christ. God has called us into such a fellowship that we may partake of Christ, participate in Him, and enjoy Him as our God-given portion. This word, like the word concerning Christ's being theirs and ours in verse 2, stresses again the crucial fact of Christ's being the unique center of the believers for the solving of the problems among them, especially that of division.

This book unveils to us that the very Christ, who is the portion of all believers, and into whose fellowship we have been called, is all-inclusive. He is God's power and God's wisdom as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to

us (1:24, 30). He is our glory for our glorification (2:7; Rom. 8:30), hence, the Lord of glory (2:8). He is the depths of God, the deep things of God (2:10). He is the unique foundation of God's building (3:11). He is our Passover (5:7), the unleavened bread (5:8), the spiritual food, the spiritual drink, and the spiritual rock (10:3-4). He is the Head (11:3) and the Body (12:12). He is the firstfruit (15:20, 23), the second Man (15:47), and the last Adam (15:45); as such, He became the life-giving Spirit (15:45). This all-inclusive One, with the riches of at least nineteen items, God has given to us as our portion for our enjoyment. We should concentrate on Him, not on any persons, things, or matters other than Him. We should focus on Him as our unique center appointed by God that all the problems among the believers may be solved. It is into the fellowship of such a One that we have been called by God. This fellowship of Him becomes the fellowship the apostles shared with the believers (Acts 2:42; 1 John 1:3) in His Body, the church, and should be the fellowship we enjoy in the partaking of His blood and His body at His table (10:16, 21). Such a fellowship must be unique, because He is unique. It forbids any division among the members of His unique Body.

This word fellowship is profound and very deep. I do not believe that any Christian teacher or expositor of the Bible can exhaust the meaning of this word. Fellowship does not merely mean that there is communication between you and someone else; it also denotes participation in that one. Furthermore, it means that we and Christ have become one. It also means that we enjoy Christ and all He is, and that He enjoys us and what we are. As a result, there is not only a mutual communication, but a mutuality in every way. All that Christ is becomes ours, and all that we are becomes His. We all have been called by God into such a mutuality between us and the Son of God. I do not believe that in any other language there is an adequate equivalent for the Greek word for fellowship. We have been called into

the fellowship of God's Son. We have been called into a mutuality in which we enjoy what the Son of God is, and in which we are one with Him and He is one with us. Elsewhere in this Epistle, in 6:17, Paul says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." We have been called into such a oneness. In this oneness we enjoy what Christ is, and He enjoys what we are.

Even though we are so pitiful, Christ still enjoys us. Perhaps you find this very difficult to believe. You may say, "I certainly believe that we have been called to enjoy Christ. But how can it be true that Christ enjoys us? You may say that this is true, but I find it hard to believe." Christ, however, would say, "Child, I enjoy you very much. You don't realize how much I enjoy you. Even when you are weak and low, I still enjoy you, for I am one spirit with you."

Verse 9 is related to verse 2. In verse 2 Paul says, "With all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and ours." Christ is ours, and He is also theirs. He belongs to us and to all the other believers.

Some Bible scholars believe that in verse 2 the words theirs and ours refer to places. I do not agree with this interpretation. Here Paul is not speaking of their place and our place as if to say that they call upon the name of the Lord Jesus in their place and that we call upon His name in our place. This should not be Paul's thought here. He is saying that the very Lord Jesus Christ upon whose name we are calling in every place is our Lord and their Lord, our portion and their portion. This means that all the saints have the Lord as their unique portion. The reason for this is that we all have been called into the fellowship of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This brings us to a very important matter. All believers in Christ, including us, have their preferences. The Corinthian believers had theirs. As Greeks, they were a philosophical people. Those who are not thoughtful may not have many preferences. For example, if I ask such a person which elder he prefers among those in his local church, he may answer that all are the same, that he does

not see any

difference among them. But if you ask this question of a person given to the exercise of his mentality, he would immediately respond that he does have a preference for a certain elder.

In a local church there are always at least two or three elders. Do you not have your preference among them? Whenever you need to discuss something concerning the church, do you not prefer to go to the elder of your choice? You may say that you like to go to Brother So-and-so. Actually, this brother is your preference. The fact that you have such a preference indicates that you are a thoughtful person, even a philosophical one. Probably you have thought a good deal about the elders in your locality. Most members of a local church have spent time to consider the elders in their locality. As a result, they have a preference regarding them.

Preferences are fleshly. As long as you hold to your preference, you are in the flesh. Furthermore, having a preference causes you to lose Christ as the unique center. Our unique center is the Lord who is both theirs and ours, the Son of God into whose fellowship we all have been called of God. We have not been called into our preference, either in elders or in local churches. Sometimes saints have said, "I am not happy with the church here, and I don't want to stay here any longer. I intend to move to another locality." This is to have a preference, and it is fleshly. To repeat, to have a preference is to lose Christ as the unique center.

I believe that as Paul was writing this Epistle to the Corinthian believers, he was saying, "Dear brothers and sisters, you need to realize that neither Paul, Cephas, Apollos, nor any other person is the unique center among the believers. This center is not even a narrow Christ, the Christ of your preference. The Christ who is the unique center of all believers is the One who is both theirs and ours." If we see this, we shall not care for persons, localities, or nationalities. Instead, we shall care for Christ as the unique center of all the believers.

Paul addressed this Epistle specifically "to the church of

God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints." These saints, the believers living in Corinth, were the components of the church in Corinth. Nevertheless, this Epistle was written not only to them, but also to "all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and ours." There is to be no difference. Furthermore, according to verse 9, God has called us all into the fellowship of Christ. We have been called into the oneness, into a mutuality, between us and Him. Therefore, there should not be any preference with respect to local churches or individual believers. Only Christ--no other one--is the unique center of all Christians.

Again and again I would emphasize the fact that the unique center is Christ and Christ alone. Whether the church in your locality is good or bad, high or low, does not matter. What matters is Christ as the unique center. We all have been called into Him, called into the fellowship, the enjoyment, the participation, in Him. We have been called into a mutuality in which we are one with Him. Only this can swallow up divisions and eliminate all the differences and preferences among the saints.

Consider the situation among Christians today: there is preference after preference. Some prefer to be Presbyterians, whereas others prefer to be Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, or Pentecostals. Some say, "I like this," and others say, "I like that." Some declare, "I like this pastor," and others say, "I like that minister." "I like...I like," is commonly uttered by believers today. You may like a certain thing, but God may not like it. God is only pleased with Christ. God has one center--Jesus Christ--and He has called you not into the denomination of your choice, but into the fellowship of His Son. No individual or group must be our preference. Our only preference, our one choice, must be Christ as the unique center, the Christ who is theirs and ours, the Christ into whose mutuality we have been called by God. Oh, we all must see that God has called us into the fellowship of such a Christ!

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FOUR

CHRIST AND HIS CROSS THE UNIQUE SOLUTION TO ALL PROBLEMS IN THE CHURCH

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:10-13

In the first message of this Life-study we pointed out that, after presenting a wonderful sketch of the Christian life, the church life, and the Body life in Romans, Paul gives us an illustration in 1 Corinthians of the actual Christian life, church life, and Body life. However, we should not understand this to mean that what we have in 1 Corinthians is an illustration of the proper or normal Christian life, church life, and Body life. Concerning these three kinds of lives, this Epistle illustrates what is actual or typical, not what is normal or proper. Thus, we should never make the mistake of saying that in 1 Corinthians we have the proper church life. What we see concerning the practice of the church life in this Epistle is neither proper nor normal. Rather, it is usual or typical.

CHRIST, THE UNIQUE CENTER

In 1:1-9 Paul impresses us with the fact that in God's economy Christ is the unique center. God's intention is to make Christ His Son the center of His economy and also to make Him everything to all the believers. This is why Paul tells us in verse 9 that we have been called into the fellowship of the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. It is also the reason he points out in verse 2 that Christ is both theirs and ours. In His economy God's intention is to make Christ

everything, to give Christ to us as our portion, and also to work Christ into us.

In verse 10 Paul begins to deal with the divisions among the Corinthians. First, he beseeches them through the name of our Lord, which is the name above all names (Phil. 2:9) and should be the unique name among all His believers. However, by ranking the names of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas with the name of Christ, the divisive Corinthians made the same kind of mistake Peter did on the mount of transfiguration when he ranked Moses and Elijah with Christ (Matt. 17:1-8). To keep the oneness in the Lord and to avoid divisions, we need to uplift and exalt the unique name of our Lord by dropping all names other than this highest name.

When the Corinthians believed in Christ, they did not receive anything from Paul, Apollos, or any other servant of God. No doubt, Paul and Apollos were a great help to the believers in Corinth. But the One received by them was Christ. In 1:13 Paul asks them, "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?" No, Paul was not crucified for them, and they were not baptized into Paul's name. Christ was the One who was crucified for them, and the believers were baptized into the name of Christ. Here Paul seems to be saying, "Actually, you did not receive anything from Paul, Apollos, or Cephas. You should not even be limited to a narrow Christ. You must pay your full attention to the unique Christ. This Christ is not only yours and ours--He belongs to everyone. He is theirs and ours, for He is the portion of the saints in every place. God has given this Christ to us, and He has called us into His fellowship."

CALLED INTO THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SON OF GOD

It is not easy to give an adequate definition of the fellowship of the Son of God. This matter is altogether wonderful. This fellowship involves not only the oneness between us and the Triune God, but also the oneness

among all the believers. Furthermore, it implies enjoyment--our enjoyment of the Triune God, the Triune God's enjoyment of us, and also the enjoyment which the believers have with one another. In this fellowship we enjoy the Triune God, and the Triune God enjoys us. Moreover, we enjoy all the believers, and all the believers enjoy us. What a wonderful, universal, mutual enjoyment! We have been called into something which is termed the fellowship of God's Son. This fellowship is universal and mutual. The mutuality of this fellowship is not only between the believers and the Triune God, but also among the believers themselves.

Because we have been called into such a fellowship, we should not say that we are of Paul, of Cephas, of Apollos, or of any other person. Neither should we say that we are of a certain doctrine or of a particular practice. God has not called us into the fellowship of persons, doctrines, and practices. We have not been called into the fellowship of Paul or of anyone else; neither have we been called into a fellowship related to a doctrine or practice. We have been called uniquely into the fellowship of God's Son. This means that we have been called into the reality, the embodiment, of the Triune God. In this fellowship we enjoy the Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In this fellowship we also enjoy all the believers, and the believers enjoy us. Furthermore, the Triune God enjoys us and all the other believers in every place.

Would it not be marvelous if all of today's Christians realized that they had been called into this fellowship? If this were the situation, the world would become like the garden of Eden. There would be no need for the millennium, for the millennium would already be here. However, the actual situation among Christians today is altogether different. Many things have come in to replace Christ as the unique portion of the believers. Even demonic and satanic things have come in. Nevertheless, God has determined that in His economy one Person--His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ--must be everything. He is the Father,

the Son, and the Spirit, and He must be constituted into us to become you and me. As we pointed out in the Life-study of Colossians, in the church as the new man, Christ must be everything and everyone. Christ must be the reality of the church. He must also be the reality of every doctrine and practice. The reality of our baptism is Christ, and the substance of our communion is also Christ. If this were the experience of Christians today, how excellent would be the situation among us all!

The actual situation among believers is very sad, even tragic. Christians may have many things, but lack the reality of Christ, the living Person. In today's Christianity there are thousands, even millions, of items and things. But where can you find the reality of Christ, the living Person? The situation among the believers in Corinth was an example of this terrible shortage. For this reason, in 1 Corinthians Paul points out to them that it is wrong to say that they are of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or even of a narrow Christ. That is altogether contrary to God's economy. In God's economy there is room only for Christ.

I appreciate Paul's word in verse 2: "With all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and ours." Here Paul speaks of all those who call upon the name of the Lord and of every place. Then he says that Christ is both theirs and ours. Concerning believers and places, there is no difference. No matter where you may be when you call on the name of the Lord Jesus, Christ is both yours and also the portion of all the saints. In every place, Christ is theirs and ours.

God does not pay attention to anything other than Christ. Why then do we pay attention to so many other things, even other persons, in place of Christ? Certain of the believers in Corinth devoted their attention to Paul. To them Paul would say, "Why do you pay attention to me? I am not worthy of your attention. And why do some of you prefer Cephas or Apollos? They should not be the objects of your attention either. Neither should you concentrate on practices or doctrines. No person, practice, or doctrine is

worthy of your attention. Your attention must be focused solely, wholly, and absolutely on Christ, the One into whose fellowship we have been called by God."

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

Perhaps you are wondering how we can enjoy this fellowship. We can enjoy it simply by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. However, if we say that we are of Paul, we are actually calling on the name of Paul. To say that we are of a certain person means that we are calling on the name of that person. Every name other than the name of Christ must be set aside, and we must exalt only one name--the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the name of the wonderful One into whose fellowship God has called us. The way to enjoy this fellowship is to call on the Lord's name. The more we call on the name of the Lord, the more we enjoy the fellowship into which we have been called. To repeat a matter we have emphasized earlier, we have been called by God to call on the name of the Lord Jesus. By calling on His name we enjoy His fellowship and participate in it. How wonderful! I urge all the saints to learn to call on the name of the Lord Jesus.

LEARNING TO HAVE NO PREFERENCES

It is crucial that the saints in the Lord's recovery learn not to have any preferences. The saints in a particular church should not prefer one elder over another. All such preferences must be condemned. I also wish to make it emphatically clear that you must not prefer Witness Lee or prefer to be in the place where the ministry is located. Some have asked me if I intend to move elsewhere. Those who inquired of me concerning this went on to say that they intended to move there also. This is a personal preference, and it must be condemned. There should be no preference for Witness Lee or for the ministry. Our only preference should be Christ. We all should be able to say that our preference is the all-inclusive and extensive Christ.

Some may say, "You may prefer a certain brother or even prefer the ministry, but I prefer Christ." Even this preference is wrong, for it is actually a preference for a very narrow Christ, not the all-inclusive Christ revealed in the writings of Paul. This narrow Christ may be your Christ, but it is not Paul's Christ. Far from being narrow, Paul's Christ is universally extensive.

We also should not have any preference with respect to churches. We should not prefer our local church above others, or some other local church above the church in our locality. We should be content to simply be in the church in the place where God has put us according to His sovereign arrangement. Yes, 1:2 does speak of the church of God which is in Corinth. But in this verse Paul goes on to mention every place. We should be willing to be in the church of God anywhere. If the wind of the Spirit blows you to a certain locality, you should simply be in the church there, without any preference. If after a period of time the spiritual wind blows you to another city, you should be equally content to be in the church there. Regarding churches, we should not have any preference. We should never say that we prefer the church in our locality or in some other locality. Rather, we should be able to say, "My preference is only in Christ. I am willing for the wind to blow me in any direction, for in every place Christ is the same."

We should not have the concept that we can enjoy Christ more in a particular locality than we can somewhere else. We should not think, for example, that we can enjoy more of Christ in that place where the ministry may be located. Actually, if the Lord sends you to a certain city, perhaps for the start of the church life there, you may have more enjoyment of Christ in that place than if you are in the city where the ministry is located. However, if you go to this city out of a preference for that place, you are wrong. Do not go anywhere because of your preference. Instead, simply allow the Lord to lead you in any move you make.

If all Christians preferred only the all-inclusive Christ,

the entire world would be subdued. Even a region such as Southern California, a place people consider an entertainment center, would be subdued by us. In addition, New England, a region sometimes considered the graveyard of religion, would also be enlivened through the saints' enjoyment of Christ.

TAKING CHRIST AS EVERYTHING

I am burdened that we all understand what the Lord's recovery really is. God's intention in His recovery is to recover Christ as everything. It is to recover Christ as the unique center of God's economy and as everything to us as our portion for our enjoyment.

As we consider the Epistle of 1 Corinthians, we see that here Paul gives us an illustration. This does not mean, however, that we should follow the Corinthians in their way of having the Christian life, the church life, and the Body life. On the contrary, it means that we should not complain about the church in our locality. We should not think that the local church where we are is inferior and that, according to our preference, we should move to a place where we imagine the church life is better. We need to see that wherever we may be, the actual church life is like that described in 1 Corinthians. Since we are all in such a situation, what should we do? First, we must drop every name other than the name of Christ. We should drop the names of any persons or servants of God whom we may prefer, and we should also lay aside all denominational names. Furthermore, we must turn from all doctrines and practices and take Christ, the unique center of God's economy, as our everything.

In the first nine verses Paul lays as the foundation Christ, the unique center. In this unique center we have a unique and all-inclusive fellowship and enjoyment, the fellowship of Christ. In 1:10 Paul begins to deal with the eleven problems found in 1 Corinthians. In dealing with all these problems, Paul makes it very clear that the unique solution to all problems in the church is Christ and His

cross. The only answer is Christ and Him crucified. By pointing to such a unique solution to the problems in the church in Corinth, and to the problems in every local church, as well, Paul uplifted Christ and exalted Him. Paul was crystal clear that the only solution to our problems is Christ and the cross. Therefore, with 1:1-9 as a good foundation, we can begin to appreciate Christ and the cross as the unique solution to all problems in the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIVE

CHRIST AND HIS CROSS, THE UNIQUE SOLUTION TO ALL PROBLEMS IN THE CHURCH

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:10-13

In the foregoing message we pointed out that Christ and His cross are the unique solution to all problems in the church. In this message we shall consider this unique solution in a fuller way.

I. CHRIST

A. The Center of God's Economy

Christ is the center of God's economy. Among the thousands of verses in the Bible, one verse is extremely crucial regarding this matter, and this verse is Colossians 3:11. Speaking of the new man, Paul says, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all and in all." In the light of this verse none of us should boast in matters of race or nationality. During my travels around the world, I have observed that everyone is proud of his country and race. But as believers in Christ, we should not pride ourselves in our race or nationality. According to Colossians 3:10 and 11, the church, the Body of Christ, is the new man. In the new man there are no distinctions of race or nationality. As Paul says, in the new man there cannot be Greek and Jew. The Jews are known for their religion, and the Greeks, for their culture, especially for their philosophy. However, there is room for neither Greek nor Jew in the new man. Paul goes on to say

that there cannot be circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or freeman. This indicates that in the new man there is no place for religion or culture, no matter what a particular culture may be. Rather, Christ is all and in all.

Colossians 3:11 gives us a strong basis for saying that in God's economy Christ is everything. He is every person, every matter, and every thing. Christ must be our race and nationality. If someone asks you to what race you belong, you should reply, "I belong to the race of Christ." We should have the realization within that we are not Chinese, Germans, French, New Zealanders, Americans, or any other nationality, but are members of Christ. If all Christians knew that Christ is the center of God's economy, all divisions would disappear.

Not long ago I read that in a certain country members of a particular racial group held a meeting in a cathedral to celebrate an event which they regarded as a victory for their cause. During this meeting, some things were said negatively about another racial group. Afterwards, directly in front of the cathedral there was a clash between members of these different racial groups. What a shame that such a confrontation could take place after a meeting which was supposedly held in the name of Christ! Such a thing is utterly contrary to the nature of the new man. In the church as the new man there are no distinctions on the basis of color; there is no white, black, red, brown, or yellow. To repeat, in the new man Christ is everything; He is all and in all.

In his preaching to the Corinthians, Paul testified to them of the all-inclusive Christ, of the Christ who is the center of God's economy and everything in God's economy. According to his background, Paul was an authentic and typical Jew. As such, he should have avoided all social contact with Greeks. But because Paul realized that in the new man there is no Jew or Greek but that Christ is everything, he could testify to the Greeks in Corinth concerning Christ. He could say, "I wish to testify that

Christ is everything and that in the new man there cannot be Jew and Greek. In the new man, I am not a Jew--I am a person constituted of Christ. But although I have testified concerning this, you insist on remaining in your old social status. You have not taken Christ as the unique, all-inclusive center. Although I declare to you that I have dropped my religion and that I now uplift Christ, you still hold to your Greek culture and philosophy. You know that I was deeply involved with Judaism. I advanced in Judaism beyond many others. But I have abandoned all this. When I came to you, I decided not to know anything among you but Christ and Him crucified. God does not care for Jewish religion or Greek philosophy. He cares only for Christ, because in His economy Christ is the center and everything to us."

B. The Saints' Portion

Colossians 1:12 says, "Giving thanks to the Father, Who qualified you for a share of the portion of the saints in the light." All Christians know that God has redeemed us, but not many realize that He has also qualified us to partake of Christ as the portion of the saints. The word portion in Colossians 1:12 indicates enjoyment. Christ is the unique enjoyment for all the saints. Nothing should be allowed to replace Him as our portion. Things such as baptism, speaking in tongues, or healing must not replace Christ Himself. Only the living Person of Christ, not any doctrine or practice, is our portion.

Sometimes we say that we enjoy the meetings of the church. However, instead of saying that we enjoy the meetings, we should testify that we enjoy Christ in the meetings. There is a great difference between enjoying a meeting itself and enjoying Christ in a particular meeting. Certain saints may boast that the meetings in their locality are better than the meetings elsewhere. We must be very careful concerning this. Do not say that you enjoy the meetings in your place. Instead, tell others that you enjoy Christ. We should not be proud of our locality or any other

place. In a sense, every locality should be lowered down in our estimation so that we may uplift Christ, our unique portion. The unique portion of the saints is not the church in any particular locality. Our unique portion is Christ.

C. The All-inclusive One to Be Our All

Christ is the all-inclusive One to be our all. In his Gospel John indicates that Christ is many things. For example, He is the living bread, the door, the Shepherd, and the true vine. Moreover, in Colossians we see that Christ is not only all-inclusive, but also all-extensive. But neither in the Gospel of John nor in the Epistle to the Colossians do we have the aspects of Christ which are itemized in 1 Corinthians. In this Epistle Paul mentions nineteen aspects of the all-inclusive Christ. In this message we shall simply list them and refer to them briefly.

1. Power

In 1:24 Paul says, "But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, God's power and God's wisdom." The crucified Christ preached by Paul is God's power. This power is for carrying out and accomplishing what God has planned and purposed.

2. Wisdom

According to 1:24, Christ is also God's wisdom. Wisdom is for planning, purposing. In God's economy Christ is both wisdom for planning and power for accomplishing what has been planned.

3. Righteousness

In 1:30 Paul says that Christ is our righteousness. In particular, this righteousness is for our past and enables us to be justified by God.

4. Sanctification

Verse 30 also reveals that Christ is our sanctification.

This is for the present and is related to being sanctified in the soul.

5. Redemption

According to 1:30, Christ is also our redemption. This is for the future and is related in particular to the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23).

6. Glory

In 2:7 Paul says, "But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom which has been hidden, which God predestined before the ages for our glory." Christ, the Lord of glory (2:8), is our life today (Col. 3:4) and will be our glory in the future (Col. 1:27). To this glory God has called us (1 Pet. 5:10), and into it He will bring us (Heb. 2:10). This is the goal of God's salvation. How marvelous that Christ is our glory for our glorification!

7. Depths of God

In 2:10 Paul says, "The Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." Christ is the depths of God. This aspect of Christ is far beyond our experience and apprehension. It refers to the deep things of God, to Christ in many aspects as our eternal portion.

8. Unique Foundation of God's Building

In 3:11 Paul says, "For other foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is being laid, which is Jesus Christ." As the Christ and the Son of the living God, the Lord Jesus Christ is the unique foundation laid by God for the building of the church (Matt. 16:16-18). No one can lay any other foundation.

9. Passover

In 5:7 Paul says, "For indeed our Passover, Christ, has been sacrificed." To say that Christ is our Passover means

not only that He is the Passover lamb, but also the entire Passover.

10. Unleavened Bread

In 5:8 Paul goes on to say, "Let us therefore keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and evil, but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Christ Himself is this unleavened bread.

11. Spiritual Food

First Corinthians 10:3 says, "And all ate the same spiritual food." Christ is the spiritual food as our daily life supply.

12. Spiritual Drink

In 10:4 Paul says, "And all drank the same spiritual drink." Christ today is our spiritual drink.

13. Spiritual Rock

In 10:4 Paul also says, "They drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ." The rock smitten in Exodus 17:6 is a type of Christ smitten and cleft by God to flow out the water of life and to satisfy our thirst (John 19:34).

14. Head

In 11:3 we see that Christ is the Head. He is the Head of every man.

15. The Body

According to 12:12, Christ is also the Body. This means that He is not only the Head, but that He is constituted in us to actually become us. Hence, He is both the Head and the Body. It is difficult to explain how Christ can be the Body. Nevertheless, the Bible reveals this, and we believe it.

16. Firstfruit

In 15:20 Paul says, "But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruit of them that are asleep." In verse 23 he again refers to "Christ the firstfruit." Thus, Christ Himself is the firstfruit.

17. The Second Man

In 15:47 Paul speaks of the second man. This second man is also Christ.

18. The Last Adam

In 15:45 Paul refers to Christ as the last Adam. As the firstfruit, the second Man, and the last Adam, Christ is the first, the second, and the last. As such, He is everything.

19. The Life-giving Spirit

In 15:45 Paul says that as the last Adam Christ became a life-giving Spirit. If Christ were not the life-giving Spirit, He could not be power and wisdom to us. Neither could He be our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Those who claim that it is heretical to teach that Christ is the Spirit have no way to experience Christ. Because they do not know Him as the Spirit, they do not experience Him as these nineteen items. Although Christ has been installed in them, they do not experience Him. We may use electricity once again as an illustration. Although electricity may be installed in a building, if there is no flow of electricity the installation does not mean anything in a practical way. Likewise, even though we have Christ in us, if we do not experience Him as the Spirit, there is no way for us to experience Christ. If Christ were not the life-giving Spirit, how could He be the Head and the Body? How could He be our food, our drink, and the rock which follows us? The key to experiencing Christ in all these aspects consists in the fact that He, the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit.

We have pointed out again and again that in 1:9 Paul says that God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. This fellowship is actually carried on by the Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 13:14 Paul says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all." This fellowship is a wonderful, excellent mutuality. Since it is carried out by the Spirit, if we do not have the Spirit, we do not have the fellowship. This fellowship is called not only the fellowship of the Son, but also the fellowship of the Spirit, because after passing through a marvelous process, the Son has become the life-giving Spirit. Therefore, in our experience the fellowship of the Son eventually becomes the fellowship of the Spirit. If we are one spirit with this Spirit, we may have the enjoyment of this fellowship.

According to 1 Corinthians we have Christ in nineteen aspects, including the aspect of His being the all-inclusive Spirit. The first eighteen items of Christ's riches are embodied in the life-giving Spirit. In our study of this Epistle, we need to pay our attention to these crucial matters. Do not spend too much time studying the details of the various negative things. Rather, concentrate on the many aspects of Christ. Pray concerning them and have fellowship about them. Christ is the unique center of God's economy, He is the unique portion of ail the saints, and He is the all-inclusive One to be our all.

After pointing out many aspects of His riches, Paul declares that this Christ has become the life-giving Spirit. Now the Spirit makes all the aspects of Christ's riches real, applicable, and prevailing in our experience. When we touch Christ as the Spirit and are one spirit with Him, we apply all the aspects of His riches.

Whenever I consider the pitiful situation among Christians today, my heart is broken. Instead of the riches of the all-inclusive Christ, most believers have only husks or lumps of clay. Yes, they have Christ in name, but they do not have Christ as their enjoyment in their experience. Because I daily experience Christ and enjoy Him, my heart

aches for all the believers who do not have Christ in this way.

We in the Lord's recovery need to consider our situation with respect to the enjoyment of Christ. How much do you enjoy Christ daily? Do you enjoy Him in all the nineteen aspects revealed in 1 Corinthians? I hope that more and more the saints will be able to declare, "Lord Jesus, I enjoy You and I am very happy in You. Lord, You are everything to me. You are God's power and wisdom. You are my righteousness, sanctification, redemption, and even glory for my glorification. Lord, you are the depths of God. I pray that You will bring me further into the enjoyment of Yourself as these depths."

Some have asked me how I receive light from the Word. Others wonder how I am able to give so many messages. I am able to receive light and give messages because I daily enjoy Christ. Not even the members of my family know how much I enjoy Him. I fellowship with Him, I pray to Him, and I ask Him to reveal Himself to me in the Word. I have prayed, "Lord, show me how You Yourself are the depths of God." I can testify that He did answer my prayer and show Himself to me in this way. Actually, this kind of experience is not unusual. As a result, when it is necessary for me to give a message, I have something fresh to say. Furthermore, it is not unusual for new light to come even while I am speaking. I am not the source myself--the source is the very Christ I enjoy day by day.

In the first message in this Life-study, we saw that 1 Corinthians is an illustration of the Christian life, the church life, and the Body life. The light regarding this came not when I was writing the notes on 1 Corinthians, but when I was resting during the afternoon of the very day I gave that message. Spontaneously I prayed, "Lord, what should I say in the message tonight?" Then I began to sense that I should open the message with the word about 1 Corinthians being an illustration of the Christian life, the church life, and the Body life. I had the impression from the Lord that I should tell the saints that Paul, after

presenting a full sketch of the Christian life and the church life in Romans, gives us an illustration in 1 Corinthians. This realization did not come as an accident; it came as a result of my past experience of the Lord and my present enjoyment of Him.

I encourage all the saints to concentrate on Christ in their reading of the Bible. For example, when you come to the book of Revelation, do not be preoccupied with things such as the ten horns and seven heads. Instead, focus your attention on the Christ revealed in this book and on such matters as the golden lampstands, the enjoyment of the tree of life, and the drinking of the water of life. In this way you will enjoy the many aspects of the riches of Christ.

D. Called to the Participation in Christ

We have seen from 1:9 that God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, into the participation of Christ. This means that we have been called into the enjoyment of Christ. As we have pointed out, the way to enjoy this fellowship is to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. Again I say, we have been called by God to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has called us to call upon this unique name, the name which is above every other name. We should turn from considering the names of persons and places and concentrate on the unique name, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. THE CROSS

The cross of Christ is also part of the unique solution to the problems in the church. The first work the cross does in our experience is to terminate us. According to my observation, brothers are usually more willing than sisters to be terminated. Throughout all my years in the Lord's recovery, I have seen few sisters who were willing to be terminated by the cross. Do you realize that every wedding is a termination? When a sister gets married, she puts a covering on her head. This covering is a sign of termination

and burial. If a sister is not willing for such a termination, she should not cover her head at the time of her wedding. Furthermore, a married sister loses her maiden name and takes another last name, the name of her husband.

The cross works in us to terminate us. On the one hand, Christ is our enjoyment; on the other hand, the cross is our termination. From experience we know that the more we enjoy Christ, the more we are terminated. When the cross works to terminate us, what should we do? We should not do anything except remain restfully in the place of termination.

It is a wonderful fact that whatever is terminated by the cross is redeemed. How encouraging this is! The enjoyment of redemption depends on the experience of termination. Certain saints have little enjoyment of redemption because they are not willing to be terminated.

The cross solves all the entanglements we face in the church life and especially in our married life. According to my experience, married life can be very entangling, bothersome, and puzzling. What can untangle all the complications and solve the problems? We need an instrument to cut through the entanglement, and this instrument, this cutting knife, is the cross. Only the cross can save us from the entanglements of married life. When we are cut by the cross, we are not entangled by anything.

Human life is filled with problems and entanglements. Simply to be alive is to encounter problems and troubles. This is true not only in the married life and family life, but also in the church life. According to the human way, negotiation is the means of solving problems or resolving entanglements. A brother and his wife may attempt to solve problems in this way. However, this is not the divine way. God's way is to supply you with Christ and terminate you by the cross. Whenever there is a problem in the family life or in the church life, the natural man may immediately try to negotiate and solve the problem through conversation. By the Lord's mercy I can testify that whenever I face this temptation, deep within I have the

sense that there is no need for me to talk or negotiate. My only need is to go to the cross and be terminated. Then Christ comes in with the supply to solve every problem. This is God's way to solve all the problems in the church life.

We should pay our full attention to Christ. He is our unique preference and choice. Furthermore, we need to have a proper understanding concerning the cross, realizing that the purpose of the cross is to terminate whatever we are. We need to take this cross and enjoy Christ. This is the unique solution to all problems in the church. To the Jews the cross is an offense, and to the nations it is foolishness. But to us, God's called ones, it is truly God's power and God's wisdom (1:24). According to our natural, cultural mentality, it is foolishness to be crossed out. But as called ones we know that the cross is God's wisdom and His power.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIX

CHRIST NOT DIVIDED

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:10-17

In 1:10 Paul says, "Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion." From this verse the apostle begins to deal with the divisions among the Corinthians. First, he beseeches them through the name of our Lord, which is the name above all names (Phil. 2:9) and should be the unique name among all His believers. However, by ranking the names of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas with the name of Christ, the divisive Corinthians made the same kind of mistake Peter made on the mount of transfiguration when he ranked Moses and Elijah with Christ (Matt. 17:1-8). To keep the oneness in the Lord and to avoid divisions, we need to uplift and exalt the unique name of our Lord by dropping all names other than this highest name.

SPEAKING THE SAME THING

In verse 10 Paul urges the believers to speak the same thing so that there be no divisions among them. In this Epistle Paul deals with eleven problems among the believers in Corinth. The first is the matter of division. Division is nearly always the leading problem, bringing in all other problems among the believers. It may be considered the root of the problems among believers. Hence, in dealing with all the problems in the church at Corinth, the apostle's ax first touches the root, that is, the divisions among them. The first virtue of the walk worthy

of God's calling is the keeping of the oneness of the Spirit in the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-6).

In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, "Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." In principle this is just the same as saying I am a Lutheran, I am a Wesleyan, I am a Presbyterian, I am an Episcopalian, I am a Baptist. All such designations should be condemned and rejected. They can only be terminated and eliminated by taking Christ as the unique center among all the believers.

To say "I am of Christ" in the way of excluding the apostles and their teachings or of excluding other believers is as divisive as to say "I am of" this or of that.

These verses indicate that divisions among Christians always result from placing another name above the name of the Lord Jesus. When certain of the Corinthians said, "I am of Apollos," they automatically uplifted the name of Apollos above the name of Christ. Throughout the centuries, divisions among Christians have been caused by this practice. Today believers commonly designate themselves as Lutherans, Presbyterians, or Baptists without any sense of shame. Actually it is a shame for a Christian to call himself a Lutheran, for this means that he places the name of Luther above the name of Christ. No believer should do such a thing.

It is very significant that in verse 10 Paul beseeches the brothers through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. This indicates that we should not uplift any name above this name. For this reason, Christians should not have any kind of designation. To designate ourselves with a name is to make that name higher than the name of Christ. This is a shame both to the Lord and to the believers. However, some Christians are proud to say that they are of a certain denomination. Furthermore, these names are put on signs and are advertised. This indicates how far today's Christians have gone astray. They have no feeling of shame when they designate themselves by a particular name other than the name of Christ.

Through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ Paul charged the believers at Corinth to all speak the same thing. When I was a young Christian, certain Christian leaders told me that I should not expect all Christians ever to speak the same thing. Do you think it is possible for us as Christians to speak the same thing? If you regard this as possible, I would ask you how we can speak the same thing. As we consider the differences among nations and races today, we see that people do not speak the same thing. For example, the Chinese do not speak the same thing as the Japanese, nor the Germans, as the French. How is it possible for believers of different nationalities to speak the same thing? To answer this question we need to understand what Paul means by the expression "the same thing."

CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED

When Paul speaks of "the same thing," he means Christ and Him crucified. Thus, for us to speak the same thing means that we all speak concerning Christ and Christ crucified. From experience I can testify that, although according to history it is impossible for Chinese and Japanese, Germans and French, to be truly one, I have seen real oneness among the believers from these different nationalities. It is beautiful to see the genuine oneness between Chinese and Japanese believers and also between German and French believers. Such a oneness is possible only when we concentrate on Christ as our unique center and unique portion. As our unique center and portion, Christ is in all the saints (Col. 1:27) to even become all the saints (Col. 3:11). Whereas many of today's Christians are divided because they emphasize many things in place of Christ, we are one because we have nothing but Christ.

Christians are divided because they care for many other things instead of Christ. For example, some argue concerning the name in which we should baptize believers. For us, the all-inclusive Christ must be our center and our unique enjoyment. As long as people have a living faith in

Christ Jesus, it does not matter whether they are baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus or into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Because the Lord has raised us up to carry out His recovery, we focus our attention on Christ and not on any practices. We have turned away from everything else to the Lord Himself. This has caused others to spread rumors about us and to criticize us. For example, beginning in 1968, some brothers and sisters were convicted of their oldness and wanted to be buried in the waters of baptism. Eventually, some rumors were spread that we teach re-baptism. The opposers quoted Paul's word in Ephesians 4 concerning one baptism. However, that refers to a baptism which is one in nature or in kind, not to the practice of baptizing a believer one time. It is a fact that we neither teach nor practice re-baptism. If some believers are convicted of their oldness and want to be buried, they should not be condemned for it.

Others have criticized us because we practice calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. Some have even said that this is a mantra and is the same as oriental chanting.

In the past some were distracted by what they thought was a better way of meeting. However, our center is not a certain way of meeting--our center is Christ Himself. Should someone come to you and criticize the way of meeting and propose another way, you should reply, "I don't care to talk about this. I only know Christ and Him crucified." Talk about things other than Christ, even about the church meetings, can be a snare. In the Lord's recovery our only choice and preference is Christ crucified. The best way to silence the gossiping tongue is not to respond when someone seeks to turn you from Christ to other things. Suppose a brother comes to you and says, "How did you feel about the meetings last week?" You should answer, "I don't care about the meetings--I care only for Christ." However, if you begin to talk about the meetings, the door will be open for gossip and criticism.

Many Christians today do not talk at all about Christ.

In their conversation they are preoccupied with many other things. In the local churches we all need to speak of Christ crucified. Do not discuss the meetings, whether they are high or low, and do not talk about the church, whether it is good or bad. Likewise, do not speak about the elders, whether they are right or wrong, capable or incapable. Our attitude should be that we care only for Christ, for the church of God in every place, and for the Lord's recovery. God's goal in His recovery is to recover Christ as everything to us.

During more than fifty years in the church life, I have observed that many saints in different countries and cities have not yet been absolutely rescued from the degraded situation of Christianity. Even some of the dear saints in the Lord's recovery talk in the way of the practice of today's Christianity. Instead of speaking of Christ and Him crucified, they talk about the meetings, the elders, and the saints. When others want you to talk with them in such a way, you should say, "I do not have any heart for this. My only preference is Christ. I only care for Christ, not for the condition of the church or the meetings."

SEEING CHRIST AS THE UNIQUE CENTER

Whether or not a local church is a genuine church is not a matter of condition. Do not think that if a certain church is healthy, it is the church, but that it is no longer the church if its condition becomes unhealthy. Brother So-and-so is the same person whether he is strong or weak, healthy or sick. Likewise, even if the condition of the church is poor and very unhealthy, it is still the church. If we see the church in the Lord's recovery in this way and care only for Christ as our unique center, we shall not have any divisions.

For a person to be able to leave the recovery means that he has never seen what the recovery is. If you are able to give up the church life, this proves that you have never seen the church. Whether the church is good or bad, healthy or unhealthy, living or dead, it is still the church. If

we realize this, it indicates that we have seen that Christ is God's unique center.

If you were a Christian living in Corinth, would you have met with the church there? I believe that most of us, bothered by such a confused and divided church, would prefer to move to another locality for the church life. Although such an attitude may not seem divisive, it actually is divisive. No matter what may be the condition of the church in our locality, we should not make our choice, have our own preference, or seek an opportunity for ourselves. On the contrary, we should let the wind of the Spirit blow freely. At the present time we are in a certain locality by God's ordination. We should not move elsewhere according to our preference. But if the wind blows us to another city, this is God's ordination, not our choice or preference.

Do not take for granted that because you are now in the Lord's recovery, you are secure in the recovery and that it is not possible for you ever to be divisive. Whether or not we are secure in the recovery and protected from divisiveness depends on the vision we have seen. If we have seen that Christ is the unique center, we shall be secure. No matter what may take place in the recovery, we shall remain in the church life. We shall have the assurance within us that we are in the Lord's recovery.

Whenever we visit another locality or have fellowship with saints from another locality, we are tempted to ask about the church in their place. This kind of question can open the door for many negative things to come in. We must learn to care for Christ and not be curious about the condition of the churches elsewhere.

In 1942 there was great turmoil in Shanghai, mainly caused by opposition against Brother Nee. This turmoil spread to other places. At that time I was in Chefoo, in north China. The leading ones made a strong decision before the Lord that whoever came from Shanghai should be told not to talk about the situation of the church there. We said, "Do not talk about the church in Shanghai. We here are the church in Chefoo. Let us talk of the Lord Jesus

Christ and the church here." This saved Chefoo from being involved in that turmoil.

It is crucial for us all to learn the secret not to know anything except Christ and Him crucified. However, it is actually quite difficult to practice this. It is not easy for us to speak the same thing. Nevertheless, we need to learn to speak the same thing--Christ and Him crucified.

ATTUNED IN THE SAME MIND AND IN THE SAME OPINION

In verse 10 Paul also tells the Corinthians to be "attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion." The Greek word rendered attuned here is the same word that is translated mending in Matthew 4:21. It means to repair, to restore, to adjust, to mend, making a broken thing thoroughly complete, joined perfectly together. The Corinthian believers as a whole were divided; their oneness was broken. They needed mending to join them perfectly together that they might be in harmony, having the same mind and the same opinion to speak the same thing, that is, Christ and His cross.

The testimony of the church in Corinth had been severely damaged, and Paul wrote this Epistle to mend this situation. This mending was also an attuning. The word attune is a musical term. Among the saints in Corinth there was no harmony. In writing this Epistle Paul was seeking to restore the harmony, to attune them so that they might be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion.

The problem among the Corinthians was not with their spirit. They had been regenerated, and the Lord Jesus dwelt in their spirit. Their problems were with the mind and their opinions. There is a difference between mind and opinion. Thinking takes place in the mind; opinions are thoughts expressed in words. If we only think about a matter, that is an activity in the mind. But when our thinking is turned into speaking, it becomes opinion. It is difficult to be attuned in the same way of thinking, that is,

in the same mind, and in the same way of speaking, that is, in the same opinion. To be attuned to the same opinion actually means to speak the same thing. When we all speak the same thing, we are in the same opinion.

A VISION OF CHRIST IN GOD'S ECONOMY

If we would be attuned in the same opinion, we need to have a vision of the place of Christ in God's economy. I am burdened that all the saints would see Christ and know Him. When you have seen the all-inclusive Christ and have learned the secret of enjoying Him, your way of thinking and speaking will be changed. Then you will become pure and simple. Instead of expressing your own opinions, you will care only to enjoy Christ and speak of Him. Having become a person who does not know anything except Christ, you will be faithful to the Lord's recovery.

Today the Lord is seeking a people who care only for Him. Collectively, here and there, these people will be lampstands. Among them, there will be no preferences or opinions--only Christ. May we all learn this secret.

Suppose you come into the meeting hall and the chairs are arranged in a very unusual way, altogether contrary to your preference. It should not make any difference to us how the chairs are arranged. As long as we can meet together to read the Word and speak of Christ, we should be satisfied. If you complain about the arrangement of the chairs and are distracted by it, this proves that you have not seen the vision concerning Christ. Divine diamonds are available to you in the meeting of the church, but you are distracted from the diamonds by the arrangement of the chairs. Does this not indicate that you do not realize the preciousness of the diamonds? As long as you can receive more diamonds from the Lord, you should not care how the chairs are arranged. If you know the preciousness of diamonds, you will not have the heart to care for anything else. You will not care for the arrangement of the chairs, for you will come to the meetings for Christ and Christ alone.

In the Lord's recovery we care only for Christ. In the

recovery the Lord is not recovering anything other than Christ Himself in our experience. Only by focusing on Christ can we be saved from division.

SAVED FROM DIVISIVENESS

By nature we all are divisive. We were born with a divisive element. The only way to be rescued from this divisiveness is to see the all-inclusive Christ and learn the secret of enjoying Him. Please be impressed that the only way to avoid division is to see Christ, receive Christ, and enjoy Christ. This and only this will cause us to be attuned in the same opinion. Then there will be real harmony among us.

If you visit another locality, do not seek to know things about the church there. Do not ask about the elders or about the young people. Instead, care only for the harmony which comes from the enjoyment of Christ. When I visit any church, I care only to behold such harmony. If this harmony is not present in a particular church, I realize that the saints in that place have not been enjoying Christ adequately. But if we enjoy Christ continually, there will be harmony among us.

Sometimes I have been disappointed when saints tell me of what they have seen during their visit to churches and different places. What disappointed me was not the news they related, but the very fact that they spoke of things other than the enjoyment of Christ. Their conversation indicates that they did not have a proper view and that they have not been fully rescued from their divisive nature. Instead of caring for Christ, they are interested in the way the elders manage the church or in the way the young people are going on. To care for such things instead of Christ is divisive. Whenever you visit another local church, you should seek to be blind and not see anything other than Christ. Then you will be one who has learned the secret, who speaks the same thing, and who has the same mind and the same opinion.

Let us learn not to have any choice, preference, or taste

other than Christ. The all-inclusive Christ is our unique choice, preference, taste, and enjoyment. This will preserve us in the church in the Lord's recovery until He comes back. Otherwise, eventually we shall be disappointed or distracted and forsake the Lord's recovery.

CHRIST, UNIQUE AND UNDIVIDED

In verse 13 Paul asks, "Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?" Christ is unique and not divided. This unique and undivided Christ, taken as the unique center among all the believers, should be the termination of all divisions.

Christ, not any other person, was crucified for us. The One who was crucified for us should be the One to whom all the believers belong. This surely is Christ, not anyone else. All believers were baptized into the name, that is, into the Person, of the crucified and resurrected Christ. This issues in an organic union with Him. His unique name and unique Person cannot be replaced by the name and person of any of His servants.

After speaking in verses 14 through 16 of those baptized by him, Paul says in verse 17, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in wisdom of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void." Paul was not sent to baptize people in a formal way, but to preach the gospel, ministering Christ to others for the producing of the church as an expression of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SEVEN

CHRIST CRUCIFIED, GOD'S POWER AND GOD'S WISDOM

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:18-25

PAUL'S SPIRIT IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Brother Watchman Nee once told us that what is most important and precious in reading the Bible is to touch the spirit of the writer. When Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians, no doubt there was a specific burden in his spirit. As we read this Epistle, we need to get into the writer's spirit.

In order to touch Paul's spirit in 1 Corinthians, we need to know something of the background both of Paul himself and of the believers in Corinth. Paul was a typical religious Jew, absolutely committed to the religion of his forefathers. Because of his absoluteness for Judaism, he was opposed to the gospel, to the name of Jesus, and to the church. As we know, when he was opposing the church, the Lord Jesus came to him, called him, separated him, commissioned him, and charged him to preach Christ. In obedience to the Lord's commission, Paul did preach Christ.

On a particular journey of ministry he visited the city of Corinth, a cultured city in Greece, where many philosophical people lived. To these people Paul preached Christ Jesus. Some of the philosophical Greeks in Corinth received the word of Paul's preaching, accepted Christ, and were saved. When they were regenerated, they received the initial gifts: eternal life and the Holy Spirit. These initial gifts were sown into them as spiritual seeds. However, after receiving the divine life and the Holy

Spirit, they did

not live by these gifts. Instead of living by the divine life and by the Holy Spirit, they still lived a life according to Greek culture. This means that they lived a life of wisdom and philosophy, not a life of Christ. They lived according to their philosophy and worldly wisdom, not according to the divine life and the Holy Spirit.

Due to the worldly wisdom of their philosophy, the believers at Corinth had different minds and opinions. They spoke different things and had different preferences and choices. Some said, "I like Paul"; others said, "I prefer Cephas"; and still others said, "My choice is Apollos." Certain of the Corinthian believers even said, "I like Christ." These different opinions and ways of speaking opened the door for many evil things to come into the church life, things including strifes, quarrels, fornication, and lawsuits. Regarding married life, there was also confusion and differing opinions. Some said that a brother should leave his wife if she was not willing to go along with him to believe in the Lord. Others advised against this. Thus, among the believers in Corinth there were differing opinions. Even though they were genuine Christians who had received the divine gifts, they were not living a Christian life, but living a Greek life. They were not living a life of divinity, but living a life of philosophy according to their worldly wisdom. As a result, there was confusion among them. This was the background of this Epistle.

As Paul was writing this Epistle, he was burdened to guide the distracted, philosophical Christians in Corinth back to Christ. These believers had been distracted by their wisdom, philosophy, and culture. Thus, Paul's spirit was burdened to bring them back to the very Christ whom he had testified to them. This burden in Paul's spirit is especially evident in the first two chapters of this book.

THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

The first two chapters of 1 Corinthians are very difficult to understand. You may read these chapters again and

again without understanding what Paul is talking about. You may be impressed by many different verses and yet not be able to see Paul's main point. The main point in these chapters is that in his spirit Paul was endeavoring to bring the distracted philosophical believers back to Christ. For this reason, in these chapters Paul does not emphasize the resurrected Christ or the ascended Christ; instead, he emphasizes the crucified Christ. In 2:2 he says, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified." To the Corinthians Paul proclaimed a crucified Christ, a Christ who had been killed.

We have pointed out that the best way to solve problems among people is to terminate everyone involved. However, the human way of solving problems is to negotiate. God's way, on the contrary, is not to negotiate, but to terminate. When everyone has been terminated, there is silence. The best way to bring in silence and simplicity is to have a Christ who has been crucified. It seems as if Paul was saying to the Corinthians, "I testified to you a Christ who had been crucified. When I first came to you, I preached to you concerning the crucified Christ. The Lord's life on earth ended with death by crucifixion."

The fact that Christ was crucified implies many things. It implies that He was despised, rejected, and defeated. No one could be crucified without first being rejected and defeated. Through crucifixion Christ suffered man's rejection. He was able to avoid death by crucifixion, but He did not do so. He could be crucified only because He was willing to be killed. The crucifixion of Christ has silenced the entire universe and simplified the extremely complicated situation in the universe.

Deep in his spirit, Paul was yearning to impress the distracted, philosophical Christians in Corinth with this crucified Christ. Among the saints there was turmoil and trouble. Many voices were speaking different things: "I am of Apollos," "I am of Cephas," "I am of Paul," "I am of Christ." What could silence all these voices? Paul knew that they could be silenced only by a crucified Christ.

Therefore, in Paul's spirit was the burden to bring the believers back to the Christ whom he had preached to them and testified to them. Paul could say, "The Christ I preached to you was a silent Christ, a Christ who was willing to be crucified without a word. He was willing to be despised, rejected, and put to death. This is the Christ I ministered to you when I came to you. Now I want you to know that such a Christ is God's power. Only a crucified Christ can save you. God's saving power is not a strong Christ but a crucified Christ, not a fighting Christ but a defeated Christ." I repeat, Paul's spirit was to bring back these striving, philosophical Christians to the simplicity and silence of the crucified Christ.

Furthermore, in 1:17 Paul said that he preached the gospel "not in wisdom of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void." In this verse wisdom of speech refers to philosophical speculations. In 2:1 Paul says, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, came not with excellence of speech or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God." Literally, the Greek term rendered "with excellence" means according to elevation or superiority. Paul did not come to Corinth to display excellent speech or philosophical wisdom in the testimony of God. On the contrary, Paul avoided philosophical speculation and excellence of speech and preached the simple word of the cross. The word of the cross is simple, having nothing to do with excellence of speech.

When Paul ministered Christ to the Corinthians, he did not exercise philosophical wisdom, for he realized that the Corinthians were a philosophical people, a people who had been born into a philosophical environment and raised under its influence. Paul's goal was to deliver the Corinthians from the philosophy into which they had been born. Paul seems to be saying, "You were born into philosophy and worldly wisdom. But I came to you not with philosophy, but with Christ and the cross. I did not preach Christ according to the excellence of your philosophical speculations. Instead, I preached Christ to you in a simple way, telling you that He had been crucified. Christ was

willing to be despised and rejected. He accepted man's rejection. When He was arrested, He did not resist. When He was put on the cross, He did not fight. He was silent, for He was willing to be crucified. This is the Christ I preached to you."

Paul's preaching was absolutely contrary to the principle of Greek philosophy. According to the philosophy of the Greeks, Paul's preaching of a crucified Christ was neither logical nor philosophical. Here Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians, "My preaching was not according to philosophy or worldly wisdom. Nevertheless, you accepted my preaching and my testimony, you were enriched in Christ in all expression and all knowledge, and by grace you received the initial gifts--the divine life and the Holy Spirit. However, you have not lived according to what you have received from the Lord. The initial gifts you received have not been developed. They have not grown to maturity. Rather, you have remained in a stage of infancy. You are still babes in Christ. Now my burden is to bring you back to the crucified Christ and to the initial gifts. You need to forget your Greek culture, wisdom, and philosophy and return to Christ and Him crucified." This was Paul's spirit in writing the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians. Writing with such a spirit, Paul pointed the believers to the crucified Christ and spoke to them the word of the cross. He told them that Christ crucified is the power of God for saving us and the wisdom of God for fulfilling His plan.

In this message we shall consider 1:18-25. Our understanding of these verses depends on a proper understanding of the foregoing seventeen verses. Verses 1 through 9 are the introduction to this Epistle. In this introductory section Paul speaks of the initial gifts and of the participation in Christ. In verses 10 through 17 Paul goes on to show that Christ is not divided. He beseeches the saints through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to all speak the same thing--Christ and the cross--and to be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion. Then in verses 18 through 25 Paul shows us that Christ crucified is God's power and God's wisdom.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Verse 18 says, "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The little word "for" at the beginning of this verse indicates that verse 18 is an explanation of verse 17. In verse 17 Paul declares, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in wisdom of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void." The cross of Christ is the center in the accomplishment of God's New Testament economy, which is to have a church produced through the redemption of Christ. Paul preached Christ crucified (v. 23; 2:2; Gal. 3:1) and boasted in the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14), not the law with circumcision, which the Jews and some of the Jewish believers fought for (Gal. 3:11; 5:11; 6:12-13), nor the philosophy which was promoted by the Greeks and some of the Gentile believers (Col. 2:8, 20). The cross of Christ abolished the ordinances of the law (Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14), and we the believers have died to philosophy, an element of the world (Col. 2:20). But Satan instigated the Judaizers and philosophers to preach their isms of worldly wisdom that the cross of Christ might be made void. The Apostle Paul was alert in this matter. In dealing with the division among the Corinthian believers, which came mostly from the background of Jewish religion and Greek philosophy, the apostle stressed Christ and His cross. When Christ is taken to replace religious opinions and philosophical wisdom, and His cross is working to deal with the flesh attached to any background, divisions will be terminated. The exaltation of natural preference and human wisdom cannot stand before Christ and His cross.

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

Paul did not want the cross of Christ to be made void through preaching in wisdom of speech, that is, in philosophical speculations. Christ did not send Paul to preach the gospel in the wisdom of speech. Paul refused to indulge in philosophical speculations. He was concerned lest the cross of Christ be made void. He realized that the

word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. They regard the word of the cross as too simple and consider it foolishness.

The Greek term rendered word in this verse is the same as that translated expression in 1:5. The word of the cross is the expression, the speech, the preaching, of the cross. Such preaching is despised and considered foolishness by those who are perishing, but honored and received as the power of God by us who are being saved. Paul, in his ministry, stressed the cross as the center of God's salvation (Gal. 2:20; 3:1; 5:11, 24; 6:14; Eph. 2:15; Phil. 2:8; 3:18; Col. 2:14).

Many professors and educated people today treat the word of the cross as if it were foolishness. To them, it is folly to speak about a Christ who was despised, rejected, and crucified. They do not want to hear of a Christ who was killed without reacting in His own defense. When presented with a word concerning the crucified Christ, they would say, "This is foolishness, and don't talk to me about it. If anyone despises me, I will react against him. If anyone rejects me, I will fight. Furthermore, should someone try to kill me, I will protect myself and strike him down first. Even the law of the land assures me of the right of self-protection. Don't tell me about a Christ who was crucified." Thus, the word of the cross is still foolishness to those who are perishing, especially the philosophical people.

BEING SAVED

In verse 18 Paul speaks of "us who are being saved." I appreciate the expression "being saved." If someone asks you if you are saved, you may wish to reply, "I am in the process of being saved. I have been saved partially, saved to a certain extent. However, I have not yet been saved to the full extent. But I am being saved." To us who are in the process of being saved, the word of the cross is the power of God.

DESTROYING THE WISDOM OF THE WISE

In verse 19 Paul continues, "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of

the prudent I will set aside." Once again Paul introduces this verse with the word "for," showing that it also is an explanation of what has gone before. Here Paul points out that God does not care for the wisdom of the wise or the understanding of the prudent. Rather, He will destroy this wisdom and set aside this understanding.

Paul's intention in verse 19 was to refer in particular to the philosophical Greeks. It seems as if Paul was saying, "You Greeks think that you are wise and prudent. You do not realize that God will destroy the wisdom of the wise and set aside the understanding of the prudent. If you regard yourselves as wise, God will destroy your wisdom. If you consider yourselves prudent, God will set aside your prudence. It is dangerous to regard yourselves as wise or prudent, for you run the risk of being destroyed by God or of being set aside by Him."

In verse 20 Paul asks a number of questions: "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Where are the wise today? Are they in Greece? In New Zealand? In America? In Taiwan? It is common for those with a certain national or cultural background to regard themselves as the most wise and philosophical of people. Perhaps such ones are wiser than others, but they are not wiser than God in the heavens. In the church life we should not practice any particular wisdom. Furthermore, in the church life we should not be scribes or disputers. However, the leading ones in certain places may pride themselves in thinking that the young people under their training are scribes and disputers. But the Bible asks, "Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age?" God has in fact made foolish the wisdom of the world.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE PREACHING

In verse 21 Paul goes on to say, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, God was pleased through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe." Here the preaching differs from preaching. Preaching is the means to minister

the word. The preaching here is the thing preached, that is, the message. God is pleased through the foolishness of the preaching, the message, the thing preached, to save those who believe.

In this verse Paul refers to the foolishness of the message. In my speaking and writing I intentionally use simple expressions. Others have advised me against this practice saying that the use of simple expressions does not attract learned people. However, I do not want to use eloquent expressions. That is not to preach Christ or the cross. In the preaching of Christ and the cross, we should use simple terms and expressions. We are not those who preach the excellency of speculation. Thus, we should follow the example of John in his Gospel. His writing is very simple. For example, John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In verse 4 John says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." In verse 14 he tells us simply, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us."

In preaching Christ and the cross to philosophical people Paul spoke in a simple way. According to our opinion, he should have exercised his knowledge to put forth excellent words of philosophical speculation. Paul, however, deliberately avoided this. When he went to Corinth to preach Christ and the cross, he chose not to know anything of excellent utterance. On the contrary, he used simple and brief expressions, expressions which may have been regarded as foolishness by philosophical Greeks. Nevertheless, Paul says that God uses the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe. By the preaching of Christ and the cross in a simple way, people believe and are saved. As a result, we have the assurance that they believe not in our excellency of speech, but in Christ and the cross as preached by us.

SIGNS AND WISDOM

Verse 22 says, "Since Jews indeed ask for signs and Greeks seek wisdom." A sign is a miraculous token (Matt. 12:38-39) to substantiate what is preached. Religion needs

signs, and the Jews kept requiring them. Wisdom pertains to philosophy and was constantly sought by the Greeks.

In verse 22 Paul refers to two kinds of people--to religious Jews and philosophical Greeks. The religious ones desire signs, miracles, and the philosophical ones pursue wisdom. But in preaching Christ crucified, Paul cared for neither wisdom nor signs.

When the Lord Jesus was on the cross, the Jews mocked Him and said, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" (Matt. 27:40). The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders said, "He saved others; himself he cannot save! He is king of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe on him" (v. 42). They challenged the Lord to prove that He was the Christ, the Son of God, by delivering Himself from the cross. However, the Lord remained silent; He did not do anything to save Himself. Instead of a miracle and wisdom, there were weakness and foolishness. According to man's wisdom, it would be utterly foolish to be crucified.

In saying, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Cephas," the Corinthians were exercising their wisdom. They were following their philosophy, not following Christ. But Paul preached to them Christ crucified, an offense to miracle-seeking Jews and wisdom-pursuing Greeks. But to those who are called, this Christ is God's wisdom and God's power.

PREACHING CHRIST CRUCIFIED

It is significant that Paul did not tell the Corinthians, "We preach Christ resurrected." The focus of the preaching in Acts is on the resurrection of Christ. According to the book of Acts, this preaching is a testimony that Jesus Christ, the One who was crucified, has been resurrected. But in this Epistle Paul does not emphasize Christ's resurrection. Rather, he emphasizes the preaching of Christ crucified. No doubt, both the Jews and the Greeks would have preferred to hear of a resurrected Christ. For

Jews, this would have been a great miracle. How miraculous for someone to rise out of the tomb and ascend into the heavens! The Greeks may have regarded a word about resurrection as very philosophical. In their quest for wisdom they may have been interested to learn how a dead person could become alive again. Nevertheless, Paul preached a crucified Christ, a Christ who did not do anything to save Himself. Paul followed this crucified Christ and preached Him to the Corinthians. Therefore, verse 23 declares, "But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews an offense, and to the nations foolishness." It was offensive to Jews and foolishness to Greeks that Paul followed a crucified Christ.

In verse 24 Paul goes on to say, "But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, God's power and God's wisdom." Those who are called are the believers who were chosen by God in eternity (Eph. 1:4) and who believed in Christ in time (Acts 13:48). To these called ones, the crucified Christ preached by the apostles is God's power and God's wisdom. Wisdom is for planning, for purposing; power is for carrying out, for accomplishing, what is planned and purposed. In God's economy Christ is both. Praise the Lord that for us today the crucified Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God!

In verse 25 Paul concludes, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Even God's foolishness is wiser than our wisdom, and His weakness stronger than our strength.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE EIGHT

CHRIST CRUCIFIED, GOD'S POWER AND GOD'S WISDOM

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:18-25

In this message we shall consider further how the crucified Christ is God's power and God's wisdom. In 1:23 and 24 Paul says, "But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews an offense, and to the nations foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, God's power and God's wisdom."

I. CHRIST CRUCIFIED

As believers in Christ, we all must be able to answer this question: Why was it necessary for Christ to be crucified? In his preaching to the philosophical Greeks at Corinth, Paul must have indicated why it was necessary for Christ to be crucified. Perhaps the most common answer to this question is to say that Christ had to be crucified in order for God to save us. God cannot save us apart from the crucifixion of Christ. According to the New Testament, God has no way to save anyone apart from the cross of Christ. Let us consider briefly why this is so.

In the universe there are many kinds of problems. There are the problems of Satan, the world, and sin. There is also the problem of man. The man created by God for His purpose fell and became sinful. Other problems related to man are the flesh and the natural life. In addition, everything in the universe has become old; that is, it has become rotten, corrupt. Anything that is not corrupt cannot

be old. Oldness indicates a shortage of life. When a tree grows, it has life. But when it begins to die, there is a shortage of life. Because of Satan, the world, and man with sin, the flesh, and the natural life, the whole universe, including the heavens and the earth, has become old, corrupt, ruined, and full of death.

In addition to all these problems, there is the problem of the ordinances and regulations given by God for man's living. Therefore, the cross deals with the problems of Satan, the world, sin, man, the flesh, the natural life, oldness, and ordinances. In order for these problems to be solved, it was necessary for Christ to be crucified.

Before Christ could be crucified to solve all these problems, He had to put on human nature. This means that He had to become a man, a creature. By becoming a man, Christ became a creature. He took on human nature, not only for the purpose of dying for us and of shedding His blood for our sins, but also for the purpose of solving the problems of Satan, the world, sin, fallen man, the natural life, flesh, oldness, and ordinances.

Although Christ could have refused death by crucifixion, He was crucified. According to the human understanding, Christ was executed by others. However, His understanding of His death was different. In John 10:11 the Lord Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." Concerning His life, the Lord goes on to say in John 10:18, "No one takes it away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again." His life was not taken from Him. On the contrary, He gave up His life for us. If Christ had not been willing to lay down His life, it would not have been possible for people to execute Him. Instead of fighting for Himself, Christ accepted the death of the cross. He was willing to be crucified in order to accomplish redemption and solve all the problems in the universe. Christ crucified is an offense to those who seek signs, and foolishness to those who seek wisdom. But to us who believe He is God's power and wisdom.

II. GOD'S POWER

In the cross of Christ we see God's power. It takes the power of God to defeat Satan, the world, sin, fallen man, the flesh, the natural life, the old creation, and the ordinances. What other power is greater than Christ crucified as God's power? What other power can destroy Satan or overcome the world? Only God has the power to accomplish these things. This power is not that of doing things by speaking, such as the power God exercised in creation. Rather, it is the power of crucifixion, the power of the wonderful death of Christ. This means that the crucifixion of Christ has become the power of God. The death of Christ has become God's power to destroy Satan, to solve the problem of the world, to eliminate sin, and to terminate fallen man, the flesh, the natural life, and the old creation. By this power God is able also to solve the problem of the ordinances. By one death, the death of Christ, all the problems in the universe have been cleared. Thus, Christ crucified is God's power to abolish all negative things and carry out His plan.

III. GOD'S WISDOM

This crucified Christ is also God's wisdom. In order to accomplish anything, we need both power and wisdom. We have pointed out that wisdom is for planning and purposing, whereas power is for carrying out and accomplishing what is planned and purposed. In God's economy Christ crucified is both God's power and His wisdom. It is possible for us to have power or strength without having wisdom or the way. If we have power without wisdom, we may use our strength in a foolish way. Therefore, we need Christ as both power and wisdom.

The crucified Christ as God's power and wisdom can be applied to the problem we face with our temper. Without exception, we all are bothered by our temper. Who can say that he has never lost his temper? After experiencing a certain amount of growth in life, we come to hate our temper and long to be free from it. I know of some sisters

who, shortly before the day of their wedding, made a vow that they would never again lose their temper, especially never lose it with their husband. However, in every case this vow was broken. Not only in married life but in all kinds of situations in our daily life, we are troubled by our temper.

Many Christians who love the Lord and seek Him have prayed something like this: "Lord Jesus, You know how easy it is for me to lose my temper. Lord, You are Jehovah the Savior. I ask You to save me from this sin of losing my temper. O Lord, deliver me from this." Although many have prayed in this way, none have been delivered from their temper as a result. In ourselves we simply do not have either the power to overcome our temper or the wisdom, the way, to do it. We may think that prayer will give us power and wisdom. However, even when we pray, we still do not have power and wisdom. But when we call on the name of the Lord, enjoy Christ, and are filled with the life-giving Spirit, we have no problem with our temper. Spontaneously we have both the power to overcome our temper and the way to deal with it. What is this power and this way? It is the death of Christ. Only the crucified Christ is the power and the wisdom to deal with our temper.

We may also apply the crucified Christ as God's power and wisdom to our need for patience. We all desire to be patient. But I have never met a person who is truly patient. We value patience and we desire to be patient, but we cannot be patient. However, when we experience the crucified Christ, we automatically have patience. This crucified Christ becomes to us both the power and the wisdom for patience. As a result, we have both the strength and the way to be patient. Actually, we do not try to be patient. We simply are patient through our experience of Christ crucified.

The crucified Christ can be applied to all manner of human experiences. For more than forty years, we have been preaching nothing other than Christ and Him crucified. Within this crucified Christ there are the

elements of resurrection and ascension. Thus, when we enjoy the crucified Christ, we also enjoy His resurrection and ascension. The key to experiencing the resurrection and ascension of Christ is found in Christ's crucifixion. Crucifixion is the threshold into all the riches of Christ. The cross is the way to experience Christ with all His riches. Apart from Christ's crucifixion, there is no gateway for us to enter into the riches of Christ.

Ephesians 1:9 speaks of God's good pleasure which He purposed in Himself. In Ephesians 3:11 Paul refers to "the purpose of the ages which He made in Christ Jesus our Lord." Furthermore, in Ephesians 1:11 Paul says that God "operates all things according to the counsel of His will." The crucified Christ as God's wisdom is related to God's plan according to His good pleasure and also according to God's way to fulfill His will. God's plan according to His good pleasure and His way to fulfill His will are deep and profound. Nevertheless, these profound matters can be applied to our experience.

We have seen that when we experience the crucified Christ, He becomes to us both the power of God and the wisdom of God. Since we have the crucified Christ as God's wisdom, there is no need for us to seek a way to carry out God's will. Simply by experiencing the crucified Christ, we spontaneously have a way to do God's will. We become very wise in doing the will of God. No longer is it necessary for us to make up our mind to do God's will or to determine to do the will of God. Doing God's will does not even depend on our praying, "Lord, Your will be done." Christians everywhere pray for the will of God to be done. It is common in Christian services for believers to pray, "Lord, not our will, but Your will be done." But no matter how many times believers pray for the will of God to be done, the will of God is not accomplished. If you want to do the will of God, there is no need for you to pray the words, "Your will be done." As long as you experience the crucified Christ, Christ will become to you God's wisdom to fulfill His plan. You will have the wisdom of God to do His will.

Perhaps you may not understand this at the time. But if you look backward after a period of months or years, you will realize that you did have God's wisdom to carry out His plan according to His will. This, of course, is not your natural wisdom; it is the crucified Christ as God's wisdom.

When we experience the crucified Christ, we are terminated. All that we are, all that we have, and all that we can do--all is completely terminated. To be terminated, there is no need for you to crucify yourself. There is not even any need for you to reckon yourself dead. You are terminated simply by experiencing the crucified Christ. Actually, it is impossible for anyone to crucify himself. But when we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, as we are enjoying Him and experiencing Him, His crucifixion will terminate us. All that we are is terminated by this crucified Christ.

Crucifixion is the way for us to be delivered from the flesh, the natural life, and the old creation. Christ crucified is not only the power; He is also the way. To the Jews, such a Christ is an offense, and to the Greeks, He is foolishness. But to us who have been called, the crucified Christ is God's power and God's wisdom for us to be delivered from all negative things. We thank Him and praise Him that we are now in the process of being saved. The more we are saved by experiencing the crucified Christ, the more we enjoy Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE NINE

CHRIST, OUR WISDOM: RIGHTEOUSNESS, SANCTIFICATION, AND REDEMPTION

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:26-31

In this message we shall consider 1:26-31.

I. GOD'S CHOICE

A. The Foolish to Shame the Wise

In verse 26 Paul says, "For you see your calling, brothers, that there are not many wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many wellborn." Here we see that among the believers there are not many wise according to flesh. In verse 27 Paul says, "God has chosen the foolish of the world that He might shame the wise." To be wise is related to the mind, whereas to be powerful is related to the will.

B. The Weak to Shame the Strong

In verse 27 Paul also says, "God has chosen the weak of the world that He might shame the strong." When I read these verses many years ago, I wondered how a loving God could shame people. I wondered how He could use the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and the weak of the world to shame the strong. Nevertheless, Paul clearly says that God shames the wise and the strong.

In verse 27 Paul twice uses the word "chosen." God's calling (vv. 24-26) is based upon God's choosing, God's selection. Both are according to His purpose (Rom. 9:11; 2 Tim. 1:9). God's choosing was ordained before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4); His calling is

accomplished in time to carry out His choosing. God's calling and choosing are the initiation of the salvation of His predestined people. We did not choose Him; He chose us. We did not call upon Him until He called us. He is the Initiator. All the glory should be to Him!

C. The Lowborn and the Despised to Bring to Nothing the Wellborn

In verse 26 Paul points out that among the believers in Corinth there were not many wellborn. In verse 28 he goes on to say, "And the lowborn of the world and the despised has God chosen, things which are not, that He might bring to nought things which are." The Greek word rendered wellborn in verse 26 means highborn, noble, that is, born of a noble or royal family. The church of God is composed not mainly of the upper class, but of the lowborn of the world and the despised. To appreciate the upper class is against God's mind and a shame to the church.

In verse 28 the word lowborn means base, ignoble, that is, born of common people. Despised also means contemptible. The expression "things which are not" refers to the lowborn and the despised as being as good as having no existence. The lowborn and the despised are of no account in the world.

The threefold repetition of "God has chosen" in verses 27 and 28 unveils to us God's sovereign dealing with three kinds of people of the world--the wise, the strong (the powerful), and the wellborn. Hence, "things that are" refer to the wellborn, who are counted much in the world but brought to nothing by God in His economy.

In the eyes of man, the lowborn, the despised ones, seem not to exist. They are so looked down upon that they seem to have no existence. Thus, they are "things which are not." But God uses these very things to bring to nothing the things which are, the wellborn who are counted much in the world. God has chosen the lowborn, the low class, that He might shame the wellborn, those of the upper class.

On the one hand, in verses 26 through 28 Paul refers in a general way to everyone. On the other hand, he refers in a particular way to the Greeks. Certain of the Greeks who had been saved still regarded themselves as wise. In these verses Paul points out that such an attitude is mistaken. Paul seems to be saying, "Believers at Corinth, do not consider yourselves wise. God does not choose the wise. If you regard yourselves as wise, this means that you have not been chosen by God. Likewise, God has not chosen the powerful ones or the highborn ones."

What do you think about yourself? Do you consider yourself wise or foolish? Strong or weak? Wellborn or lowborn? I do not believe that, deep within, we regard ourselves foolish, weak, and lowborn. We simply do not view ourselves in this way.

Once again we need to know Paul's spirit in writing this Epistle. The emphasis in Paul's spirit was that the Corinthian believers were not living as saved ones. Paul seemed to be telling them, "Dear saints in Corinth, you are saved ones, God's chosen ones. But you are not living the life of chosen ones. Rather, you are living as if you had not been chosen by God. There is no indication in your living that God has chosen you, for you think of yourselves as wise, strong, and wellborn. Brothers, you must realize that God does not choose such ones. If you regard yourselves as wise, this indicates that God has not chosen you. Remember, He has chosen the foolish ones to shame the wise, the weak ones to shame the strong, and the lowborn to shame the wellborn. Thus, do not regard yourselves as wise, strong, and wellborn."

It is easy to talk about living Christ, but it is difficult to practice living Him. As long as we consider ourselves wise, we do not live Christ. All those who truly live Christ regard themselves as foolish, weak, and lowborn. They think of themselves as nothing and realize that their existence on earth does not mean anything. They can say of themselves, "I am among the things which are not. I live in a certain

locality, but my existence here does not mean anything. But although I am nothing, God has chosen me." I repeat, God does not choose the wise, the strong, or the wellborn. If you consider yourself wise, strong, and wellborn, you reject God's choosing. By the way you live, you renounce God's choosing. God shames the wise, the strong, and the wellborn. We all should be able to say, "Lord, I confess that I am not wise or powerful. Instead, I truly am foolish, weak, and among the lowborn." What was in Paul's spirit in writing this portion of 1 Corinthians was an emphasis on this matter.

In his spirit Paul also sensed the need to lower down the haughty Greek believers. Certain ones among them may have been very intelligent and wise, but Paul paid no attention to that. On the contrary, he was seeking to point out that the very fact that they had been chosen by God proved that they were foolish, not wise; weak, not strong; and lowborn, not wellborn. Therefore, it was a mistake for the believers in Corinth to think that they were wise and powerful.

We have seen that in verse 28 Paul says that God will "bring to nought" the things which are. The meaning of the Greek word here, as in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 and Hebrews 2:14, is to destroy. To be brought to nought by God actually means to be destroyed by Him. If we study history, we shall see that many people of honor have been brought to nought by God. Many with a high social standing have been destroyed, made nothing, by Him. We should never consider ourselves something. If we view ourselves as something, God will bring us to nothing.

D. No Flesh Boasting before God

In verse 29 Paul says, "So that all flesh should not boast before God." This declares the reason for God's particular favor in His choosing of us. It is that no flesh, no human being, may have any boast, any glory, before Him.

II. OF GOD WE ARE IN CHRIST

Paul opens verse 30 with the words, "But of Him you

are in Christ Jesus." What we believers, as the new creation, are and have in Christ is of God, not of ourselves. It is God who put us in Christ, transferring us from Adam into Christ. It is God who has made Christ wisdom to us. God has transferred us out of Adam into Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (Gal. 2:20) and by our believing and being baptized (John 3:15; Gal. 3:26-28).

The word "but" at the beginning of verse 30 implies a strong contrast with the preceding verses. Furthermore, being in Christ implies that now, in Christ, we are wise, strong, and wellborn. However, very few believers consider themselves wise in Christ, strong in Christ, and wellborn in Christ. If the sisters realized that they were wise and strong in Christ, they would not weep so much. It is very easy for sisters to shed tears. This indicates that, as far as their experience is concerned, they are not wise or strong in Christ. According to our experience, too many times we are wise in the flesh, but foolish in Christ; strong in the flesh, but weak in Christ. This means that in our Christian life there may not be the "but" inserted by Paul into verse 30. In our experience there should be this "but." Although we were born foolish, weak, and low, we should be able to say, "But of God we are in Christ." Now that we are in Christ, we are wise, strong, and wellborn in Him.

Regeneration causes us to be wellborn, and it gives us a very high status, the status of a child in a royal family. Do you realize that, as one who believes in Christ, you have a divine status, that you are a child of the King of kings? We have been born into God's family! This means that we have a status higher than that of the angels. We are members of God's household, and the angels are our servants. In Christ, we are truly higher than the angels. How good it is that God has chosen us foolish, weak, and lowborn ones and has caused us to be in Christ! This is not our own doing or the work of any other person; it is absolutely of God that we are in Christ.

According to the context, in Christ here implies that we

are wise, strong, and wellborn in Christ. It is crucial for us to realize that we are in Christ. We should also boast of the fact that we are now in Christ. Furthermore, we can testify that because we are in Christ we are no longer foolish, weak, or lowborn. Sisters, if in your experience you are strong in Christ, you will have a foretaste of the New Jerusalem and not be so quick to shed tears. In the New Jerusalem there will be no more tears. Sometimes at the Lord's table we thank Him for the foretaste of the coming New Jerusalem. When we experience the full taste, there will not be any tears. Instead of tears, there will be the flowing of the water of life. Sisters, when you are inclined to weep, remember Paul's words: But of God you are in Christ. In Christ you are wise and strong. Praise the Lord that in Christ we are wellborn, children of the royal family! What a marvelous status!

III. CHRIST BECOMING WISDOM TO THE BELIEVERS FROM GOD

In 1:30 Paul says that Christ Jesus "became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Paul does not say that Christ *is* wisdom to us; he says that Christ *became* wisdom to us. This indicates that at one time Christ was not wisdom to us, but that He later became wisdom to us. For example, to say that I am your friend is somewhat different from saying that I became your friend. To say that I became your friend implies that once I was not your friend, but now I have become a friend to you. Christ could not become wisdom to us before we were in Him. But when we believed in Christ, God put us into Him. Then Christ became wisdom to us.

Suppose that a certain young lady is in poverty. One day she marries a millionaire. On that very day she becomes rich. Formerly she was poor, but now she has become rich. In a similar way, formerly, because we were not yet in Him, Christ was not wisdom to us. But once we believed into Christ and God put us in Him, He became wisdom to us.

Notice that in verse 30 Paul does not say that Christ became our wisdom; he says that Christ became wisdom *to us*. For Christ to become wisdom to us is different from His becoming our wisdom. Day by day, we need Christ to be wisdom to us. We may again use electricity as an illustration. To speak of our electricity is different from speaking of electricity being to us. When electricity is to you, you receive an electrical charge. For electricity to be your electricity means that it belongs to you, but for electricity to be to you means that it is transmitted to you and that you experience it. Likewise, to say that Christ is our wisdom is rather general, not experiential. But when Christ becomes wisdom to us, we experience Him.

Paul had not only knowledge but also a great deal of spiritual experience. Furthermore, he knew the situation among the believers. As Christians, we may say, "We have Christ as our wisdom." However, this does not mean very much in experience. It is similar to saying, "We have electricity as our power." We may say this and actually not have light or heat, because electricity is not yet to us. We may also have Christ as our wisdom without having Christ being wisdom to us. We need Christ to become wisdom to us.

In verse 30 I appreciate the two phrases "to us" and "from God." Christ became wisdom to us from God. The expression "to us from God" indicates something present, practical, and experiential in the way of transmission. Continually, Christ must become wisdom to us from God. This indicates a living, ongoing transmission. The words "to" and "from" indicate that a present, living, and practical transmission is taking place from God to us.

Paul composed verse 30 in the way he did in order to indicate to the believers in Corinth that Christ should continually become wisdom to them from God. Christ as wisdom should unceasingly flow from God to them. However, their actual situation was contrary to this. Christ may have been their wisdom, but He was not presently flowing to them from God. Once again I wish to point out

that Paul does not say, "Christ is God's wisdom," or "Christ is your wisdom." He says, "Christ became wisdom to us from God." This indicates that Christ should continually flow from God to us and be our present and practical wisdom in our experience.

It is important for us to learn to apply the Bible to our experience. The Bible is not primarily a book of doctrine; it is a book of life, and life is a matter of experience. What is revealed in the Bible must be living to us and applicable to us in our experience.

In verse 30 both the punctuation and the grammar are significant. After the phrase "from God" there is a colon. This indicates that wisdom includes the three items which follow the colon, that is, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. According to Greek grammar, the word "both" is used with respect not to two items but to three. Although this is awkward in our language, the translation is accurate according to the Greek. In verse 30 Paul definitely says Christ "became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." This wisdom implies righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Christ was made wisdom to us from God as three vital things in God's salvation: righteousness (for our past), by which we have been justified by God, that we might be reborn in our spirit to receive the divine life (Rom. 5:18); sanctification (for the present), by which we are being sanctified in our soul, that is, transformed in our mind, emotion, and will, with the divine life (Rom. 6:19, 22); and redemption (for the future), that is, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23), by which we will be transfigured in our body with His divine life to have His glorious likeness (Phil. 3:21). It is of God that we participate in such a complete and perfect salvation, making our entire being--spirit, soul, and body--organically one with Christ, and making Christ everything to us. It is altogether of God, not of ourselves, that we may boast and glory in Him, not in ourselves.

It is certainly correct to say that Christ is righteousness for our past, sanctification for our present, and redemption for our future. After we believe in the Lord Jesus and are justified, we need to live a holy life, a sanctified life. The subjective experience of sanctification implies transformation, a process which takes place in our soul. The redemption of our body will occur in the future. Thus, we were regenerated in our spirit when we believed in the Lord, we are in the process of being transformed, sanctified, in our soul, and, in the future, our body will be redeemed, transfigured.

Although this understanding is correct, we must point out that this is an interpretation of verse 30. Because it is an interpretation, we should not allow Paul's meaning here to be limited by it. Yes, for a sinner to be fully saved, he must pass through three steps: regeneration in the spirit, sanctification in the soul, and transfiguration, redemption, in the body. When this process is complete, we shall be the same as the Lord Jesus. According to 1 John 3:2, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Today we are not like the Lord in our body. But when our body is transfigured, fully redeemed, we shall be wholly like Him.

Righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are not only related to our past, present, and future. Daily we need Christ as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Every day we need to be righteous, we need to be sanctified, and we need to be redeemed, not only in one matter, but in all matters. For example, in dealing with their children, some parents may still behave in an old way. Thus, these parents need to be righteous, holy, and redeemed in relation to their children.

Recently, in the Life-study of Exodus we pointed out that redemption includes three matters: termination, replacement, and being brought back to God. When God redeems us, He terminates us, replaces us with Christ, and brings us back to Himself.

With regard to everything in our daily life, we need to be terminated, replaced with Christ, and brought back to God. The way we deal with our children, if it is still the old

way, needs to be terminated, replaced with Christ, and brought back to God. Then we shall be redeemed as far as the matter of dealing with our children is concerned.

In the church life we also need redemption because in many matters we are still very natural. Some may dislike a certain brother or a certain sister. Others may lack a proper care for the young people or for the older ones. Still others may have a preference for a particular elder. All these are related to the natural life and point to the need for redemption. Thus, in the church life we need to be terminated, replaced with Christ, and brought back to God. In all things we need to be righteous, sanctified, and redeemed. When Christ becomes wisdom to us from God, eventually in everything He will be our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. How deep and profound is Paul's thought here!

IV. BOASTING IN THE LORD

In verse 31 Paul concludes, "That according as it is written, He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord." It is of God that we are in Christ, and it is Christ who became wisdom to us from God to meet all our need. Therefore, our boast should be only in Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TEN

FOUR CRUCIAL MATTERS FOR THE PARTICIPATION IN CHRIST

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:2, 9; 6:17; 10:16

In this message we shall consider four crucial matters covered in the first ten chapters of 1 Corinthians. In 1:2 Paul says, "To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and ours." I do not believe that most readers of this Epistle pay adequate attention to all the points mentioned in this verse. A crucial matter in 1:2 is Paul's expression "theirs and ours." In verse 9 Paul goes on to say, "God is faithful, through Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." In this verse the crucial matter is the fellowship of the Son of God. In the sequence of experience, this follows the vital point in verse 2. A third important matter is found in 6:17. Here Paul says, "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." In our experience, the matter of being one spirit with the Lord follows being called by God into the fellowship of His Son. The fourth crucial matter is related to the fellowship of the blood of Christ and of the body of Christ. In 10:16 Paul speaks of this: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a fellowship of the body of Christ?" This verse refers to the Lord's table. Thus, in these verses the four crucial matters are Christ being theirs and ours, the fellowship of the Son of God, being one spirit with the Lord, and the Lord's table.

THE PERSON OF PAUL AND HIS SPIRIT

As a help to understanding these matters, we need to consider the way Paul deals with the problems among the believers at Corinth. The way a person handles a problem invariably depends on what kind of person he is. The same problem will be dealt with in different ways by different persons. For example, one who holds a high office in the government will handle a problem differently from one who is a thief or a robber. Likewise, a learned professor will deal with a problem differently from a person with very limited education. To be sure, a government official, a thief, a professor, and an uneducated person will each deal with the same problem in a different way. In each case, the way the problem is handled will depend entirely on the person taking care of the problem. In keeping with this principle, the way Paul deals with the problems among the Corinthians is based on the kind of person he is. Therefore, to understand how Paul deals with the problems we must first know what kind of person he was and what was within him.

In reading 1 Corinthians we need to get into Paul's spirit and touch the burden in his spirit. To touch Paul's spirit in this way is to touch the reality of his being. A person's spirit is the reality of his being. This means that your spirit is the real you, the true person. The reality of our being is not our mind or emotion, much less any aspect of our physical body. The reality of our being as persons is our spirit. For this reason, a person is often the most genuine when he loses his temper, because at such a time his spirit comes forth. However, when we behave ourselves carefully and act in a certain way, we may cover up our real being and not express our real person. Only when our spirit comes forth do we manifest the reality of our being. Many times this occurs when we are angry and lose our temper. The point here is that only when we touch a person's spirit do we contact the reality of his being.

In reading the Bible it is very important that we touch

the spirit of the writer. Otherwise, we shall not understand the meaning of what he says. We shall know his writings only on the surface and according to letters in black and white. But when we get into a writer's spirit, we touch the depth of his writings.

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he was a person infused with the Triune God. He had been filled, permeated, and saturated with the Father, Son, and Spirit. Moreover, in a full way Paul had seen the vision concerning God's economy. He realized that the intention of the Triune God is to dispense Himself into His chosen and redeemed people. As one of God's redeemed people, Paul had experienced this dispensation. Paul certainly knew that God the Father is the source, that God the Son is the course, and that God the Spirit is the flow. He also had a clear realization that the Triune God had been dispensed into him for a goal and that this goal is the corporate expression of God. All these things were not only clear to Paul, but they were also in him and part of his very being. Thus, Paul was a person infused with the Triune God and His economy. This should help us see what kind of person Paul was, what were the basic elements in his being.

Since Paul was a person saturated with the Triune God and His economy, he dealt with the problems among the believers at Corinth according to the kind of person he was. If we understand this, we shall be able to understand why Paul dealt with the church in Corinth the way he did.

THOSE WHO CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

In dealing with the problems in the church at Corinth, Paul includes the verses we quoted at the beginning of this message. Even 1:2 is an aspect of Paul's handling of the problems. In this verse Paul refers to those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, both theirs and ours. It may seem to most readers of this book that this verse has nothing to do with the problems Paul confronts later in this Epistle. Furthermore, it may appear

that nothing in this verse is helpful in solving these problems. When I studied this book many years ago, making a detailed outline of the whole Epistle and writing many notes, I did not pay much attention to this verse. I wondered what a statement about calling on the name of the Lord Jesus in every place had to do with the problems among the believers at Corinth. If I had been the writer, I probably would not have included this verse. Nevertheless, 1:2 contains an important tool used by Paul in dealing with the problems among the Corinthians.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF GOD'S SON

First Corinthians 1:9 seems to be more directly related to the problems among the Corinthians. Paul begins this verse by saying, "God is faithful." Then he goes on to say that through this faithful God we have been called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ. I do not think that the Corinthian believers understood what Paul meant by the fellowship of the Son of God. But why would he use an expression that his readers could not understand? What was his aim in pointing out that they had been called into the fellowship of God's Son? What help could this render to the divisive Corinthians, to those who were saying that they were of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or of a narrow Christ? To the Corinthians this must have sounded like a foreign language. As this Epistle was read among them, some may have said to themselves, "Paul, why do you tell us that we have been called into the fellowship of the Son of God? What do you mean by this?"

ONE SPIRIT WITH THE LORD

In 6:12-20 Paul deals with the abuse of freedom in foods and in the body. Suddenly, he inserts the words, "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." We may wonder what this sentence has to do with the abuse of eating and of the body. Of course, we may gain some understanding by reading this verse in its context. But if we do not have Paul's vision, we shall not understand why this verse is

inserted. We shall not appreciate that it is a very useful tool in dealing with the Corinthians and their problems.

THE GOOD LAND AND THE LORD'S TABLE

In 10:1-13 Paul takes the history of the children of Israel in the Old Testament as a type of the New Testament believers (v. 6). Actually, here Paul specifically uses the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness as a type to warn the Corinthians. Paul tells them that God's people passed through the sea and "all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (10:2). Furthermore, they "all ate the same spiritual food" and "all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ" (vv. 3-4). Then in verse 5 Paul speaks a serious word, saying, "But with most of them God was not well pleased, for they were strewn along in the wilderness." Then Paul says explicitly "these things occurred as types of us." If we read this portion of 1 Corinthians in a thoughtful way, we may wonder what was Paul's main purpose in giving this warning.

This warning is related to the enjoyment of Christ as the good land. Here Paul seems to be saying, "You Corinthians must be careful. The good land lay ahead of the children of Israel as God's promise. But most of them did not enter the land. Rather, with most of the children of Israel God was not well pleased; they died and were strewn in the wilderness. They did not receive the good land as their inheritance promised by God. You must be careful lest your situation become the same. You believers at Corinth also have a goal promised by God, and this goal is to enter into Christ as the good land. However, there is the definite possibility that you will not reach Christ as the land, but instead be scattered in the wilderness and thereby fail to receive the promise of reaching Christ as the land." This thought regarding the good land is definitely implied in these verses.

After issuing the warning based on the type of the children of Israel, Paul goes on to speak about the Lord's

table. He says in 10:16, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a fellowship of the body of Christ?" If we have the proper realization of Paul's purpose in writing, we shall see that this word is a continuation of the warning about losing the enjoyment of the good land, the full enjoyment of the rich Christ promised by God. Furthermore, the enjoyment of this rich Christ is the very fellowship of His body and blood. In other words, this enjoyment refers to the table.

THE RICH ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST AS OUR PORTION

Let us now put these four matters together and see what kind of picture they present. In 1:2 we see that, based on His economy, God has given Christ to us to be our portion. As our portion, Christ is both theirs and ours. We may enjoy Christ as our unique portion simply by calling on His name. When we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we get His Person, and then this Person becomes our portion.

According to 1:9, God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ. This means that He has called us into the enjoyment and participation of the very Person of Christ as our portion. Because God has called us into the enjoyment of such a Person, we now should be those who call on His name. The word called in verse 9 is a repetition of the same word in verse 2, where Paul speaks of called saints. Through the faithful God we, the called saints, have been called into the fellowship, the participation, the enjoyment, of His Son. By calling on the name of the Lord Jesus, we enjoy Him as the One who is both theirs and ours. This is the connection and continuation between verses 2 and 9.

Knowing that we have been called into the fellowship of Christ and that we should now call on Him to enjoy Him as our portion, we may wonder how we can have this experience of Christ in a practical way. We may experience Christ through the Spirit as the heavenly electricity. We

have pointed out again and again that in 6:17 Paul says that he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. The word joined in this verse is a synonym for fellowship in 1:9. Fellowship and being joined refer to the same matter. For example, if you are joined to a saint, you have fellowship with him. The joining is actually the fellowship. This enables us to see the connection between 1:2 and 9 and 6:17. The word called in 1:9 connects that verse with 1:2, and the word joined in 6:17 connects that verse with 1:9.

The way to enjoy the Lord experientially is through Him as the Spirit in our spirit. Today Christ is the life-giving Spirit, and we have a regenerated human spirit. When we are joined to Him, we become one spirit with Him. Whenever we are one spirit with the Lord, we are in the fellowship of Christ. Furthermore, when we exercise our spirit to call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we apply this fellowship and enjoy Christ. What a rich enjoyment this is!

This enjoyment is signified by the Lord's table in chapter ten. The table is a symbol of enjoyment, for the table is a feast. Of course, the word fellowship is used twice in 10:16 with reference to the fellowship of the body and blood of the Lord. In 1:9 the fellowship is that in the Son of God, but in 10:16 this fellowship becomes the fellowship of the Lord's body and blood. This indicates that Christ has been processed through death and resurrection to become the food on the table for our enjoyment.

The process Christ has gone through can be illustrated by the process of preparing a chicken to become our food. Before a living chicken can become food for us, the chicken must be slain, prepared, and cooked. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, has also been slain, prepared, processed, "cooked," to be the body and blood on the table, ready for us to eat. In this way He is available for our enjoyment.

When we put these four matters together, we have the full enjoyment of the processed, "cooked," Son of God. He has become the Spirit, we have a regenerated spirit, and now these two spirits have become one. When we exercise

our spirit to call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we enjoy Him as our portion and experience the fellowship of Christ in a practical way.

The four matters covered by Paul in these verses are tools used to deal with the problems among the Corinthians. Because these matters were deep in Paul's spirit, they came out of his being as he faced the problems. However, Christians who read this Epistle superficially do not have any understanding of these matters. But if we consider these matters and understand them, we shall have a deep and more comprehensive view of the Lord's table. Furthermore, if we have this view when we come to the table, it will make a difference as far as the enjoyment of Christ is concerned. Also, if we are those who enjoy the Son of God in this way, all problems will be solved. Praise the Lord for Paul's way of dealing with the problems among Christians! We need to consider the connection between these four verses until our view becomes very clear. Then we shall touch the depths of the first ten chapters of 1 Corinthians. It is crucial that we all touch the depths of this book.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE ELEVEN

PARTICIPATION IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:2, 9-13

In 1 Corinthians chapters one, two, and three Paul uses a number of special terms and extraordinary expressions. These terms and expressions are not found elsewhere in Paul's writings. The first extraordinary verse is 1:2. Here Paul says, "To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and ours." The expression "called saints" is unusual. Many Christians do not have the assurance that they are saints. Have you ever praised the Lord for the fact that you are a saint? Do you even have the concept, or thought, that you are a saint? If I were to declare boldly that I am a saint, some might accuse me of pride, saying that I am simply a Chinese man by blood and a Christian by faith. Nevertheless, Paul speaks of those who received this Epistle as "called saints." This is an extraordinary term.

In verse 2 Paul also refers to the matter of calling upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place. Then he goes on to say that Christ is "theirs and ours." The very Christ on whose name we call is both theirs and ours. Perhaps you have read this verse many times without paying attention to this expression. The significance of these words is deep and profound.

In 1:9 Paul says, "God is faithful, through Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Every Christian realizes that God is faithful. It is also common for Christians to realize that God is merciful,

gracious, and loving. Few Christians, however, realize that they have been called into the fellowship of the Son of God, and few have an adequate understanding of what this fellowship is. Christians often ask others if they have been saved, but rarely do they inquire if a person has been called. Has anyone ever approached you and asked, "Have you been called by God into the fellowship of His Son?" In this verse Paul speaks not of being saved, but of being called. Furthermore, he does not say that we have been called to heaven or to eternal blessings; he says that we have been called into the fellowship of God's Son.

The Christ on whom we call is theirs and ours. We have been called by the faithful God into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. This is very deep and profound. Throughout the centuries, Christians have not adequately touched the depth and the profoundness of these matters.

GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE

If we would understand these two verses, we need to go back to the beginning with God in eternity past. Before God created the universe, He had a pleasure, a heart's desire. Every human being is seeking some kind of pleasure. God also has His pleasure. According to this good pleasure, God made a plan. This plan was to dispense Himself into a number of human beings, to work Himself into them. This is God's pleasure, His delight. Christians cannot adequately know the meaning of 1:2 and 9 unless they realize this.

Few Christians realize that God has a pleasure and that His plan is to dispense Himself into us and work Himself into us. Yet this is revealed in the Bible. In Ephesians 1:5 Paul speaks of "the good pleasure of His will," and in verse 9, of "His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself." Furthermore, Paul uses the word dispensation several times. In Ephesians 1:10 he speaks of a "dispensation of the fullness of the times," and in Ephesians 3:9 he refers to "the dispensation of the mystery,

which from the ages has been hidden in God, Who created all things." To repeat, God's good pleasure is to dispense Himself into us and work Himself into us.

THE PROCESS OF GOD'S DISPENSATION

Creation

At this point we need to ask a crucial question: How is it possible for God to dispense Himself into us? First, God created the heavens, the earth, and man. 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. The human spirit is a special organ created by God for man to receive God. We may use a transistor radio as an illustration. A transistor radio contains a receiver which picks up the sound waves in the air. We can compare ourselves to the radio, and our spirit to the receiver. The heavens are for the earth, the earth is for man, and man, created with a spirit, is for God. Because man has a spirit, a receiver, it is possible for him to take God into him.

Incarnation

Long after God accomplished the work of creation, the first step toward the dispensing of Himself into us, God took the second step--incarnation. One day, the infinite God, the very God who created the universe, became a man. According to John 1:1 and 14, the Word, who is God, became flesh; that is, God became a man. In the words of Isaiah 9:6, a child has been born to us whose name is called the mighty God. The baby born in a manger in Bethlehem was actually the mighty God. The Lord Jesus lived on earth in a lowly way. He was raised in the home of a carpenter, and He Himself worked as a carpenter. Who would have thought that the very God dwelt in Him? At the age of thirty He came forth to minister. Certain of the things He did caused people to wonder about Him. His words were far more philosophical than anything uttered by the greatest philosophers. Some of those who heard Him marveled and said, "How does this man know letters,

having never learned?" (John 7:15). Others were offended and claimed to know His mother, brothers, and sisters. Eventually, the Lord Jesus went to the cross and died.

Crucifixion

By incarnation the Lord took on humanity. Man is the head of the old creation. When Adam, the representative of the entire creation, fell, the whole creation fell and became old. When God put on humanity, He put on the entire old creation. Thus, when Christ was crucified, the creation was crucified also. Therefore, by His death on the cross, the Lord terminated the entire creation, including you and me. Through this wonderful, all-inclusive death, Christ redeemed us; He brought us back to God. Not only did He terminate us and bring us back to God, but in resurrection He replaces us with Himself. Therefore, the Lord has terminated us, brought us back to God, and is replacing us in resurrection with Himself.

Resurrection

In John 11:25 the Lord Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life." The Lord as resurrection is the element with which we are replaced. Furthermore, in resurrection Christ became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). Resurrection is actually the living Person of Christ, the One who is God incarnate, who lived on earth as a man, who died on the cross for our redemption, and who in resurrection has become the life-giving Spirit. Thus, Christ is both the resurrection and the Spirit. He has become the Spirit, and the Spirit is resurrection. Now He as the Spirit and as the resurrection is our replacement.

After Christ became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection, it was possible for Him to come into us. He, the divine electricity, can come into our receiver. However, it is necessary for us to receive Him by repenting, believing in Him, and calling on His name. A sinner may pray, "Lord Jesus, I am sinful. But, Lord, You are my Savior. Now I open myself to You and receive You." Whenever a person

prays in such a way, this dear, excellent, wonderful One, the very One who is the Spirit and resurrection, enters into him. This is not mere theology--it is a marvelous fact. Every genuine Christian can testify that when he believed in the Lord and called on His name, something unusual happened to him. The Lord as the life-giving Spirit came into him. Once we have received the Lord into us, He will never leave, even if we sometimes regret that we have become a Christian. After you have believed in the Lord Jesus, you will not be able to stop believing in Him. Once He has come into you, He will never leave. Now we can see by what way God dispenses Himself into us.

Do you realize what kind of God is dispensing Himself into you? He is the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The One whom we have received is Christ, the Redeemer, the Savior, the life-giving Spirit, and the resurrection. All these are different aspects of one Person.

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

The One in whom we believe, whom we have received, and who has entered into us should also be the One upon whom we call. However, many Christians today pay no attention to this matter of calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. As we have seen, Paul speaks of this in 1:2, when he refers to "all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place." Here the Greek word for call is *epikaleo*. This word means to call aloud. To pray in a soft, gentle way is very different from calling aloud on the name of the Lord Jesus. Suppose a sinner hears the preaching of the gospel and is persuaded to believe in the Lord and call on Him. He may pray quietly, "Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I thank You for dying for me. I believe in You. Your blood cleanses me. You give me eternal life." A person who prays like this can be saved, but he may not be saved in a strong way. Suppose another person is convinced that he should believe in the Lord Jesus. But instead of praying quietly, he calls aloud on the name of the Lord, declaring that he believes in Him and receives Him. If he calls on the

Lord in this way, his experience of salvation will be very strong.

When we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, the One whom we have received, He becomes ours. This means that He becomes our portion, even our all-inclusive portion. As our portion, Christ is our life, our life supply, and everything to us. He is whatever we need: comfort, patience, righteousness, holiness, power. Then He becomes wisdom to us from God. This Christ who is our portion is both theirs and ours.

THE MEANING OF FELLOWSHIP

In 1:9 Paul says that God has called us into the fellowship of His Son. The meaning of the word fellowship is deep and profound. The New Testament illustrates this fellowship by a feast. In the Gospels the Lord Jesus said that a feast had been prepared and that people were invited to it (Matt. 22:1-3; Luke 14:16-17). We all have been invited to a marvelous feast. Here at the feast we are enjoying course after course. This enjoyment of the feast is a mutual participation, a co-participation. Thus, in the fellowship of God's Son we have enjoyment. This enjoyment, however, is corporate, not individualistic. As we enjoy this feast together, we have fellowship, communion.

Some versions translate the Greek word for fellowship, *koinonia*, as communion. Fellowship definitely implies communion. To have communion is to share something in common. When you eat breakfast alone, you do not enjoy communion. But when you come to a feast attended by a large number of people and enjoy the feast with them, you have communion. This communion is a co-enjoyment, a co-participation.

Fellowship also includes communication. Whenever we feast together with others, there is communication. You communicate with others, and they communicate with you.

The fellowship into which God has called us is the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. This

fellowship includes the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is the fellowship of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ, the One who in resurrection is the life-giving Spirit. This all-inclusive One is our feast, and this feast is the fellowship. As those who have been called into this fellowship, we are now enjoying Christ by feasting on Him. Furthermore, we have communion and we are in communication with one another. This fellowship, this communion, is the church life.

The church life is the resurrection life in which we all participate. Furthermore, this resurrection is the life-giving Spirit, the life-giving Spirit is Christ, and Christ is the incarnated God. Christ, an all-inclusive Person, also implies justification, sanctification, and redemption. Christ is God, even the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. As the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected One, He is both resurrection and the life-giving Spirit. He is even our feast. Furthermore, Christ Himself is actually the fellowship into which God has called us. To say that we have been called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ means that we have been called into Him. Christ is the life, the resurrection, the sanctification, the justification, the redemption, and everything to us. Therefore, He Himself is the fellowship.

DIVIDED BY PREFERENCES

Let us consider once again the background of 1 Corinthians. Paul wrote this Epistle to philosophical Greeks, to those who regarded themselves as very wise. Because of their philosophizing, some of them said, "I am of Paul," others said, "I am of Apollos," and still others declared, "I am of Cephas." The believers at Corinth thus had preferences. These preferences caused them to be divided. To say, "I am of Paul," is equal to saying, "I have been called into a preference for Paul." The same is true of saying, "I am of Apollos," or, "I am of Cephas." Instead of taking Christ, the all-inclusive One, as their portion, the Corinthians were taking another person, Paul, Apollos, or

Cephas, as their portion. Thus, in this Epistle Paul seems to be saying, "Believers at Corinth, you have not been called into your own preferences. God has called you into the fellowship of His Son. You should not prefer me, Apollos, Cephas, or anyone else. We all have been called into one living, all-inclusive Person. We all have been called by God into the fellowship of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ."

In the original Greek text of the New Testament, there were no verse divisions. This means that 1:10 is the direct continuation of verse 9. Again and again we have pointed out that in verse 9 Paul says that God has called us into the fellowship of His Son. Then in verse 10 he goes on to say, "But I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion." Here we see that Paul beseeches the believers through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the very name upon which all believers call. In particular, Paul was beseeching them to speak the same thing. Because the Corinthians were saying, "I am of Paul," or, "I am of Apollos," they were speaking different things. If we go on to consider verses 11 through 13, we shall see that the fellowship in verse 9 is in contrast to the divisions in verse 10. Furthermore, these divisions were caused by preferences for certain persons. We have not been called into preferences, into divisions, but into the unique fellowship, into the unique enjoyment of Christ and participation in Christ. Oh, it is vital for us to see this! Only one thing can keep us from division--the realization that the all-inclusive Christ is our portion and that we have been called into the fellowship, the enjoyment, of such a One.

Christians today are divided because of their preferences. This may also be true of us in the church life. You may be pleased with the church today because the condition of the church matches your preference. Some may say, "Praise the Lord! The church life in my locality is

excellent. The meetings are high and living, and I enjoy them very much." Perhaps after a period of time, the meetings will not be as high or as living as they are now. Then some may become disappointed, leave the church life, and pursue something which suits their preference.

To have a preference is very different from enjoying the all-inclusive Christ. If we have seen what it means for Christ to be our portion and what it means to be called into His fellowship, we shall not be concerned whether the meetings are high or low. We shall not have preferences concerning the meetings. The primary source of division among Christians is this matter of preferences. But if we have seen that God's good pleasure is simply to work the all-inclusive Christ into us as our portion for our enjoyment, we shall not care for anything other than Christ and the enjoyment of His fellowship.

EXPERIENCING AND ENJOYING THE FELLOWSHIP

We have seen that the fellowship is the enjoyment of Christ and the co-participation in Christ. There is no need for us to analyze this fellowship in a doctrinal way in order to experience it. When you eat breakfast, do you analyze everything you eat? Do you make a study of the composition of the eggs, the toast, and the juice? No one would be so foolish as to study breakfast instead of enjoying it. Furthermore, we should not be concerned about the utensils used for eating breakfast. How foolish to dispute about the silverware, the glasses, or the bowls! Would it not be ridiculous for someone to turn from the food prepared for his enjoyment and to be occupied with the kind of knives, forks, and spoons on the table? Nevertheless, this is an illustration of the actual situation among Christians today. Instead of caring for Christ as their unique portion, many argue about doctrines and practices.

Suppose you come to a church meeting and find the chairs arranged in a very unusual way. If this bothers you, it proves that you have not yet seen what the church is. The proper church life does not depend on a particular

arrangement of chairs. The church is the fellowship, the communion, the co-participation, the mutual enjoyment, of Christ. This Christ is now the resurrection and the Spirit. If you have seen that the church life consists in this fellowship, you will not be concerned about such things as the arrangement of chairs in the meeting hall. Furthermore, you will not be distracted from Christ by doctrines or practices.

I would encourage you all to seek the experience and the enjoyment of the fellowship of God's Son. The more we enjoy the co-participation in this fellowship, the better the church life will be. We need to enjoy this fellowship both at home and in the meetings. Then we shall not be troubled by opinions, gossip, or different teachings, for we shall not care for anything other than the practical co-enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ who is to us the Spirit, the resurrection, and the Triune God. This fellowship is the reality of the church. Thus, we must seek to experience this fellowship all the time. Then we shall enjoy Christ in the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWELVE

PARTAKING OF CHRIST AS OUR PORTION

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:2, 9; 6:17; 10:16-17

IN RESURRECTION

Our Christ is the all-inclusive One. He is the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. As God incarnate, He lived as a man on earth for thirty-three and a half years. Through His death on the cross, He crucified the old creation. In so doing, He brought creation back to God. Now that Christ has terminated us on the cross, what He has terminated He is replacing with Himself in resurrection. In resurrection Christ became a life-giving Spirit. Actually, the life-giving Spirit is resurrection. Thus, resurrection is not merely a thing or a matter--it is a living Person. In John 11:25 the Lord Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

Today the wonderful Person of Christ, the One through whom all things were created, the One who has passed through incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, is the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit. This Spirit is the ultimate and consummate expression of the Triune God.

If someone asks us where we are today, we should say that we are in resurrection. Resurrection is the life-giving Spirit, the life-giving Spirit is Christ, and Christ is the processed Triune God.

In the book of 1 Corinthians Paul deals with eleven problems. Six of these problems are covered in the first ten chapters, and five are covered in the last six chapters. The first six problems are division, lawsuits, incest, the abuse of freedom in eating and in marriage, the question of marriage itself, and the eating of sacrifices to idols. All

these problems are related to humanity, to human life. The second group of problems involves the realm of God's administration. These five problems involve headship, the Lord's table, spiritual gifts, resurrection, and the gift of material things. In dealing with the problem of resurrection Paul utters a wonderful word. In 15:45 he says that the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. This is resurrection. When Christ was simply the last Adam, He was not yet in resurrection. Rather, He was in the flesh, in humanity. But through death He entered into resurrection. Now in resurrection He is no longer in the flesh, for He is the life-giving Spirit. This life-giving Spirit is the reality of resurrection.

When we are in the spirit, we are in resurrection. Resurrection is life which overcomes death. If we are truly in resurrection experientially, we are fresh and living, with life bubbling up from within. In such a case, we can be compared to a green plant. A living plant may be used as an illustration of resurrection. If a plant is flourishing and blossoming, we may say that it is in resurrection. But if the plant is withering and dying, we cannot say that it is in resurrection. Likewise, if we are living and fresh, we are truly in resurrection. But if we sit in the meetings in a formal, religious way, we certainly are not in resurrection. On the contrary, for the most part, we are still in the tomb.

PAUL'S WAYS OF DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

We have pointed out that the first six problems covered in 1 Corinthians are related to human living. Paul's way of dealing with these problems is very different from the way practiced by today's ministers and pastors. For example, if a married couple has a problem and consults their pastor, he will deal with their problem either in a religious way or in a natural way. Paul's way is profound and very difficult to describe. His way of dealing with problems is gradually revealed in the first ten chapters. Paul's way is spiritual and uplifted. We may liken his way to a chain which has many parts linked together. The first chapter of this

Epistle begins with one part of the chain, and the last chapter ends with another part. Paul begins with the word in 1:2 concerning Christ being theirs and ours. The problems among the believers at Corinth were all due to the fact that they were neglecting Christ as their unique portion. Their portion was not Greek philosophy or worldly wisdom; it was the all-inclusive Christ ministered by Paul. This all-inclusive Christ is both theirs and ours. This means that He is our unique portion.

If a couple having problems in married life were to contact Paul, he would not help them in a religious way. He would not charge the husband to love his wife or the wife to submit to her husband. This, however, is the way practiced by pastors today. Paul's way of dealing with human problems is very different. Even his word in 1:2 concerning the called saints, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, and those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, both theirs and ours, is a word related to the problems covered in this Epistle. Although this verse does not appear to be part of Paul's way of approaching human problems, it actually contains the spiritual riches used by Paul to solve the problems. According to this verse, we Christians must realize that the all-inclusive Christ is ours. Furthermore, we are called saints, those who have been called by God to call upon the dear and precious name of the Lord Jesus Christ. If a married sister calls on the name of the all-inclusive Christ, she will be truly submissive to her husband. The reason wives are not submissive is that they are short of the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ. Sisters, when you have trouble being submissive to your husbands, simply call on the name of the Lord. I assure you that after calling a few times, the Lord will touch you and supply you. Spontaneously you will become a very submissive wife. This is the result of enjoying Christ as your portion.

Over the years sisters have often come to me with problems concerning married life. In many cases I not only sympathized with the sisters, but also agreed with them.

In the early years of my ministry I behaved in the same way many pastors do. I encouraged the sisters to read Ephesians 5 and also to pray, even with fasting if necessary. Many times a sister would return to say that what I had suggested did not work. All I could do then was tell the sister to be comforted and that I would try to help her. Actually, I was not any help whatever. Gradually I learned that problems in married life are not solved simply by praying and reading the Bible. Nourishment and life supply are necessary. We cannot receive the nourishment we need simply from the Bible in black and white letters, for what we need is the living Christ Himself. By pray-reading the Word and by calling on the name of the Lord, we receive the needed nourishment and supply. When a sister is supplied in this way, she can find the solution to the problem she faces with her husband.

Sometimes when I call on the name of the Lord Jesus, I am deeply touched by Him and even weep. This touch then becomes my nourishment, supply, and strength. Moreover, I have realized that by calling on the name of the Lord, I can do things which I am not able to do in my own strength. This is the enjoyment of Christ according to 1:2. If we call on the name of the Lord Jesus in every place, we shall know that Christ is ours, and we shall enjoy Him.

First Corinthians 1:9 says, "God is faithful, through Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." We have been called into the fellowship of the all-inclusive Christ as our portion. This fellowship is nothing less than the living Person of the all-inclusive Christ. This means that we have been called into this Person and into His fellowship. God has called us into Christ for our co-participation and enjoyment.

ONE SPIRIT WITH THE LORD

We have seen that the all-inclusive Christ is our portion and that we have been called into the fellowship of this Christ. But how can the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ become our portion for our enjoyment?

To understand this we need to consider 6:17. In this verse Paul declares, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." The fellowship into which we have been called is Christ as the life-giving Spirit. To experience this fellowship we must be one spirit with Him. In our spirit we are one with the life-giving Spirit.

When I began the ministry in this country many years ago, I emphasized the fact that we who believe in Christ have a regenerated human spirit, a human spirit indwelt by the divine Spirit, and that we are one spirit with the Lord. Many were surprised to learn that they have a spirit. Of course, they knew that they had a soul and a heart, but they did not know the human spirit. All Christians know of the Holy Spirit, but not all realize that they have a human spirit. It is important that all those who have recently come into the church life realize that they have a human spirit regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, in our daily living we must exercise the spirit.

When we face problems in our daily living, we may react with our soul, our body, or our spirit. Suppose a brother comes home from work exhausted by the day's labor. He finds his wife full of complaints and unhappy with him. The brother can respond in one of three ways. The first way, universally common, is for him to react in the soul, especially from the mind or the emotion. A second possibility is for him to react in a physical way out of anger. The third alternative is for this brother to respond by exercising his regenerated spirit. It is vital for all believers to realize that our spirit has been regenerated and is indwelt by the all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit. The brother facing difficulty with his wife should exercise his spirit and allow the life-giving Spirit to guide him. Then he will know what to say to his wife and how to behave. Anyone observing a brother living in such a way will realize that he is different from ordinary husbands. Instead of exercising his body to react physically or exercising his soul, he exercises his spirit. We all need to exercise our spirit in our daily living, especially in our married life and family life.

Because we have a regenerated spirit, we can experience Christ as our portion and also experience the fellowship of this Christ. If our spirit were not regenerated by the Spirit and indwelt by the Spirit, Christ could not be our portion, and we could not be in the fellowship of Christ. Just as electrical appliances must have the flow of electricity if they are to function, so we must be in the spirit if we are to experience Christ as our portion and enjoy His fellowship. Only when the electrical current flows into the appliances can we actually have light, heat, or cool air. Likewise, only by being one spirit with the Lord can we experience Him as the all-inclusive One. For this reason, Paul tells us that he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. All those who believe in the Lord Jesus and who love Him have been joined to Him. In spirit we are truly one with Him. We have a regenerated spirit, and Christ is now the life-giving Spirit dwelling in our spirit. As a result, we are one spirit with Him. How marvelous! Oh, we all must realize that we are one spirit with the Lord. If we see this, we shall say, "Praise the Lord that I am one spirit with Him! God created me with a human spirit, and my spirit has been regenerated by Him. Today the all-inclusive Christ is the life-giving Spirit dwelling in my spirit. He is one with my spirit, and I am one with Him."

Often brothers have told me that they cannot understand how I am able to give so many messages in conferences and trainings year after year. Some have asked me where these hundreds and even thousands of messages come from. I can testify that these messages come from Christ, the all-inclusive One, who is the life-giving Spirit mingled with my spirit. Whenever I call on the name of the Lord Jesus, He supplies me. This is the reason I am able to give message upon message. The only limitations are time and physical strength. There is no limitation to the Lord's supply. Actually, the more I speak, the more I am able to speak. The spiritual reservoir is inexhaustible. The more water flows out, the more there is to flow out. For anyone who is one spirit with the Lord the supply is inexhaustible.

Suppose a brother comes to you with complaints about his wife. The brother may say, "The Lord has given you a wife who is kind, gentle, patient, and loving. But my wife is extremely difficult to live with. If your wife were like mine, you would probably be in a worse situation than I am concerning married life. I simply have no way to go on with my wife. What shall I do?" The best way to help such a brother is not to explain matters to him or argue with him. Neither is the proper way to teach him, to give him more doctrinal concepts. His urgent need is to realize that he is one spirit with the Lord. However, it is difficult to help a brother in such a situation to see that he is one spirit with the Lord and that he should call on the name of the Lord. But if you can help this brother understand that he is one spirit with the life-giving Spirit, and if you can help him call on the Lord, that brother's living will be revolutionized.

If you are to convince another saint that he is one spirit with the Lord, you yourself must have adequate experience of being one spirit with Him. When you have become such a person, you will testify that even when your wife offends you, you are able to exercise your spirit, call on the name of the Lord Jesus, and receive His supply.

Apart from Christ, it is not possible for any brother to be an adequate husband or for any sister to be a proper wife. There are no exceptions. Apart from Christ, we are all the same. It is extremely difficult for a sister to be a good wife or for a brother to be a good husband. Nevertheless, marriage is ordained by God. Therefore, since marriage is God's ordination and since it is so difficult to be a proper husband or wife, we have no choice except to experience Christ.

As many of us can testify, when we exercise our spirit and call on the name of the Lord, we enjoy His sweetness. At times we may weep because the Lord touches us in a very tender way. At other times praises may burst forth, and we may thank the Lord for giving us the best and most suitable wife or husband. If we call on the name of the Lord by exercising our spirit, we shall immediately realize that

God has given us the best mate. May more and more among us have this kind of experience.

Christ is both theirs and ours, and we have been called into the fellowship of this Christ. This fellowship takes place only in the spirit. Praise the Lord that he who is joined to Him is one spirit! Therefore, we have a source, a fountain, and an inexhaustible reservoir. This source is Christ, the processed Triune God, the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

TAKING CHRIST BY EATING HIM

In 10:16 Paul comes to another important point: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a fellowship of the body of Christ?" First Corinthians 1:9 speaks of the fellowship of the Son, but 10:16 speaks of the fellowship of the body and blood of Christ. The fellowship in 10:16 is more practical than that in 1:9, for in 10:16 Christ's blood is separate from His body, indicating that it is possible for us to feast on Him. However, in 1:9 Christ as the Son of God is not yet ready for us to partake of by eating Him.

The practicality of the fellowship in 10:16 may be illustrated by the way a chicken is processed for eating. Years ago in China sisters in the church often gave my family a chicken. Their intention was that this chicken be used for our nourishment. A chicken was a genuine gift. However, it was not yet practical for eating. Before a chicken can nourish us, it must be killed, cooked, and then served on the dining table. In like manner, in order to become our feast, Christ, the Son of God, had to be processed. In 10:16 we see that His blood and His body are now on the table, a place of feasting. This points to the fact that Christ has been incarnated and crucified. The blood separate from the body indicates crucifixion. Nevertheless, the fact that Christ is on the table points to His resurrection. Therefore, on the table we see Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

If Christ had not been incarnated, He could not have blood and a body. If He had not been crucified, His blood could not be separated from His body. If He had not been resurrected, He could not be on the table as our food. Whenever we come to the Lord's table and see the bread and cup, we should say, "Lord, how I worship You! You are the incarnated One, the crucified One, and the resurrected One. I thank You, Lord, that through incarnation You put on a human body with blood and flesh. I also thank You that through crucifixion Your blood was separated from Your body. Now, in resurrection, You are served to us on the table. O Lord, I praise You!"

In chapter ten the wonderful One into whose fellowship we have been called becomes very practical to us. Now we can take Him into us by eating Him. As we shall see in a later message, the table with the body and blood of Christ is the reality of Christ as the good land. Christ not only has blood and a body, but He is also the table, and this table is the good land.

SHORT OF THE ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

In 1 Corinthians Paul does not deal with the problems among the believers in a religious way or in a natural, human way. On the contrary, his way of dealing with problems is altogether related to the enjoyment of Christ. Paul knew that problems among Christians are caused by a shortage of the enjoyment of Christ. If a brother and his wife are having problems, this proves that they are short of Christ. They lack the proper enjoyment of Christ. Likewise, if there are problems among the elders, or in a local church, or among the saints, this also is a sign of the shortage of the enjoyment of Christ.

Because Paul realized that the problems among the Corinthians were due to the lack of the enjoyment of Christ, he dealt with their problems by pointing to Christ as their portion for their enjoyment. In this Epistle it seems as if Paul is telling the Corinthians, "You need to realize that Christ alone is your portion. You should not find your portion in wisdom or philosophy. God has called you into the fellowship of Christ as your portion. Today

this portion is the Spirit, and you are one spirit with Him. Furthermore, Christ, the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected One, is now presented to you on the table as a feast for your nourishment and enjoyment. You are invited to enjoy this One served to you on the table. If you enjoy Him as the table and also as the good land, you will be nourished. Then there will be no problems in the church."

The reason we have problems in certain matters is that we are short of the enjoyment of Christ. If we have problems in the church life or in our family life, it is because we lack the adequate enjoyment of Christ. What we need is not a doctrinal Christ in our mentality, but a Christ in our spirit whom we can enjoy and experience in a practical way. If we see that the all-inclusive Christ who indwells our spirit as the life-giving Spirit is our unique portion for our enjoyment, and if we exercise our spirit to call on Him day by day, our married life and church life will be filled with Christ. As a result, we shall not be disturbed by anything in our married life or church life. We shall care only for Christ, and we shall not have the taste or the appetite for anything other than Christ. We shall desire Christ and Christ alone, and we shall feast on Him at the Lord's table. This is the revelation found in the book of 1 Corinthians.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

EXPERIENCING CHRIST AS WISDOM TO US FROM GOD

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:24, 30

In 1:24 Paul says, "But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, God's power and God's wisdom." This is an important verse. Here Paul says that to those who are called, the ones who were chosen by God in eternity and who have come to believe in Christ, Christ is God's power and wisdom. As those who have been called by God to call on the name of the Lord, Christ is God's power and wisdom to us.

ASPECTS OF CHRIST AS OUR PORTION

In 1:30 Paul goes on to say, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Why does Paul, after pointing out that Christ is theirs and ours and that we have been called into His fellowship, say that this very Christ has become wisdom to us from God, both righteousness, sanctification, and redemption? We have seen that to be called into the fellowship of Christ means to be called into the co-enjoyment of Christ as our unique portion. In the second part of chapter one Paul shows us various aspects of the enjoyment of this wonderful portion. We may use a chicken dinner as an illustration. When you are served a platter of chicken, the host may ask you what part of the chicken you prefer, the wings, the breast, or the leg. In verses 24 and 30 we have different aspects of Christ; we have the "wings, " "breast, " and "legs" of Christ for our enjoyment. In verse 2 Paul speaks of our portion, and in

verse 9 he tells us that we have been called into the enjoyment of this portion. Now in verses 24 and 30 we see the aspects of this portion for our enjoyment. From these verses we realize that we may enjoy Christ as God's wisdom and God's power. Furthermore, Christ as God's wisdom includes righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. My burden in this message is to consider from the standpoint of our experience how Christ is wisdom to us from God, including righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

THE DIVINE WAY

It is not easy to understand or explain wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. I prefer to speak of these matters according to spiritual experience. In verses 24 and 30 the wisdom of God denotes the divine way. If we have wisdom, we shall know the proper way to do things. But if we are not wise, our way of doing things will be foolish. In order to have the best way, we must have wisdom. Wisdom in these verses is equal to the way in John 14:6, a verse where the Lord Jesus says, "I am the way." Apart from Christ as the way, we do not have access to the Father. Hence, God's way is His wisdom. How can we enjoy God and participate in Him? If we would enjoy Him and participate in Him, we must have a way, and this way is God's wisdom.

We may use learning to drive an automobile as an illustration of the relationship between wisdom and the way. One who is learning to drive may find it difficult to turn the car. Because he does not have adequate wisdom, he does not have the way to turn the car properly. However, a skillful and experienced driver has the wisdom to manage the car. He has the way to control it, to make it go where he desires. This way is the driver's wisdom.

As wisdom to us from God as God's way, Christ is righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Actually, these are three steps of the way. This understanding is, of course, related to our experience.

Suppose a sister has a problem with her husband. She exercises her spirit and calls on the name of the Lord Jesus. As a result, she is rescued from the problem. To speak more exactly, she receives Christ as wisdom to her from God. Before she learned to exercise her spirit and call on the Lord's name, she would argue with her husband. This is foolish. Nevertheless, wives often argue with their husbands, trying to convince them and even to subdue them. For example, a certain husband may habitually come home late. Relying on her natural wisdom, the wife may try to change her husband's behavior. However, the more she argues with him, the more frequently he comes home late. His wife's arguing actually causes the problem to become worse. Instead of arguing with her husband, the wife should exercise her spirit and call on the name of the Lord. Then she will have the wisdom, the way, to deal with the problem.

BECOMING RIGHTEOUS

Righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are the materials used in the construction of the freeway in our Christian life. Have you ever realized that wisdom is our way, our freeway, and that righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are the materials used in making this freeway? This is very true to our Christian experience. When we enjoy Christ, the first aspect of the divine virtue, the divine goodness, we shall experience is God as our righteousness. Whenever we enjoy Christ and experience Him, we first have God as our righteousness. This means that when we exercise our spirit and call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we become righteous. The more we call, the more righteous we become.

Let us again refer to an illustration from married life. It certainly is wrong for a husband to come home late at night. Nevertheless, a wife may be wrong and unrighteous in the way she deals with her husband concerning this matter. She may be altogether unfair, condemning him and putting all the blame on him. She never condemns herself

or blames herself. Her attitude is also wrong, and she is unrighteous in arguing with her husband. Even though the husband may be just ten percent wrong, the wife condemns him as if he were completely wrong. Therefore, her attitude and behavior toward her husband are ninety percent unrighteous.

Whenever a husband and wife exchange words, both parties are unrighteous. The husband will declare that he is right and that his wife is completely wrong. The wife will insist that the husband is wholly wrong and that only she is right. As a result, both the husband and the wife become unrighteous. Should the wife begin to exercise her spirit and call on the name of the Lord Jesus, she will realize that she has been unfair and unrighteous in relation to her husband. Then she will say to herself, "Yes, my husband is wrong to a certain extent. But I put too much blame upon him. Furthermore, I am wrong to argue with him and to condemn him. Now I see that he is wrong only to a small degree, but that I am much more wrong than he is. I am at least twice as unrighteous as my husband is." When the sister realizes her situation by calling on the name of the Lord, she spontaneously becomes righteous, for Christ becomes righteousness to her.

Whenever there is strife or argument between people, none of the parties involved is righteous. For example, suppose an elder and a brother in the church have an argument. Instead of exercising his spirit to call on the name of the Lord, the elder stands up for himself. In such a case, he is not righteous. Furthermore, he may say to the other elders, "That particular brother always brings death into the meetings." Later, when this elder exercises his spirit and calls on the name of the Lord, he realizes that he was unrighteous. He may also realize that the brother in question rarely spreads death in the meetings. The elder, however, has told others that this brother always brings death into the meetings of the church. Therefore, this elder, realizing that he was not righteous, will need to confess to the other elders and say, "Brothers, I ask you to

forgive me for what I said about this brother. I have made confession to the Lord, and He has forgiven me. Now I also make confession to you. According to my memory, only on one occasion has this brother brought death into the meetings. But I said that he always does this. I was not fair, neither was I righteous."

When we call on the Lord's name with the exercise of our spirit, we become righteous. As we gradually become righteous in this way, we shall eventually become righteous in the way we speak to our husband or wife. Suppose a sister is very righteous with respect to her husband. Eventually, her righteousness will convince him and subdue him. He may say to himself, "Formerly my wife was not like this. Whenever I was wrong, she would condemn me very much. I admit that I was wrong, but she was even more wrong in the way she condemned me." Because of her condemnation of her husband, she offended him and caused him to react negatively. But now she is righteous toward him because she exercises her spirit to call on the name of the Lord. In this way, the Lord becomes righteousness to her.

Whenever we become righteous by calling on the Lord, we become calm. Righteousness calms us down. The reason a husband and wife argue and exchange words is that neither party is righteous. But if one party becomes righteous, this righteousness will cause the other party to calm down. Suppose it is the wife who turns to the Lord, calls on Him, and becomes righteous in dealing with her husband. Immediately he will realize that she has changed and that she is now fair and righteous in relation to him.

What I have been describing of righteousness I have learned through experience, not from books. From our experience we know that to be righteous is to be wise. To have Christ as our righteousness is to have Him as our wisdom. In this way Christ becomes wisdom to us from God.

BEING SANCTIFIED

We have pointed out that the more we exercise our

spirit to call on the name of the Lord, the more righteous we become. Now we need to see that not only do we become righteous and holy, but we are also sanctified. This means that the more we exercise the spirit to call on the name of the Lord Jesus, the more we are separated from what is common and from being common ourselves. Whenever a sister quarrels with her husband, arguing with him and exchanging words, she is common. She is no different from an unbelieving wife. Every worldly, unbelieving wife quarrels with her husband. But when a sister calls on the name of the Lord and becomes righteous, she experiences Christ as sanctification, and she is sanctified. The Christ she enjoys causes her to become holy, sanctified, separated. As a result, her husband will realize the difference. Even if he does not believe in the Lord, he will know that his wife is no longer common.

Through the years I have known many sisters who have become genuinely sanctified. In a number of cases a sister's sanctification convinced her husband and influenced him to believe in the Lord. As a result, the husband of such a sister became a good brother in the Lord.

Both righteousness and sanctification are aspects of Christ becoming wisdom to us from God. We have emphasized the fact that wisdom is the way. How do we receive the wisdom we need? This wisdom comes from the enjoyment of Christ. Day by day and hour by hour, we should not live in the soul, in the self, but live in the spirit, exercising the spirit to call on the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Christ will become our enjoyment, nourishment, support, and supply in a very practical way. The result is that we become righteous. Instead of condemning others and blaming them, we know only to condemn ourselves and blame ourselves. We see that we are wrong with others in many ways. Hence, we become righteous and fair. Furthermore, we become a husband different from other husbands or a wife different from other wives. We are no longer common; instead we are separated, sanctified, and even special. This is sanctification.

BROUGHT BACK TO GOD

If we are those who exercise our spirit, call on the Lord's name, and enjoy Christ as our unique portion, we shall not only become righteous and sanctified, but we shall also experience Christ as our redemption. This means that in our experience we shall be brought back to God. Whenever a sister quarrels with her husband or debates with him, she is far away from God. The more she argues with her husband, the more she is carried away from the Lord. But when she enjoys Christ and thereby becomes righteous and sanctified, she is brought back to God.

Redemption also includes termination. The Christ who dwells in us, who supplies us, and who becomes our nourishment also terminates us. The more we call on the Lord's name, the more we shall gradually come to realize how much we are still in the old creation. We shall hate ourselves and confess that we need to be terminated. This termination is a second aspect of experiencing Christ as redemption to us. First, to be redeemed is to be brought back to God; second, it is to be terminated by the Lord. Redemption includes the realization of our need to be terminated and our realization that the Lord is in fact terminating us.

Redemption also includes being replaced by Christ. When Christ terminates us, He replaces us with Himself. This is transformation; it is also transfiguration. This is more than sanctification, which separates us and makes us different from others. This is the actual process of transformation in which our old element, our old constitution, is terminated and replaced with a new element, a new constitution--Christ Himself in resurrection. When we are replaced, we are transformed and reconstituted of Christ. Is not this the wisdom of God? When we experience Christ as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, we truly have Him as wisdom to us from God.

To repeat, 1:2 says that Christ our portion is both theirs and ours. Verse 9 says that we have been called into the

enjoyment, into the fellowship, of Christ as our unique portion. In the last few verses of chapter one we see that when we enjoy Christ as this portion, we become righteous, sanctified, and redeemed. Then Christ becomes our wisdom, our way. As a result, we become the most wise people on earth. If you are a married brother, you will become a very wise husband, a husband with the wisdom of God. This wisdom is the Christ you enjoy daily in a practical way. With Christ as our wisdom, we shall walk in the way of righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We shall become righteous, separated, and redeemed. This is the result of enjoying Christ as our unique portion.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST ISSUING IN THE EXPERIENCE OF HIM

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:9-12, 23-24, 30

If we read 1 Corinthians only in a superficial way, we may think that it is a book which deals merely with outward matters. Actually, this Epistle is one of the richest books in the New Testament. First Corinthians is rich in Christ, the Spirit, the church, and life. The first two chapters contain a profound revelation of Christ. The Spirit is also clearly revealed in this book in many aspects. More aspects of the Spirit are revealed in 1 Corinthians than in any other book. Furthermore, in this Epistle Paul has much to say about the church in a very practical way. This Epistle is also rich in life.

Many of the chapters of 1 Corinthians are deep and profound. However, the most rich, deep, and profound chapters in this book are the first three chapters. In these chapters Paul uses a number of unique and significant terms and expressions.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SON OF GOD

In 1:9 Paul says, "God is faithful, through Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Do not make the mistake of thinking that the expression "the fellowship of His Son" is insignificant. Many Christians today use the word fellowship in a very common way. But in the Bible fellowship denotes a matter of great significance. In the Old Testament there was not such a thing as fellowship. At most, there was the unity of the brothers spoken of in Psalm 133. Verse 1 of this Psalm declares, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for

brethren to dwell together in unity!" This unity, however, is outward, whereas fellowship is inward. It is possible to have a certain kind of unity without life. For example, those who are members of a labor union may have a particular kind of unity. But such a unity is absolutely devoid of life. Fellowship requires life. Without life, we cannot have fellowship. Fellowship is an inward matter which we may describe as the intercommunication of life.

The word fellowship is used for the first time in Acts 2:42, where we are told that those who were saved and added to the church on the day of Pentecost continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles. The apostles had preached the gospel to them, and this gospel preaching brought them into something which the Bible calls fellowship.

I doubt that there is in any language an equivalent of the Greek word for fellowship, *koinonia*. This word implies oneness and also a mutual flowing among the believers. When we enjoy fellowship with one another, there is a flow among us. Although electrical current is not living, it can be used to illustrate what we mean by a flow in fellowship. The flowing of electricity produces oneness. The flow, the current, we have in our spiritual fellowship involves both oneness and life. Our fellowship is a flow in oneness; it is an intercommunication among us as believers in Christ.

In the New Testament fellowship describes both the flowing between us and the Lord and between us and one another. First John 1:3 says, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." In 1 John we have life (1:1-2) and then fellowship. There is a flow, a current, vertically between us and the Father and the Son and horizontally between us and other believers. Praise the Lord that on earth today there is something called fellowship, a fellowship among the children of God and a fellowship of the children of God with the Triune God!

Since the day of Pentecost a current has been flowing

horizontally among the believers. This flow crosses space and time. As far as time is concerned, this fellowship has been flowing from generation to generation. As far as space is concerned, this fellowship is worldwide; it flows among believers throughout the globe. Because we are in this one flow, we cannot be separated by space. No matter where we may be, we are all in the flow; that is, we are all in the one fellowship.

According to Paul's word in 1:9, we all have been called by God into this fellowship. Perhaps the best illustration of fellowship is the circulation of blood in the human body. Right now the blood is circulating throughout your body. In a very short period of time the blood makes one complete circuit. Life depends on this circulation. Just as there is the circulation of blood in the human body, so there is a spiritual circulation, called the fellowship, in the Body of Christ. It is a very sad thing that among a great many of today's Christians, this circulation is either neglected or is altogether lacking. Thus, it is crucial for us to realize that in the Lord's recovery we are being brought back into this flow, into this fellowship.

From 1:9 we see that through the faithful God we have been called into the fellowship of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This indicates clearly that we have not been called into the fellowship of any denomination, practice, or theological doctrine. The unique fellowship into which God has called us is the fellowship of His Son. This means that He alone must be our fellowship.

The word fellowship in 1:9 means participation. This can be proved by considering this verse in its context. Verse 10, a continuation of verse 9, says, "But I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion." Verse 10 stands in contrast to verse 9. In verse 9 Paul says that God has called us into the fellowship of His Son. Then he begins verse 10 with the words, "But I beseech you, brothers, through the name of

our Lord Jesus Christ." Through the name of the Lord Jesus Paul beseeches that there be no divisions among the saints. Divisions are contrary to fellowship. They are against the fellowship into which God has called us. In verse 11 Paul continues, "For it was made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of the household of Chloe, that there are strifes among you." The strifes mentioned in this verse are also contrary to the fellowship.

In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, "Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." Because the Corinthians said such things, they were out of the fellowship. To say, "I am of Paul," is to be outside the fellowship of the Son of God. Even those who said, "I am of Christ," were not in the fellowship.

The Corinthians were divided by their preferences and choices. Paul, however, wanted them to realize that they had been called into one fellowship. This means that they had been called into one participation, one appreciation, one enjoyment, one preference, one choice. Those who said, "I am of Paul," appreciated Paul and enjoyed him. The same was true of those who said that they were of Apollos or of Cephas. But the fellowship in 1:9 is our participation in Christ; it is our enjoyment and appreciation of Him and our preference for Him. In these verses Paul seems to be saying to the believers at Corinth, "Don't say that you are of this person or of that person. You all must realize that you have been called into one enjoyment, appreciation, preference, and choice. You have been called into one fellowship, and this is the Son of God as our portion. We all are in the fellowship of Christ."

GOD'S POWER AND GOD'S WISDOM

In 1:23 and 24 Paul says, "But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews an offense, and to the nations foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, God's power and God's wisdom." God has called us into the fellowship of Christ, the unique One. This One is the power

of God and the wisdom of God to us who have been called.

IN CHRIST

First Corinthians 1:30 says, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." God has put us into Christ, and now we are in Him. Formerly, we were in Adam, but we have been transferred out of Adam and into Christ. This was not an outward transfer; it was an inward transfer of life. In life we have been transferred from one realm into another, from Adam into Christ. Now we all can declare, "Hallelujah, I am in Christ! How happy I am to be in Christ!"

Being in Christ is a tremendous matter. Far from being a mere doctrine, this is a marvelous fact. We are in Christ, and Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. He is the embodiment of the Triune God. How wonderful that we are in such a Person!

RIGHTEOUSNESS, SANCTIFICATION, AND REDEMPTION

In 1:30 Paul tells us that Christ has become wisdom to us from God. This wisdom comprises righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Righteousness is related to substance, whereas sanctification is related to action. We may say that righteousness is a thing, but sanctification is a matter that involves a process. Sanctification implies the action of being sanctified. Redemption also is not merely a thing, but a matter that involves a process, for it involves the action of being redeemed.

It is significant that in verse 30 Paul speaks of righteousness, but not of justification, and of sanctification, but not of holiness. Why does Paul speak of righteousness but not holiness, and why does he speak of sanctification and redemption, but not of justification? We have pointed out that righteousness is Christ for our past, that sanctification is Christ for the present, and that redemption is Christ for the future. Because our past life was sinful, we need Christ to be our righteousness for the past. Because our present life is not holy, sanctified, we

need Christ to be our present sanctification that we may become holy and separated unto God. In the future our body will be redeemed. Hence, redemption is for the future. This interpretation of righteousness, sanctification, and redemption is not wrong; however, it is not sufficiently practical. We need to understand righteousness, sanctification, and redemption in a deeper and more experiential way.

Whenever we truly enjoy Christ in our daily life and experience Him, He becomes righteousness to us. This is different from saying that Christ justifies us or that He becomes our justification. Paul is certainly correct in using the word righteousness in verse 30 instead of justification.

Once again I would use an illustration from married life to show how Christ can become righteousness to us. Whenever a husband and wife argue and exchange words, both parties consider themselves to be completely right. Actually, it is not accurate to say that either the husband or the wife is altogether right. Suppose the husband genuinely enjoys Christ in his daily living. Then Christ will become righteousness to him. The more he enjoys the Lord, the more Christ becomes righteousness to him. As a result, he will realize that, for the most part, he is wrong in relation to his wife. Likewise, if the wife enjoys Christ, He will become righteousness to her, and she will have the same realization about herself. She will sense that she is wrong to argue with her husband and that he is much more right than she is. By this we see that the more we enjoy Christ, the more we become fair, just, upright, and righteous. Moreover, the more a husband and wife enjoy Christ, the more they will condemn themselves and not the other party. The husband will realize that he is wrong and will condemn himself, and the wife will do the same thing. This will keep them from arguing and exchanging words. In this way, Christ becomes righteousness to them day by day.

By nature, no human being is truly righteous. Not even husbands and wives are righteous with one another. On the contrary, they are often unrighteous. Brothers, do you

honestly believe that you are righteous with your wife? Sisters, are you righteous with your husband? During the years of your married life, have you always been righteous with your spouse? I do not believe that any married person can testify honestly that he or she has always been righteous. The reason we are not righteous is that we do not have the adequate enjoyment of Christ. But if we enjoy Christ continually in our daily life, we shall become the most righteous of people.

Righteousness is actually Christ Himself. Christ, therefore, is not merely to be righteousness for our past so that we may be justified by God; He should also be our present righteousness in our daily living. I have come to realize this not from books, but through Christian experience. Furthermore, this realization did not come easily; it was the result of facing many problems and difficulties.

If we enjoy Christ in our daily living and if He becomes righteousness to us in a practical way, we shall become special people, a sanctified people. Instead of being common, we shall be separated to God.

It is very common for husbands and wives to argue. Every married couple does this. If our married life is common, we are not sanctified in our married life. But should a brother be delivered from arguing with his wife because Christ has become righteousness to him, he will be a special husband, a particular husband, a husband who is sanctified, separated to God. Christ as our daily righteousness causes us to become sanctified and separated persons. No longer are we common; rather, we are separate from others. Therefore, in our daily living Christ should be not only our righteousness, but also our sanctification.

When we are sanctified and separated unto God, we are also redeemed. This means that we are brought back to God. Whenever a husband and wife quarrel, they are carried away from the Lord. But when Christ becomes righteousness and sanctification to them, spontaneously they are brought back to God. This is redemption. As we have pointed out, redemption includes termination,

replacement, and being brought back to God. Thus, redemption is actually transformation.

If we enjoy Christ daily, He will become our righteousness. Then Christ as our righteousness will make us different from others. We shall be sanctified and separated unto God by Christ as our sanctification. Automatically this sanctification will bring us back to God, from whom we have gone astray. This is the experience of Christ as our redemption. Furthermore, this redemption terminates us and causes us to be replaced with what Christ is. This is transfiguration. The future redemption of our body will be the transfiguration of the body. But today we may experience Christ as the One who transfigures our inner being. Thus, Christ will be not only our transfiguration in the future but is also our present transfiguration, redemption, in our being.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to realize that they were foolish to have divisions and preferences. It was foolish for them to say that they were of a particular person. God had called them into the fellowship of His Son, into the fellowship of the One who is God's wisdom and power. This is the Christ who, in our experience, becomes righteousness to us, who sanctifies us, and who brings us back to God by terminating us and replacing us with Himself.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

CHRIST CRUCIFIED, THE FOCUS OF THE APOSTLE'S MINISTRY

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Col. 2:2, 9; Eph. 1:9-10

In this message we come to 2:1-5. According to these verses, Christ crucified was the focus of Paul's ministry. Furthermore, in these verses we see the way of the apostle's ministry.

PAUL'S WAY OF PREACHING

In verse 1 Paul says, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, came not with excellence of speech or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God." Literally, the Greek words rendered "with excellence" mean according to elevation or superiority. Paul did not come to Corinth to display excellent speech or philosophical wisdom in the testimony of God.

The Greeks delighted in excellent expressions of philosophical thoughts. Paul, however, did not come to Corinth with excellence of speech or wisdom. This indicates that Paul did not preach the gospel to the Greeks according to their way of wisdom. On the contrary, he avoided such a practice.

Paul's way of preaching the gospel was different from that common among ministers and pastors today. In Bible institutes and seminaries people are taught to preach using the psychology and philosophy of the people to whom their message is addressed. For example, those who go to Germany to preach the gospel are encouraged to learn German psychology and philosophy and to use these things in their preaching. However, when Paul went to Greece, he did not preach in this way. Paul was concerned that the

cross of Christ should not be made void through the wisdom of speech.

In China I heard certain missionaries preach in the way of using Chinese ethical philosophy. Although these ministers used the name of Christ and mentioned the Bible, their speaking did not impress others either with Christ or with the Word of God. Instead, they gave the impression to the learned Chinese that the gospel actually confirmed their native philosophy.

THE TESTIMONY OF GOD

In speaking to others concerning Christ and the gospel, we must be certain that the way we speak does not cause the listeners to miss the crucial point. It is better that our speaking be considered awkward than that we should cause others to miss the basic matters of Christ and the cross. It is not our aim to impress people with our knowledge or speech. Instead, our burden is to impress them with Christ. We must minister Christ to them and not make a display of our language or knowledge.

A second important point in verse 1 concerns the testimony of God. What is the testimony of God to which Paul refers in verse 1? Some of the best ancient authorities have mystery instead of testimony. What the apostle announced as the testimony of God was the mystery of God, which is Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the expression of Christ (Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3; Eph. 3:4-6, 9). Actually, the testimony of God and the mystery of God are one. The mystery of God is the testimony of God. This testimony, this mystery, includes Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the expression of Christ.

Today many preach about Christ and testify of Him. But most of those who preach Christ do not care for the church. However, the full testimony of God includes both Christ and the church. Recently, in the Life-study of Exodus we saw that the ark of the testimony, a type of Christ, has measurements which are half units. These

dimensions indicate that a second half is needed. If we preach Christ without preaching the church, we give only half the message, only half of God's testimony. The majority of today's Christians at most have only one half of the testimony. Actually, many do not even have a complete half, for they do not have a complete Christ. In the New Testament the full testimony of God is Christ and the church. Christ is the Head, and the church is the Body. Christ is the mystery of God, and the church is the mystery of Christ.

When Paul came to Corinth, he announced both halves of God's testimony; that is, he preached concerning Christ and the church. This can be proved by the contents of 1 Corinthians. In this Epistle we see both the Head and the Body. In fact, the greater portion of this book is related to the church, not directly to Christ. In the first two chapters Christ is revealed, but all the remaining chapters concentrate on the church. Most of the problems among the believers at Corinth involved the church. Therefore, Paul presents to them the complete testimony of God: Christ the Head and the church, the Body. Furthermore, he announces this testimony in simple words, not in excellence of speech with philosophical speculations.

DETERMINING TO KNOW ONLY CHRIST

In verse 2 Paul continues, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified." The crucified Christ was the unique subject, the center, the content, and the substance of the apostle's ministry. For this he determined not to know anything but the all-inclusive Christ when he was about to minister the word of the testimony of God to the excellent speech-exalting and wisdom-worshipping Greeks. What a determination! It should be a pattern to us all.

The expression "this One crucified" indicates Christ's humiliation and abasement. His resurrection in glory (Luke 24:26) and ascension in exaltation (Acts 2:33, 36) are not referred to here because Paul's purpose is to overturn

the pride of the Greeks in their elevated wisdom.

According to verse 2, Paul determined not to know anything among the Corinthians except Christ and Him crucified. Some may appeal to this verse as a basis for arguing that Paul did not preach about the church, but only testified concerning Christ. We know from the context of the entire book of 1 Corinthians that, beginning with chapter three, where Paul says that the believers are God's farm and God's building, Paul has much to say about the church. In this Epistle he actually speaks more about the church than about Christ. Paul's meaning in verse 2 is that he determined not to know philosophy, culture, doctrine, religion, or any kind of practice. He cared only for Christ. But when Paul spoke of Christ, he included the church, for Christ is the Head of the church, which is His Body. In 12:12 Paul even indicates that the church, the Body, is part of Christ. Therefore, it is not correct to say that Paul excluded the church when he declared that he determined not to know anything other than Christ.

In verse 2 Paul seems to be saying, "Dear brothers in Corinth, you are still very philosophical, and you live a life according to your wisdom. But when I came to you ministering God's mystery and announcing God's testimony, I did not rely on wisdom or philosophy. I certainly did not emphasize religion or culture. I spoke to you of a living Person, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. I determined not to know anything among you except this wonderful Person. I deliberately stayed away from philosophy, wisdom, and excellence of speech."

Paul also reminded the Corinthians that the Christ he preached was One who had been crucified. On the one hand, Paul did not use excellence of speech or wisdom; on the other hand, he proclaimed not an honored, exalted, glorified Christ, but a Christ who had been despised, rejected, defeated, and even crucified. Here Paul seems to be saying, "You have believed in Christ and received Him with the initial gifts. But after receiving Christ, you made the mistake of not living a crucified life. On the contrary,

you have lived a self-glorying and self-exalting life. But the One I preached to you and the One received by you was a rejected, despised, and crucified Christ. No longer should you live in a way to exalt yourselves. Rather, you should live a crucified life, even live the crucified Christ. You should not boast in your knowledge. Instead, you should be willing to give the impression that you do not know anything other than the crucified Christ. All of you are saying that you are of Paul, of Cephas, of Apollos, or of a limited Christ. This is according to man's way, not according to the crucified Christ. You should live this One who was crucified."

There will always be trouble in a local church when the saints seek to know things other than Christ. Knowing too many doctrines often produces debates and even causes divisions. It is always profitable to know nothing but Christ and Christ crucified; this is the only safe way.

If all the saints in the local churches determine to know nothing except Christ Jesus, there will be no problems in the church life. The most wonderful local church is a church composed of saints who do not know anything other than Christ. Whenever they are asked a question, they reply that they only know Christ, calling on the name of the Lord, praying, and enjoying the Lord Jesus. They are willing to appear foolish by not knowing anything except Christ and this One crucified.

If the best local church is a church where the saints do not know anything except Christ, the church with the most problems is one where the saints know too many things other than Christ. More than forty years ago, I spent a long period of time trying to help this kind of church. My efforts were in vain, because everyone knew too much.

It is very important for us to determine not to know things and to learn to say, "I don't know." Learn to determine not to know anything except Jesus Christ. Oh, we all must have such a spirit, attitude, and practice. If we determine not to know anything except Christ, there will not be any problems or divisions among us.

Sometimes when we visit a church in another locality, the saints there have questions about certain doctrines and practices. To answer their questions would be a big mistake and would waste much time and energy. Furthermore, we may waste the opportunity to minister Christ to the saints. We should be those who know only Christ and the Word of God. Then we shall have more opportunity to minister Christ to others.

The problem at Corinth was that the believers had too much knowledge. Furthermore, they treasured knowledge, even to the point of worshipping it and making it an idol. Therefore, it is not surprising that Paul's intention was to belittle their knowledge and point them to the crucified Christ.

WEAKNESS, FEAR, AND TREMBLING

In verse 3 Paul goes on to say, "And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." Weakness here refers to the apostle's physical weakness due perhaps to his physical sufferings in the persecutions he endured for the gospel. Paul did not display himself as a physically strong man among the Greeks, who sought to be strong not only psychologically in their philosophies, but also physically in their gymnastics.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that he was with them in fear and in much trembling. Fear is the inward feeling; trembling is the outward appearance. The apostle was in fear of missing Christ in his ministry to the wisdom-seeking Greeks and in trembling lest he be influenced by their prevailing aspiration. By such fear and trembling he stood faithfully and steadfastly in his God-appointed ministry according to the heavenly vision and avoided any deviation. The religious Jews were proud of their traditional religion, and the philosophical Greeks were haughty in their worldly wisdom. In ministering Christ to both, the apostle was in fear and in much trembling. What a contrast between him and them!

Paul realized that it is difficult to preach Christ to

philosophical people. It is easy to be snared by philosophy or tempted to try to subdue the other person. When we speak to others about Christ, it is best to forget what kind of people they are and simply proclaim the testimony concerning Christ. Like Paul, we should be in fear and trembling lest we miss Christ as we talk to philosophical people.

DEMONSTRATION OF SPIRIT AND POWER

Verse 4 says, "And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power." Persuasive words of wisdom issue from the human mind; demonstration of the Spirit comes from our spirit. The apostle's speech and preaching were not from his mind with words of speculation, but from his spirit with the release and exhibition of the Spirit, hence of power.

In verse 5 Paul says, "That your faith may not be in men's wisdom, but in God's power." Men's wisdom is the elementary philosophy; God's power is the all-inclusive Christ (1:24).

In verses 4 and 5 Paul repeats what he has said previously. His words are different, but his concept is the same. Paul did not exercise persuasive words of wisdom, but the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. The power demonstrated by Paul was Christ crucified. The result of such a demonstration was that the believers' faith would not be the result of Paul's wisdom overcoming their wisdom, but would be in God's power, the crucified Christ.

In centuries past both the Nestorians and the Jesuits attempted to convert the learned Chinese to Christianity. Some Chinese did embrace the Christian religion because of their efforts; however, they did so without actually receiving Christ. Mainly they were influenced in certain aspects of culture and learning. By this we see that it is a mistake to come down to someone's level when we preach Christ to him and try to use his language and philosophy. In preaching Christ we need to maintain our level, and this level is Christ Himself. Let those who are willing come up

to this level and receive Christ. Then they will become genuine believers in Christ. The efforts of both the Nestorians and the Jesuits ended in failure simply because they came down to the level of local ethics and philosophy. Many Christians today are making a similar mistake, a mistake we must learn to avoid.

A VISION OF GOD'S ECONOMY

We in the Lord's recovery must have a clear vision of God's economy. Then we need to be governed, controlled, and directed by this vision. Because I have seen this vision and am directed by it, I have never changed my tone throughout the years. I know what I have seen, I know what I am teaching, and I know what I am ministering to the Lord's people. If we have the vision of God's economy, we shall automatically have only one choice, preference, taste, and ministry. We shall care only for the all-inclusive and all-extensive Christ and for the genuine and proper church life. Today we in the Lord's recovery must be strong and unshakable in the vision of God's economy, God's eternal will. Because Paul had seen this vision and was faithful to it, he could be very strong. We all need to be strong and steadfast in this way.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

GOD'S WISDOM IN A MYSTERY, CHRIST AS THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 2:6-10

The title of this message is "God's Wisdom in a Mystery, Christ as the Deep Things of God." The comma in the title indicates that Christ as the deep things of God stands in apposition to God's wisdom in a mystery. God's wisdom in a mystery is actually the all-inclusive Christ as the deep things of God.

Chapters one and two of 1 Corinthians are a very deep portion of the Word. Not many readers of the Bible understand these chapters properly and adequately. Paul's word in 2:6-10 is especially deep. We should not take these verses or these chapters for granted. Furthermore, knowing these chapters is necessary for understanding the remainder of the book. The gateway to understanding 1 Corinthians is found in chapters one and two.

A MYSTERIOUS WISDOM

In 2:6 Paul says, "But we speak wisdom among those who are full-grown, yet a wisdom not of this age, neither of the rulers of this age, who are being brought to nought." In the foregoing verses Paul says that he did not come with excellence of wisdom and that his speech was not in persuasive words of wisdom. But in verse 6 he says that he speaks wisdom among those who are full-grown. When Paul wrote this Epistle, he certainly realized that the believers at Corinth were far from full-grown. Why, then, does he say that he speaks wisdom among those who are full-grown? His purpose in doing this was to belittle the Corinthians. Here Paul seems to be saying, "You Corinthians think you have attained something great, but

actually you are still babes. We do speak wisdom, but we speak wisdom among those who are full-grown. Furthermore, the wisdom we speak is not a wisdom of this age, neither of the rulers of this age. The common people do not have this wisdom, and those in the ruling class do not have it either. In fact, the rulers of this age are being brought to nothing."

In verse 7 Paul continues, "But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom which has been hidden, which God predestined before the ages for our glory." God's wisdom is Christ (1:24), who is the hidden mystery (Col. 1:26-27), predestined, predesignated, and foreordained before the ages, in eternity, for our glory.

Glory in this verse refers to Christ, who is the Lord of glory (v. 8). Christ is our life today (Col. 3:4) and He will be our glory in the future (Col. 1:27). To this glory God has called us (1 Pet. 5:10), and into it He will bring us (Heb. 2:10). This is the goal of God's salvation.

According to verse 7, God's wisdom is in a mystery; it is a mysterious wisdom. Hence, God's wisdom is not like Greek wisdom, which is open and very shallow. Furthermore, God's wisdom is the wisdom which has been hidden and which God predestined before the ages for our glory. God's wisdom is our destiny, and this destiny was determined by God, decided by Him, beforehand. In eternity God determined our destiny. He predestined His wisdom to be for our glory. This means that in eternity He decided that His wisdom would be our destiny and glory. Our destiny is not merely the enjoyment of eternal blessings in heaven. Rather, our destiny is God's mysterious wisdom. God has predestined His mysterious wisdom to be our glory.

In verse 8 Paul continues his thought from verse 7: "Which not one of the rulers of this age has known; for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." In this verse the relative pronoun "which" refers to wisdom in verse 7; it does not refer to glory.

In verse 9 Paul goes on to say, "But even as it is

written, Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not come up in man's heart, how much God has prepared for those who love Him." The sphere of what the eye can see is narrow; the sphere of what the ear can hear is broader; and the sphere of what the heart can realize is without limitation. God in His wisdom (that is, in Christ) has ordained and prepared for us many deep and hidden things, such as justification, sanctification, and glorification. All these the human eye has never seen, the human ear has never heard, and the human heart has never realized.

Verse 10 says, "For God has revealed them to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." As we shall see, the depths of God here refer to Christ as the deep things of God.

GOD'S CENTER AND OUR PORTION

The more we consider 2:6-10, the more we realize that these verses are deep, profound, and difficult to understand. To understand them we need to consider the context of chapters one and two, chapters which give us a clear view of Christ as God's center and our portion. In these chapters Paul emphasizes the fact that Christ is God's center and our portion. God has an economy which He desires to fulfill. This economy is His will, His purpose. The focal point of God's economy is Christ. As the One who is the power of God and the wisdom of God in His economy, Christ is God's unique center. God has called us into the fellowship, the participation, the mutuality, of this center. As a result, Christ as the unique center becomes the portion for our enjoyment. This is indicated by the phrase "theirs and ours" in 1:2.

The central thought of 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 is expressed by the words center and portion. According to these chapters, Paul regards Christ as God's center and our portion. This means that God's center has been given to us as our portion for our enjoyment.

First Corinthians 1:30 says, "But of Him are you in

Christ Jesus, Who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Here we see that Christ has become wisdom to us from God. As such, He is our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. These terms are a further definition of what Christ is to us as our portion. Not only is Christ our righteousness for the past, our sanctification for the present, and our redemption for the future, but even in our daily life He is righteousness, sanctification, and redemption to us. This is what Christ is as our portion for our enjoyment.

If we have this understanding of the central thought of chapters one and two, we are prepared to consider 2:6-10. As God's center and our portion for our enjoyment, Christ is God's wisdom in a mystery. The wisdom in 2:7 is deep and profound. It is a wisdom beyond human understanding, for it is a mysterious wisdom, wisdom in a mystery. Within God there is something which Paul describes as wisdom in a mystery. This is Christ, the center of God's economy and the portion for our enjoyment. Few ministers today preach Christ as God's wisdom in a mystery. The majority of today's Christians do not know Him as this mysterious wisdom. By the Lord's mercy we are endeavoring to minister Christ and testify Him as such a wisdom in a mystery. It is helpful even to have the expression "wisdom in a mystery" in our Christian vocabulary. Praise the Lord that we see that this Christ is God's center and our portion!

In verse 7 Paul says that this wisdom has been hidden and predestined before the ages for our glory. A destiny is a person's final, ultimate portion. As Christians we have a destiny, and this destiny is the ultimate and consummate portion of our enjoyment. God's wisdom in a mystery has not only been hidden, but also predestined by God to become our destiny for our glory. Glory is our destiny, our destination. In eternity we all shall be in glory.

VEILED BY PHILOSOPHY

The believers at Corinth, being Greeks, regarded

themselves as philosophical and full of wisdom. But to God their wisdom was not wisdom at all; it was foolishness. Real wisdom is the wisdom which has been hidden in God. The wisdom of human philosophy is not true wisdom.

As a person born and raised in China, I became familiar with the classical writings of Confucius. Apparently these writings are full of wisdom. Actually, in the sight of God, they are foolishness. I eventually came to pity the Chinese who were learned in the ethical philosophy of Confucius. This philosophy veiled them and kept them from seeing God, Christ, the Spirit, and God's salvation. Because they were veiled by philosophy, these ethical Chinese could not see these wonderful realities. No doubt, the principle is the same with Greek philosophy. This philosophy was a thick veil covering the Greeks. Even those at Corinth who had believed in the Lord and received Him were still veiled by their philosophy and wisdom.

Philosophy makes people foolish because it causes them to reject God and deny Christ. What could be more foolish than this? It is the philosophical people who deny God and Christ. Therefore, in the eyes of God, their philosophical wisdom is nothing but foolishness. When I was in China, I earnestly desired that the learned Chinese could turn from their philosophy and see God and Christ.

OUR DESTINY

According to Paul's understanding in chapters one and two, real wisdom is the mysterious wisdom hidden in God. As we have pointed out, this wisdom is Christ Himself. God has made this mysterious, hidden wisdom to be our destiny. This means that God has determined that the mysterious and hidden Christ become our destiny. Do you know what your destiny is as a Christian? Your destiny is the mysterious and hidden Christ, the One who is the wisdom of God, the center of God's economy and our portion. Have you ever heard that Christ is your destiny? We all know that Christ is our Redeemer, Savior, Lord, Master, and even our life. But probably you have never

realized that Christ is your destiny. Nevertheless, this marvelous fact is revealed in 2:7. Here Paul says that there is a wisdom, a mysterious, hidden wisdom, a wisdom hidden in God, which is Christ Himself. Furthermore, God has predestined this wisdom for our glory. This surely indicates that God has made Christ to be our destiny. Praise Him that He is not only our Savior, Lord, and life--He is also our destiny! This destiny will eventually lead us into glory.

Although it is correct to say that glory is Christ, we need to remember that glory is God expressed. To say that glory is Christ actually means that Christ is God expressed. The expression of God, Christ, is our destiny. What a destiny we have! This destiny will bring us into glory, a glory which is the very expression of God. If we see this, we shall want to bow down before the Lord, worship Him, and offer our thanks and praise to Him.

LOVING GOD

In verse 9 Paul says, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not come up in man's heart, how much God has prepared for those who love Him." To realize and participate in the deep and hidden things God has ordained and prepared for us requires us not only to believe in Him, but also to love Him. To fear God, to worship God, and to believe in God, that is, to receive God, are all inadequate; to love Him is the indispensable requirement. To love God means to set our entire being--spirit, soul, and body, with the heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30)--absolutely on Him, that is, to let our entire being be occupied by Him and lost in Him, so that He becomes everything to us and we are one with Him practically in our daily life. In this way we have the closest and most intimate fellowship with God. It is thus we are able to enter into His heart and apprehend all its secrets (Psa. 73:25; 25:14). Thus, we not only realize, but also experience, enjoy, and fully participate in these deep and hidden things of God.

KNOWING THE DEPTHS OF GOD

In verse 6 Paul says that the wisdom we speak is not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age. In themselves, human beings are not capable of knowing this wisdom. It must be revealed through the Spirit. Therefore, in verse 10 Paul says, "For God has revealed them to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." God reveals the deep and hidden things to us through the Spirit, for these things have not been seen by man's eyes, heard by man's ears, nor have they come up in man's heart. This means that man has no idea concerning them, no thought of them. They are altogether mysterious, hidden in God, and beyond human understanding. But God has revealed them to us through the Spirit, who searches all things, even the depths of God.

To have something revealed to us is different from being taught about that thing. To teach is related to our mind; to reveal, to our spirit. To realize the deep and hidden things God has prepared for us, our spirit is more necessary than our mind. When our entire being becomes one with God through loving Him in intimate fellowship, He shows us, in our spirit through His Spirit, all the secrets of Christ as our portion. This is to reveal the hidden things planned by His wisdom concerning Christ, things which have never come up in man's heart.

First Corinthians 2:10 says that the Spirit searches all things. The Greek word rendered searches includes active research and implies accurate knowledge not in discovering but in exploring. The Spirit of God explores the depths of God concerning Christ and shows them to us in our spirit for our realization and participation.

The depths of God refer to the deep things of God, which are Christ in many aspects as our eternal portion, foreordained, prepared, and given to us freely by God. These have never arisen in man's heart, but are revealed to us in our spirit by God's Spirit. Hence, we must be spiritual in order to partake of them. We must move and live in our spirit that we may enjoy Christ as everything to us.

Many of those who believe in God do not know the depths of God. They know God only in a superficial way. This is true of Jews, Moslems, and the majority of Christians. How many Christians today know God according to His depths? Many believers do not even have a proper realization of the matters which God regards as truly deep. Some think that to have biblical knowledge about the seven heads, the ten horns, and the seventy weeks is to know deep things. According to them, to understand such matters is to know the Bible in a deep way. Certain believers even think that speaking in tongues is something deep. Actually, tongues-speaking is a very shallow matter. It has nothing to do with the depths of God spoken of in verse 10.

If you wish to know the depths of God, the deep things of God, you need to know the books of Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Hebrews, John, and Revelation. But not even these books, books which reveal deep and profound matters, tell us that Christ, the last Adam in the flesh, has become the life-giving Spirit. Only in 1 Corinthians do we have such a statement. Moreover, only in this book does Paul say, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (6:17). What things are deeper than these? What is deeper than the last Adam becoming the life-giving Spirit and our being joined to the Lord as one spirit? These things are unfathomable; they are immeasurably deep and profound.

To know God only as Creator is to know Him very superficially. Even medical students who study physiology may conclude that the human body must have had a Creator. Through their study they may come to know God and acknowledge Him as Creator. Others may know that God is sovereign and that He can provide everything we need. But not even this is the knowledge of the deep things of God.

If we would know the depths of God, we must know that through incarnation God one day became a man named

Jesus. Through His crucifixion the Lord Jesus terminated the old creation and released the divine life that it may be imparted into all who believe in Him. Now, in resurrection, He is the life-giving Spirit who indwells our spirit and who has become one spirit with us. We have a mingled spirit within us, our regenerated human spirit mingled with the divine Spirit. This is a very deep matter. Unfortunately, few Christians know these deep things.

If we consider the context of the whole book of 1 Corinthians, we shall have the assurance to interpret the deep things of God in 2:10 as referring to the all-inclusive Christ who, as the life-giving Spirit, indwells our spirit. After accomplishing redemption, this Christ has become a life-giving Spirit. As such, He is so available to us that we can be joined to Him as one spirit. Nothing can be deeper than this. How sad that these depths are neglected by so many Christians today!

To know the depths of God is to know Christ in many aspects as our eternal portion. Christ is the center of God's economy, the portion given to us by God for our enjoyment, and the mysterious wisdom hidden in God. God's wisdom in a mystery is Christ as the deep things of God. I encourage you all to pray and fellowship concerning this and to seek a deeper understanding of the depths of God--Christ Himself as the mysterious and hidden wisdom, the focus of God's economy, and the portion given to us by God for our enjoyment. Christ, the all-inclusive and extensive One, is truly the depths of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

COMMUNICATING SPIRITUAL THINGS BY SPIRITUAL WORDS TO SPIRITUAL MEN

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 2:11-16, 7, 10

LIVING CHRIST FOR THE EXPRESSION OF GOD

God's intention is to make man His expression. In order to accomplish this, God desires to come into man to be his life so that man may live Him out. For this, God became a man through incarnation. Eventually Christ, God incarnate, died on the cross. Through His crucifixion He terminated the entire old creation. Hence, Christ's crucifixion involved not only the death of the Lord Jesus, but the termination of everything of the old creation. By means of this all-inclusive death, the divine life, which is actually God Himself, was released and imparted to God's predestinated, redeemed, and called people. By believing in the crucified and resurrected Christ, they have received the divine life and the divine Spirit. God's expectation is that they will now live by this life and walk by this Spirit. This is to live Christ for the expression of God. Furthermore, such a living should not be individualistic; on the contrary, it should be corporate. Thus, God desires that His people be built together into His habitation, the Body of Christ. This is God's intention.

The believers at Corinth, most of whom were Greeks, received the initial gifts, the divine life and the divine Spirit. But after receiving these gifts, they did not live by them. They did not live by the divine life or walk by the divine Spirit. As a result, they did not live Christ. They failed to take Christ as their life, their content, and their everything. Instead, they remained in their Greek culture

and exulted in their wisdom and philosophy. This was their situation at the time Paul wrote this Epistle to them.

LIVING CULTURE INSTEAD OF CHRIST

In writing to the Corinthians Paul seemed to be saying, "You believers there in Corinth should drop your Greek culture, wisdom, and philosophy. Instead of being Greeks, you should now be Christians. You should no longer live your Greek culture, exult in your philosophy, and boast in your wisdom. You have received Christ, and God has put you into Christ. Now that God has made you Christians, you should take Christ as your life, content, and everything, and you should live Christ. Furthermore, this Christ is God's wisdom. Greek wisdom is shallow, and it is foolishness in the sight of God. But God's wisdom, the genuine wisdom, is deep and mysterious. It is far beyond philosophical people to comprehend this wisdom, for it is a wisdom hidden in God and is even the depths of God. This wisdom, the depths of God, is the very Christ in whom you have believed and whom you have received. I urge you to exalt this Christ, take Him as your life and everything, and live Him." If we understand this underlying concept, it will be much easier for us to understand the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians.

Both Catholicism and Protestantism have departed from the revelation of Christ in these chapters. Catholicism has assimilated many pagan, demonic, satanic, and devilish things. The practice of Catholicism is to take in and absorb heathenism and paganism. This is documented in the book *The Two Babylons* and in the writings of G. H. Pember. Protestantism has followed the practice of adapting to local culture. As long as the elements of a culture are not sinful or idolatrous, they will be taken in by Protestantism. For example, in China many Protestant missionaries adopted Chinese ethics, and in India, they followed certain aspects of Indian culture. As a result, the so-called church in China and in India became a cultural mixture. In China I saw that the missionaries were happy when the Chinese adopted western culture. The

missionaries were also willing to take in the local culture. Therefore, Christianity in China became a mixture of Chinese culture and western culture. Apparently such a mixture is not as demonic or satanic as the paganism in Catholicism. In principle, however, both are the same, for both preach Christ, but do not help people to live Christ, to take Him as their life, living, content, and everything.

What kind of living did you have when you were in organized Christianity? Instead of living Christ, did you not live according to your culture? Surely no one taught you to live Christ, to take Christ as your life and content. Did anyone tell you to breathe Christ, drink Christ, and eat Christ? All this is foreign to most of today's Christians.

In principle, the situation among believers today is the same as that among the believers in Corinth. The Corinthian believers received Christ, but they did not live Him. They did not have the concept that Christ should be their life, their living, and their content. Instead, their thoughts were focused on Greek culture, wisdom, and philosophy. Furthermore, they exulted in their wisdom and boasted in their philosophy. This caused them to think differently from one another and to have different preferences. Some preferred Paul, others preferred Cephas, and still others preferred Apollos. As a result, they were divided. This division was the root of the evil and confusion among them.

The situation among Christians today is the same as that of the church at Corinth. Therefore, all Christians, including us, need this Epistle. We need to be helped by this book to drop everything other than Christ. No matter what your culture or nationality may be, you need to drop it. We all must forsake our culture, philosophy, ethics, and traditions and center on Christ as our unique portion.

TAKING CHRIST AS EVERYTHING

Most of those believers who are baptized into a particular denomination are shaped, not according to Christ or the Bible, but according to that denomination. They speak and behave according to that particular

denomination. Now that we are in the church life in the Lord's recovery, we should not be shaped by something other than Christ. We should have only Christ, not traditions or regulations. For example, there is a difference between a sister who does not wear makeup because she shapes herself according to the recovery and a sister who does not wear makeup because she lives Christ by walking in the spirit and calling on Him. Likewise, a brother may give up smoking because he is trying to conform himself to the practices of the recovery, or he may do so because he lives Christ and no longer has any desire to smoke. Instead of shaping ourselves according to the recovery, we should simply live Christ.

It is very common among Christians to have many things in place of Christ. Believers may have ethics, morality, culture, philosophy, doctrine, and tradition instead of Christ. In a very real sense, today's Christianity is Christless. Among Christians almost anything can become a substitute for Christ.

The underlying concept of 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 is that we must drop everything except Christ. When Paul came to Corinth and preached Christ, he determined not to know anything among them except Jesus Christ and this One crucified. This indicates clearly that he forsook everything except Christ. As we read 1 Corinthians, we need to be deeply impressed with this underlying thought. We need to see that we must drop everything but Christ and genuinely take Christ as everything to us. Christ truly is all-inclusive; He is everything, even the depths of God.

KNOWING THE TWO SPIRITS

In 2:11 Paul says, "For who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him? So also the things of God no one has known except the Spirit of God." The spirit of man is the deepest part of his being. Its faculty can penetrate the innermost region of the things of man, whereas the mind of man is capable only of knowing superficial things. So also, only the Spirit of God can know the deep things of God.

The Greeks were famous for gymnastics and philosophy. Gymnastics were for the training and development of the body, and philosophy was for the development of the mind. Today there is also a strong emphasis on developing the body and the mind. The spirit, however, is altogether neglected. When we mention the spirit, some do not understand what we are talking about. To them the spirit denotes a demon or phantom. Even many Christians do not know the difference between the human spirit and the soul. Many Christians believe in dichotomy--the teaching that man is of two parts, body and soul--and only a minority follow the Bible to believe in trichotomy--the truth that man has three parts, spirit, soul, and body. The believers at Corinth knew how to exercise the body and the mind, but they were ignorant concerning the human spirit. Thus, in verse 11 Paul teaches them about the spirit and says that the spirit of man knows the things of a man. Those who do not exercise the human spirit cannot fully know the things of man. Just as only the spirit of man knows the things of man, so only the Spirit of God knows the things of God.

In verse 12 Paul continues, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, that we may know the things which have been freely given to us by God." As those who have been born of God by His Spirit, we have received the Spirit of God. Hence, we are well able to know the deep things of God which He has freely given to us for our enjoyment.

Paul wanted the believers at Corinth to know that, as human beings, they had a spirit to know the things of man, and that, as believers in Christ, they had received the Spirit of God to know the things freely given by God. The Christians there lacked the proper knowledge of these two spirits. They had a keen mind and a strong soul, but they did not realize that they had a human spirit. Furthermore, they neglected the Spirit of God whom they had received. Thus, in verses 11 and 12 Paul reminds them of these spirits. He points out that they have a human spirit within them and that they have received the Spirit from God to

know the things freely given by God. According to verse 9, these are the things prepared by God and ordained by Him. All these things are related to Christ. In order to know these things, the Corinthians had to pay attention to their human spirit and to the Spirit of God.

SPIRITUAL THINGS AND SPIRITUAL WORDS

Referring to the things given to us by God, Paul goes on to say in verse 13, "Which also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, communicating spiritual things by spiritual things." The Greek word rendered communicating literally means mixing or putting together, as interpreting or expounding. It is common in the Septuagint, found in verses such as Genesis 40:8; 41:12, 15. The thought here is to speak spiritual things by spiritual words. The stress is not on the person to whom the speaking is done, but rather on the means by which the spiritual things are spoken. The apostle speaks the spiritual things, which are the deep things of God concerning Christ, by the spiritual things, which are the spiritual words taught by the Spirit.

Paul says that he did not speak the spiritual things in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit. This means that he did not speak in the words of Greek philosophy or wisdom. Rather, he communicated spiritual things by spiritual words. In this verse, Paul uses the same term with two meanings. First, spiritual things refers to the spiritual things themselves, the deep things of God concerning Christ. Second, the expression refers to spiritual words. Spiritual things are designated by spiritual words. These spiritual words are spiritual things used to designate spiritual things. For example, the word table denotes an object called a table. Because the word table is a designation of an actual table, we should not regard the word as one thing and the table as another. The speaking that is according to Greek wisdom is not spiritual. But the words taught by the Spirit of God are truly spiritual things. Thus, spiritual things are both the things given to us by God concerning Christ as our portion

and also the words taught by the Spirit of God. Like Paul, we need to speak spiritual things by spiritual things.

The believers at Corinth talked about Christ not in spiritual words, but in the words of Greek philosophy and wisdom. As a result, they impressed others with philosophy, not with Christ. Paul, however, did not use philosophical terms when he spoke concerning Christ. Instead, he spoke spiritual things by spiritual things. He used spiritual words which are equal to the spiritual things themselves. In verse 13 Paul seems to be saying to the Corinthians, "I cannot use words of Greek wisdom to communicate spiritual things. These are words taught by man's wisdom. As such, they are not spiritual things, and they are of no avail in communicating spiritual things. If I used the wisdom of words admired by you Greeks, I would not be able to speak spiritual things to you."

We all should learn from Paul not to try to speak in the common expressions of the people. This means that we should not lower the standard of our preaching to the standard of common human expression. Ordinary human expression is not adequate to convey spiritual things. As soon as we depart from the standard of Spirit-taught language to the words taught by human wisdom, we shall no longer be able to convey spiritual things to others. For this reason, in my speaking and writing I endeavor to remain in the words taught by the Spirit.

We must resist the temptation to lower the spiritual standard. Instead, we must seek to bring others up to this standard. Having seen the vision of God's economy, we must maintain the standard of this vision, even when others encourage us to come down to their level with the claim that they cannot understand what we say. This kind of demand has come to me many times and from many different directions. Nevertheless, I refuse to descend to the level of human wisdom. On the contrary, I encourage others, by God's mercy, to come up to His standard. We simply cannot communicate spiritual things by means of Greek philosophy, Chinese ethics, or with the expressions common to American culture. Spiritual things can be

communicated only by spiritual things, that is, by spiritual words. This is an important lesson for us to learn.

Those who translated the Bible into Chinese learned the importance of using spiritual words to communicate spiritual things. For example, the New Testament often uses the expression "in Christ." However, in the Chinese language there was no way to express the fact that one person could be in another person. The translators did not change the expression "in Christ." They did not try to adapt to the limitations of the Chinese language in this matter. Instead, they invented a new Chinese expression to convey the thought of being in Christ. Later, this expression became popular in the spoken Chinese language. This illustrates the fact that if we communicate spiritual things by spiritual words, others will eventually learn and come up to God's standard.

SOULISH MEN

Verse 14 says, "But a soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Verse 13 stresses the spiritual means, that is, the spiritual words by which the spiritual things are spoken. Verses 14 and 15 stress the spiritual object, that is, a spiritual man, not a soulish one, who is able to discern the spiritual things. Both the means and the object need to be spiritual. The spiritual things must be spoken by the spiritual words to the spiritual man.

A soulish man is a natural man, one living in his soul, not in his spirit. Such a man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. Rather, he rejects them. The religious Jews who required signs and the philosophical Greeks who sought wisdom (1:22) were such natural men, to whom the things of the Spirit of God were foolishness (1:23).

The things of the Spirit of God in verse 14 refer to the deep things of God concerning Christ as our portion. A soulish man cannot know these things, for he does not have the constitutional capacity for spiritual perception. Hence,

he is not able to know spiritual things. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned, examined, and investigated by spiritual persons with spiritual means.

According to the context of 1 Corinthians, a soulish man is one who lives according to Greek culture. In principle, those who live according to their culture are soulish. If a Chinese believer lives according to Chinese ethics, he is soulish. Likewise, if an American brother lives according to modern American culture, he also is a soulish man. Hence, a soulish man is a person who lives in his culture.

SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

In verse 14 Paul emphasizes the fact that the things of the Spirit of God are spiritually discerned. If we would discern spiritual things, we must know that we have a spirit. Then we need to realize that the Spirit of God dwells in our spirit and go on to exercise our spirit to discern spiritual things in a spiritual way.

In verse 15 Paul says, "But he who is spiritual discerns all things, and he is discerned by no one." To be spiritual is to move, act, and live in our spirit by the Spirit of God, who dwells in our spirit. Those who do not exercise the spirit have no way to discern a spiritual man. Just as a cow has no appreciation of good music, so a soulish person cannot discern a spiritual person. Today many Christians can be compared to cows listening to music: they have no appreciation or discernment of what they hear. These Christians can readily understand worldly things or natural things, but they are not able to discern spiritual things or spiritual people.

THE MIND OF CHRIST

Verse 16 is a conclusion to this portion of 1 Corinthians: "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Who will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ." Because we are organically one with Christ, we have all the faculties He has. The mind is the intelligence faculty, the understanding organ. We have such an organ of Christ so we can know what He knows. We have not only the life of

Christ but also His mind. Christ must saturate our mind from our spirit, making our mind one with His. When we are one with Christ, His mind becomes our mind. This should not merely be a doctrine to us; it must be both our experience and our practice.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

THE TWO SPIRITS IN KNOWING CHRIST AS THE DEPTHS OF GOD

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 2:2, 7-16

In 2:1 Paul says, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, came not with excellence of speech or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God." Paul did not come to Corinth to display excellent speech or philosophical wisdom in proclaiming the testimony of God. This does not mean that Paul did not have excellence of speech or wisdom; it means that he deliberately dropped those things. In verse 2 he goes on to say, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified." Paul deliberately decided not to know anything other than the crucified Christ. This implies that Paul came to the Corinthians as a crucified person. He was willing to appear foolish and not knowledgeable because he had made such a determination.

GOD'S WISDOM IN A MYSTERY

In verse 6 Paul tells the Corinthians, "But we speak wisdom among those who are full-grown, yet a wisdom not of this age, neither of the rulers of this age, who are being brought to nought." Here Paul seems to be saying, "Don't think that we do not have wisdom. We have wisdom and we can speak wisdom, but we speak wisdom only to those who are full-grown. You Corinthians are still babes. How is it possible for me to speak this wisdom to you?"

In verse 7 Paul goes on to say, "But we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the wisdom which has been hidden, which God predestined before the ages for our glory." The

expression "wisdom in a mystery" implies that the wisdom is the mystery. This wisdom, this mystery, is Christ. Furthermore, Christ as the wisdom in a mystery has been predestined by God before the ages for our glory. Christ as the wisdom and the mystery will be our portion in glory.

THE DEPTHS OF GOD

Christ as God's wisdom in a mystery is even the depths of God. In verse 10 Paul says, "For God has revealed them to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." Christ Himself is the deep things of God. Every genuine Christian knows that Christ is the Savior who died on the cross for our sins. However, to know Christ in this way is to know only superficial things. What, then, are the depths? Christ as the depths of God includes such matters as God's wisdom and mystery.

Before you were saved, did you know the purpose of the universe, and did you know the meaning of human life? Certainly you did not know these things. You did not know the purpose of your life on earth or what your destiny would be. Both the purpose of the universe and the meaning of your life were a mystery. Only when we receive a vision concerning Christ and experience God's salvation can we understand the mysteries of the universe and of our life on earth. Many Christians have received Christ's salvation, but they have not seen the vision concerning Christ. As a result, they still do not know the meaning of life. But when we see the vision of Christ in God's economy, we begin to realize that Christ Himself is the purpose of the universe and also the meaning of our human life. We were created by God for Christ, and today we are living for Christ. Christ is our life, the purpose of our life, and also the goal of our living. Furthermore, Christ is our destiny; we are heading toward Him. When we receive such a vision concerning Christ, we begin to know the mystery of the universe and of human life. Spontaneously we become wise, for we have Christ as God's wisdom. Then, little by little and step by step, we begin to know Christ as the depths of God.

EXPERIENCING THE DEPTHS OF GOD'S BEING

The depths of God are among the things predestined by God for our glory. Paul speaks of these things in verse 9: "But even as it is written, Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not come up in man's heart, how much God has prepared for those who love Him." Although eye has not seen them and ear has not heard them and although they have never arisen in man's heart, God has revealed them to us (v. 10), and freely given them to us (v. 12). Day by day, we see something further and deeper regarding Christ as our portion. I can testify that throughout the years, especially in the last few years, Christ has truly become the depths of God to me.

When we enjoy Christ, He becomes our righteousness. Furthermore, from experience we know that whenever we enjoy Christ, Christ becomes God's joy to us. But when we do not experience Christ, God is not happy with us, and we do not have the joy of God. Whenever we enjoy Christ in a practical way, we have God's joy. In fact, the Christ whom we enjoy is Himself the joy of God. At first, when we enjoy Christ, we realize that we are not righteous. Then, spontaneously, Christ becomes the righteousness we need. Then as we continue to enjoy Him, we realize that God is happy with us and that we have God's joy. This experience is somewhat deep, but it is still not the experience of the depths of God.

When we enjoy Christ continually, we eventually enter into the depths of God's being. Then we realize that we are in the very heart, the depths, of the almighty God and that He becomes our inner element. Those who oppose the truth that we who believe in Christ are mingled with God will call this heresy because they have not experienced it. Nevertheless, I cannot deny the fact that when I enjoy Christ, I touch the depths of God and God becomes the element within me.

Christ is practical to us in our experience. He is not only our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, but also the depths of God. In chapter one, we see that Christ

is something to us, and in chapter two, that He is something of God. Because our experience is limited, we are not able to explain adequately what it means for Christ to be the depths of God. But one day we shall advance in our experience and we shall truly know Him as God's depths.

THE SPIRIT OF MAN KNOWING THE THINGS OF MAN

The way to experience all the aspects of Christ revealed in chapters one and two is through the two spirits, the divine Spirit and the regenerated human spirit. In verse 10 Paul speaks of the divine Spirit, and in verse 11 he goes on to speak of the human spirit: "For who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him? So also the things of God no one has known except the Spirit of God." This verse indicates that if we would know the things of man, we must use our human spirit, and if we would know the things of God, we must do so by the Spirit of God.

No matter how educated worldly people may be, they do not know the things of man. The things of man in verse 11 do not refer to matters such as marriage, housing, food, and transportation. It is not necessary to use the human spirit in order to know such things. These are not the things of man to which Paul refers.

According to the Bible, what are the things of man? When the Bible first speaks of man, it tells us that man was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). The first aspect of the things of man is that man was created by God in His image in order to express Him. But the man created by God to be His expression became fallen and sinful. Most philosophers do not realize that they are fallen. But the fall of man is an important item of the things of man. As those who were created by God and who became fallen, we need to repent, we need to be saved, and we need to be regenerated. These also are things of man. Now as saved and regenerated ones, we must love the Lord, live Him, express Him, and fulfill His eternal purpose. These are more aspects of the things of man.

Worldly people do not know any of these things, because they do not exercise their spirit. If you talk to an unbelieving professor about these things of man, he will not have any understanding of them. He may know mathematics or science, but not the things of man. In like manner, medical doctors know about disease, medicine, and vitamins, but they do not know the things of man. Before we were saved, we also had no understanding of the things of man, for our spirit was deadened. We did not even know that we had a human spirit, and we never used our spirit. Apart from the human spirit, how can we know the things of man? It is simply impossible to know the things of man without exercising the spirit of man.

To be saved is to be enlivened and stirred up in our spirit. All the truly saved ones, no matter where they may be, have been stirred up in their spirit. This is a fact of their experience, even if they have no realization concerning it.

As soon as a person's spirit is stirred up in this way, he begins to know the real meaning of human life and also the source of human life. This means that he begins to know the things of man. However, after they were stirred up in their spirit at the time they were saved, many Christians are influenced to turn from the spirit and to exercise their natural mind. Probably the only place where Christians today hear messages on the development of the regenerated human spirit is in the Lord's recovery. Elsewhere, Christians are encouraged to develop the natural mentality. That development destroys the proper knowing of the things of man and of man's situation. Again I say, if we would know the things of man, we must use our spirit.

USHERED INTO THE SPIRIT OF GOD

When we exercise our spirit to know the things of man, we are ushered into the Spirit of God. The two spirits, the regenerated human spirit and the divine Spirit, cannot be separated. This is the reason Paul speaks of both spirits in 2:11. First he says that no one knows the things of man except the spirit of man which is in him. Then he goes on

to say that the things of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. If we would be a proper and genuine human being, we must have these two spirits. We must have the spirit of man to know the things of man and the Spirit of God to know the things of God. According to the Bible, the things of man are related to the things of God. This makes it all the more necessary for us to have these two spirits.

THE MEANING OF BEING SPIRITUAL

In verse 13 Paul goes on to refer to spiritual things: "Which also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, communicating spiritual things by spiritual things." In verse 14 Paul points out that the things of the Spirit of God are spiritually discerned: "But a soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he is not able to know them, because they are spiritually discerned." A soulish man is a natural man, a person who lives in the soul instead of in the spirit. In verse 15 Paul says, "But he who is spiritual discerns all things, and he is discerned by no one." In these verses we have spiritual knowledge, spiritual communication, spiritual discernment, and spiritual persons.

Do you know what it means to be spiritual? To be spiritual is to have the two spirits mingled together in your being. To be spiritual is to have your spirit, the regenerated human spirit, mingled with the Spirit of God to become one spirit. Spiritual persons live in this mingled spirit. Whenever you are in the mingled spirit, you are spiritual, and you have spiritual discernment, spiritual knowledge, and spiritual communication. You are able to discern spiritually both the things of man and the things of God.

As we consider the matter of Christ as the depths of God and the matter of the two spirits, we must admit that in order to experience Christ as the depths of God, we must have these two spirits. We must exercise the human spirit, and we must be ushered into the Spirit of God. This means that our spirit must be mingled with the Spirit of God.

EXPERIENCING THE MINGLED SPIRIT

We have pointed out that one who lives in the mingled spirit is a spiritual man. A spiritual man stands in contrast to the soulish man. According to the context of these chapters, to be soulish is to be Greek and to live according to Greek culture. Philosophers and those who admire human wisdom are soulish people. The spiritual persons are those who exercise their spirit to coordinate with the Spirit of God. Because they live in the mingled spirit, they are truly spiritual and they have spiritual knowledge, discernment, and communication. Here in the mingled spirit we enjoy Christ not in a superficial way, but as the depths of God and even in the depths of God. We enjoy Him in a way that eye has not seen, ear has not heard, mind has not thought, and heart has never imagined. We enjoy Christ in a way beyond all we have ever dreamed.

God has predestined Christ for us, He has prepared Him for us, He has revealed Him to us, and He has given Him to us as the deep things of God. How wonderful! We need to pray more concerning these matters, especially that we shall see this vision clearly. We also need to practice the mingled spirit in order to be spiritual. Then we shall be able to discern the things of man and of God and to communicate with others spiritually in the mingled spirit. To be sure, if we experience the mingled spirit in this way, we shall have the deeper experience of Christ. We shall experience Him not in a superficial way, but as the depths of God. We shall experience Christ daily as our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But we shall experience Him in a way that even surpasses these aspects, for we shall experience God Himself with all His depths. Praise the Lord that He is our portion through the mingled spirit!

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE NINETEEN

THE SPIRIT OF MAN KNOWING THE THINGS OF MAN AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD KNOWING THE THINGS OF GOD

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:9-12, 17-31; 2:1-16

According to the arrangement of the books in the New Testament, Romans comes immediately before 1 Corinthians. Although both Epistles were written by Paul, they are different in their style of composition. Romans is composed according to doctrine and reveals the truth in a doctrinal way. At the beginning of Romans there are sinners, but at the end of this book there are local churches. In Romans 1:18-32 we have a description of sinners under God's condemnation. But in Romans 16 we read of churches. For example, in verse 1 Paul says, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deaconess of the church which is at Cenchrea." It is marvelous that those who were sinners can be justified, sanctified, and eventually go on to have the full experience and enjoyment of the Spirit as the firstfruit. As a result, they become the Body of Christ expressed in a practical way as local churches. Romans 16 speaks not only of the church at Cenchrea, but also the church in the house of Prisca and Aquila (v. 5). The church in Rome met in the house of this couple. It certainly is interesting that such a doctrinal book as Romans begins with sinners and concludes with local churches.

A BOOK OF COMPLICATIONS

Romans and 1 Corinthians are composed of sixteen chapters each. In contrast to Romans, the book of 1 Corinthians is not a book of doctrines, but a book of

practices. Nevertheless, this Epistle is quite complicated. Usually doctrinal matters are complicated. It seems that whenever and wherever we discuss doctrines, we face complications. However, it is strange that in a doctrinal book such as Romans there are no complications. For this reason, from the time I was a young Christian, I enjoyed the book of Romans because it did not have any complications. But I did not care very much for 1 Corinthians. Sometimes in my reading of the Bible I skipped over this book, wanting to avoid all the complications and problems it contains.

Examples of the complications in 1 Corinthians are found in chapters one, five, and fifteen. In 1:10 Paul beseeches the believers at Corinth that there be no divisions among them. Then in verses 11 and 12 he proceeds to speak of strifes and divisions: "For it was made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of the household of Chloe, that there are strifes among you. Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." To be sure, the report received by Paul concerned a complicated situation.

In chapter five Paul deals with the gross sin of fornication. This matter is so terrible that I do not even like to talk about it. Then in chapter fifteen we learn that some of the believers claimed that there was no resurrection. By considering these three chapters we see what serious complications there were among the believers at Corinth.

Because 1 Corinthians involves the complications in the practice of the church life, there is a sense in which I do not like this book. But in a very different sense, I love this Epistle very much. This may appear contradictory, but it is actually a way of viewing two different aspects of this book. Many things in the Bible appear contradictory. For example, God is one, yet He is triune. The Spirit of God is one; nevertheless the book of Revelation speaks of the seven Spirits. It also seems contradictory to say that Christ is both God and man. In keeping with the principle of seeing both sides of the truth in the Bible, I can say that, when I view 1 Corinthians from one angle, I do not

like this book, but when I view it from a different angle, I like it very much.

A COMPARISON OF ROMANS AND 1 CORINTHIANS

In the past I have said that we may liken the Bible as a whole to a person's hand, the New Testament to a ring on the hand, and the book of Romans to a diamond on the ring. How lovable and precious is Paul's Epistle to the Romans! It certainly is a diamond. Although I may use such an illustration to point out the great value of Romans, I have no way to illustrate the preciousness of 1 Corinthians. In a certain sense, 1 Corinthians is more precious than Romans is.

In 1 Corinthians Paul covers many things that he does not even mention in Romans. For example, in 1:9 Paul tells us that through the faithful God we have been called into the fellowship of the Son of God. Nowhere in Romans does he utter such a word. In 1:24 Paul goes on to say that to us who are called, Christ is God's power and God's wisdom. There is no mention of this in Romans.

The book of Romans reveals that we are in Christ, but in 1 Corinthians 1:30 Paul declares further: "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus." Here we see that it is of God we are in Christ. Romans gives us the fact of being in Christ, but it does not say that it is of God that we are in Christ. Before you were saved, did you ever dream that you would be in Christ? Did you ever imagine that God would put you in Him? We know from 1:30 that it is altogether of God that we are now in Christ. In eternity past, before God created anything, God thought of putting us in Christ. We may even say that God had a dream concerning us, a dream that, according to the desire of His heart, we would be in Christ. Because God desired to have us, He had such a dream concerning us. Thus, it is no accident that we are

in Christ. This matter was decided by God in eternity past. Whenever I consider that in eternity past God had a dream about me and decided to put me in Christ, I am beside myself with joy. Oh, it is a matter of tremendous significance that God dreamt about us in eternity! How sweet and endearing this is! How precious is the declaration, "Of Him you are in Christ Jesus"!

In 1 Corinthians Paul also speaks of the depths of God and of drinking of the one Spirit. In Romans 11:33 Paul does say, "O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!" However, in Romans he does not mention the depths of God. Neither is there any reference in Romans to drinking of the one Spirit. These unique expressions found in 1 Corinthians are not only precious, but delightful to our taste. In Romans there are many precious things, but the precious things in 1 Corinthians are especially good to our taste. In this message we shall consider further many of the precious things found in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2.

THE THINGS OF MAN AND THE SPIRIT OF MAN

When I read 1 Corinthians as a youth, I was puzzled by the expression "the things of man" in 2:11. Have you not been puzzled by this? Why does Paul say that we cannot know the things of man apart from the spirit of man? Why is it so difficult to know the things of man? According to my concept, it was easy to know the things of man, for I thought that Paul was referring to things such as food, clothing, housing, and family life. At that time, I did not know the human spirit. Do you know what your spirit is and where it is located within you? As a young Christian I knew neither the spirit of man nor the things of man which can be known only by the spirit of man. However, I was not troubled by Paul's word that the things of God no one has known except the Spirit of God. It seemed obvious to me that since I was not God, I could not know the things of God. I readily understood that only the Spirit of God knows the things of God. What was troublesome to me was what

Paul said about the things of man and the spirit of man.

What are the things of man to which Paul refers in 2:11? This surely does not refer to the knowledge of outward things related to man--to knowing his age, his birthplace, the names of his wife and children, his occupation, the schools from which he graduated, and the kind of automobile he drives. Knowing about a person in this way has nothing to do with what Paul means by the things of man in 1 Corinthians.

According to John 6:42, the Jews said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" They knew certain outward things about the Lord--that He came from Galilee, that He was a carpenter, and that He had brothers and sisters--but they actually did not know Him at all (Mark 6:3; John 7:41). This indicates that what we may know about a man does not mean anything. We may know man in an outward way without knowing the real things of man. On the one hand, we do know man; on the other hand, we do not know the things of man. We cannot deny the fact that we know about man. Nevertheless, we cannot claim to know the things of man. Do you have the full knowledge concerning yourself? Do you know your source and your destiny? Do you know your real love and your real life? You may know many things about yourself without knowing the things which are deep within you.

A PICTURE OF MAN AND GOD

In principle, both the things of man and the things of God mentioned in 2:11 should refer to matters Paul has spoken of in the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians. This is the proper way to understand not only the Bible, but also any kind of writing. Suppose your father writes you a long letter in which he speaks about many things. At a certain point, he may say, "If you don't have adequate knowledge, you will not be able to understand these things." The phrase "these things" certainly refers to all the matters

previously mentioned in the letter. In like manner, the things of man in 2:11 must refer to what Paul has said concerning man in the foregoing verses. The same is true regarding the things of God. By this we can see that 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 give us a revelation, a clear view, of both man and God. In these chapters we see a picture of man and also of God.

These two chapters give us simultaneously a portrait of both God and man. In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 we have a twofold vision, a vision of the things of God and of the things of man. Have you seen this twofold vision? Have you seen that within Paul's portrait of man we also have a portrait of God? Have you seen that as we behold the things of man in these chapters, we see the things of God? What a marvelous revelation is contained here!

We have pointed out that, in principle, both the things of man and the things of God in 2:11 refer to what Paul has already written in this Epistle concerning man and God. Thus, if we would know the things of man and the things of God, we must consider what Paul covers in these chapters.

EXAMPLES OF THE THINGS OF MAN

In 1:10-12 Paul speaks of certain things of man. For example, in verse 10 he says, "Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing." Speaking the same thing is certainly one aspect of the things of man. We may think that speaking the same thing is a common, ordinary matter. However, have you ever seen a group of people who always spoke the same thing? Do you know of even one married couple who truly speak the same thing? It is very difficult for a husband and wife to speak the same thing. Brothers, how often do you and your wife speak the same thing? In 1:10 Paul urges all the believers at Corinth to speak the same thing. This kind of speaking is not an aspect of the life of fallen man, but an aspect of saved people. When I read this verse years ago, I shook my head

in disbelief. To me, it was impossible for all the believers in a locality ever to speak the same thing. Does everyone in the church in your locality speak the same thing? It is a fact that we often speak different things both in the church life and in our married life. Speaking differently is a predominant characteristic of fallen man. The failure to speak the same thing causes many problems both in married life and in the church life. But even though it is common for us to speak different things, the desire of God is that all His saved and redeemed people speak the same thing. Thus, according to this desire, Paul beseeches the believers at Corinth to speak the same thing.

In 1:10 Paul goes on to say, "That there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion." Here we have divisions, the mind, and opinions, all of which are things of man. Here Paul touches the mind. Often we may not speak differently, but inwardly we hold to different opinions. For example, a brother may say that sisters should wear a head covering. Although his wife may not say anything, inwardly she may disagree with him. This shows that this brother and his wife are not of the same opinion. According to Paul's word in 1:10, we should not only speak the same thing, but also be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion.

We often have different opinions in the church life. For instance, one brother may prefer a smart elder, another brother may prefer one who is gentle, and yet another brother may prefer an elder who is slow and deliberate. This exposes the fact that among these brothers there are different opinions. Such opinions certainly are aspects of the things of man.

In 1:11 Paul continues, "For it was made clear to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of the household of Chloe, that there are strifes among you." The strifes mentioned in this verse are also things of man. In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, "Now I mean this, that each one of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." Here we have the preferences among the Corinthians. These preferences also are things of man.

THE THINGS OF GOD

In verses 17 through 25 Paul comes to the things of God. In 1:18 he mentions the word of the cross. The word of the cross is one of the things of God. To us who are being saved, the word of the cross is the power of God. The power of God is also an aspect of the things of God. According to verses 19 and 20, God will destroy the wisdom of the wise, set aside the understanding of the prudent, and make foolish the wisdom of the world. These matters also should be included among the things of God. In verse 21 Paul says, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, God was pleased through the foolishness of the preaching to save those who believe." Even the foolishness of preaching is one of the things of God. Verse 24 continues, "But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, God's power and God's wisdom." God's power and wisdom are further things of God. Finally, in verse 25 Paul declares, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Paul even includes the foolishness of God and the weakness of God among the things of God.

In verse 26 Paul again turns to things of man: "For you see your calling, brothers, that there are not many wise according to flesh, not many powerful, not many wellborn." According to the human concept, we should regard ourselves as wise, not as foolish.

In verse 27 Paul again speaks of the things of God: "But God has chosen the foolish of the world that He might shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak of the world that He might shame the strong, and the lowborn of the world and the despised has God chosen, things which are not, that He might bring to nought things which are." Here we see what God has chosen. The things of God here include God's choosing the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong, and the lowborn and the despised, the things which are not, to bring to nought the things which are. The result is that no flesh should boast before God (v. 29).

Verse 30 says, "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness

and sanctification and redemption." The things of God certainly include God's putting us in Christ Jesus.

THE PROPER KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND MAN

As we consider the book of 1 Corinthians, we see that the things of man include man's position, situation, condition, need, source, and destiny. The natural mind of man is not adequate to know these things. Not even university professors know these things of man. Confucius knew ethical philosophy, but he did not know either the things of God or the things of man. He said that if we sin against the heavens, that is, against God, there is no way to be forgiven. This indicates that he did not know God or man. He did not know the source, condition, position, situation, need, and destiny of man. Although he knew that there was a God, he did not know God.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees thought that because they knew the Old Testament they also knew God. Although they endeavored to follow the Old Testament to a certain extent, they did not have the true knowledge of God. Do you think that the priests worshipping God in the temple actually knew Him? No, they did not know Him at all. Likewise, the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes did not know the things of man. They did not know their own position, condition, and need. Only the Lord Jesus knew both the things of man and the things of God. Because the religionists exercised their natural mentality, they could not know these things. The Lord Jesus, however, exercised His spirit. According to Mark 2:8, in His spirit He perceived the thoughts and motives of the Pharisees. Because He exercised His spirit with the Spirit of God, He could know both the things of man and the things of God.

In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 we see that Paul is an example of a person who knows the things of man and also the things of God. He knew the position, condition, situation, and destiny of the believers at Corinth. Because these believers exercised the Greek philosophical mentality, they

did not know the things of man. Although they did not know themselves, Paul knew them very well, for he was a person who exercised his spirit in order to be ushered into the Spirit of God. By means of these two spirits, Paul had a thorough knowledge of the Corinthians.

Paul also had the proper knowledge of God. As he depicts the condition and situation among those philosophical Greeks at Corinth, he gives us a portrait of God. Is it not amazing that as he describes the condition of the believers he presents a picture of the things of God? Paul here shows that whereas the Corinthians were exalting human wisdom, God intends to destroy it. Thus, concerning this one thing, we have a twofold revelation: first, that the Corinthians were exalting their wisdom; second, that God was tearing down the same wisdom. In the same principle, in chapter three the Corinthian believers were destroying the church; however, God was building it up. Again, one picture presents a twofold revelation: a vision of man's destruction and of God's building up. Furthermore, by showing how much the Corinthians needed Christ, Paul also reveals to what extent God was supplying them with Christ. Again, one picture contains two visions. In these two chapters we see how much we need Christ and also how much Christ is being supplied to us by God. Therefore, we see both the things of man and the things of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY

THE SPIRIT OF MAN KNOWING THE THINGS OF MAN AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD KNOWING THE THINGS OF GOD

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:9-12; 17-31; 2:1-16

NEGLECTING THE TWO SPIRITS

In 2:11 Paul says, "For who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him? So also the things of God no one has known except the Spirit of God." If we would know the things of man and the things of God, we need the two spirits, the human spirit and the divine Spirit. Because the Corinthian believers neglected these two spirits, they could know neither the things of man nor the things of God. Thus, in chapter two Paul seems to be saying to them, "Corinthians, instead of relying on your philosophical mind, exercise your spirit, not your soul or your flesh. If you exercise your spirit and rely on the Spirit of God, you will know your condition, situation, position, need, and destiny. No one knows these things of man except the spirit of man. By failing to exercise the spirit and instead using your philosophical mind, you have missed the mark. You do not know the things of man, and you do not know yourselves. You do not know your situation, and you do not realize how pitiful your condition is. I urge you to exercise your spirit just as I am exercising mine. Because I exercise the spirit, I know the things concerning you. I know your position, condition,

and situation." In dealing with the Corinthian believers Paul certainly was in the spirit.

Something Paul says in 4:21 makes it very clear that Paul was in spirit as he wrote to the believers at Corinth. In this verse Paul asks, "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness?" Paul was a person fully in the spirit. He could come to Corinth either with a rod or with a spirit of meekness. Because he was in the spirit, he could say, "My spirit causes me to know the things concerning you. As I exercise my spirit, I realize that you have departed from your standing in Christ, that you are ignorant of your destiny, and that you are neglecting the blessings which you have in Christ. Instead of exercising your spirit, you are exalting your philosophy and wisdom and are making choices according to your preferences. You, however, don't know these things about yourselves, because you don't exercise the spirit. Forget your Greek mentality and use your regenerated spirit. Then you will know the things of man, the things concerning yourselves."

Paul also realized that the Corinthian believers trusted more in their philosophical wisdom than in the Spirit of God. In chapter two he seems to be telling them, "When I came to you, I did not trust in my wisdom. Although I had received an excellent education, when I was with you I determined not to know anything except Christ and Him crucified. I exercised my spirit, and I trusted in the Spirit of God. Therefore, when I was among you, I was a person in the mingled spirit. Because I am in the spirit, I know your situation, and I know the things of God. I know Christ, God's wisdom and God's power. I even know that God's weakness is stronger than man's power and that God's foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom. I came to know the things of God in my spirit mingled with the Spirit of God. God has even revealed the depths of God to me. I not only know the things God has done and is doing; I even know the depths of God Himself, the depths of God's being. What I am able to do, you cannot do, because you do not rely on the two spirits, your human spirit and the Spirit of

God." Many Christians today also neglect these two spirits.

The majority of believers hold to a doctrine of dichotomy--the belief that man is composed of two main parts, the soul and the body. According to this view, the spirit of man is identical to man's soul. Some who teach dichotomy even claim that the spirit, the soul, the heart, and the mind are all synonymous. They say that the spirit is the soul, that the soul is the heart, and that the heart is the mind.

In 1954 I had a conversation with an American missionary who believed in dichotomy. At the end of a conference held in Hong Kong, he told me how much he appreciated the conference. However, he could not agree with the teaching that the human spirit is different from the human soul. He claimed that the spirit and the soul are identical. I referred him to Paul's word in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. In this verse Paul speaks of the spirit and the soul and the body, purposely using two conjunctions. I asked him how, on the basis of this verse, he could insist that the soul and the spirit are synonymous. Nevertheless, he still held to the view that the soul and the spirit are the same.

TWO EXTREMES

Many believers do not have an adequate understanding of the Spirit of God. Certain fundamentalists emphasize doctrine. In many cases they are even afraid of talking about the Spirit. They do not pay proper attention to the two spirits in the New Testament. In particular they do not place the proper emphasis on the two spirits in the Epistles of Paul. Thus, the fundamentalists represent one extreme with respect to the Spirit of God.

Certain Christians in the Pentecostal movement or charismatic movement represent another extreme, for they overemphasize particular gifts of the Spirit, such as healing and speaking in tongues. The situation among many of these Christians is very similar to that of the believers in Corinth: they place too much emphasis on tongues and miracles. In many cases, the supposed

occurrences of speaking in tongues and healing are not

genuine. According to Acts 2, speaking in tongues must be the speaking of a language or dialect. Genuine tongues-speaking does not consist of the mere repetition of sounds. If the so-called speaking in tongues practiced in many charismatic groups today were recorded and studied by a linguist, the linguist would conclude that the sounds uttered are not that of any language or dialect.

In some charismatic meetings neither the tongues-speaking nor the interpretation of the tongues is genuine. For example, someone may utter certain sounds, which are given a particular interpretation. On another occasion, the same person may utter the same sounds, but they are given an altogether different interpretation. On one occasion, the interpretation may be an exhortation to be humble before the Lord, whereas on another occasion, the interpretation may be a word about an earthquake or the Lord's coming. Certain believers devote much attention to the exercise of so-called spiritual gifts without any attempt to discern what is genuine from what is false.

In some Christian groups there is great emphasis on miraculous healing. I once attended a healing campaign in Manila purposely to see if there were any cases of genuine healing. In the meeting I attended there was not one instance of a real healing. Some claimed to be healed, but eventually this supposed healing was proved to be merely a psychological phenomenon. There was no permanent cure. After a period of time, everyone who was supposedly healed in that meeting was the same as before.

The claim has been made in some Pentecostal groups that in their meetings people's teeth have been filled with gold miraculously. I absolutely do not believe such reports. Why would God not restore the teeth instead of filling them with gold? That would be more in agreement with the principle in the Bible. Furthermore, if such miracles had actually taken place, newsmen would learn of them and publicize them.

In 1963 I attended some meetings of a particular Pentecostal group. In one of these meetings, a woman gave a short word in tongues. Then a young man gave a long

interpretation of that word. Later the leader of the group admitted to me that the interpretation given by this young man was not genuine. Much later I met this young man in another place and asked him about that interpretation he had given. In particular I asked him if he thought this interpretation was genuine. He denied that what he had spoken was intended to be the interpretation of that woman's message in tongues. Then I reminded him that he had clearly indicated to all present that he was giving an interpretation. I went on to say, "There is no need for us to do such things. I definitely believe that you love the Lord. Why don't you simply preach the truth and minister the riches of Christ to others?"

The situation of today's Christianity is very much like that of the church in Corinth. There is the neglect of the human spirit and often the identification of the spirit with the soul. Furthermore, there is either the neglect of the Spirit of God because of a preoccupation with doctrine, or an overemphasis on spiritual gifts, genuine or false.

THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST

In dealing with the division and confusion at Corinth, Paul did not depend on doctrine. Instead he took as his basis the experience of Christ. In 2:1 and 2 he says, "And I, when I came to you, brothers, came not with excellence of speech or wisdom, announcing to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified." The crucified Christ was the unique subject, center, content, and substance of the apostle's ministry. Christ crucified is the center of God's economy. Paul determined that, among the Corinthians, he would not know anything except this crucified Christ.

THE LORD'S RECOVERY TODAY

If we did not have the ministry of Paul, we would not know God's eternal purpose or His economy. Although Peter was a leading apostle, he does not tell us anything about the Body of Christ. The highest word in Peter's

writings concerns the partaking of the divine nature: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). In Paul's writings many terms are used to show that Christ is all-inclusive and extensive, that He is the life-giving Spirit, that He is everything in God's economy and everything to us. In his Epistles Paul also reveals that the church is the Body of Christ, the fullness of Christ, the dwelling place of Christ, the bride of Christ, and even the new man. Furthermore, in his ministry Paul tells us that we are in Christ, that Christ is in us, and that we are joined to Christ as one spirit. In Paul's ministry, the completing ministry, there is a central vision. This is the vision that Christ, the ultimate expression of God, has become the life-giving Spirit so that He may impart Himself into us as our life to make us living members of His Body to express Him organically. This is the central vision of Paul's completing ministry. Paul is the only one to make this tremendous matter clear to us.

The Lord's recovery today is the recovery of the central vision of Paul's completing ministry. The primary goal of the Lord today is not the recovery of doctrinal truths. During the past centuries, the Lord has recovered many truths. For example, the truth of baptism by immersion has been recovered. According to the Bible, baptism must be by immersion. However, this is not the central goal of God's economy, and neither is it an aspect of Paul's completing ministry. In fact, in 1:17 Paul declares, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in wisdom of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void." Paul was sent not to baptize people in a formal way, but to preach the gospel, ministering Christ to others for the producing of the church as an expression of Christ. Nevertheless, certain believers treasure the truth of baptism by immersion and even take it as the basis to form the Baptist denomination.

Other doctrinal matters have been recovered which also are not elements of the central vision of Paul's ministry. For example, the truths regarding presbytery,

healing, and holiness are according to the Scriptures, but they are not the focus of the Lord's recovery today. In His recovery the Lord is seeking to recover the all-inclusive Christ as the life-giving Spirit who imparts Himself into the believers and makes them His living Body. In other words, the center of the Lord's recovery today is Christ and the church.

Whenever people come to me with the intention of arguing about doctrine or practices, I do not have the heart to say much. Some have tried to dispute with us about baptism or head covering. Regarding the sisters' head covering, some have inquired, "Why do so many of the sisters in your meetings not wear a head covering? Don't you know and believe what Paul says about this in 1 Corinthians 11?" To this I have replied that we certainly know and believe what Paul says about head covering. Furthermore, we do practice this matter according to the Bible. However, we do not force any sister to wear a head covering. Yes, we practice this truth, but not in a formal, legal way, as is done in some Christian groups. We realize that today what the Lord is seeking to recover is not head covering or any other doctrine or practice as a central thing. Rather, the Lord is recovering Christ as life and everything to us and the church as His Body, His fullness. We agree that immersion and head covering are aspects of the recovery, but neither of these things is the center. To repeat, the center of the Lord's recovery is Christ and the church: Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the expression of Christ. This is what God is seeking today, and it is crucial that we all see it.

If we would fulfill the Lord's desire to have the proper church life on earth as His expression and as a preparation for His coming back, we must exercise our spirit to know the things of man, and we must also trust in the indwelling Spirit to know the things of God. Then we shall know that what God wants is not speaking in tongues, healing, or miraculous gifts. The Lord has recovered these matters, but they are not the center or the goal of His recovery. What the Lord wants is not tongues-speaking, healing, or

the lengthening of legs; He wants a church composed of believers who are filled, saturated, and infused with Himself to be His Body for His expression. For this, we need the real experience of the indwelling Spirit, not merely the outward gifts of the Spirit.

God wants us to realize that the Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--has passed through a process involving incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. By crucifixion, Jesus Christ terminated the old creation. By resurrection, He germinated us in the new creation. By ascension, He was glorified, exalted, enthroned, appointed Lord, and commissioned with the divine government. Following this, He came down upon the church as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. Today, as this Spirit, He is waiting for people to receive Him by believing in Him. As soon as a person calls on the name of the Lord Jesus, Christ will immediately come into him, regenerate his spirit, indwell his spirit, and mingle Himself with his regenerated spirit to cause him to become truly one with Him. Then this new believer must come to know his spirit and also the life-giving Spirit, the ultimate expression of the Triune God, that he may be transformed and built up with others to be the Body, the organism to express the Triune God for the fulfillment of God's purpose. This is God's goal, the center of His recovery today.

BECOMING A LIVING TESTIMONY

We in the Lord's recovery, therefore, should not care for insignificant things or be distracted by doctrines or practices. We should care only to become a living testimony by having the Triune God dispensed into us to make us members of His organic Body to express Him.

We do not expect that the majority of Christians will see this vision or take this way. But we do believe that it is of the Lord that a minority of His chosen people, who love Him and seek Him, will be brought into this central vision that they may grow in life and be transformed by the Spirit to become parts of the living Body of Christ.

Eventually, this living Body will become Christ's loving bride, who will prepare the way for His coming back.

In the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians Paul paves the way for us to see the central vision of His completing ministry. In these chapters Paul helps us to see the position, condition, situation, and destiny of the believers. If we are clear about these matters, we shall drop all natural things--our philosophy, wisdom, and culture. We shall not care for our attainments, but only for our position in Christ and our condition, situation, and destiny in Him. We shall also care for the genuine experience of the Triune God and for the enjoyment of Christ, the Son of God. By the Spirit in our spirit we shall know God and all the things of God, which are actually Christ Himself. We shall see that God's power, and even His weakness, is Christ. When Christ was crucified, He became weak. If He had not become such a weak One, how could He have been arrested, tried, and put to death? Christ purposely became weak, but His weakness is powerful. Now Christ today is our power and wisdom from God. Furthermore, He is our daily righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We may even know Him as the depths of God. In this way we know all the things of God.

By our spirit we know the things of man, and by God's Spirit we know the things of God. As a result, we can live in Christ, with Christ, by Christ, and for Christ. Then He will have the proper church life as His organic Body to express Him.

What a mercy that we can see this vision! What a grace and what a wonder that we may be brought into the realization of this vision! We are burdened that all the saints in the Lord's recovery will see the same vision and then speak the same thing, having the same mind with the same opinion. Actually, Christ is our mind, opinion, and speaking. The same speaking, the same mind, and the same opinion are nothing less than our dear Christ Himself. Truly He is everything to us. How precious is the revelation in these first two chapters of 1 Corinthians!

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

THE SPIRIT OF MAN KNOWING THE THINGS OF MAN AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD KNOWING THE THINGS OF GOD

(3)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 2:1-16

In 2:11 Paul says, "For who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him? So also the things of God no one has known except the Spirit of God." By this verse we see that the spirit of man knows the things of man, and the Spirit of God knows the things of God. The spirit of man is the deepest part of his being. It is the faculty that can penetrate the innermost region of the things of man, whereas the mind of man is capable only of knowing superficial things. So also, only the Spirit of God can know the things of God.

USING THE RIGHT ORGAN

In order to substantiate something we need to use the proper organ. For example, we substantiate sounds by the sense of hearing. But suppose someone is speaking and you exercise your sense of smell instead of your sense of hearing. In such a case you will not realize anything and may come to the conclusion that nothing is taking place. Actually, someone is speaking, but you are using the wrong organ to substantiate what he is saying.

An argument between a husband and wife can also illustrate the mistake of using the wrong organ. A brother may be very unhappy with his wife and offended in his emotion by her attitude toward him. But if he turns from

his emotion to his spirit through the exercise of his will, his feeling will change. Instead of condemning his wife and being offended with her, he will understand her in an altogether different way. From these examples we see that it matters very much that we use the proper organs in dealing with various matters.

THE SPIRIT AND THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

It is especially important that we use the proper organ--the human spirit--to know spiritual things. However, concerning the experience of Christ and the church, most Christians have been taught to know Christ and the church by the exercise of the mind and with traditional teachings as the basis. Some denominations even conduct seminars in which people are trained to use their mentality to solve problems among Christians. Furthermore, that training is based not on the pure Word of God, but on tradition. Thus, instead of using the spirit, the majority of Christians use their natural mind to understand, analyze, visualize, and philosophize. Furthermore, the basis for this mental activity is tradition, not the Bible.

This practice has caused many believers to make serious mistakes in their understanding of the experience of Christ. For example, one well-known Christian teacher has said in writing that Christ does not actually dwell in us, but is only in the heavens and is represented in us by the Holy Spirit. This is a clear case of exercising the mind according to traditional doctrine and theology to understand the experience of Christ. According to the Bible, Christ is both in the heavens and in the believers. In John 14:17 the Lord Jesus says concerning the Spirit of reality, "You know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you." Here the Lord says explicitly that the Spirit of reality will be in us. When we compare verses 17 and 18, we see that the very He who is the Spirit of reality in verse 17 becomes the very I who is the Lord Himself in verse 18. In verse 18 the Lord goes on to say, "I will not leave you orphans; I am coming to you." This surely does not refer to Christ's second coming. If it did refer to

Christ's second coming, then all the Christians from the first century until now would have been orphans.

In verse 19 the Lord declares, "Yet a little while and the world beholds Me no longer, but you behold Me; because I live, you shall live also." The words "a little while" certainly do not refer to the nineteen hundred years that have gone by since the Lord's first coming. By this expression the Lord did not mean a period of years or even weeks. The Lord was indicating here that He was about to be crucified and buried. For this reason, the world would see Him no longer. However, just three days later, on the day of His resurrection, His disciples would behold Him. First the Lord was seen by Mary in the morning and then by a group of His disciples in the evening. Thus, it was after a little while that they beheld Him, although the world beheld Him no longer.

At the end of verse 19 the Lord Jesus says, "Because I live, you shall live also." This indicates that He will live in us and cause us to live by Him. Hence, the Lord seems to be saying, "I will come into you and live in you and cause you to live by Me." This began to take place on the night of His resurrection. John 20:19 says, "When therefore it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst and said to them, Peace be to you." According to John 20:22, "He breathed into them and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit." By breathing the Spirit into the disciples, the Lord imparted Himself as life and everything into them. In this way, all that He had spoken in chapters fourteen through sixteen could be fulfilled. After the Lord breathed the Holy Spirit into the disciples, He disappeared from their sight. But from that time onward the resurrected Christ began to live within them and to cause them to live by Him.

In John 14:20 the Lord says, "In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." This day is the day of the Lord's resurrection. Here the Lord does not say, "In that day you will know that I am in the heavens and that you are on earth." Nevertheless, this

is the traditional teaching held by many Christians. The Lord says definitely, "You shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you." The Lord says nothing here concerning being represented in them by the Holy Spirit. He says clearly, "I in you."

Based upon the revelation in chapter fourteen of John, the Lord Jesus says in John 15:4, "Abide in Me and I in you." In verse 5 He continues, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." Here the Lord speaks not simply of being in us, but of abiding in us as we abide in Him. To abide means to stay, to remain. Christ abides in us; He remains in us. This is not representation, but the abiding in us of Christ Himself.

HOLDING BOTH ASPECTS OF THE TRUTH

In John 14:23 the Lord Jesus says, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him." Here the Lord says that the Father and the Son will come to the one who loves the Lord and make Their abode with him. However, traditional Christian teaching is contrary to this. First, there is an emphasis on the fact that after His resurrection Christ ascended to the heavens. Second, it is also emphasized that, after His ascension, Christ sent the Holy Spirit of God upon the church. With these concepts as the basis, the traditional teachings, stressing only one side of the truth, say that Christ is now in the heavens and that the Holy Spirit is on earth representing Him in the believers. However, this traditional view altogether neglects the clear word of the Bible concerning Christ's indwelling. The Bible reveals both that Christ is in heaven (Rom. 8:34) and also that He is actually in us (Rom. 8:10). Concerning this, we need to believe and hold both aspects of the truth.

In the last century Robert Govett wrote a book entitled *The Twofoldness of Divine Truth*. Like virtually everything else, the divine truth in the Bible has two sides. Concerning Christ, one side of the truth is that Christ has

ascended to the heavens and has sent down the Holy Spirit. But the other side of the divine truth is that Christ Himself is actually within us.

It is indeed sad that many Christians today emphasize just one aspect of the truth and altogether neglect the other aspect. This gives rise to many problems and arguments. We need to turn from the traditional teachings, come back to the pure Word, and accept both aspects of the divine truth. For example, the truth of the Trinity, the Triune God, has two sides. The word triune means three-one. It comes from Latin roots meaning three (*tri-*) and one (*-une*). Our God is three-one. According to the Bible, we accept the truth that God is uniquely one and also that He is three. Thus, we believe that God is Triune, that He is three-one.

THE NEED TO EXERCISE OUR SPIRIT

It is one thing to stay in the natural mind and seek to understand matters in a traditional way. It is very different to exercise our spirit to know things according to the Word of God. Suppose a certain university professor claims to be an atheist. According to his mental understanding, there is no God. Furthermore, he tells others that God does not exist. But if such a person would turn to his spirit, he would automatically pray, "O God, forgive me." According to his mentality, there is no God, for in the natural mind it is impossible to know God. But should he turn to the spirit, he would immediately have a sense of God and realize that he must pray and ask for forgiveness.

This principle certainly applies to us as believers. Some may argue that there is nothing wrong with having many churches in one city. Such a statement is made according to their natural concept. But if they would turn to their spirit and read the New Testament, they would worship the Lord and say, "O Lord, You are unique, and Your church is also unique. Lord, You are the Head, and the church is the Body. Now I see that there is one Head and one Body. I also see that the expression of the church in a locality must be uniquely one. Lord, forgive me for saying

that there can be many churches in one city." Again we see that to use only the natural mind to understand matters gives one picture, but to turn to the spirit to perceive spiritual things gives another picture.

Because Paul exercised his spirit, he had a thorough knowledge of the situation and condition of the believers at Corinth. In chapter two he seems to be telling them, "Because you Corinthians are still in your Greek philosophical mind, you don't know yourselves. With the mind it is not possible to know the things concerning man. You don't know your situation, your position, your condition, your need, or your destiny. You think you are very wise, but you are actually foolish and blind. I know the things of man because I am in my spirit. Only the spirit of man knows the things of man. Because you exercise your mind and not your spirit, you do not know the things of man concerning the experience of Christ and the church. You do not realize that you are standing on the wrong position and are in the wrong condition. Furthermore, you lose God's supply for your needs. You don't even realize that you are neglecting your destiny."

If we exercise our spirit, we shall discover that in our spirit dwells the Spirit of God. Then we shall know not only the things of man, but also the things of God. We shall know ourselves, and we shall also know Christ.

I am concerned that even some among us may not know themselves properly. Certain ones may not know that they are in a wrong condition. There may be many things which they have not yet confessed to God and concerning which they have not received His cleansing. They may be proud in their thoughts, thinking that they are right and that everyone else, including the whole church, is wrong. This way of thinking about themselves comes out of their failure to exercise their spirit. But if they would turn to the spirit and exercise the spirit, they would say, "O Lord, I am the one who is wrong. I am wrong in everything and wrong with everyone. O Lord, forgive me and cleanse me."

Exercising our spirit ushers us into the Spirit of God. God's Spirit enables us to know not only where we are

wrong, but also that God loves us and that Christ wants to be our life and our person. By the Spirit of God we may also know Christ as wisdom to us from God. Then if we continue to live in the mingled spirit, in our human spirit with the Spirit of God, we shall discover that Christ is our daily righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We shall experience Him and enjoy Him. We shall also sense our need for the church and shall desire to come to the meetings, even though others may criticize us and wonder what we are doing.

If we use our spirit, we shall first come to know ourselves. In particular, we shall know where we are wrong in our position, condition, and situation. We shall also know where we are missing the mark of the divine provisions God has predestined, prepared, revealed, and given to us. Then we shall make confession to the Lord and seek His forgiveness. Eventually, we shall realize that the Spirit of God dwells in us and that He is eager to show us how much Christ loves us and how rich He is to us for our experience and enjoyment. This will cause us to enjoy the Lord and to have an increased desire for the church life. This is the experience of the spirit of man knowing the things of man and the Spirit of God knowing the things of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

THE CHURCH, GOD'S FARM AND GOD'S BUILDING

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:5-17

In chapter three of 1 Corinthians Paul comes to the church. Although the word church cannot be found in this chapter, what Paul covers here is very much related to the church.

Paul composed this chapter in a very wise way. Paul did not use superficial expressions with regard to the church; here he speaks of the church by using deep and profound expressions. In this chapter Paul uses three main terms for the church: the farm, the building, and the temple.

In verse 9 Paul says, "You are God's farm, God's building." The Greek word rendered farm in this verse literally means cultivated land. The believers who have been regenerated in Christ with God's life are God's cultivated land, a farm in God's new creation to grow Christ, that precious materials may be produced for God's building. Hence, we are not only God's farm, but also God's building. Corporately, we as the church of God have Christ planted in us. Christ must also grow in us, and out of us He must produce, in the sense of this chapter, not the fruit, but the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones for the building of God's habitation on earth. Thus, the building of God, the house of God, the church, is the increase of Christ, the enlargement of Christ in His unlimitedness.

In verses 16 and 17 Paul twice refers to the temple of God: "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys the

temple of God, God shall destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, which you are." A temple of God in verse 16 refers to the believers collectively in a certain locality, as in Corinth, whereas the temple of God in verse 17 refers to all the believers universally. The unique, spiritual temple of God in the universe has its expressions in many localities on earth. Each expression is a temple of God in that locality.

The temple of God in these verses is the explanation of God's building in verse 9. The temple is the building, and the building is produced by the materials grown on the farm. Thus, we have the farm, the building, and the temple. God's building is not an ordinary building; it is the sanctuary of the holy God, the temple in which the Spirit of God dwells. We, the builders of such a holy temple, should realize this so that we may be careful to build not with the worthless materials of wood, grass, and stubble, but with the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones (v. 12), which correspond to God's nature and economy.

In the Epistle of 1 Corinthians Paul spends more time to speak concerning the church than concerning Christ. We have seen that in the first two chapters Paul has much to say about Christ. The problems among the believers at Corinth were caused by their lack of experience of Christ. For this reason, Paul begins this Epistle with Christ and then continues with the church.

Where Christ is, there the church must be also. If we preach Christ, we must also preach the church. Likewise, if we have Christ, we should be in the church. Christ and the church cannot be divided, just as a person's head should not be separated from his body. To separate the head from the body is to bring death to the body. Therefore, we should never separate Christ from the church or the church from Christ.

GOD'S FARM

The title of this message is "The Church, God's Farm and God's Building." This title indicates that the church is both God's farm and God's building. We all know that the

purpose of a farm is to produce food for us to eat. A building is a structure made of certain materials. Apparently, a farm is not related to a building, for a farm produces food for eating, not materials for building. No one would build a house with the produce grown on a farm. Farm products seemingly are not useful for building. Nevertheless, the farm in verse 9 is for the building. Whatever is produced on the farm is for the building.

In verse 9 Paul speaks first of God's farm, then of God's building. The reason for this order is that the building depends on the farm. If there is no farm, there cannot be the building, because the farm produces materials for the building.

PLANTS ON GOD'S FARM

All the members of the church are plants on God's farm. They have been planted by the ministers of Christ, God's fellow-workers, they have been watered by other ministers, also God's fellow-workers, and they are made to grow in life by God Himself. We become members of the church not by the way of joining a social organization, but by being planted. In verse 6 Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow." Paul planted the believers at Corinth into the church, which is God's farm, so that they might grow Christ.

It is a very significant matter to be a plant on God's farm. There is no need on the farm for a teacher to instruct the plants. A plant does not need anyone to tell it what to do or how to grow. However, among Christians today a great deal of teaching is given to the plants. Actually, the believers are regarded not as plants, but as students, as learners. Before I came into the church life, I was a "student" in the Brethren assembly. Although I learned a great deal about the Bible, I was dying for the lack of life. Instead of living like a plant, I was living like a student. I am even concerned that in some local churches there is a school instead of a farm. There may be teaching, but very little watering of the plants. We all should practice the church life in the way of farming, in the way of planting,

watering, cultivating, and trimming. We must learn when to water the saints, when to feed them, and when to trim them.

GROWING MATERIALS FOR GOD'S BUILDING

Planted, watered, and made to grow (v. 6) are all related to the matter of life. This indicates that the believers are God's farm to grow Christ. As plants on God's farm, the church, we need to grow. Without growth, we are useless. Some of the plants in my garden at home are living, but they do not grow. In like manner, there are many believers today who are alive spiritually, but they do not grow. Of course, it is better to live than to die. As long as we are alive, we have the opportunity to grow. I hope that no one in the Lord's recovery will be content to live without growing. We all must grow to produce Christ. All the saints in the Lord's recovery must be desperate to grow. We should pray, "Lord, grant me the growth."

The purpose of our growth on God's farm is to produce Christ. Just as it is the goal of a vineyard to produce grapes, it is the goal of God's farm to produce Christ. The central point of these messages on 1 Corinthians 3 is growing to produce Christ.

As a help in growing Christ, we need to consider chapters one and two again and again. If you read and pray-read these chapters, you will be watered and nourished. The very element and substance of Christ will be imparted into your being. Then spontaneously you will grow and produce Christ. The issue of your growth will be Christ.

Paul's intention in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 is to present Christ as our portion, enjoyment, life, living, content, and everything. Christ should be our one choice, preference, taste, and enjoyment. We should enjoy Christ to such an extent that we do not care for culture of any kind. Instead of living culture, we live Christ. Christ becomes everything to us in our daily living--our culture, our ethics, and our morality.

When we grow properly, Christ will be produced in us.

Then whatever we grow of Christ will become the materials for God's building. The church is built only with Christ. However, the church is not built with the objective Christ, with a Christ who is in the heavens or who suddenly descends from the heavens. On the contrary, the church is built with the Christ we experience and who is even the produce grown by us. Thus, for the building of the church, we must have the Christ who is produced through our growth in life.

In the Life-study of Exodus we pointed out that the materials used for the building of the tabernacle were called heave offerings. This means that the materials created by God had to be gained, possessed, enjoyed, and treasured by God's redeemed people. Then the people were to bring these materials and present them to God as heave offerings. Only materials gained, possessed, and offered in this way could be the proper materials for the building of the tabernacle. This signifies that we need to gain, possess, and enjoy the riches of Christ until they become our treasure. Then we need to bring what we have experienced of Christ to the church meetings and offer this Christ to the Lord as a heave offering. This Christ will then become the materials used for the building up of the church.

Because today's Christians do not experience Christ and produce Christ, there is no building among them. Building the church is not merely a matter of preaching the gospel, saving sinners, and bringing these newly saved ones into a so-called church. This is not the building up of the church; it is the piling up of raw materials. Among most believers today the best that can be seen is such a piling up of building materials. But where is the genuine building? There is no building because there is no experience of Christ, no growing of Christ as the material for God's building. Now that we have seen that we are God's farm, we must grow in the divine life to produce Christ.

PLANTING AND WATERING

In verse 6 Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow." If we would grow Christ on God's farm, we need the planting and the watering. However, we should not think that only those such as Paul and Apollos are responsible for planting and watering. All the brothers and sisters in the church should carry out this work. However, we do not have this concept. Instead, when we discover that a saint is weak in certain matters, we may refer this one to the elders. If a brother comes to you and you realize that he is weak, you should water him. Instead of calling for the elders, you should feed him and nourish him. It is crucial for us all to learn this.

You may feel that you are weak and very low in life. However, other saints are even weaker and lower than you are. Should one of these weaker ones contact you, you need to water him. Then you will be watered also. But this does not mean that we should water others purposely. Rather, the watering should be done spontaneously and even unconsciously. Whenever a weaker one comes to you, do not make up your mind to water him. This is a performance, not genuine watering. If you water another saint spontaneously, even unintentionally, the Lord will sovereignly send others to you that you may water them. Eventually you will discover that by watering others, you yourself are watered. This is true revival. In the church life, we all should water one another. Then we shall grow to produce Christ.

The reason we lack the practice of watering others is that we are still under the influence of Christianity. We, of course, do not have the term clergy-laity, but we may still have this practice. Even though we have left our religious background behind, the influence of this background still follows us and keeps us from watering others. For example, a brother may say to himself, "Who am I? I am nothing. Let the elders and the more experienced ones take care of others. I am just a little brother in the church. How can I help anyone?" This thought must be rooted out of us. No brother or sister should hold the concept that they are too weak or too low in life to water others.

Perhaps you are weak, but you are not dead. Even though you may feel dead, the fact that you are still in the church life proves that you are not completely dead. Since you are still alive, you are able to water others. Do not consider yourself useless. Just as all the members of our physical bodies are useful, so there is not one member of the church who is useless and who cannot care for others by watering them.

Because of our religious background, it is easy for us to apply Paul's word only to such persons as Paul and Apollos. We may think that only certain ones can plant and water, but that we ourselves are not able to carry out this work. Some saints may think that the elders or the leading ones in their locality should do all the watering. Others may concentrate on their own need to be watered by others, not on the importance of watering others. Again I say that this concept needs to be rooted out. We all are able to water others. Let us not carry on the practice of today's Christianity. The church is the Body of Christ. In the Body every member is useful and can function. May the poison of the clergy-laity practice be completely eliminated!

I hope that all the saints will see that they are able to plant and water. From now on, we should not consider that only the elders and the more experienced ones can help others. Instead, we all must realize that we should be the ones to help others. I encourage you to pray, "Lord, have mercy on Me and grant me grace that I may live You in order to water others. Whenever a saint comes to me with a problem, remind me to take up the burden to help that one and to water him."

Some may fear that if they try to plant and water, they will make mistakes. Perhaps you will do something wrong. But be encouraged that true learning comes from doing, from practicing. You may do certain things wrong, but eventually you will learn from your mistakes and become skillful at planting and watering. In certain matters you may even become more helpful than the elders. The number of elders in a local church is few. How can they care for so many brothers and sisters? Instead of looking to

the elders to do everything, take up the burden to care for others, to water them. We in the Lord's recovery are here

for the practice of the church life. In order to practice the church life in a proper way, we all should plant and water.

Because Paul says that he planted and Apollos watered, do not think that Paul is useful only for planting and Apollos only for watering. No, those who labor on the farm do not only plant or water; they do whatever is necessary--plant, water, supply fertilizer, and even cut and trim the plants. Through practice we shall learn to do all these things in the church life. It is not true that you should only plant or water and not be involved in the other things. Rather, we all must learn to do whatever is needed to produce the growth of Christ on God's farm. This even includes learning to kill the "bugs" that trouble the growing plants. A weaker saint may contact you, and you may realize that he is bothered by a particular bug. Spontaneously, you may realize that you also are plagued by this bug and that you both need the same medicine.

I hope that all the saints in the Lord's recovery will touch the burden in this message and also enter into the spirit in which it is given. Then we shall be helped to grow on God's farm to produce Christ, and we shall also learn to take care of others.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

THE CHURCH, GOD'S FARM AND GOD'S BUILDING

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:5-17

TWO ASPECTS OF PLANTING

In 3:6 and 7 Paul speaks of planting and watering: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow; so that neither is the one who plants anything nor the one who waters, but the One Who makes to grow, God." To plant is to minister life and impart life to someone who is spiritually dead so that this person may become living. When life is imparted to a person dead in sins, he becomes a living plant. Because Paul imparted life to the Corinthians, he was their father in Christ. In 4:15 he says, "For though you have ten thousand guides in Christ, yet not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." Before Paul came to Corinth, the Corinthians were not plants. On the contrary, they were dead sinners. But when Paul visited them, he imparted life to them, and they became living plants. This is the first aspect of planting.

The second aspect of planting is to bring the living plants into contact with the proper soil and to place them in the soil. To be sure, the right soil in which the plants may grow is the church life. On the one hand, we need to learn how to impart Christ into sinners through the preaching of the gospel in life. When Christ is imparted into others, they become living plants. On the other hand, we need to put these plants into the proper soil, the church life. These two things together constitute the planting.

A MATTER OF LIFE

Planting, watering, and making to grow are all related to the matter of life. This indicates clearly that the believers are God's farm to grow Christ. The ministers of Christ can plant and water. God is the only One who can make to grow. The Corinthian believers overestimated the planter and the waterer, but neglected the One who makes to grow. Hence, they did not grow in Christ as their life.

The Corinthian believers, under the influence of Greek philosophical wisdom, paid too much attention to knowledge and neglected life. In this chapter Paul's aim is to turn their attention from knowledge to life, pointing out to them that he is a feeder and a planter, Apollos is a waterer, and God is the Giver of growth. In 4:15 he even tells them that he is their spiritual father, who begot them in Christ through the gospel. From the view of life, the divine view, they are God's farm to grow Christ. This is totally a matter of life, a matter which is utterly missed by believers who are dominated by their soulish, natural life under the influence of their natural wisdom.

In verse 7 Paul says, "So that neither is the one who plants anything nor the one who waters, but the One Who makes to grow, God." As far as the growth in life is concerned, all the ministers of Christ, whether a planter or a waterer, are nothing, and God is everything. We must turn our eyes from them to God alone. This delivers us from the divisiveness which results from appreciating one minister of Christ above another.

PLANTING, WATERING, AND GROWTH

In the church life we must learn not only how to plant, but also how to water. Actually, watering others is very easy. Suppose a saint comes to you with a problem. Do not try to solve this person's problem. Actually, we are not able to solve others' problems. Do you not have many problems of your own which are not yet solved? Since you have not solved your own problems, how do you expect to help others with their problems? Thus, in watering the saints, we should forget about trying to solve their problems.

According to my experience, the best way to water others is to pray-read a few verses with them. For example, a brother may present a problem concerning his job or family life. Instead of touching the problem, pray-read the Word with him. If you do this, both of you will be watered. You will know that the one who came to you has been watered by the fact that you yourself have been watered. Your consciousness of having been watered proves that you have watered him.

In our contact with others a great deal of time is wasted by vain talk. Problems cannot be solved by talking. Even if you are able to solve someone's problem, this will not supply him with life or water him. Instead, it will kill him. I repeat, we should not try to solve the problems of others. The more we try to solve problems, the more problems there will be, and the more others will be killed by our efforts.

Instead of becoming involved with problems, we should be simple in our contact with those who come to us for fellowship. God is our Father, and eventually He will take care of all the problems. The crucial matter is the watering. We have pointed out that by pray-reading with another saint, we can water him. Sometimes it is sufficient simply to pray with that one. By praying the other person is brought to the Lord, and we are brought into the Lord in a deeper way. As a result, both parties are watered. This is a very practical way of watering the saints in the church life.

In verses 6 and 7 Paul speaks not only of planting and watering, but also of growing. Paul emphasizes the fact that it is God alone who makes to grow. The growth on God's farm produces the materials for God's building.

Since it is God who makes to grow, we must leave the matter of growth to Him. Our responsibility is to plant and water, not to help others grow. If we try to help others grow, we overstep our responsibility. It is beyond our capacity to cause the saints to grow. None of us can produce growth in other believers. Not even Paul was able to make the saints grow. He was very clear that we can plant and water, but only God gives the growth.

While we are planting and watering, we need to have the assurance with faith that God will make to grow. We need to believe that God is here and that He will cause whatever we plant and water to grow. If we have this assurance, we shall not try to help others grow.

If we try to help other plants grow, we may damage them and pluck them up. I once read of a little boy who was bothered by the fact that the grass near his house was not growing very well. Wanting to help the grass grow, he plucked up many blades of grass. As a result, instead of growing, the grass died. What this little boy did to the grass illustrates what some saints are doing in the church life today. The elders in some churches are not planting and watering; instead, in their efforts to help the saints to grow, they are plucking them up. But the more the elders help in this way, the less the plants grow.

It is important for us to have the full assurance that when we plant and water, God will make to grow. Thus, after planting and watering, we should be at rest and not try to help others grow. Growth is not of us; it is altogether of God. Through the church life and our watering, God will supply the plants and enable them to grow. As long as the saints remain in the church life and are watered, God will make them grow.

THE BUILDING, GOD'S ETERNAL GOAL

The church is not only God's farm, but also God's building. As we grow on the farm, we produce precious materials for the building of God's habitation on earth. God's eternal goal is the building, the temple built with precious materials on Christ as the unique foundation. The work of building is accomplished not only through those such as Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, but also through every member of the Body, as revealed in Ephesians 4:16.

Concerning the building, Paul says in 3:11 and 12, "For other foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is being laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if anyone builds on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble." The foundation of the building is unique, but the

building may differ due to different builders with different materials. All the Corinthian believers had accepted Christ as the foundation. However, some Jewish believers among them attempted to build the church with their Judaistic attainments, and some Greek believers attempted to use their philosophical wisdom. They were not like the apostles, who built with their excellent knowledge and rich experiences of Christ. The intention of the apostle in this Epistle is to warn the believers not to build the church with the things of their natural background. They must learn to build with Christ, both in objective knowledge and subjective experience, as Paul did.

We have pointed out that in verse 16 a temple refers to the believers collectively in a certain locality, but in verse 17 the temple refers to all the believers universally. The unique spiritual temple of God in the universe has its expressions in various localities on earth. Each expression is a temple of God in that locality. Furthermore, the temple in verse 16 is the explanation of God's building in verse 9. God's building is the sanctuary of God, the temple in which the Spirit of God dwells.

The philosophical Greek believers at Corinth did not have the proper realization that God's eternal goal is to have a temple. Instead of caring for this goal, they cared for their philosophy, culture, and wisdom. They also cared for their personal interests, preferences, choices, and tastes. This is proved by the fact that in 1:12 Paul points out that "each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." This indicates that for some, Paul was their preference; for others, Apollos was their choice; and for still others, Cephas was according to their taste. The believers at Corinth cared for various personal and individual matters, but neglected God's building as His eternal goal.

In chapter three Paul was endeavoring to show the Corinthians that God's eternal goal is the building. This means that God does not want the believers to be individualistic. He definitely does not want the saints to have personal, individualistic preferences for Paul,

Apollos,

Cephas, or even for a limited Christ. God cares for the building, and He desires that all the believers in a locality be built together as His temple. Moreover, if we would be built up together to become God's dwelling place, we need to grow, and in order to grow, we need the watering. Thus, the planting, the watering, and the growth are all for God's goal, the building.

Paul had a clear understanding of God's goal. He also realized clearly that the Greek believers at Corinth were too individualistic in their concept and practice. It is not God's goal merely to have many individual believers. His goal is to have a farm that will grow materials for the building up of the holy temple as His dwelling place.

CARING FOR THE CORPORATE CHURCH LIFE

We need to consider the background of this Epistle to understand Paul's use of the expressions God's farm and God's building. The Greek believers at Corinth did not care for the corporate church life, but cared instead for their personal and individual interests. This produced division. Whenever there are divisions there cannot be the temple of God. Therefore, after covering certain crucial matters in chapters one and two, Paul indicates in chapter three that the Corinthians are completely wrong in caring for their individual interests and not for God's temple, God's corporate building.

In 3:17 Paul specifically points out that God's building, the temple, is holy. It is not secular, worldly, or Greek. Actually, the word holy in this verse stands in contrast to anything Greek. God's holy temple is separate from anything human, secular, and worldly; in particular, it is separated from anything Greek.

If we consider the context of the first three chapters of this book, we shall realize that Paul's intention was to impress the believers at Corinth that God's building is separate from anything Greek. The Greek believers still valued their wisdom, philosophy, culture, and way of living. They regarded Greek culture as the best. But Paul says

that God's temple is holy, separate from anything worldly and particularly from anything Greek.

In verse 16 Paul emphasizes the fact that the Spirit of God dwells in the believers as His corporate temple. But as long as the believers at Corinth were individualistic and as long as they cared for their personal interests, especially for their Greek philosophy and way of living, they were neither holy nor corporate. Then they could not experience very much of the indwelling of the Spirit or enjoy the Spirit's indwelling. If we do not have a proper corporate church life, we cannot have much enjoyment of the indwelling of the Spirit. Yes, the Spirit dwells within our spirit. But the Spirit's indwelling in the church corporately is much richer and is more prevailing than His indwelling in the believers individually.

If we consider all these matters, we shall realize that Paul's concept is deep. His thought is to convince all the individualistic Greek believers that they must care for the corporate church life and not for their individualistic interests, preferences, and choices.

THE UNIQUE FOUNDATION

We know from 3:11 that Christ is the unique foundation for the church as God's building. No one can lay any other foundation. Nevertheless, certain of the believers at Corinth were taking Paul, Apollos, or Cephas as their foundation. When they were declaring that they were of Paul, Apollos, or Cephas, they were saying that these were their foundation and standing. In 1:13 Paul asks them, "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?" By asking these questions Paul was pointing out that he is not the unique foundation. On the contrary, Paul says in 3:10, "According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation." The unique foundation is not Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or anyone other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The problem among the Corinthians is that they were trying to lay many other foundations. We see in chapter fourteen that for some, speaking in tongues was a

foundation. This indicates that it is possible for a particular practice to become a foundation. Therefore, Paul wanted the believers at Corinth to realize that he had already laid the unique foundation, Jesus Christ.

First Corinthians 3:10 says, "According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each one take heed how he builds upon it." This verse indicates that the church is built not only by ministers of Christ such as Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, but by every member of the Body. Every one of us must be a builder.

We should realize not only that we are builders, but also that we must take heed how we build upon Christ as the unique foundation. As we shall see, the church, the house of God, must be built with gold, silver, and precious stones, materials produced from Christ's growing in us. Yet, as verse 12 indicates, there is the possibility that we may build with wood, grass, and stubble, materials produced by us in the flesh and in the natural life. Hence, each of us, every member of the Body, must take heed how we build; that is, we must take heed with what material we build. We must build with gold, silver, and precious stones, not with wood, grass, and stubble.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

GROWTH IN LIFE NEEDED

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:1-9

Paul's underlying thought in chapters one and two is that Christ is God's unique center and also the portion of the saints. Beginning with chapter three, Paul speaks regarding the church. When he comes to the church, he writes in a very meaningful, profitable, and life-giving way, in the way of feeding, planting, and watering for growth. In 3:9 he says that the church is God's farm and God's building. Even though Paul does not use the word church in this chapter, he speaks about the church in a wonderful way. Paul writes of the church not in the way of doctrine, not even the doctrine of life, but in the way of the experience of life.

SPIRITUAL, SOULISH, AND FLESHY

In 3:1 Paul says, "And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshy, as to infants in Christ." Here Paul is very frank in telling the Corinthians that he could not speak unto them as to spiritual, but as to fleshy. A spiritual man is one who does not behave according to the flesh or act according to the soulish life, but lives according to the spirit, that is, his spirit mingled with the Spirit of God. Such a one is dominated, governed, directed, moved, and led by such a mingled spirit.

The term fleshy is a stronger expression than fleshly in verse 3, and it refers to aspects of the flesh that are more gross. Fleshy denotes made of flesh; fleshly denotes being influenced by the nature of the flesh, partaking of the character of the flesh. In verse 1 the apostle considers the

Corinthian believers to be totally of the flesh, made of the flesh, and just the flesh. What a strong word! Then in verse 3 the apostle condemns their behaving in jealousy and strife as fleshly, being under the influence of their fleshly nature and partaking of the character of the flesh.

This book reveals clearly that a believer may be one of three kinds of men: a spiritual man, living in his spirit under the anointing of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:25); a soulish man, living in his soul under the direction of the soul, the natural life (2:14); or a fleshy and fleshly man, of the flesh and living in the flesh under the influence of the nature of the flesh. The Lord desires that all His believers may take His grace to be the first kind of man--a spiritual man. This is the goal of this book--to motivate the Corinthian believers who are soulish, fleshy, and fleshly to aspire to the growth in life that they may become spiritual (2:15; 3:1; 14:37). As we have been called by God into the fellowship of Christ (1:9), who is now the life-giving Spirit (15:45), and as we are one spirit with Him (6:17), we can experience and enjoy Him only when we live in our spirit under the leading of the Holy Spirit. When we live in the soul or in the flesh, we are missing the mark of participating in Him.

INFANTS IN CHRIST

In 3:1 Paul refers to the believers at Corinth as infants in Christ. Although they had received all the initial gifts in life and were lacking in none of them (1:7), they had not grown in life after receiving them, but rather remained as infants in Christ, not spiritual but fleshy. The apostle here points out their deficiency and indicates their need, that is, to grow in life to maturity, to be full grown (2:6; Col. 1:28).

In verse 2 Paul goes on to say, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not then able to receive it. But neither yet now are you able." To give milk to drink or food to eat is to feed others. Feeding refers to the matter of life. This differs from teaching, which refers to knowledge. What the apostle ministered to the Corinthian believers seemed to be knowledge. Actually it was milk (not

yet solid food), and it should have nourished them. Milk is mainly for infants, whereas solid food is for the mature (Heb. 5:12). The fact that the Corinthian believers could not receive solid food indicates that they were not growing in life.

In verse 3 Paul continues, "For you are still fleshly. For whereas there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly and walking according to man?" Jealousy and strife are expressions, characteristics, of the nature of the flesh. Hence, they characterize those who are in the flesh, those who are fleshly. Every fallen human being is the flesh (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16). Therefore, to walk according to man is to walk according to the flesh.

Verse 4 says, "For whenever one says, I am of Paul, and another, I of Apollos, are you not men?" The word men here refers to men of the flesh, to fallen natural men, to men in the world. Instead of walking according to the natural man, we should walk according to the mingled spirit. However, in saying that they were of Paul or of Apollos, the Corinthians were walking according to the fallen natural man. They were not living and behaving according to the Spirit in their regenerated human spirit.

In verse 8 Paul declares, "Now he who plants and he who waters are one." Here Paul seems to be saying, "I and Apollos are one. I am one with Apollos, and Apollos is one with me. Why do you try to divide us? Why do some of you say that you are of him and others say that you are of me? To speak in this way is to be divisive. Apollos and I are one in the God-given ministry. I planted and he watered, but we both share in the one ministry. Furthermore, each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. We are God's fellow-workers, and you are God's farm, God's building."

PLANTS NEEDING GROWTH

In 3:1-9 we see that Paul regarded all the believers in Christ as plants which need growth. The most necessary thing for a plant is growth. The Corinthian believers were not lacking in the initial gifts in life--the eternal life and

the Holy Spirit--but they were desperately short in the growth in life. The initial gifts were given for the purpose of growth and development.

Many Christians today do not realize that they have received the initial gifts in life and that they urgently need the growth in life. The matter most neglected among believers is the initial gifts for the growth in life. I hope that many among us, especially the young ones, will realize that they have the divine life and the Holy Spirit within them as the initial gifts and that these gifts need growth and development.

The Corinthian believers had received the initial gifts of life as the seed. This means that the seed had been sown into their being, and that their being was the earth in which the seed would grow. But although they had received the seed, they still needed the growth in life for the development of the gifts they had received.

THE INITIAL GIFTS AND THE MIRACULOUS GIFTS

Many Christians talk about gifts, but they do not pay attention to the initial gifts. The gifts in 1:7 are different from those in chapters twelve and fourteen. The gifts in these chapters are not the initial gifts. Rather, in chapters twelve and fourteen we have both miraculous gifts and mature gifts. Genuine tongues-speaking is a miraculous gift. For example, it certainly was a miracle for Balaam's donkey to speak a human language. Although that may be called a gift, it certainly was not the initial gift in life. Believers may be amazed at the manifestation of a miraculous gift, but they may consider the initial gifts of eternal life and of the Holy Spirit very common and not worthy of much attention. However, even though the miraculous gifts have their source in God, they actually do not count as much as the initial gifts. No doubt, it was of God that Balaam's donkey spoke in tongues. But this miraculous occurrence did not render either the donkey or Balaam very much help in life.

Many Christians today appreciate miraculous gifts

more than the initial gifts. Some would be pleased if every believer spoke in tongues, even if the so-called tongues are not genuine. I can testify of this from experience. In 1963 I was invited to a certain Pentecostal group. After one of the meetings, the leader of this group and his wife tried to get a particular Chinese brother to speak in tongues. The wife told him not to speak either English or Chinese, but to make other sounds. The brother realized that in order to get out of that situation he had to say something. Remembering a few words in the Malay language, he uttered some words he remembered in that language. Immediately the leader of this Pentecostal group and his wife clapped their hands and rejoiced that this brother had spoken in tongues. The next day I pointed out to that couple what had actually happened and went on to question them about this practice.

Furthermore, in one of the meetings of this same Pentecostal group, a woman gave a short word in tongues. Then a young man gave a long interpretation of that word. Later the leader of the group admitted that the interpretation given by the young man was not genuine. I then asked him why he engaged in these practices when we have such a rich Christ to minister to others. He had nothing to say in response to my question.

Pentecostal believers ignore the initial gifts in favor of miraculous gifts, and many fundamental Christians pay their attention not to gifts but to doctrine. Thus, among both Pentecostalists and fundamentalists there is a serious neglect of the initial gifts, the gifts of the divine life and the Holy Spirit. How pitiful is the situation among so many Christians today! This causes me to be burdened to emphasize the crucial importance of the initial gifts. We all need to see that these gifts are the seed sown into us and that these gifts need to be developed and cultivated. In this Epistle Paul is seeking to develop and cultivate the initial gifts received by the Corinthian believers. He fully realized that the believers at Corinth were infants and desperately in need of growth. He could still feed them only with milk, but his desire was to supply them with solid food.

Once again I wish to point out that when we read or study the Bible, we need to get into the spirit of the writer. In 1 Corinthians 3 the burden in Paul's spirit was to help the believers at Corinth realize what they had and what they needed. They had the divine life and the Holy Spirit, and they needed growth--growth in life and growth in the Holy Spirit. But how could these believers grow? If they were to grow, they needed to be watered.

Although the saints may water others, growth comes only from God Himself. As Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow; so that neither is the one who plants anything nor the one who waters, but the One Who makes to grow, God." Because growth comes from God alone, those who water others must help them contact God. Actually, contacting God is itself the watering. Thus, the best way to be watered is to contact God. If you can help a weaker one or a young one have some contact with God, that will bring in the genuine watering. The watering will then supply the ingredients of life to those who already possess the divine life. As these ingredients are added to them, they will have an additional supply of life. Then spontaneously they will grow. Just as fertilizer helps plants to grow in a spontaneous way, so the believers in Christ also grow spontaneously by receiving an additional supply of life.

Many of those in the charismatic movement or the Pentecostal movement do not care for life or for the growth in life. Most of them do not even understand what life is. Instead of concentrating on the development of the divine life within the believers, they give their attention to the pursuit of miraculous gifts. As a result, many who emphasize things such as speaking in tongues are extremely immature in life. Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians is very different. This book reveals that Christ is the unique center of God's economy and also our portion for our enjoyment. This wonderful One is now the life-giving Spirit dwelling in our spirit. Continually we need to

exercise our spirit to be one spirit with Him. The more we contact the Lord in this way, the more we are watered, supplied, and nourished. Then spontaneously we shall grow. I thank the Lord that many of the saints in the churches throughout the world are experiencing the genuine growth in life. What we need in the Lord's recovery, and what the Lord is seeking among us, is more growth in life, more development of the initial gifts.

We have seen that in 3:1 Paul indicates that the believers at Corinth were infants in Christ. They, of course, had been genuinely saved, but they were fleshly and even fleshy, not spiritual. They exhibited the signs of infancy: not able to receive solid food, but only milk; being full of jealousy and strife and walking according to man; and exalting spiritual giants to cause divisions.

The situation in Corinth was the same as that found among many believers today. In almost every Christian group certain leaders are exalted in such a way as to cause division. Furthermore, many Christians are not able to receive solid food, but only a small amount of milk.

Paul knew that the Corinthian believers needed feeding, watering, and the additional supply of life. They needed to be fed with solid food (v. 2), they needed to be watered continually (vv. 6-7), and they needed the additional supply of life from God so that they could grow in life. These are the very things we need in the church life today. We need to be fed with solid food. We also need to water others and to be watered ourselves. We have seen that even the youngest and weakest among us is able to water the saints. But in watering others we should not try to solve their problems or presume to do God's work by trying to help others grow. Instead, we should simply take time to contact God together. Then others will be watered, and God will give them growth through the additional life supply. May we all see that what is urgently needed is the growth in life. May we live in a way which produces the growth in life, and may we function by planting, feeding, watering, and also by leaving the actual growth to God.

GOD'S FELLOW-WORKERS

In verse 8 Paul says that he who plants and he who waters are one. In the same verse he goes on to say, "Each one shall receive his own reward according to his own labor." The reward is an incentive to the ministers of Christ who labor by planting or watering on God's farm.

In 3:9 Paul says, "For we are God's fellow-workers." This indicates that God is also a worker. While the ministers of Christ, His fellow-workers, are working on His farm, He also is working. What a privilege and glory that men can be God's fellow-workers, working together with God on His farm to grow Christ!

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

GROWTH IN LIFE NEEDED

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:1-9

In 3:1 Paul tells the believers at Corinth, "And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshy, as to infants in Christ." The fact that Paul refers to them as infants indicates that they had not grown in life after receiving the initial gifts of the divine life and the Holy Spirit.

If the saints in a particular locality are short of the growth of life, they cannot have the proper church life. Actually, the reality of the church does not exist among them. Yes, they are a local church in name, but they do not have the reality of the church. The church exists as a gathering of saved people, but it cannot be considered a reality in the growth of life and in the experience and enjoyment of Christ. Furthermore, where the growth of life is lacking, the believers' Christian life will be a mess, the church life will be damaged, and the Body life will be destroyed. This was exactly the situation in Corinth. Although the Corinthian believers had received the initial gifts, they had not grown in life. Instead, they merely had the divine life and the Holy Spirit sown into them as seeds. Because they did not have the normal growth in life, they did not have the proper Christian life, church life, and Body life.

Realizing the situation among the Corinthians, Paul does not speak of the church in a doctrinal way, but in the way of life, in the way of feeding, watering, and growing. Only if the Corinthians grew in life could the reality of the church exist among them through the experience of Christ and only then could the Body life be built up.

THREE KINDS OF GIFTS

In 1 Corinthians there are three kinds of gifts: the initial gifts in chapter one and the miraculous and the mature gifts in chapters twelve and fourteen. Again and again we have pointed out that the initial gifts, the gifts believers receive at the time they are saved, include the divine life and the Holy Spirit. Miraculous gifts include such things as healing and speaking in tongues. When Balaam's donkey spoke a human language, that certainly was a miraculous occurrence, a true instance of speaking in tongues. A creature that did not even possess human life actually spoke a human language. The tongues-speaking in chapters twelve and fourteen refers to the speaking of an actual language which a person has not learned. Suddenly, under the divine power, a believer miraculously speaks another language. This is genuine tongues-speaking. This kind of miraculous gift does not require the growth in life as the mature gifts do.

Genuine tongues-speaking is different from the so-called speaking in tongues practiced today, where people utter sounds and syllables which have nothing to do with any actual language. If these sounds were recorded and analyzed by a linguist, it would be proved that they are not part of any language or dialect.

In chapters twelve and fourteen Paul mentions both speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Among Pentecostal and charismatic groups, there are many supposed instances of speaking in tongues with interpretation. However, in many cases these are not genuine. For example, in a meeting someone may speak certain sounds or syllables which will then be interpreted in a particular way. In another meeting the same person may utter the same sounds; however, they are given a different interpretation. Thus, the same sounds have two interpretations. Such a thing is not a genuine miraculous

gift. On the contrary, it is natural and of human invention.

There can be no doubt that healing is a miraculous gift. The gift of healing mentioned by Paul is truly miraculous. But in the healing campaigns conducted by Christians today there are many false healings. In many of these campaigns, there is not one case of a genuine miraculous healing.

In chapters twelve and fourteen we also have another category of gifts, the mature gifts. Prophesying is one of these mature gifts. To prophesy is better than to speak in tongues because speaking in tongues does not build up the church, but prophesying does build up the church (14:4). We all should seek those gifts, especially prophesying, which build up the church.

If we would prophesy for the building up of the church, we must have the experience in life. Our ability to prophesy depends on our experience. If we do not have the proper experience in life, we shall not be able to prophesy to build up the church.

The gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians is different from that commonly practiced in charismatic groups today. For example, many years ago some prophesied that a great earthquake would destroy the city of Los Angeles. Usually, such so-called prophecies conclude, in Old Testament fashion, with the words, "Thus saith the Lord." But in 1 Corinthians prophesying means to speak for Christ and even to speak forth Christ. If we would speak forth Christ, we must first experience Christ. Only when we have the genuine experience of Christ can we minister Him to the church. Thus, to prophesy by speaking forth Christ requires experience. Among the Corinthians there may have been a number of miraculous gifts, but they were short of the mature gifts, such as the gift of prophesying for the building up of the church.

In 1 Corinthians we also have the gift of ruling, or of taking the lead. Such a gift is based on maturity. We cannot expect that a young saint should be able to be a leading one. Taking the lead requires a certain amount of maturity. Actually, this gift is related to eldership. An

elder is one who is not a babe. On the contrary, he must be a person with some maturity.

The believers at Corinth were lacking in the mature gifts. In particular, they were short of the gift to speak forth Christ that the church may be supplied and built up, and short of the gift of proper leadership. They had received the initial gifts, but not many among them had grown in life. As a result, there was neither the proper gift of prophesying nor of leading that can build up the church.

PAUL'S BURDEN

We know from Paul's word in 3:1 that the Corinthian believers had not grown in life, but remained in the stage of infancy. Thus, burdened to point out the need for growth, he says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow; so that neither is the one who plants anything nor the one who waters, but the One Who makes to grow, God" (vv. 6-7). This clearly indicates that the believers need the planting and the watering in order to grow in life.

We have pointed out that even though the Corinthian believers had received the divine life and the Holy Spirit as the seed sown into them, they remained in their infancy and did not grow in life. Actually, they continued to live in their Greek culture, philosophy, and wisdom. This caused confusion in their Christian life, damage to the church life, and ruin to the Body life. Hence, in writing this Epistle Paul was burdened to tell them that they should no longer live their Greek culture, wisdom, and philosophy.

When Paul uses the word wisdom in chapter one, he is specifically referring to the wisdom of Greek culture. I believe that when the Corinthians read this Epistle, they realized that wisdom was equivalent to culture. They remained in their native culture and lived in it. Paul, however, seemed to be saying, "Brothers, God has called you into the fellowship of His Son, not into your culture. The very Christ who is your portion and into whose

fellowship you have been called has become wisdom from God to you. Daily He is your righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. No longer should you live your culture, but you should live Christ. As God's wisdom, Christ is the deep things of God. What man's eye has not seen, what man's ear has not heard, and what man's heart has never imagined has been revealed to us through the Spirit of God. These things, the depths of God, are related to Christ as God's mysterious wisdom for our destiny."

Paul was burdened that the Corinthian believers would grow in life. He knew that if they would grow in life, spontaneously they would have a proper Christian life. Then the reality of the church life would exist among them, and the genuine Body life would be built up. They would be the church not merely in name, but in reality, in life, and in the experience of Christ. Then they would be the farm of God and the temple of God in a way that is actual and practical.

SIGNS OF INFANCY

In 1 Corinthians 3 we see that the believers at Corinth showed certain signs of infancy. Verse 2 says, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not then able to receive it. But neither yet now are you able." One sign of infancy among the believers is that they are able to receive only milk, not solid food. As long as a believer remains in a stage of infancy, he is not able to receive anything solid, no matter how many messages he may hear which contain solid food.

To some extent at least, this sign of infancy is present among us. Year by year solid food is ministered to the saints. But in many cases the saints, by their reaction to what is ministered, show that they are not able to come up to this level. This indicates that many are not yet able to receive solid food. Instead, they can only take in milk. This is a sign of infancy.

Recently in a certain meeting the saints were reviewing one of the Life-study messages on 1 Corinthians. I was hoping that the response of the saints would indicate that

they had digested some solid food. However, according to what was shared in that meeting, it became evident that many can still receive only milk. I was hoping that some would testify that, by the Lord's mercy, they were experiencing Christ as daily righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. But testimonies of this kind were not given. Furthermore, instead of caring for the "diamonds" found in the messages, many paid more attention to the "wrappings" and the "box." They spoke about the box and the wrappings, but neglected the diamonds. Those who have grown in life are not preoccupied by wrappings or by the box, but concentrate on the diamonds. In their testimonies they appreciate the diamonds and speak of them.

There are many diamonds in chapters one and two of 1 Corinthians. However, throughout the generations most readers of this Epistle have touched only the wrappings or the box, not the diamonds, the deep things of God. For example, when we testify concerning 1:30 we should be able to tell how Christ becomes wisdom to us from God in our daily life. A brother may testify that in his married life he enjoys Christ as his present, living, and instant righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. To speak in this way is to show that we have seen the diamonds and not just the wrappings.

I am very concerned that certain of the leading ones who minister the Word in their localities may repeat the messages given in the ministry without themselves having seen the diamonds. They may encourage the saints and advise them about the growth in life, and they may teach them how to wrap the diamonds, how to put the diamonds in pretty boxes, and how to treasure the diamonds and love them. They may speak a lot about "how to," without having seen the genuine vision of the diamonds. Nevertheless, I hope that more and more the leading ones and all the saints will be able to testify of what they have seen and experienced concerning the diamonds in 1 Corinthians.

Paul's word about the fellowship of the Son of God in 1:9 is certainly a diamond. We need to testify of this

fellowship, this mutual enjoyment, not in a doctrinal way, but in the way of experience. To learn doctrine is to receive only milk, whereas to take the diamonds in an experiential way is to receive solid food. The first sign of infancy is not being able to receive solid food.

In verse 3 Paul exposes a second sign of infancy: "For whereas there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly and walking according to man?" Those who are infants are full of jealousy and strife and walk according to man, that is, according to fallen man in the flesh. Those who are infants, who are shallow and superficial concerning spiritual things, still have jealousy and strife. Any strife or jealousy among us indicates infancy.

Suppose a brother gives a very good testimony in the meeting. Then another brother, hearing this testimony, decides to give an even better testimony. This is strife, a sign of this brother's infancy.

Suppose only a few saints say amen to your testimony, but many say amen to a testimony given by another. If this bothers you, it exposes the fact that with you there is still some strife or jealousy. We should be happy when there is a loud response of amen to a brother's testimony. We should praise the Lord that there is such a "diamond" among us.

A third sign of infancy is exalting spiritual giants to cause divisions. In 3:4 and 5 Paul writes, "For whenever one says, I am of Paul, and another, I of Apollos, are you not men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Ministers through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to each one." The fact that the Corinthians were exalting certain persons is a further indication of their immaturity. In verse 7 Paul points out that both those who plant and those who water are not anything, but God is everything as far as the growth in life is concerned. If we turn our eyes to God alone, we shall be delivered from the divisiveness which results from appreciating one minister of Christ above another.

It is possible for us to be like the Corinthians in exalting certain spiritual giants and thereby causing

division. Some may declare, "I like this brother very much and think his speaking is excellent." In the church life we should not have any preference concerning speakers, elders, brothers, or sisters. To have preferences is a sign of infancy.

The three signs of infancy pointed out by Paul in this chapter are the very signs present among many Christians today. Few believers are able to receive solid food. Jealousy, strife, and the exaltation of certain persons are common. I hope that among us in the Lord's recovery all these signs of infancy will disappear. When we hear a message, we should be able to get into the depths of that message and not be distracted by the wrappings or the box. Furthermore, we should not have jealousy or strife, and we should not have any personal preferences or choices. This will prove that we have grown and even matured in life.

THE FARM AND THE BUILDING

At this point, I would like to say a further word concerning the church as God's farm and God's building. The expression "God's farm" refers mainly to the growth in life. The building, the temple, refers to the goal of God's eternal purpose. Thus, the church is the farm to produce materials so that God may fulfill His goal to have the building. First we have the farm for the growth in life, then the building for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose. To be able to grasp these crucial matters is an indication that we have taken in the solid food in 3:9. Praise the Lord that the farm is for the growth in life and that the building is for the fulfillment of God's goal!

In 3:17 Paul says that the temple of God is holy. According to the context, to be holy here is not simply to be separated to God; to be holy means not to be Greek. If we think that the word holy merely means to be separated, our understanding of this verse is too superficial and doctrinal. For the Corinthians to be separated unto God means that they are no longer Greek. In the same principle, for us to be holy, separated unto God, means that

we are no longer American, Chinese, Japanese, or German. If we see this matter, it is a sign that we have received solid food from verse 17. It proves that we have grasped something experiential, practical, and deep.

To be God's building means that we are no longer divided or scattered. According to the context of these chapters, the building is versus division. Paul knew that the Greek believers at Corinth had been divided by their preferences. In 1:12 he says, "Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." This indicates that the believers had been scattered; they were not even piled up, much less built up together to be God's temple. To repeat, God desires a building. God's goal is the building. First, He wants a farm to grow Christ, and then He wants a building.

The Corinthians did not have a building which was holy, a building which was outside Greek culture. This means that they did not have a building which was holy and indwelt by the Spirit of God, a building which contained nothing of their wisdom, philosophy, and culture. Nevertheless, God's goal is to have a building filled with the Spirit of God, a building of materials grown on His farm. As believers, we all must be for God's building.

RECEIVING MERCY TO SEE THE VISION

When we realize our shortage concerning the growth in life and the building, we may react in a way which causes us to become even more veiled. Some may become excited, others may weep, and still others may pray or try to repent. But it is possible even for excitement, weeping, praying, and repenting to become veils. These activities may hinder us from seeing the vision of God's economy.

To see this vision we need God's mercy. In Romans 9 we have a word about God's mercy and, in Acts 9 an illustration of God's mercy. Romans 9:16 says, "So then, it is not of the one who wills, nor of the one who runs, but of God, the One Who shows mercy." According to Acts 9, God showed mercy to Saul of Tarsus. No doubt, Saul prayed a great deal before he was saved. It is doubtful, however,

that God ever answered his prayers. But one day, to Saul's great surprise, the Lord appeared to him. This is mercy.

We do not need to weep, pray, or repent in a religious way, but we do need the Lord's mercy to see the vision shown to Paul. We need to see how much we are still living in our culture, tradition, and religion. We need to see that we are living in many things other than Christ and that we are not actually living Christ day by day. Yes, we have heard messages, but still we may not see the vision. Oh, we need the Lord's mercy to see a heavenly vision! Neither our weeping nor our excitement means anything. Again I say, we need God's mercy. Although we should not pray in an excited way or in a religious way, we should pray earnestly for the Lord's mercy. Let us all pray, "Lord, have mercy on me. I need to see the vision seen by Paul. Lord, grant me a clear sky that I may see the revelation of Your economy."

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

THE BUILDING WORK WITH TRANSFORMED MATERIALS

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:10-14

In this message we shall consider from 3:10-14 the subject of the building work with transformed materials.

I. NOT LAYING ANOTHER FOUNDATION, BUT BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATION ALREADY LAID

In 3:10 and 11 Paul says, "According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each one take heed how he builds upon it. For other foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is being laid, which is Jesus Christ." Doctrinally speaking, many Christians understand what it means not to lay any foundation other than Jesus Christ. However, when writing these words, Paul was not speaking in a doctrinal way. He realized that by saying that they were of Paul, Apollos, or Cephas, the Corinthians were actually laying another foundation. Here Paul seems to be saying, "Believers at Corinth, you should not say that you are of anyone or of anything. Christ, the unique foundation, has already been laid. This Christ is the One who is both theirs and ours and also the One into whose fellowship we have been called by God. This Christ is the unique foundation."

It is common for Christians to lay foundations other than Christ as the unique foundation. For example, when someone declares that he is for immersion, he is laying immersion as a foundation. The same is true of someone who is for tongues-speaking. Whenever you claim to be for

a particular person, doctrine, or practice, you are laying another foundation. This is the right meaning of Paul's word in verses 10 and 11.

Christians have been divided by the many different foundations. Thousands of foundations have been laid, and more are being laid. Thus, we should be careful not to say that we are of a certain thing or of a certain person. To speak in this way is to lay another foundation; it is also to cause division. Furthermore, in the church in our locality we should not say that we are of anything or anyone or that we are for anything or anyone. We are only of Christ and for Christ. It is possible that even the saints in the local churches are laying different foundations. Regarding this matter, my eyes are very watchful, not over Christianity, but over the Lord's recovery. Even the saints who love the Lord and His recovery may still say that they are for certain things. This is to lay another foundation.

Instead of laying another foundation, we must build upon the foundation already laid. This means that we must build upon the unique Christ. We should understand this not only doctrinally, but also practically and experientially. For example, suppose a brother tells you that, according to his feeling, the church in your locality is not positive. How would you respond to this? The answer you give will reveal whether or not you are building upon Christ as the unique foundation. The best way to respond is not to correct the brother or argue with him, but to pray-read a few verses with him. What matters in pray-reading with such a one is not the particular verses you choose; it is that you have a living spirit filled with the riches of Christ. Then if you pray-read together instead of discussing the situation, that one will be watered and nourished. Nothing waters others and nourishes others more than your living spirit. As long as your spirit is living and is filled with the riches of Christ, others will be watered and nourished, no matter what verses you pray-read. After you have pray-read with this one, there is no need to argue with him about the church or to try to improve him. If he wants to say that the

church is not positive, let him do so. What he needs is not correction or adjustment, but watering and nourishing. Every time this one comes to you, simply water him and nourish him. In a sense, such a one is spiritually sick, or he may be hungry and thirsty. For his sickness, he needs some medicine, and for his hunger and thirst, he needs food and water. Each contact with him is an opportunity to water him and nourish him. Eventually, what is supplied to him will become the medicine that will heal him. After a while, having been nourished and healed, he will no longer say that the church is not positive. He himself will realize that it is nonsense to speak in that way concerning the church.

To fellowship with others with a living spirit full of the riches of Christ is to build upon Christ as the unique foundation. It is also to build with Christ. When you contact others in this way, you build upon Christ and with Christ. As a result, others will be solidly built up into the church as part of the Body. This is to build upon the foundation already laid.

I am very concerned that the saints realize that 1 Corinthians is not a book of doctrine. It is a book which deals with practical problems. It is a mistake to regard this Epistle as one based on doctrinal matters. We may say that Ephesians is written with doctrine as the basis, but this is not true of 1 Corinthians. Whatever Paul says in this book is presented in a practical way in order to solve the problems among the believers. Thus, his word concerning Christ as the unique foundation should be understood not doctrinally, but in a way that is practical and experiential. For example, to say that we are for a certain person or for a certain practice is to lay another foundation. It is a very serious matter to speak in such a way. This is to lay another foundation and to cause division. Furthermore, to minister Christ to others is to build upon the foundation already laid. If we would minister Christ to the saints, we must have spiritual experience. It is not adequate merely to repeat in a doctrinal way messages given in the ministry. We must

share with others not a doctrinal Christ, but a Christ we have experienced.

II. TAKING HEED HOW WE BUILD UPON THE FOUNDATION

In verse 10 Paul says, "But let each one take heed how he builds upon it." The church must be built with gold, silver, and precious stones. However, there is much possibility that we may build with wood, grass, and stubble. Hence, each of us must take heed how he builds, that is, with what materials he builds.

We must take heed not to build with anything other than Christ. This means that whenever we give a message or a testimony, or whenever we have fellowship with others, we must be careful not to give others anything except Christ. Furthermore, the Christ we share should not be a doctrinal Christ, but a Christ whom we have experienced. We should minister not merely the knowledge of Christ or the doctrine of Christ, but Christ Himself. In everything we do in the church life, we must take heed not to minister anything other than the Christ we have experienced.

In chapter three Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians, "Brothers, be careful how you build on Christ as the foundation. God desires a building, a temple. Take heed that you do not build with your Greek culture, philosophy, and wisdom. Likewise, those with a background in Judaism must be careful not to build with Jewish culture, religion, and concepts. Instead, we all must learn to minister Christ to others." This is what it means to take heed how we build on the foundation already laid.

It is very easy to build on the foundation with something natural or something of our culture, even though we have no intention to do so and are not aware of what we are doing. For example, we may build with something American, Chinese, or German. Furthermore, we may also build with certain elements common to the culture of our particular region. If we minister to others in this way, we are very careless. We are not taking heed how

we build. Although I came from China, I am very careful not to build with anything Chinese, but to build only with Christ. It is crucial for us all to learn to build upon Christ

as the foundation with the Christ we have experienced in a practical way. There is a lack of such building among us. I am concerned that many brothers and sisters will simply repeat messages in a doctrinal way. What is urgently needed is the actual, practical, present, and living Christ in our experience. To build with such a Christ is to take heed how we build.

III. TO BUILD WITH GOLD, SILVER, PRECIOUS STONES

A. Transformed Materials

In verse 12 Paul says, "But if anyone builds on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble." Gold, silver, and precious stones signify various experiences of Christ in the virtues and attributes of the Triune God. It is with these the apostles and all spiritual believers build the church on the unique foundation of Christ. Gold may signify the divine nature of the Father with all its attributes, silver may signify the redeeming Christ with all the virtues and attributes of His Person and work, and precious stones may signify the transforming work of the Spirit with all its attributes. All these precious materials are the products of our participation in and enjoyment of Christ in our spirit through the Holy Spirit. Only these are good for God's building.

As God's farm with planting, watering, and growing, the church should produce plants. But the proper materials for the building up of the church are gold, silver, and precious stones, all of which are minerals. Hence, the thought of transformation is implied here. We need not only to grow in life, but also to be transformed in life, as revealed in 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Romans 12:2. This corresponds to the thought in the Lord's parables in Matthew 13 concerning wheat, mustard seed, and meal (all of which are botanical) and the treasure hidden in the earth, gold and precious stones (minerals).

The church is a farm which produces gold, silver, and precious stones. These are minerals and are usually mined from the earth. But in chapter three we have a farm that

eventually produces gold, silver, and precious stones. This implies that as the plants on God's farm grow, they eventually become minerals. The plants, of course, are botanical in nature. But as they grow, they are transformed into minerals. Thus, in this chapter, we have both growth in life and transformation. Whatever is grown on God's farm is eventually transformed in nature. Transformation does not involve mere outward change, but an inward, organic, metabolic change. In the New Testament transformation involves metabolism, a process in which a new element is added into our being to replace the old element. Hence, transformation is a metabolic change. First we are plants, but eventually we become minerals. Those who have the adequate experience of growth and transformation can testify that if we grow properly, transformation follows automatically. Growth produces transformation and even becomes transformation. The more we grow as plants, the more we become minerals.

Just as a child must have food in order to grow, we as plants on God's farm must also have something with which to grow. If we would grow, we must have the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. We do not grow by means of doctrine or by outward advice or encouragement; we grow by and with the Triune God. We grow with God as a living Person. If we would build upon Christ as the unique foundation, we need the gold, silver, and precious stones which come as a result of growing with the living Person of the Triune God.

B. Gold Signifying the Nature of God the Father

What does it mean in a practical way to build with gold? Suppose a certain brother contacts you for fellowship. This brother is humble, kind, and loving. However, you realize that he is natural and that all his virtues are natural. It will not help to give him doctrine by saying, "Brother, you are natural. Your virtues and your behavior are all natural." Instead of speaking to him like this, you need to minister to him in such a way that he realizes that his virtues are natural, something obtained

from birth, and that they do not contain anything of the element of God. Look to the Lord for His leading and for utterance that you may know how to minister to him in the proper way. Eventually, this brother will be helped to see that there is not anything of the nature of God in his good virtues. He will realize that his love, kindness, and humility do not contain the divine gold, but are simply the wood of his natural humanity. Before we can minister to others in this way, we must have adequate experience ourselves. Then we shall be able to minister the gold, the divine nature, into the saints. After a brother has been ministered to in this way, he will begin to condemn his natural virtues. Whenever he is humble or kind in a natural way, he will say, "This is my natural virtue. I condemn it because there is nothing of God in it." This understanding, of course, is altogether different from that found among most Christians today. Religion encourages believers to develop their natural virtues. But for God's building we need gold; we need the divine nature added into us.

C. Silver Signifying the Redemptive Work of God the Son

Silver signifies the redemptive work of Christ. We also need to understand this in an experiential way. The more genuine experience we have, the more we shall know what is true gold and what is true silver. If we seek the Lord, we shall eventually come to realize that, no matter what we may be like in our natural being, we are fallen. There is a sinful element even in our goodness and love. This indicates that we are altogether fallen. Whatever we are and whatever we have is fallen in nature and needs God's redemption.

According to the New Testament, God's redemption first terminates us. When Christ died on the cross to redeem us, He terminated us. Whatever Christ terminates, He also redeems, brings back to God. Thus, being brought back to God comes after termination. Furthermore, whatever Christ terminates and redeems He then replaces with Himself. Redemption, therefore,

involves termination,

being brought back to God, and being replaced with what Christ is. This is a proper, adequate, and complete definition of redemption according to the New Testament.

When Christ redeems us, He terminates us, brings us back to God, and then replaces us with Himself. This is Christ's redemptive work. We have seen that all that we have and are is fallen. But now that we have been terminated and brought back to God, the work of replacement is taking place within us. Christ as the life-giving Spirit has come into us and is gradually replacing us with Himself. This is the reason Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me." In this one verse we see the three matters of termination, replacement, and being brought back to God.

If we have the adequate experience of Christ's redemption, in our contact with the saints we shall impart the reality of redemption to them. In this way silver will be added to them. This is what it means to build with silver.

This kind of building will gradually eliminate death from the church life. Every local church is troubled by death, which comes from gossip, negative talk, and even from the natural virtues. How can this death be swallowed up? It can be swallowed up only by the building with gold and silver. Whenever you minister gold and silver to the saints, the negative germs within them are killed, and the saints are nourished in a positive way. The silver is a divine antibiotic to kill all germs. Then, spontaneously and automatically, death will be swallowed up by life. Life includes gold and silver, the nature of God and Christ's redemptive work.

D. Precious Stones Signifying the Transforming Work of God the Spirit

The precious stones are the totality of gold and silver. When in our spiritual experience we have the nature of God and the redemptive work of Christ, the result will be

the transformation of the Holy Spirit. If we minister gold and silver to the saints, the issue will be precious stones, the Spirit's transforming work. In other words, the Holy Spirit transforms us metabolically by the divine nature with the cross. In this way we become precious stones.

In chapter three Paul in effect is telling the Corinthians, "Brothers, instead of building the church in your locality, you are destroying it and tearing it down. You are not building with gold, silver, and precious stones, but with wood, grass, and stubble. You are building with your Greek natural man and your Greek culture, philosophy, wisdom, habits, and customs. Thus, you are destroying the temple of God and will suffer God's destruction. I encourage you to take heed to avoid building with your Greek humanity and culture. You need to avoid everything Greek and be in the mingled spirit to minister the golden nature of God the Father into others and also to minister the silver of the cross of Christ. The result will be precious stones, a metabolic change produced by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit." This is to build with the Triune God upon Christ as the unique foundation.

It is significant that Paul mentions only three categories of precious materials--gold, silver, and precious stones--for these correspond to the Three of the Triune God. The gold refers to the nature of God the Father, the silver to the redemptive work of the Son, and the precious stones to the transforming work of the Spirit. This is the experience of the Triune God becoming the supply for us to minister to the saints and the materials for the building up of the church. If we build the church with these precious materials, and not with our natural man or culture, we shall be taking heed how we build on Christ. Then our building work will not destroy the temple of God, and we shall not suffer God's destruction.

IV. TO BE TESTED

A. At the Day of Christ's Return

In 3:13 Paul says, "The work of each shall become manifest; for the day shall make it known, because it is

revealed by fire, and the fire itself will test each one's work, of what sort it is." The day here refers to the day of Christ's second coming, when He will judge all His believers (4:5; Matt. 25:19-30; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 22:12).

B. By Fire

The fire in verse 13 denotes the fire of the Lord's judgment (Mal. 3:2; 4:1; 2 Thes. 1:8; Heb 6:8), which will cause each believer's work to be manifest and will try and test his work. It is not the fire of purgatory as pervertedly interpreted by Catholicism. All the work of wood, grass, and stubble will not be able to stand that test and will be burned.

V. TO RECEIVE A REWARD

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

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

THE BUILDING WORK WITH NATURAL THINGS

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:10b, 12-13, 15

In the foregoing message we considered the building work with transformed materials. This is the positive side of Paul's word about the building work. In this message we shall consider the negative side, the building work with natural things.

Before we consider what it means to build with wood, grass, and stubble (v. 12), we need to point out that over the years 1 Corinthians 3 has not been adequately understood by most believers. The reason for this is that this chapter was written in an experiential way. Since most readers of 1 Corinthians are short of spiritual experience, they are not able to understand this chapter. In many cases they are not even interested in it and prefer other portions of the Bible, such as Proverbs, which suit their natural concept.

First Corinthians 3 is deep and profound. In writing this chapter Paul uses many metaphors: milk, solid food, planting, watering, God's farm, God's building, foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble, fire, and temple. Without experience we cannot interpret these metaphors properly or understand their significance. Many readers of this chapter pay attention only to two of the metaphors used by Paul: the foundation and the temple. Few know what it means to build with gold, silver, and precious stones or with wood, grass, and stubble. Therefore, for many readers today, this chapter is almost completely closed.

In reading the Bible many of us have the habit of trying

to understand it merely in a doctrinal way or in a theological way. However, when we read any portion of the Bible, we should try to understand it not theologically but experientially. We should seek to know how this portion of the Word relates to our experience with the Lord. Furthermore, in giving messages we need to present our message in an experiential way, not merely in a doctrinal way.

We have pointed out that chapters one and two of 1 Corinthians are deep and profound. These chapters even reveal the depths of God (2:10). Chapter three is also very profound. If Paul had not written this chapter in a metaphorical way, he probably would have needed several more chapters to present what was within him.

As we read this chapter we should not only seek to understand the language; we should also look at all the pictures portrayed in it. Paul's word about God's farm, a cultivated land, is not only a metaphor, but also a picture. As we consider what it means for the church to be God's farm, we can visualize plowing, sowing, planting, watering, growing, producing, and harvesting. To consider the matter in this way is to look at the picture conveyed by the metaphors used by Paul.

In reading this chapter, we should not take things for granted. Rather, we should ask what it means to lay another foundation. We should also inquire what is the significance of gold, silver, and precious stones, and what is the meaning of the wood, grass, and stubble. For example, when we read Paul's word about not laying another foundation in the light of the background of the Corinthians, we shall realize that Paul means not to lay Greek philosophy or culture as a foundation. It also implies that we should not make our opinions, preferences, or choices a foundation. A brother may say that he is burdened to go to a certain place. That burden, however, may simply be that brother's personal taste or preference. In reading this chapter we should be serious and desire to understand what Paul means by all the different metaphors. We must find the proper interpretation of these figures.

I. WITH WOOD, GRASS, AND STUBBLE

A. Natural Things, Either Fleshly or Soulish

Wood, grass, and stubble signify the knowledge, realization, and attainments which come from the believers' background (such as Judaism or other religions, philosophy, or culture) and the natural way of living (which is mostly in the soul and is the natural life). Wood may be in contrast to gold, signifying the nature of the natural man; grass may be in contrast to silver, signifying the fallen man, the man of the flesh (1 Pet. 1:24), unredeemed by Christ; and stubble may be in contrast to precious stones, signifying the work and living which issues from an earthen source, without any transformation by the Holy Spirit. All these worthless materials are the product of the believers' natural man together with what they have collected from their background. In God's economy these materials are fit only to be burned (v. 13).

B. Wood

Specifically and practically, wood here refers to the human nature of the Greeks. By nature the Greeks are very philosophical. I believe they even philosophized concerning Christ. Thus, wood refers to their nature, their natural makeup. In the same principle, wood denotes what we are according to our natural makeup. For example, the Chinese have an ethical nature. This is their "wood." We should not build the church with wood. This means that we should not build it with our nature, with our natural makeup.

C. Grass

We have pointed out that grass signifies the unredeemed man of the flesh. Wood signifies the nature of the Greeks, whereas grass signifies the natural man of the Greeks. To build the church with grass is to build it with what we are in our natural being. For example, the leader of the Brethren assembly I attended in Chefoo was a very slow and steady person. He always walked slowly,

carefully, and deliberately. Once in teaching the Bible he said that God always does things slowly. Because of the influence of this leader, almost everyone in that assembly learned to be slow. When they came into the area of the meeting hall, they walked very slowly. Furthermore, all the prayers in the meetings were offered in a very slow way. That entire Brethren assembly was according to the natural being of the leader. This is an illustration of what it means to build the church with grass.

To build with grass is to build with what we are and with what we prefer. Suppose a particular person has a strong preference for speaking in tongues. To seek to promote tongues-speaking is to build with grass. Whenever we build according to what we are in our natural being or according to our natural preference, we build with grass.

D. Stubble

Stubble signifies the work and living which issue from an earthen source. Stubble is altogether without life. To build with stubble is even worse than building with wood and grass. Jealousy, strife, envy, gossip, and criticism are all aspects of stubble. Philosophical people are usually very critical. The more they think in a philosophical way, the more they criticize others. Such criticism is stubble.

It is very difficult among Christians today to find the proper building materials. Where can you find gold, silver, and precious stones? However, there is an abundance of wood, grass, and stubble. Everywhere we can see the natural makeup, the natural being, and even such things as jealousy, envy, strife, hatred, murmuring, and complaining. In almost any Christian group you can find wood, grass, stubble; that is, you can find the building according to the natural makeup, the natural being, and the characteristics of earthly living. In particular, in 1 Corinthians 3 wood, grass, and stubble refer to the Greek nature, the Greek being, and the evil of the Greek way of living, especially as these things were expressed among the believers in Corinth.

In chapter three Paul charges the saints not to lay

anything or anyone other than Christ as the unique foundation. This means that we must not exalt anyone or anything in place of Christ. If we exalt someone or something instead of Christ, we lay another foundation. Paul also charges us to take heed how we build upon Christ as the unique foundation. The Corinthians were not to build with their Greek nature, their Greek self, or their Greek jealousy, strife, and criticism. In other words, they were not to build the church with anything Greek.

About fifty years ago there was a prevailing trend among many Christians in China to remove from the Christian churches there any trace of Western culture. The desire of those in this movement was to have everything in the church according to native Chinese culture. They even wanted the chapels and church buildings to be constructed in a native way instead of in a Western way. The Christians in this movement appreciated the Bible, but they rejected the culture brought over by the missionaries. Their goal was to make their church Chinese in every way. The church, however, should be neither Western nor Chinese. It should simply be Christian. This means that the church should be built with Christ in every way and in every aspect. Everything related to the church must be Christ.

Although the church should be built with Christ and Christ alone, virtually every denomination and Christian group seeks to be "native" or natural in some way. To have a native denomination or group is to build with our natural makeup and being, no matter what these may be. Some may desire a church according to the German nature, others according to the French makeup, and still others according to the Chinese constitution. This is to build the church according to what we are and what we do in our natural life, makeup, and being.

Many years ago I was invited to visit a place in England which was famous for the spirituality among the people there. I stayed for a month, and I did find some genuine spirituality. However, what I saw more was their emphasis on the British way of doing things. They unconsciously intended to make others British and even

exerted control over places far away. On two occasions the leader of this group came to Taiwan at our invitation to minister to us. His first visit was wonderful and very profitable. However, his second visit was quite damaging, for he sought to impose on the saints certain British habits and customs. For example, during a time of fellowship he remarked, "Why do you brothers who are servicemen put on your caps when you are still in the meeting hall? As soon as the meeting is dismissed, you put on your caps, even before you are outside the building." According to his opinion, the brothers were wrong in wearing their caps indoors. A certain brother tried to explain the custom among military personnel in the Far East, that it is not the practice for a soldier to remove his cap whether inside or outside. Nevertheless, the military brothers always remove their caps during a meeting. But as soon as the meeting is over, they put on their caps, not caring whether they are inside or outside the meeting hall. Nevertheless, this brother was very strong and asked, "Do you follow human customs, or do you follow the Bible?" After he responded in this way, I said to myself, "Brother, you are not fair. We definitely follow the Bible. According to the Bible, when a brother prays in a church meeting, he should not have any covering on his head. But there certainly is nothing wrong with putting a cap on one's head when he is still in the meeting hall. To claim that a soldier must wait until he is outside the hall is to follow your Western custom. In Britain this may be your practice. But it is unfair to accuse us of not following the Bible because we do not keep your custom in this matter."

Realizing the seriousness of using natural things to build up the church, I have earnestly endeavored, by the Lord's mercy, not to bring Chinese things into the Lord's recovery in this country. Moreover, I certainly do not want anything of what I am to influence the building of the church. None of us should build the church according to what we are in our natural being. We should not allow anything of our natural being to be put into the church. Concerning this we all need to look to the Lord for His

mercy. May the Lord have mercy on us that we will not build the church with what we are by nature. If the church expresses the natural makeup or natural being of the leading ones, this indicates that, at least to some extent, the church has been built with grass. Something of the unredeemed natural man has been put into the church. This is an element which has not been redeemed, terminated, and replaced by Christ. Although I was born a Chinese, I can testify that my desire is to be terminated and replaced. I do not want to build the church with grass, with what I am in my natural being. None of us should build with wood or grass, much less with the stubble of jealousy, strife, and criticism.

If we look at the situation among Christians today, we shall realize that Paul's word about wood, grass, and stubble is not a mere doctrine. We all must exercise our spirit, look to the Lord, and pray, "O Lord, have mercy on me that I would not build Your church with my natural makeup, with my natural being, or with anything of jealousy, strife, or envy. Lord, I want to build Your church with the gold of the Father's nature, with the silver of the cross which redeems, terminates, and replaces me, and with the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. I want to build the church in the mingled spirit where I experience the Father's nature and the Son's redemption, and eventually have the Spirit's transformation. Lord, I desire to build the church in this way."

Now we can understand Paul's concept concerning the proper materials used in building the church. In chapter three Paul was actually telling the Corinthian believers, "You are plants on God's farm. Now you need to grow Christ. The more you grow, the more you will become gold, silver, and precious stones for God's building. Do not lay any foundation other than Christ. Do not exalt anything, anyone, or any doctrine or practice. Simply build upon the all-inclusive Christ as the unique foundation already laid. But take heed not to build upon this Christ with anything Greek; rather build with the Father's nature and the Son's redemption which will result in the Spirit's

transformation. Then the church will be golden and full of silver and precious stones."

II. TO BE CONSUMED

In verse 15 Paul issues a word of warning: "If anyone's work shall be consumed, he shall suffer loss, but he shall be saved, yet so as through fire." The work of wood, grass, and stubble is fit only to be burned. This is the work which shall be consumed by the Lord's judging fire at His return.

III. TO SUFFER LOSS

When Paul says, "he shall suffer loss," he means loss of reward, not loss of salvation. To suffer loss here absolutely does not mean to perish. The salvation which we have received in Christ is not by our works (Titus 3:5) and is eternal, unchangeable in nature (Heb. 5:9; John 10:28-29). Hence, those believers whose Christian works will not be approved by the judging Lord and who will suffer the loss of reward will still be saved. God's salvation to all believers as a free gift is for eternity, whereas the Lord's reward to those whose Christian works are approved by Him is for the Kingdom age. The reward is an incentive for their Christian work, and it is not given to all believers.

Although those believers whose Christian works will not be approved by the Lord at His coming back will be saved, they will be saved so as through fire. Through fire surely indicates punishment. However, it is altogether not the purgatory heretically taught by Catholicism in its superstitious quoting of this verse. Nevertheless, this word should be a solemn warning to us today concerning our Christian works.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-EIGHT

BUILDING ON THE UNIQUE FOUNDATION

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:10-15

In 3:10 and 11 Paul says, "According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each one take heed how he builds upon it. For other foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is being laid, which is Jesus Christ." If we would have the proper and deep understanding of these verses, we need to know the background against which they were written. What was the situation among the Corinthians that caused Paul to say that, apart from Christ, there is no other foundation? The background was that the philosophical believers in Corinth were turning to their Greek culture, philosophy, and wisdom instead of Christ. In practice they were laying other foundations. Furthermore, according to their philosophical mentality, they appreciated various spiritual giants. To appreciate a certain person and prefer him is to make that person a foundation in place of Christ.

GOVERNED BY A VISION

Many Christian leaders and teachers quote Paul's word in 3:11 about not laying a foundation other than Christ. However, those who refer to this verse may not understand the background of Paul's word. Neither do they realize that they themselves may actually be laying another foundation. For some, the foundation is healing or speaking in tongues; for others, it is evangelism or missionary work. As we consider the situation among Christians today, we see that there is almost every kind of foundation imaginable. Almost anything can become a foundation in place of Christ as the unique foundation.

If we touch the depths of the truth in 3:11 and understand this verse according to its context and background, we shall see a vision of Christ as the unique foundation. This truth, this vision, will then govern and control us. Where there is no vision, people run wild (Prov. 29:18, lit.). Among the vast majority of Christians today, there is no governing vision of Christ as the unique foundation. Rather, many ministers and workers "run wild" to lay another foundation. On the one hand, many refer to Paul's word in 3:11 concerning Christ as the foundation; on the other hand, even while speaking of this verse, they are laying another foundation. This should warn us not to understand 3:11 merely in a doctrinal way.

EXPERIENTIAL TRUTHS

In these messages I have urged the saints again and again not to approach 1 Corinthians merely in a doctrinal way. Nevertheless, many are still able to take only the milk of doctrine, not the solid food of the deeper, experiential, and practical truths revealed in this book. If we read this Epistle and understand it only according to the black and white letters and do not care for the background, our understanding of it will not be very practical. On the contrary, it will be merely doctrine.

It is significant that Paul speaks of the unique foundation in 1 Corinthians, but not in his other Epistles. For example, because this was not part of the background of the Epistle to the Colossians, there is no word concerning it in that book. But the believers at Corinth were laying different foundations. Those philosophical believers were making different persons and practices foundations. This is related to Paul's word in 1:12: "Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." This indicates that one laid Apollos as a foundation, whereas others made Cephas or Paul their foundations. Some of the Corinthians laid a foundation of opinion or wisdom. Thus, among the believers at Corinth, there were many foundations. This background caused Paul to say, "Do not lay any foundation other than Christ.

As a wise master builder, I have already laid Christ as the unique foundation. When I came to you, I came with nothing except Christ. I warn you not to lay another foundation, but to build upon the foundation already laid. Furthermore, you must take heed how you build. Do not build with Greek culture, with your opinions or philosophy or with your appreciation or preference for any persons. To build with these materials is to build with wood, grass, and stubble." To understand 1 Corinthians in this way is to touch the depths of this book.

The problem in Corinth was that the Greek believers were exalting philosophy and spiritual giants. By doing this they were laying foundations other than Christ. To understand 3:11 in this way is to go beyond mere doctrine and grasp the practical significance of Paul's word. It is also to illustrate the doctrine by the actual situation among the believers. Knowing their situation, Paul seemed to be telling them, "Don't lay Greek culture or philosophy as a foundation. Neither should you exalt any person and make a person a foundation other than Christ." If we say that we are for immersion or for speaking in tongues, we are laying a foundation other than Christ. But according to 1:2 and 9, Christ is theirs and ours, and we have been called into the fellowship of Christ. This Christ, God's unique center and our unique portion, is the unique foundation.

BUILDING WITH PRECIOUS MATERIALS

In 3:10 Paul urges us to take heed how we build upon Christ as the unique foundation. The believers in Corinth were not to build with their Greek culture, philosophy, or makeup. To build in that way is to build with wood, grass, and stubble, not with gold, silver, and precious stones. What does it mean to build with these precious materials? We may say that it is to build with Christ Himself. But we need to go further and see that Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God. With the Triune God we have God the Father as the gold, the redemption of God the Son as the silver, and the transforming work of God the Spirit as

precious stones. As we have pointed out, in experience the precious stones are the totality of gold and silver. This means that the Spirit transforms us by means of the divine nature and the cross of Christ. To experience the transforming work of the Spirit is to undergo a metabolic change by the divine life within us.

PAUL'S BURDEN

Once again I wish to point out that chapters one, two, and three of this book are very deep. These chapters are not primarily doctrinal, but experiential. Paul did not compose these chapters with doctrine or theology as the basis. Rather, he composed them according to the actual situation and condition of the church in Corinth. We need to be deeply impressed with the fact that the situation among the believers there was that their living was pervaded by Greek culture, philosophy, and wisdom. They were altogether living according to the Greek way of life. Therefore, Paul was burdened to show them that this is not the way to have the Christian life, the church life, or the Body life. In God's economy the center must be Christ and Christ alone. We have been called into the fellowship of Christ, the Christ who is theirs and ours. This means that Christ is our unique portion, the portion of all those who believe in Him and call upon His name. Since Christ is our only portion, we should not have our own choices or preferences. We should not exalt anyone or anything other than Christ. Christ is the unique portion given to all the saints, and He is everything to us for our living. Christ is wisdom to us from God, our daily righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. This is the central thought concerning Christ in these few chapters.

In 2:10 Paul says, "For God has revealed them to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." Christ is God's depths, the depths of God's being. These depths can be realized and discerned not by our philosophical mind, but only by our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Spirit of God. By means of the

mingled spirit alone can we discern the depths of God, the different aspects of Christ as our portion for our enjoyment.

GROWING AND BUILDING

Based upon the revelation given in chapters one and two, Paul in chapter three points out to the Corinthians that God's goal is to have a building, the temple, for His habitation. It is not God's intention to have a group of wise men or philosophers. God's goal is to have the church. This church must be a building, called the temple, for God's habitation. In order to reach this goal, God must have the church first as a farm to grow the materials for the building. Through the process of growth on the farm, the building comes into existence. This building is God's temple.

In chapter three Paul seems to be saying, "You Corinthian believers should no longer seek to be wise. Instead, you should be plants growing on God's farm. There is no need for you to philosophize so much. You should be simple and know nothing except Christ. Then you will grow in Him and with Him, and you will even grow Him. Eventually, in your growth, you will be transformed and become the gold, silver, and precious stones as the materials for the building up of God's temple. Your urgent need today is not to philosophize--it is to grow. It is not to exercise your mind so much, but to remain continually in your spirit, where the Spirit of God dwells. Here, in the spirit, you will absorb Christ. Christ will then become your nourishment, and you will grow with Him and become precious materials for God's building. You don't need to philosophize--you simply need to grow and build. But when you build, do not lay another foundation. Christ, the unique foundation, has already been laid. You should not make Paul, Cephas, or Apollos or any aspect of Greek culture or philosophy your foundation. Put all these persons and things aside, and simply build on Christ as the unique foundation. I have ministered Christ to you, and now you need to build upon Him. But you need to build with gold, silver, and precious

stones, not with your nature, your being, or your doings."

Wood refers to our nature, our natural makeup, grass to our being, and stubble to our doings. We should never use our nature, our being, or our doings to build the church. Instead, we must renounce all these things and reject them. For the proper building we need to enjoy, experience, and possess the nature of God the Father and the redemptive work of the Son. As we experience the Father and the Son in this way, we shall be in our spirit with the Spirit of God. Spontaneously the outcome, the issue, will be precious stones. If we build with gold, silver, and precious stones, we shall build with the proper materials on Christ as the only foundation.

OUR WORK TO BE TESTED BY FIRE

In 3:13-15 Paul says, "The work of each shall become manifest; for the day shall make it known, because it is revealed by fire, and the fire itself will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built upon it shall remain, he shall receive a reward. If anyone's work shall be consumed, he shall suffer loss, but he shall be saved, yet so as through fire." When the Lord Jesus comes back, our building work will be tested by His holy fire. Only the gold, silver, and precious stones will be able to withstand the fire and pass this test. Anything of wood, grass, or stubble will be consumed. If our work is able to pass the test of fire, we shall receive a reward. According to the teaching of the New Testament, this reward will be the enjoyment of the coming kingdom. To the faithful ones the Lord Jesus will say, "Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things; enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matt. 25:21, 23). However, if our work is consumed by the fire, we shall suffer loss. This definitely does not mean that we shall lose our salvation. Our salvation is eternal and cannot be lost. But these verses indicate that we may lose the reward and yet be saved through fire. This is a serious warning.

APPLYING PAUL'S WORD

We need to apply Paul's word about taking heed how we build on the unique foundation to the situation among Christians today. It is very common to find Christians doing one of two things: laying another foundation in place of Christ, or building with wood, grass, and stubble, that is, with their nature, their being, and their doings. Thousands of foundations have been laid by Christians. Virtually every Christian group has its own kind of foundation. It is very common for Christian workers to lay other foundations. For example, a certain leader and his co-workers may form a particular organization. In doing so they are laying another foundation.

It is also common for Christians today to build with wood, grass, and stubble. The result is that the Lord does not get the proper building. Thus, there is no way for Him to come back. Nevertheless, one day He will come back. Do you think that when the Lord Jesus comes back most believers will have a large amount of gold, silver, and precious stones? I do not believe this. The precious materials will, no doubt, be small in quantity. But there will certainly be a vast amount of wood, grass, and stubble. Among today's Christians there is an abundance of natural things, but very little of the precious materials suitable for God's building. Therefore, at the time of the Lord's coming back to test our work, many will suffer loss. Some, however, will be rewarded.

I earnestly hope that you will not take these messages merely in a doctrinal way. It is not adequate to learn all the points and then repeat them. What is needed is that we digest the messages and have our eyes opened to see the revelation in these chapters. Then we shall be able to utter something in a way that is experiential and practical. We desperately need to see that God's goal is to have the church. First the church must be God's farm with all the believers as plants growing in life to produce Christ. Eventually, by the growth in life we shall be transformed and become precious materials--gold, silver, and precious stones--for God's building.

We all must heed the warning of not to lay another foundation. Christ, the unique foundation, has already been laid. In the Lord's recovery we already have the proper foundation. Hence, there is no need to initiate anything or to have a new start. Furthermore, we should not exalt anyone or have a preference for anything. Instead, we must take Christ, the all-inclusive One, as the foundation and build on Him, not with our nature, being, or doings, but with the nature of God, the redemptive work of the Son, and the transforming work of the Spirit of God. If by the mingled spirit we build with these precious materials, we shall be carrying on a proper work for the Lord's recovery. As a result, when the Lord comes back, our work will pass the test, and we shall receive the reward to enjoy the coming kingdom. If our work is done in Christ, with Christ, for Christ, and is even Christ Himself, it will pass the test of fire. Otherwise, if we build with material that can be consumed, we shall lose the reward. Oh, may we all see this truth! This will bring us into the depths of the Lord's recovery. It will cause us to realize where we are and to know that the recovery is not an ordinary Christian work or a repetition of the history of Christianity. The Lord's recovery is to bring us back to Christ, the depths of God, that God may have the building. Let us all look to the Lord that we may receive mercy to see this marvelous vision.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-NINE

FEEDING, DRINKING, EATING, PLANTING, WATERING, AND GROWING

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:1-9

In chapter three of 1 Corinthians there are many precious things and many unusual expressions. This chapter is unique; no chapter in the Bible can replace it.

In verse 1 Paul says, "And I, brothers, was not able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshy, as to infants in Christ." Here Paul speaks a very strong word. He refers to the Corinthians not merely as fleshly (v. 3), but even as fleshy. Fleshy is a stronger expression than fleshly, and refers to aspects of the flesh that are more gross. Fleshy denotes being made of flesh; fleshly denotes being influenced by the nature of the flesh and partaking of the character of the flesh. Paul could not speak to them as to spiritual, but as to those who were fleshy, infants in Christ. He was very strong with the believers at Corinth. If we were to speak such a strong word to the saints today, many would no doubt be offended and refuse to listen any further.

SIX CRUCIAL MATTERS

My burden in this message is to cover several crucial expressions used by Paul in this chapter. In verse 2 he says, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food." To give milk to drink or food to eat is to feed others. The King James Version renders the first part of verse 2 this way: "I have fed you with milk." Feeding refers to the matter of life and differs from teaching, which refers to knowledge. Paul seemed to be teaching the Corinthians; actually he was feeding them. The first crucial expression in this chapter is

feeding. To feed others is very pleasant. A mother, for example, is pleased to feed her children. Likewise, Paul's desire was to feed the Corinthian believers not only with milk, but also with solid food.

In verse 2, milk is for drinking and solid food is for eating. Hence, the thought of feeding expressed here automatically implies drinking and eating. Before you came into the church life, you may have been a Christian for years, yet you had never heard a message on drinking. If we would be proper Christians, we must be drinking Christians. Drinking is a basic thought in the book of 1 Corinthians. In 12:13 Paul says that we have all been made to drink of one Spirit. This concept of drinking was not invented by Paul. The Lord Jesus speaks of drinking in John 4 and also in John 7. In John 4:14 He says to the Samaritan woman, "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." According to John 7:37, the Lord Jesus, on the last day of the feast of tabernacles, stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink." Thus, Christ speaks of drinking, and Paul also speaks of drinking. All Christians should be those who enjoy spiritual drinking.

Which is more vital to maintaining human life, eating or drinking? The answer is that drinking is even more important than eating. We can go several days without eating, but we cannot go nearly as long without drinking. Furthermore, during the course of a day, we drink more often than we eat. We may eat just three times a day, but we may drink twelve times a day. Medical doctors advise us to drink a glass of water many times a day. Although spiritual drinking is vital to the Christian life, this matter is almost wholly neglected by Christians today.

Paul's reference to solid food in verse 2 surely implies eating. Therefore, along with feeding and drinking, Paul stresses the importance of eating.

In verses 6, 7, and 8 Paul speaks of planting. In particular, he says of himself, "I planted." Paul was not only a feeder; he was also a planter. We are told that Paul

fed the saints, giving them something to eat and drink, and that he also planted, but we are not told in this chapter that Paul was a teacher.

With the planting we have the watering and the growth. Verses 6 and 7 say, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God made to grow; so that neither is the one who plants anything nor the one who waters, but the One Who makes to grow, God." Thus, in the first seven verses of this chapter, we have six wonderful matters: feeding, drinking, eating, planting, watering, and growing. What a marvelous chapter! Can you find any other chapter in the Word which covers these six matters? I do not believe that there is another chapter in the whole Bible which covers these six things. Regarding this, 1 Corinthians 3 is unique. In a very brief way, in the span of just seven verses, Paul covers six wonderful matters. In a practical and experiential way, he refers to feeding, drinking, eating, planting, watering, and growing.

A PLACE FOR FEEDING

Have you been feeding others in the church life? In order to feed others, we must first be fed ourselves. The church is a place not primarily for teaching, but for feeding. Hence, we should not regard the church as a school, but as a dining hall, even as a restaurant. If others are bothered by the fact that you attend so many church meetings each week and wonder what you do in the meetings, you could say, "The church is a restaurant, and I go there so often because I need to eat." In the church restaurant, we should feed others and be fed ourselves.

As I give messages in the ministry, I do not have the feeling that I am teaching others or preaching. It is not my intention to be a preacher or teacher. On the contrary, my desire is to be a steward, a waiter. I want to wait on the saints and serve them with Christ. I am not the cook, for the heavenly cook, the Lord Himself, is behind the scene. I am simply a serving one who takes one delicious dish after another and serves it to the saints.

The church meetings should be like a Chinese feast of

many courses. If a friend invites you to a Chinese restaurant for a feast, be prepared to enjoy one course after another. In some feasts there may be as many as twenty different courses including various meats, fish, fowl, vegetables, and soups. The church should be a restaurant where we continually feast on Christ. Christ is the unique diet served in the church restaurant. In this restaurant we enjoy the best food, for every dish is an aspect of Christ Himself.

DRINKING AND BREATHING

The way to drink is to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. By calling on the Lord's name, we both drink of Him and breathe Him in. Calling on the Lord includes both breathing and drinking. The water we drink is in the air we breathe. The spiritual humidity in the church life is very high, for there is no dryness in the church. Whenever we breathe in the spiritual air by calling, "O Lord Jesus," we also partake of the water that is in the air. Thus, our breathing eventually becomes our drinking. This means that whenever we breathe, we also drink.

Much of the time there is no need to call aloud in order to drink. Very quietly we can say, "O Lord Jesus." Sometimes it is sufficient simply to say, "Lord," and at other times just to say, "O." Some may regard this as superstitious. However, from years of experience, I can testify that by calling on the name of the Lord I am refreshed, strengthened, and comforted. If I did not breathe and drink the Lord in this way, I would be very dry and thirsty. Furthermore, my daily life would be quite boring, altogether lacking in refreshment. But simply by saying, "O Lord Jesus," I am refreshed.

Those who are well educated or who are professional people may think that calling on the name of the Lord is not for them, but only for those who are young, inexperienced, or uneducated. But drinking is for everyone. If you do not drink in the Lord by calling on Him, you will experience dryness and boredom. Oh, we all need to drink of the Lord Jesus day by day!

As an elderly person, I have passed through a great many different experiences in human life. Many unpleasant things have happened to me. There is no such thing as a life without difficulties. As the line from a hymn says, "God hath not promised skies always blue" (*Hymns*, #720). But although I have passed through many situations of unhappiness and unpleasantness, I have been a happy person because I have the Lord Jesus. Even the demons can testify that I am happy in the Lord. I do not have the Lord Jesus merely in an objective way as the One in the heavens. My Christ is both in the heavens and also in me. Hallelujah, Christ lives in me, and I can breathe Him, drink of Him, and feast upon Him! Daily I enjoy the best breathing, drinking, and eating.

If you breathe in the Lord, drink of Him, and eat Him, you will not only be nourished, but you will also be healed. Yes, partaking of the Lord in this way can actually heal us. This can even make us stronger physically, for the happiness and joy we experience by calling on the Lord can affect our health positively. Many doctors recognize that it is healthy to be joyful. Thus, we all need to be breathing, drinking, and eating Christians. We should be Christians who feed on the Lord and who also feed others with Him.

PLANTING AND WATERING

As believers, we should also be those who plant and water. From reading verses 6 and 7, we may get the impression that only certain ones like Paul and Apollos can plant and water. But we should not think that only the leading ones or those who share in the ministry of the Word can do the planting and the watering. No, everyone of us should both plant and water.

Some saints may have the concept that we are either planters or waterers, but not both planters and waterers. A brother who does the work of planting may feel that he should not water what he has planted, regarding that as the work of another brother. He may think of himself as the planter and suppose that someone else should do the

watering. To view the matter of planting and watering this way is to be according to our natural concept. If we turn to our spirit and exercise our spirit, we shall not care whether we are a planter or a waterer. Instead, we shall simply carry on the work of planting and watering.

Some may not water other believers because they are afraid that they will damage them by watering them too much. However, it is better to make a mistake and cause some damage than to not water others at all. Although you may make some mistakes, you will help many others to grow in the Lord. I encourage you all both to plant and to water.

THE GREATEST NEED

Although feeding, drinking, eating, planting, and watering are all important, the greatest need is growth. We can plant and water, but God alone makes to grow. As far as the growth in life is concerned, God is everything. Because only God can make to grow, in our feeding, planting, and watering, we must be one with the Triune God. This means that we need to carry on the feeding, the planting, and the watering in the organic union with the Lord. Then, whenever we feed, He will also feed. He will feed in our feeding. The same should be true of our planting and watering. Before I give a message, I desperately pray, "Lord, speak in my speaking. Lord, cause me to be one spirit with You in my speaking in a very practical way." Then I can have the full assurance that while I am speaking, He is speaking also. I have the boldness to declare that I am one spirit with the Lord and that He is now one spirit with me. Without Him, whatever I speak will amount to nothing.

I may plant and water, but I have neither the ability nor the substance to cause others to grow. Growth comes from God alone. Whenever He comes in, He causes us to grow. Although only God can make to grow, He Himself will do neither the planting nor the watering. He will not plant or water apart from us, just as He will not appear and speak to the saints directly. Instead, He speaks to others in our speaking. This means that God must have a

man to cooperate with Him for speaking, planting, and watering. When we plant and water, He will also plant and water. How wonderful that we are not serving a dumb idol, but are serving the living God! In our service, He serves the saints.

I do not trust in my speaking. My speaking in itself does not carry any weight. However, I often have the assurance that when I open my mouth to speak, He speaks also. Through my speaking, He flows forth into the saints. My trust is altogether in the Lord's speaking in my speaking. My only secret is the Triune God Himself. Apart from the Triune God, I am nothing. If it were not for Him, I would die.

We all first need to enjoy the Lord by breathing, drinking, and eating. There are many ways to drink of Him and also many ways to eat Him. We can partake of the Lord by pray-reading, by attending the meetings, and by having fellowship with the saints. We can also receive the life supply by reading certain spiritual books. There are many ways to enjoy the Lord. The more we enjoy Him, the more we shall be saturated with Him. Then we shall have the burden to feed others, to plant, and to water. If we are one with the Lord in our feeding, planting, and the watering, the Lord will come in spontaneously to cause others to grow in life.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY

GOD'S FARM AND GOD'S BUILDING

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:1-17

After referring to feeding, drinking, eating, planting, watering, and growing, Paul says in 3:9, "You are God's farm, God's building." Paul could say that he planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the growth because the believers are God's farm. Literally the Greek word rendered farm means cultivated land. The believers who have been regenerated in Christ with God's life are God's cultivated land, a farm in God's new creation to grow Christ. As those who have believed in Christ and received Him, we are no longer like land that is uncultivated or wild. We are not people whom God has not touched. Rather, God has sown something into us, and we have been touched and cultivated by Him. Now we are God's farm growing Christ.

The concept of sowing, cultivating, and growing is strongly emphasized in the Bible. The Lord Jesus Himself used the figure of a sower. In Matthew 13:3 He says, "Behold, the sower went out to sow." We know from Matthew 13:37 that the Lord is the Sower: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man." The seed sown by Him is also Himself. It is the Lord in the Word. This seed is God Himself. The Lord Jesus came as a Sower to sow God into us. We are the earth, the ground, the cultivated land, the farm, to grow God.

In the foregoing message we pointed out that the church is a restaurant. Now we are saying that the church is a farm. There is, of course, no contradiction here, for the church has many aspects. As the place for growing produce, the church is a farm. But as a place where the

produce is prepared and served as our food, the church is a restaurant.

GROWING AND BUILDING

In verse 9 Paul says that we are both God's farm and God's building. There seems to be no logical connection between the farm and the building. What does the farm have to do with the building? No one has ever seen a building constructed of fruit and vegetables grown on a farm. Nevertheless, the church as God's farm produces the material for His building.

As Christians, we are growing Christ. Now we must ask ourselves whether or not we have been built. Many of us may hesitate to say that we have been truly built up to become God's building. If the saints were asked about this, most of them may reply that they have been built to a certain extent. Actually, this is the right answer. With a spiritual building, a building in life, the true building is the growth in life. The extent to which we have been built is the extent to which we have grown.

Growing here refers to growing foodstuffs. To grow is also to increase. For example, a certain brother may have weighed only seven pounds at birth, but now he weighs one hundred seventy pounds. This is growth in the second meaning of the word. To be built up in the church is to grow in the sense of increasing with Christ to have a certain stature. The increase of Christ is our stature. To be built into the spiritual building does not first mean to be connected with others. It means to have our natural life reduced and to have Christ increased within us. The more our natural life is reduced and the more Christ increases within us, the easier it will be for us to coordinate with others. In fact, we shall be able to coordinate with anyone. However, some saints have told me that they cannot move from their locality because they have been built with certain saints in the church there. According to their concept, because they have been built together with these ones, it is not possible for them to leave that locality. This is not real building. On the contrary, it is friendship or

some kind of social relationship. If you have truly been built into the church, you have been reduced, and Christ has been increased in you. Then, wherever you may be, you can be one with the saints and coordinate with them. Once you have been built into God's spiritual building, you can never be taken out of it.

As the church, we are God's farm and God's building. The farm is for the building. Whatever is produced on the farm and by the farm is for the building.

THE UNIQUE FOUNDATION

A building requires a foundation. Therefore, in 3:10 and 11 Paul speaks of the foundation of God's building: "According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each one take heed how he builds upon it. For other foundation no one is able to lay besides that which is being laid, which is Jesus Christ." Christ, the unique foundation, has already been laid. This foundation has been established not only for the time of the apostles, but for eternity. However, during the past nineteen centuries, many Christian workers have tried to lay other foundations. Every denomination and group has its own particular foundation. Among Christians today there are thousands of foundations.

LAYING OTHER FOUNDATIONS

We need to understand Paul's word about Christ as the foundation according to the context of the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians. In these chapters Paul seems to be saying, "When you Corinthians declare that you are of Apollos, Cephas, or Paul, you are laying another foundation. Whenever you say that you are of someone or something, you are laying a foundation." Preferences and choices are actually foundations. For instance, someone may prefer immersion. This is a foundation. Someone else may like to have the Lord's table with unleavened bread. This also is a foundation. Those who prefer immersion may not accept those who do not practice immersion. The result

is division. A division is always caused by laying a foundation other than Christ Himself. We may even lay another foundation by having preferences of local churches. Someone may say that he does not like the church in his locality and wants to move elsewhere. Even this is to lay a foundation. According to our concept, we have the freedom to choose a local church which matches our preference. We may prefer a particular church because that church suits our taste. To have preferences and choices with respect to churches is to lay another foundation. This is an accurate explanation of Paul's word in 3:10 and 11.

There is a direct connection between verses 4 and 11. This connection becomes apparent when we trace Paul's thought backward from verse 11 to verse 4. According to verse 11, Christ is the unique foundation. The fact that this verse begins with the word "for" indicates that it is an explanation of the foregoing verse. As we trace this connection backwards, we eventually come to the matter of the planters and the waterers being one (v. 8). In verse 7 Paul says, "So that neither is the one who plants anything nor the one who waters, but the One Who makes to grow, God." As far as the growth in life is concerned, the ministers of Christ are nothing, and God is everything. In verses 5 and 6 we see that Paul, the one who planted, and Apollos, the one who watered, are simply ministers through whom the Corinthians believed. Therefore, the Corinthians should not prefer one or the other. As Paul says in verse 4, "For whenever one says, I am of Paul, and another, I of Apollos, are you not men?" The connection between verses 4 and 11 is this: Saying that we are of a certain person is to lay another foundation. To belong to someone other than Christ is to lay a foundation besides Christ. Those who said, "I am of Paul," were laying Paul as a foundation, and those who declared, "I belong to Apollos," were laying him as a foundation. In principle, the same is true of all those who prefer a certain doctrine, practice, or person. Those who are for immersion lay immersion as a foundation. This separates them from other believers and divides them from those believers.

Since the time of the apostles, many Christian leaders and teachers have laid special foundations. These foundations have been factors of division. Christians today are divided by the different kinds of foundations. Although we in the Lord's recovery do not lay other foundations in an outward way, we may still have our preferences. For example, someone may say to himself, "I prefer a certain elder in my local church. Whenever I need to talk to an elder about a matter, I prefer to go to him. I do not like to speak to the other elders. This elder is my choice, my preference." This is actually to say, "I am of this elder." As we have pointed out, this is to lay a foundation other than Christ. To lay a foundation besides Christ Himself ruins the Body life and damages God's building. In other words, this is not the building up of the church; it is the tearing down of the church.

NO PREFERENCES

When the Corinthians said that they were of Paul, of Apollos, or of Cephas, they were destroying the building; they were damaging the temple of God. This should be a strong warning to us not to have preferences of persons or practices or choices of place. Whenever a saint moves from one local church to another, this should be purely according to the Lord's leading. There should be no other motive. If someone moves because the church in his locality is not according to his taste, or because a certain elder is not pleasing to him, or because he does not feel happy with certain brothers and sisters, that person is laying another foundation. This is division. It definitely is not the building. As we have seen, the true building is to become reduced in our natural life and to have Christ increased within us. If this is our situation, we shall not have any preferences. If the Lord leads us to a place which is rather difficult, we shall praise Him for those hardships, knowing that they will cause us to be reduced even more and will create more room in our being for Christ. Then we shall have real growth, and we shall be happy with the church life.

Suppose the church in your locality is a hardship to you. Furthermore, suppose the elders do not seem happy with anyone. What would you do? Would you move to a locality where, according to your impression, the church life is better? Will you want to go to a place where the elders are happy and the church does not present any hardships to you? If you make this choice apart from the Lord's leading, you will be acting according to your preference. I hope that all the saints, young and old alike, will realize that such preferences should have no place in the Lord's recovery.

Even to criticize the church in your locality is to lay another foundation. To criticize is to be divisive and to bring in destruction. It is to tear down the building. When some saints hear this word, they may say, "This is not fair. You don't know how poor the church is in my locality. If you were to visit the church here, you would agree with me." No, I would not criticize your local church. On the contrary, if I were to be in that locality, I would lovingly embrace the church there.

Suppose you live in a very large family consisting of five brothers and six sisters. Some of your brothers and sisters are wise, but others are foolish. Some are kind, but others are coarse. Will you reject the foolish ones and the coarse ones and care only for the wise ones and the nice ones? No, you must love and receive all your brothers and sisters. They all are the offspring of your parents. In the same principle, all the brothers and sisters in the church life are children of God the Father. We should not find fault with them or criticize them, for they have been born of God. We have no right to love certain ones more than others. Furthermore, we should not have any preferences or choices among them. Just as our family is uniquely one, so the church is uniquely one. Therefore, we should not seek our own preferences.

What I have been speaking in this message is according to Paul's word in the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians. Chapter three is based upon chapters one and two. In these chapters Paul seems to be saying, "You believers at

Corinth have your preferences. Some prefer me, others prefer Apollos, and still others prefer Cephas. You also have preferences regarding culture, for certain of you prefer Judaism, whereas others have a preference for Greek culture and philosophy. You have preferences in persons, matters, and things. You need to see that to have a preference is to lay a foundation. But no foundation can be laid other than the foundation which has already been laid--Jesus Christ. When I was among you, I laid the unique foundation, and this foundation is Christ Himself. I came to you with the determination not to know anything except Christ and this One crucified. Only this Christ is the foundation. The foundation cannot be Judaism, Greek philosophy, Cephas, Apollos, Paul, or any other person. Paul and Apollos are nothing; we are nobodies. Both the one who plants and the one who waters are nothing. The only One who is something is God, who gives the growth." This is the meaning of Paul's word concerning Christ as the unique foundation.

GENUINE BUILDING

I hope that all the saints in the Lord's recovery will see that we are God's farm to grow Christ and also God's building, His dwelling place. We need the genuine building. To have this building we must grow by having ourselves reduced and by having Christ increased within us. The result of this genuine growth and building is that we do not have preferences for any person, matter, or thing. It also means that we do not have any choice of place. We are happy simply to be members in the Lord's Body, growing in Christ. If this is our condition, then wherever we may be, we shall coordinate with all the saints, no matter whether they are kind or coarse. The real building is to have ourselves reduced and to have Christ increased until we arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

In 3:10 Paul warns us to take heed how we build on the foundation already laid. We should not build with wood, grass, or stubble, but with gold, silver, and precious stones.

These materials involve transformation. What the farm grows is of the plant life, but what is needed for the building is not plants, but minerals. Only minerals can be used for God's building. In order to have the minerals, there must be transformation. The plant life must be transformed into minerals. Thus, in chapter three we have the concepts of the farm, the building, and transformation. In verse 17 we also have the concept of the temple of God.

As we consider all these things, we shall realize that 1 Corinthians is a precious book, a book filled with treasures. At the same time, this book deals with many complications related to the church life. Praise the Lord for what we have seen of the feeding, the drinking, the eating, the planting, the watering, and the growing! We are also thankful for what we have seen regarding the farm, the building, the foundation, transformation, and the temple of God. First Corinthians, a book of both treasures and complications, corresponds to our present condition and situation. This book is urgently needed by Christians today. All believers need to see what is revealed in this Epistle.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE

TRANSFORMATION FOR THE BUILDING

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:10-17; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; Rom. 12:2

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul covers the matters of feeding, drinking, eating, planting, watering, and growing. These are all related to life. In 3:9 Paul goes on to refer to the church as God's farm and God's building. The farm certainly is a matter of life, and the building is the issue of life. No material building involves anything of life. But the spiritual building mentioned in this chapter has much to do with life. Paul talks about this building not only in 1 Corinthians, but also in Ephesians, Colossians, and Romans. However, the basic points regarding the building are covered in 1 Corinthians. God's building is altogether a building in life and of life, for it is the building up of the Body of Christ.

THE FARM AND THE BUILDING

Apparently, there is no connection between the farm and the building. According to our natural concept, a farm is a matter of life, but a building is a composition of lifeless materials. Thus, there does not seem to be a proper continuation between the expressions God's farm and God's building. However, if we realize that the building here is a life building, a building in life, we shall see that there is a direct connection, an excellent continuation, between the farm and the building. Whatever is produced on the farm is not for the farm itself; it is for the building. The produce grown on the farm is for the building.

Although the produce grown on the farm is for the building, it does not go into the building directly. Rather, we may say that it goes to the church restaurant to be eaten, digested, and assimilated by the saints. Through

this process, what is grown on the farm is consumed by the saints and eventually even becomes them.

The farm produces not only vegetables, the plant life, but also livestock, the animal life. Both the plant life and the animal life must be eaten by us in the church restaurant. In 3:2 Paul says, "I gave you milk to drink." Milk is a product of both the plant life and the animal life. It is produced by cows, which feed on grass. Milk is a product of the mingling of the animal life with the plant life. This mingling of two lives also produces meat. Without the animal life, we cannot have meat. Likewise, without the plant life, we also cannot have meat, for cattle are dependent on the grass for their food. First they eat the vegetable life and then produce milk and meat for us.

I mention this because both milk and meat are figures of Christ as our life supply. In John 6:48 the Lord Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." Bread is made primarily of flour, which comes from the plant life. However, the Lord goes on to speak of the bread as His flesh: "And the bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). This indicates that the composition of this bread is not only of the vegetable life, but also of the animal life; it is flesh-bread. Therefore, it is difficult to say whether Christ as our life supply is of the vegetable life or the animal life. This bread is a product, a mingling, of both lives.

The more we eat of Christ as our life supply, the more we shall be transferred into God's building. First we are the farm to produce something to eat. By eating what is produced on the farm we are brought into the building.

A METABOLIC PROCESS

In order for the food we eat to become our constitution, there must be the process of metabolism. In the Bible this process is called transformation. Transformation involves a metabolic change. Hence, transformation is altogether a metabolic process. First we eat a meal. After a period of

time, the food is digested and assimilated. Eventually, the digested and assimilated food becomes the fibers of our being. This is metabolism, transformation.

In order for an infant of seven pounds to grow into a mature man weighing one hundred seventy pounds, there must be a regular eating and a normal process of metabolism. Gradually, the food taken in by an infant will cause him to grow. Eventually, as a result of a metabolic process over a long period of time, he will become a full-grown man. As a mature man, he is a product, a composition, of all the food he has eaten, digested, and assimilated. This illustrates the process of spiritual metabolism. The produce grown on the farm is eaten and digested by us. Eventually, through the process of metabolism, this food supply becomes us and transforms us into material for the building up of the Body of Christ.

The church is a farm to grow Christ. Every item of the produce grown on the farm is Christ. The farm produce includes many different aspects of Christ. Christ is the milk, the vegetables, and the meat. The church grows Christ, and all the saints eat Christ. Eventually, through digestion, assimilation, and metabolism, Christ becomes us, and we become Him. Then we are the proper materials for the building.

Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 3 has a direct connection from item to item. First he refers to feeding, drinking, and eating. Then he goes on to mention planting and watering, after which he tells us that it is God alone who gives the growth. Following this, he says in verse 9 that we are the farm and the building. Therefore, there is a direct connection between all these matters. As we have seen, the farm becomes the building.

BUILDING ON THE UNIQUE FOUNDATION

In verses 10 and 11 Paul speaks directly and explicitly concerning Christ as the foundation: "According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation, but another builds upon it. But let each one take heed how he builds upon it. For other foundation

no one is able to lay besides that which is being laid, which is Jesus Christ." Here Paul indicates that he had already laid Christ as the unique foundation. In this universe there is just one foundation, and we should not lay another. We must not say that we are of a certain person or a certain thing, that we prefer a certain matter, or that we choose a certain locality for the church life. To speak in this way is to lay another foundation in addition to Christ. Instead of laying another foundation, we need to build upon the foundation already laid.

In today's Christianity there are many other foundations, but there is virtually no building upon the foundation already laid. The Lord's recovery must be altogether different. In the recovery we should never lay another foundation; we should simply build on the foundation which was laid more than nineteen hundred years ago. We thank the Lord that, in His mercy, He has recovered this unique foundation. Many years ago, in China, we took a strong stand for Christ as the unique foundation. We had to declare to those in the denominations that we could not have any foundation other than Christ Himself. As a result, many things had to be put aside so that Christ alone would be exalted. Now that the unique foundation has been laid, we should build upon it.

In 3:10 Paul says, "But let each one take heed how he builds upon it." When we refer to how we do a certain thing, we usually mean the way, not the material used. When referring to the material, we usually say, "What are you building with?" We do not ask, "How are you building?" But in the Bible these two are the same. How we build upon the foundation is equivalent to what we build with. In other words, according to the Bible, the material used in building is the way we build. According to our natural thought, the material is one thing and the way is another. The material refers to a substance, but the way refers to skill or technique. But in the Bible the substance is the technique; the material is the way. Actually, the Bible pays little attention to skill or technique, but devotes much attention to the material. Paul's concern is not by

what way or method we build the church. His concern is what material we use in building.

TWO WAYS OF BUILDING

In verse 12 Paul refers to two ways of building: "But if anyone builds on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble." The first way is to build with gold, silver, and precious stones; the second way is to build with wood, grass, and stubble. Here we have two categories of building materials. Gold, silver, and precious stones are minerals. Wood, grass, and stubble are related to the plant life. We in the Lord's recovery all are doing the work of building. Thus, we must take heed how we build. Are we building with gold, silver, and precious stones, or with wood, grass, and stubble?

Paul's word in 3:12 is not only for elders or co-workers. On the contrary, it is written to every believer. This is included in an Epistle addressed to the church in Corinth, with all those who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in every place. Thus, this verse is intended for all of us. It applies to you and also to me.

In the building of the church we ourselves are used as material. Since we are the building material, we need to ask what kind of material we are. Are we wood or gold, silver or grass, precious stones or stubble? Many of us may answer this question by saying that we are in the process of transformation. Therefore, in a sense we are both wood and gold, grass and silver, stubble and precious stones. Using an example from the insect world, we may compare ourselves to a caterpillar in a cocoon in the process of becoming a butterfly. On the one hand, we are still a caterpillar; on the other hand, there are signs that we are becoming a butterfly. The process of transformation has begun, but it is not yet complete. We are all on the way of transformation; we are in the process of being transformed.

TRANSFUSION AND TRANSFORMATION

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" (lit.). In order to behold the Lord and be transformed, we need an unveiled face. There should not be a veil between us and the Lord. Experientially speaking, a veil refers to some kind of insulation. No matter how close we may be to the Lord, if we are insulated by a veil, He cannot infuse Himself into us. Insulation is a term often used with respect to electricity. To insulate something is to cover it so that it cannot receive an electrical charge. Even a thin piece of paper can be an insulator. An electrical appliance may be in working order, and electricity may be installed in the room, but electrical power cannot be transfused into the appliance if there is insulation blocking a direct connection.

This illustrates what takes place in the lives of many Christians today. Believers may think that if they love the Lord, are close to the Lord, and walk with the Lord, then everything is all right. They may not realize, however, that they are still under certain veils, and that these veils insulate them from the Lord's transfusion.

According to Paul's word, we need to behold the Lord with an unveiled face. There should not be any veils between us and the Lord. If we are unveiled we shall be a mirror beholding and reflecting the glorious image of the Lord. Whenever we behold Him in a direct way without any veil, without any insulation, we experience His transfusion. We are infused with the divine electricity.

Eating the Lord has much to do with being transfused with Him. Actually, to eat the Lord Jesus is to allow Him to get into us by the way of transfusion. This is clearly revealed in the New Testament. According to the New Testament, our relationship with the Lord is altogether a matter of spiritual life. Because it is a spiritual thing, human language cannot describe it adequately. For this reason, Paul uses metaphors. In 1 Corinthians 3 the words feeding, milk, drinking, and solid food are metaphors. The Lord Jesus also used metaphors and parables in His

teaching, for example, when He said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). The Lord went on to say that the bread which He gives is His flesh. The Jews "contended with one another, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (v. 52). To eat the Lord Jesus is to receive Him into us and allow Him to add Himself to us.

Eating is not once for all; it must be repeated day by day. We have been eating various foodstuffs for years, but we still need to eat today. Each time we take food into us, transfusion occurs within us. By eating and by transfusion Christ is added into our being.

Eating is related to transformation. When food is eaten, digested, and assimilated, a new substance is added into our being to replace and discharge the old substance. This is the metabolic process of transformation. The significance of eating is that a new substance is added into us to discharge the old substance in order to produce a metabolic transformation. This crucial matter is very much neglected by Christians today.

Suppose a person's face is very pale. There is a great difference between applying makeup to change the color of his complexion and having his complexion changed as a result of proper nourishment and metabolism. To apply makeup is to do the work of a mortician. A mortician adds makeup to the face of a dead person because there cannot be any metabolic change in life. In our Christian life, we should not try to color ourselves with spiritual makeup. Instead, we should eat the Lord. Paul's work was not the work of a mortician. He did not apply makeup to the Corinthians. Instead, he fed them. He knew that if they would eat and drink properly, they would be transformed and have a healthy spiritual complexion.

Paul's work was very different from that of many Christian workers today. Whereas many carry on the work of "morticians," Paul fed the saints with Christ. Likewise, the church should not be a place where people buy cosmetics; on the contrary, it must be the Lord's restaurant where His people can eat. The more we eat of Christ, the more we shall be transformed. Transformation

will make us glorious. It will cause us to bear the Lord's image, His appearance, His glorious expression.

The transfusion of the Lord into us can also be illustrated by the transmission of electricity into a child's toy. Certain toys move, jump, and even dance when they are powered by electricity. We can be compared to such an electrically powered toy. When Christ is transfused into us, we begin to move. We may even feel as if we could jump or soar in the air. Our Christian life is a life of transfusion; it is a life of continually having the Lord infuse Himself into us.

Transformation and transfusion make us living materials for God's building. As living materials, we are growing and changing. I can observe a change, a transformation, in the lives of many saints, especially in the lives of those whom I have not seen for a period of time. Praise the Lord that we are being transformed! We are becoming gold, silver, and precious stones for God's building.

The church is not an organization or society; the church is an organic entity--the Body of Christ. Only transformed persons can be constituted into the Body. Because the Body of Christ is organic, the more we grow and are transformed, the more we are built up as the Body. This building of an organic Body is what the Lord is seeking today.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO

BUILDING OR DESTROYING THE TEMPLE OF GOD?

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:10-23; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2

GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES

Referring to Christ as the unique foundation, Paul says in 3:10, "But let each one take heed how he builds upon it." In verse 12 he goes on to say, "But if anyone builds on the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble." According to this verse, the proper building materials are gold, silver, and precious stones. Why does Paul mention only three such materials and not two or four? There are three because these materials refer to the Three of the Trinity, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The precious stones are related to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Every precious stone is a transformed substance. At one time it used to be some other material, perhaps clay or carbon. Then as a result of intense heat and pressure this material has been transformed into precious stone. Thus, precious stones indicate transformation. According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, we are transformed by the Lord Spirit. This reveals clearly that transformation is the work of the Spirit. Therefore, the third item of the proper materials mentioned in 3:12 refers to the third of the Trinity, the Spirit.

In Exodus 30 we see that silver was used to redeem the life of God's people. Silver signifies the redemption accomplished by Christ the Son, the second of the Trinity. Therefore, the silver in 3:12 refers to the redemption of Christ.

Gold, the first of the precious materials mentioned by Paul, refers to the first of the Trinity, God the Father. Gold signifies neither redemption nor transformation; rather, as a precious element, it signifies something which does not change or become corrupt in nature. Gold always remains the same. Hence, in the Bible it signifies the nature of God the Father. The divine nature, like gold, never changes.

CONSTITUTED OF THE TRIUNE GOD

We have seen that gold, silver, and precious stones refer to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Now we must go on to see what it means to build with these materials. In order to build with these materials, we ourselves must first be constituted of them. We need to be constituted of the Father's nature, the Son's redemption, and the Spirit's transformation. This means that we must be constituted of the Triune God. When we receive Him, when we take Him into us by drinking Him and eating Him, when we are transfused with Him and by Him, the very Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--comes into us to be our element and substance. This causes a metabolic process to take place within us by which a new element is added and an old element is discharged. Another name for this process is transformation.

Transformation does not take place overnight. On the contrary, it is a work which goes on continually day by day. As we call on the Lord Jesus, praise the Father, read and pray-read the Word, pray, sing, worship, attend the meetings of the church, and fellowship with the saints, we take the Triune God into us. The more we receive of Him, the more His element transforms us metabolically and causes us to be constituted of Himself. Then we have gold, silver, and precious stones.

To have gold is to have the Father's incorruptible nature. To be redeemed is to be terminated, replaced, and brought back to God through Christ. Even though we are saved, in many things we are still far away from the Triune God. When Christ becomes our redemption, He

brings us back to God, terminates our natural life, and replaces us with Himself. This is to experience silver. Following this, the third of the Triune God, the Spirit, works both within us and in our circumstances to transform us into precious stones.

THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

Transformation involves the Spirit's working both inwardly and outwardly. The Spirit works outwardly in our circumstances for the sake of His inward working. For example, the Spirit may use our children to help transform us. We may expect that our children will be submissive and obedient. But a certain child may be stubborn or even rebellious. Such a child can cause us to be pressed for the sake of our transformation. As an elderly person with many children and grandchildren, I can testify that the Spirit often uses our children to press us and "burn us" as part of His work of transformation. When I first began to experience this in my family life, I was troubled and could not explain what was going on. Gradually I came to know that I needed the heat and pressure caused by my children. I also came to see that I need other pressures as well. It takes a great deal of intensified heat and pressure for clay to become precious stones. According to Romans 8:28, God causes all things to work together for good on our behalf. We need all things to work for us. Therefore, we should not be surprised when even our children are used to press us and burn us so that we may become precious stones.

Many Christians are under the influence of the teaching that if we believe in the Lord Jesus and behave ourselves properly for the glory of God, we shall be blessed and prospered in every way. According to this teaching, we shall be successful and prosperous. Furthermore, supposedly our children will become successful in their chosen professions. If this teaching is accurate, then Paul must be the most pitiful believer who ever lived. Listen to what he says in 4:11-13: "Until the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and beaten and wander without a home; and we labor, working with our own

hands; being reviled we bless, being persecuted we bear it, being defamed we appeal; we have become as the offscouring of the world, as the scum of all things until now." Is this the description of one who is successful and prosperous? Paul's situation was very different from that promised by the teaching that those who believe in the Lord and live properly will be blessed materially. However, Paul was in fact the most blessed of Christians, for he was truly constituted of the Triune God.

We in the Lord's recovery should not be frightened by the process of transformation. We should not desire to turn from the recovery and seek an easier way, to go to a religious gathering where we can be comforted psychologically. We praise the Lord that we are receiving the Lord's nourishment and are also undergoing the process of transformation. We are receiving more of the divine gold into our being. I can strongly testify that I do not regret taking the way of the Lord's recovery. Yes, I have lost a lot, but I have gained much more. If there is no loss, there can be no gain. What I have lost has been material things, but I have gained the nature of God my Father. I have gained the gold of the divine nature, something that never changes or decays. Hallelujah for the divine nature that has been added into us! We also praise the Lord for the wonderful redemption we are experiencing daily to be terminated, brought back to God, and replaced by Christ Himself. We are also thankful for the heat and pressure which are transforming us from clay into precious stones.

TRANSFORMATION AND BUILDING

As we become gold, silver, and precious stones, we are built up. Building is a matter of growth and transformation. The more we grow, the more we are rescued from our natural being. Then wherever we may be, we can easily be one with the saints. This is building.

If we have been built up in a genuine way, there will be no opinions, disputations, strifes, comparisons, preferences, or choices. We shall simply be for the Lord's Body and desire to be part of the Body. No matter where

we may go, we shall be one with every saint. This is what it means to be built with gold, silver, and precious stones.

The majority of today's Christians are divided. It is difficult even to find two who have been built together in a proper way. The reason for the division and the lack of building is that the believers remain in their natural life, in their natural being, and in their worldly aspirations. Many still have their own preferences, desires, and choices. As a result, it is impossible for them to be truly one. Therefore there cannot be the practical Body life among them.

We cannot have the real Body life until, at least to a certain extent, we grow by being transformed. We praise the Lord that, to some degree at least, the churches in the Lord's recovery are being built up in this way. The saints are becoming one and are not so much in their opinions, preferences, and choices. Furthermore, we have one goal--the central vision of God's eternal purpose, which is to have Christ ministered into the saints so that they may all be constituted into one Body. Although we may not be fully one in this goal, we are in the process of entering into this oneness. The situation today is greatly improved over that of ten years ago. We praise the Lord for what He has done in the last ten years. However, we want to experience more transformation so that we may have more building.

First, we ourselves must become gold, silver, and precious stones. Then, spontaneously, we build ourselves into the Body. In this way we build ourselves up upon Christ as the unique foundation. The more we are transformed, the more we build upon Christ as the foundation. Furthermore, as we minister the Triune God to others--the Father as the golden element, the Son with His practical redemption, and the Spirit with the work of transformation--they will be infused and nourished. Then gradually one by one they will become the same category of precious materials. They will be in the same condition and situation, receive the same nourishment, and have the same destiny. Eventually, the Lord will get the church He desires--the Body as the corporate expression of Christ.

Do not expect that this work of transformation and building will be carried out on a large scale involving a very large number of Christians. On the contrary, it will be accomplished among a rather small number according to the principle of the overcomers. The Lord addressed the seven epistles in Revelation to all the churches and to all the saints in the churches. However, He did not expect that everyone in the churches would be according to what He is. For this reason, at the end of each epistle He says a word about the one who overcomes. Eventually, the Lord will gain a small number of believers, the overcomers, to satisfy the desire of His heart and accomplish His eternal purpose.

Do you know by what way the Lord will gain these overcoming believers? It will be through the way of feeding, drinking, eating, planting, watering, and growing. It will be by having a farm and a building with Christ as the unique foundation and constructed of the precious materials of gold, silver, and precious stones. Eventually, this building will become God's temple.

A WARNING NOT TO DESTROY GOD'S TEMPLE

In 3:16 and 17 Paul says, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys the temple of God, God shall destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, which you are." Here Paul warns us not to destroy God's temple. When I was a young Christian, I thought that the temple in verses 16 and 17 referred merely to the church in a broad, general sense. Later, as a result of much study and experience, I came to see that whereas the temple in verse 17 may refer to all the believers universally, the temple in verse 16 refers to the believers collectively in a certain locality, as in Corinth. The unique spiritual temple of God in the universe has its expression in many localities on earth. Each expression is a temple of God in that locality. Thus, the temple must mean the built up church in a locality. The temple is built up with the believers in a practical way. Regarding the building, first we must gather the

materials, and then the materials become part of the building.

In chapter three Paul warns the Corinthians to take heed how they build. On the positive side, he indicates that

they should build on the foundation with gold, silver, and precious stones. On the negative side, he warns them about destroying the temple of God. The Greek word rendered destroy also means ruin, corrupt, defile, mar. To build with wood, grass, and stubble is to ruin, to mar, God's building. According to the context of chapter three, we may destroy the temple either by laying a foundation other than Christ, or by building on the foundation with wood, grass, and stubble. For the Corinthians to say that they were of Paul, Apollos, or Cephas was to lay another foundation and thus to mar the temple. Furthermore, to build with natural things was also to ruin the temple of God.

The problem with the Corinthians was that they had other foundations consisting of their preferences and choices. According to the context, we defile the temple of God when we boast in men and say that we are of a particular person. Those who have their own choices and preferences may consider themselves wise; actually, they are foolish. As we shall see, at the end of chapter three Paul points out that all things and all servants of the Lord are ours. There is no need for us to have preferences or choices. Therefore, we should not say that we are of anyone or anything. All are ours, we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

If we consider the last verses of chapter three according to the context of the first three chapters of this Epistle, we shall see that Paul's concept is that saying we are of someone is to destroy the church. Paul seems to be saying here, "The church is in the process of being built up. Some parts have already been built. Do not destroy the church. Do not mar it, ruin it, or defile it. If you build the church with your natural being or your natural makeup, you defile the church. You also ruin the church when you say that you are of Apollos, Cephas, or Paul. If you destroy the church in this way, God will destroy you." On the one hand, to be destroyed by God is to be deprived of the blessing. It is to lack the feeding, the drinking, the eating, the planting, the watering, and the growing. It is also to miss the opportunity to gain the gold, silver, and precious

stones. On the other hand, to be destroyed is to be judged by fire and to have our work consumed. However, if we build with gold, silver, and precious stones, our work will remain, and we shall receive a reward (v. 14).

I encourage you to pray-read these verses in the light of what we have covered in this message. If you do this, you will be nourished and have the divine element infused into you. Then you will experience more transformation, and the church will have more building.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-THREE

ALL THINGS FOR THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCH FOR CHRIST

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 3:16-23

From reading 3:18-23 we realize that chapter three is an explanation and continuation of chapters one and two. In the first two chapters of this book, Paul deals with the wisdom of the Corinthians. Because of their philosophical wisdom, they were divisive, and they exalted spiritual giants. In 3:18 Paul refers to those who think themselves to be wise, and in verse 19 he says that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. In the sight of God, Greek wisdom is foolishness. The Lord grasps the wise in their craftiness, and He knows that the reasonings of the wise are vain (v. 20).

I. DESTROYING THE TEMPLE OF GOD BY BUILDING THE CHURCH WITH NATURAL THINGS AND BEING PUNISHED BY GOD

First Corinthians 3:17 says, "If anyone destroys the temple of God, God shall destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, which you are." To destroy the temple of God is to ruin, corrupt, defile, or mar it. To destroy the temple of God means to build with the worthless materials of wood, grass, and stubble, as described in verse 12. This refers to some Jewish believers who attempted to build the church with elements of Judaism, and to some Greek believers who endeavored to bring philosophical elements into the building. All this tended to corrupt, ruin, defile, and mar the temple of God, that is, to destroy it. Using any doctrine which differs from the fundamental teachings of the

apostles (Acts 2:42), or any ways and efforts that contradict God's nature, Christ's redemptive work, and the Spirit's transforming work is to corrupt, ruin, defile, mar, and destroy the church of God.

The word destroy in verse 17 at least implies the punishment unveiled in verse 15. All those who have corrupted, ruined, defiled, and marred the church of God by their heretical doctrines, divisive teachings, worldly ways, and natural efforts in building will suffer God's punishment.

In this verse Paul points out that the temple of God is holy. Since the temple of God, the church, is holy, the materials, the ways, and the efforts by which we build it must also be holy and correspond to God's nature, Christ's redemption, and the Spirit's transformation.

We have seen that to build the church with natural things, with wood, grass, and stubble, is to build with our natural makeup, our being, and such evil doings as jealousy, strife, envy, and hatred. With wood, grass, and stubble, there is nothing precious. The interpretation of these figures is not the important matter here; the crucial matter is that we realize that our nature, our being, and our negative doings have no part in the building up of the church. As members of the church, we must participate in the building up of the church. However, we must take heed not to allow the wood, the grass, and stubble--our nature, our being, and our evil doings--to be brought into the church. It is dreadful to inject these things into the church life. We need to have a deep realization of this. We need to see how abominable it is and condemn it.

During the last nineteen hundred years, there has been hardly any real building up of the church. Today the Bible is freely available, and the gospel has been preached in every country. But where is the genuine building up of the church? We must admit that even among us in the Lord's recovery there is not much building. The reason for this lack is that too much of our nature, being, and doings have been brought into the church life. These elements are germs which damage the church life. However, we may not

be enlightened regarding the seriousness of this matter.

Certain saints are strong in their character or peculiar in their way of thinking. Others, however, may regard themselves as common, general, and not strong in any particular way. But according to my experience and observation, such persons are the most natural ones. They may not criticize others and they may adapt to every situation. Nevertheless, they are extremely difficult to deal with. Some of the saints who are unusually nice are like rubber, which cannot be broken. Nothing seems to touch them. No matter how they are treated, they never lose their temper. But automatically these people bring their nature and being into the church life. They regard their nature as good, and others also may appreciate it. Thus, it is unconsciously injected into the church life. But because all this is natural, it cannot be the proper material for the building up of the church. Of course, those who are rough and tough by nature are also not the right material for God's building.

It is very difficult to find any use for stubble, but certain kinds of wood may be useful and also have a good appearance. Many saints in the Lord's recovery are like this kind of wood. But not even the wood of a humanity that is naturally good is useful for the building up of the church.

To build the church with natural things is to destroy the temple of God. Many years ago I thought that to destroy the temple of God was to persecute the church. I did not realize that, according to the context, to destroy the church is to build with natural things. For example, would it not mar the New Jerusalem to bring in grass or stubble? Likewise, to inject our natural makeup, our being, or our doings into the church damages the church. Perhaps you have never realized that when you bring your good nature, your good being, and even your good natural deeds into the church life, you ruin and corrupt the church. Of course, if there is jealousy or strife among us, that will also mar and defile the church life.

Those who destroy the church by building with natural things will be punished by God. According to verse 17, those who destroy God's temple will be destroyed by Him. One aspect of God's punishment is darkness. It certainly is a serious punishment not to have light and to remain in darkness. If you build the church with natural things, you will be in darkness. God punished Pharaoh with darkness, and He will also use darkness to punish the kingdom of Antichrist (Exo. 10:21-23; Rev. 16:10). This indicates that darkness is a serious punishment. All those who endeavor to bring their nature, being, and doings into the church will be left in darkness.

According to verses 13 through 15, our building work will be tested by fire. If our work remains, we shall receive a reward. But if our work is consumed, we shall suffer loss. I cannot say definitely what this judging fire is. However, in both the Old Testament and the New fire comes from God as a judgment. For example, Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, were judged by fire. In the book of Malachi we are told that the Lord will judge people by fire. In the same principle, fire from God will judge our work. Work that is of gold, silver, and precious stones will pass the test of fire. In fact, the more intense the fire is, the more refined these materials become. However, everything of wood, grass, and stubble will be consumed by fire. Whatever is done according to our nature, being, and natural doings will be burned by fire.

The Lord's punishment has at least two aspects: darkness and burning. We ourselves may be in darkness, and our work may be burned to ashes. Often I have been in fear and trembling before the Lord, wondering if my work will remain. Many times I have asked myself if my work will pass the test of the Lord's judging fire. We all should inquire whether our work brings us into the light or keeps us in darkness. Some of those who labored on the mission field can testify that the more they worked, the more they remained in darkness. This is a sign that their work was according to their nature, being, and human doings.

II. DESTROYING THE TEMPLE OF GOD, THE CHURCH, BY BOASTING IN SPIRITUAL GIANTS

To boast in spiritual giants is also to destroy the temple of God, the church. To do this is to be in the flesh and to walk according to men (3:3-4). Thus, we must be careful not to have preferences in elders, co-workers, or in brothers and sisters. Along with learning not to bring our nature, being, and doings into the church, we must also learn not to have preferences for any persons. If we exalt a certain person, we shall mar, defile, destroy, the temple of God, and we shall suffer God's punishment.

III. THINKING OURSELVES TO BE WISE AND BEING SELF-DECEIVED

In verse 18 Paul says, "Let no one deceive himself: if anyone among you thinks himself to be wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise." Both the Judaizing believers and the philosophizing Greek believers deceived themselves by bringing the elements of Judaism and Greek philosophy into the building up of the church. The apostle's thought here centers mainly on those Greek believers who highly esteemed the wisdom of their philosophy (1:22).

To boast in spiritual giants is also to think ourselves to be wise and thus to be self-deceived. Those who exalt a certain person regard themselves as wiser than others. The ones who exercise their philosophical mind are those who exalt others. To think ourselves more clever than others and to exalt certain persons is to be self-deceived. Exalting spiritual giants not only destroys the church; it also causes us to be self-deceived. According to the context of verse 18, deceiving ourselves is related to exalting man. Nevertheless, many think that there is nothing wrong with exalting others. For example, someone may say, "Brother So-and-so is one of the best elders. I like him, and I am for him." This may sound harmless, but it is actually damaging to the church. In the Lord's recovery there must not be the exalting of any person.

IV. BECOMING FOOLISH IN ORDER TO HAVE GOD'S WISDOM

In verse 18 Paul charges the one who thinks himself to be wise in this age to become foolish that he may become wise. To become foolish here is to forsake the wisdom of philosophy and receive the simple word concerning Christ and His cross (1:21, 23). To become wise is to take the wisdom of God in making Christ everything to us (1:24, 30; 2:6-8).

Although it is easy to become wise and difficult to become foolish, everyone in the Lord's recovery must learn to become foolish in the sense in which Paul speaks in verse 18. Actually all believers today are "Greeks," for we are philosophical in our own way. Thus, we need to become foolish in order that we may become wise. The more foolish we become in the proper sense, the more enjoyment we shall have. But the more we become wise in a philosophical way, the less enjoyment we shall have. Furthermore, the growth in life in the churches depends on this. If we are all willing to become foolish, we shall experience much progress in the growth in life.

In the church life it is necessary that we learn to become foolish that we may have God's wisdom. Then God's revelation will come to us. Those who receive the most revelation from God are those who have learned to become foolish. As a result, they have God's wisdom.

V. REALIZING THAT ALL THINGS ARE OURS, THAT WE ARE CHRIST'S, AND THAT CHRIST IS GOD'S

In verses 21 and 22 Paul says, "All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours." All things, including the world and even death, are ours and work good for us (Rom. 8:28). The Corinthian believers said they were of Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas (1:12), but Paul says he, Apollos, and Cephas are of them; all are theirs. They are the church, and all these things are for the

church. Furthermore, the church is for Christ, and Christ is for God.

According to these verses, not only the spiritual giants are for us, but all things, including negative things such as the world and death, are for us. This means that even the world and death can work good for us. Have you ever realized that the negative condition of the church in your locality is yours and that it works good for you? Some saints may say, "The situation of my local church is not good. I am thinking of moving to a place where the condition of the church is better." However, those who are dissatisfied with a certain local church and move to another place do not experience the growth in life as a result. We all must see that the condition of the church in our locality, like death, is ours, and is for us. Truly all things are for us.

As you read 1 Corinthians 3, you may wonder why Paul concludes the chapter in this way. After speaking of wisdom and the exalting of spiritual giants, he concludes by saying that all things are ours, that we are Christ's, and that Christ is God's. Here Paul seems to be saying, "You Corinthian believers exercise your Greek culture, wisdom, and philosophy. According to your wisdom, you have preferences and choices. You have preferences in persons, doctrines, and practices. These preferences are all related to your wisdom, to your philosophical way of thinking. But I want you to know that all things, whether good or evil, and all persons are used by God to perfect you. Even the world and death are means used by God to work good for you. All things are your servants for your perfection."

I would like to speak a comforting and encouraging word to all the saints in the Lord's recovery. Do not feel that the church in your locality is not the right place for you. Even if the condition of your church is poor, God still uses that church to perfect you. He uses a church which does not satisfy you to work good for you. This means that you need this kind of church. When I was in China, many saints regarded the church in Shanghai as excellent and

wanted to move to that city. But those who went there were disappointed. Many who had never been to Shanghai thought that the church there was wonderful. But some of those in the church in Shanghai were unhappy with the church there. This illustrates the fact that we should not move to another locality in order to be in a place which we imagine is better than the church in our locality. No matter where you may be, the church is yours, and God uses that church to perfect you. God used the church in Shanghai to perfect the saints in Shanghai. Those in that locality needed that church. However, those who lived elsewhere needed the church in their own locality.

God uses everything to perfect us. Hence, all things are for us, we are for Christ, and Christ is for God. God uses everything to perfect us so that we may be the living Body of Christ. Therefore, we are the Body for Christ, and Christ is the expression of God. Thus, Christ is for God. God is expressed through Christ, Christ is expressed through us, and we are perfected through all things. If we see this, we shall not complain or have any preference, choice, or selection. Furthermore, we shall be content to receive all that God ordains for us. If God ordains a difficult church life for you, you should accept it and praise Him for it. God may ordain a difficult husband or wife. He may even ordain death. But even a difficult spouse or death itself is for us and is used to perfect us. Therefore, we need to receive what God has ordained and acknowledge that it is being used by Him to perfect us.

As an elderly person, I have passed through a great many things in my lifetime. I can truly testify that all things are mine and that God uses them all to perfect me. Because God uses all things, I find it very difficult to say who would make the best wife for a certain brother or the best husband for a certain sister. Likewise, I do not know who would be the best co-worker. The Lord has brought me to the point where I do not consider which co-workers are good and which are not so profitable, for I realize that they all work good for me. Even those whom I may regard as the worst may be used to perfect me the most. How

blessed we are to be perfected by all things! Oh, how good it is to see that all things are for us!

Since all things are ours and work for us, we should not be so foolish as to have personal preferences and choices. We are for Christ, and Christ is for God. God is manifested through Christ, Christ is expressed through us, and we are perfected by all things. Every thing, every person, and every situation is ours. God is sovereign, and He is using everything and everyone to perfect those who love Him. As long as you love the Lord, you may have the assurance that He is using everything to perfect you. Therefore, all things are ours for the church, the church is for Christ to be His Body, and Christ is for God to be His expression. This is Paul's concluding word in 1 Corinthians 3.

In the light of this word, we should not exalt anyone, and we should not have any preferences or choices concerning persons, matters, or things. Rather, we should see that all things, bad as well as good, are for us to perfect us so that we may become the Body of Christ, who is the expression of God. This is the proper understanding of Paul's word that all things are ours, that we are Christ's, and that Christ is God's.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FOUR

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 4:1-9

The subject of 1 Corinthians 4 is stewards of the mysteries of God (4:1-21). The focus of this chapter is neither Christ nor the church; it is the stewards of God's mysteries. In 4:1 Paul says, "In this way let a man account of us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." The Greek word rendered stewards in this verse is of the same root as the word economy or dispensation in 1 Timothy 1:4 and Ephesians 1:10. It means a dispensing steward, a household administrator, one who dispenses the household supply to its members. The apostles were appointed by the Lord to be such stewards, dispensing God's mysteries, which are Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4), to the believers. The dispensing service, the stewardship, is the ministry of the apostles.

In God's economy revealed in the New Testament there are mainly two mysteries. The first mystery, revealed in the book of Colossians, is Christ as the mystery of God. In Colossians 2:2 Paul speaks of the "full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ." Christ is God's mystery. In Himself God is a mystery. He is real, living, and almighty; however, He is invisible. Because no one has ever seen God, He is a mystery. This mysterious God is embodied in Christ. Hence, Christ is the mystery of God. Christ is not only God, but He is God embodied, God defined, God explained, and God expressed. Therefore, Christ is God made visible. The Lord Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). The first mystery in

God's economy is Christ, God expressed, as the mystery of God.

The second mystery, revealed in the book of Ephesians and explained in it, especially in chapter three, is the mystery of Christ. Christ also is a mystery. In Ephesians 3:4 Paul uses the expression "the mystery of Christ." Furthermore, Colossians 1:27 says, "To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." As believers, we have Christ dwelling in us. But this Christ whom we have is a mystery. Although Christ lives in us, worldly people do not realize that He is in us. To them, this is a mystery. But although Christ is mysterious, the church is the manifestation of Christ. As the Body of Christ, the church is the expression of Christ. When we see the church, we see Christ. When we come into the church, we come into Christ. When we contact the church, we contact Christ. The church is truly the mystery of Christ.

When in 4:1 Paul refers to the mysteries of God, he means Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ. Paul and the other apostles were stewards of these mysteries.

We have pointed out that the Greek word for stewards in 4:1 is of the same root as the word economy or dispensation used elsewhere. This word, *oikonomia*, denotes a household administration or management. In the New Testament a steward is one who serves and takes care of the dispensing of God to His family. God has a very large family, and His desire is to dispense Himself into all the members of His family.

The place of a steward in God's family may be illustrated by the function of a steward in a wealthy family in ancient times. A steward in such a family was responsible to care for the dispensing of the means of life--food, clothing, and other necessities--to the members of the family. Wealthy families often had an abundant supply of these necessities in storage. The responsibility of a steward was to dispense this supply to the members of the family.

Using this as a metaphor, Paul refers to himself as a steward in God's family. God is exceedingly rich; He has a vast storehouse of goods which He intends to dispense into His children. But this dispensation requires a steward. Thus, a steward is a dispenser, one who dispenses the divine life supply to God's children.

As such a dispenser, Paul dispensed Christ into all the believers. Receiving such a dispensation through Paul, the believers could then grow with the supply they had received. By this we see that Paul's ministry was a dispensing ministry, a ministry of dispensing the unsearchable riches of Christ into our being so that we may grow and become the church. Paul dispensed Christ's riches not only into the saints individually, but also into the Body corporately.

Paul's service of dispensing is called the stewardship. In other words, this stewardship is the ministry. The ministry is a stewardship, a service, that dispenses the riches of Christ into the saints, the members of the Body, and into the church, the Body as a whole. May we all be impressed with the two crucial matters of the mysteries of God and the dispensing steward.

If we read 1 Corinthians 4 carefully, we shall see that this chapter on the stewards of the mysteries of God emphasizes four main points: faithful servants of Christ (vv. 1-5), a spectacle both to angels and to men (vv. 6-9), the offscouring of the world and the scum of all things (vv. 10-13), and the begetting father (vv. 14-21). We shall cover the first two points in this message and the last two points in the following message.

I. FAITHFUL SERVANTS OF CHRIST

In 4:1 Paul says, "In this way let a man account of us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." By "this way" Paul means the way described in 3:21-23. In these verses Paul charges us not to boast in men, for all things are ours, we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

In this way, Paul says, he was to be accounted as a servant of Christ. The Greek word rendered "account" here

also means reckon, measure, or classify. Paul is saying that he was to be evaluated, or estimated, in this way as a servant of Christ.

The word servant in this verse means an attendant or appointed servant, an official servant appointed specifically for a certain purpose (Acts 26:16).

In verse 2 Paul goes on to say, "Here, furthermore, it is sought in stewards that one be found faithful." The word "here" means in the stewardship, in the dispensing ministry. In this dispensing ministry it is most important that stewards be found faithful.

Here Paul seems to be talking about himself. Today many so-called spiritual people think that it is always wrong for Christians to talk about themselves. When I was with the Brethren, we were taught never to refer to ourselves in a positive way. But here Paul seems to indicate that he was faithful as a steward.

In verse 3 Paul continues, "But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you or by man's day; nor do I even examine myself." The word examined means examined for judgment or in judgment. It also means to be criticized. Paul is saying that he regarded it as a small thing to be criticized by the saints or by man's day. Man's day is the present age in which man judges. This is in contrast to the Lord's day (3:13), which will be the coming age, the kingdom age, in which the Lord will judge.

In this verse Paul also tells us that he did not even examine himself. He regarded it as a very small matter to be examined by the Corinthians or by man's day, and he would not examine himself.

In this verse there are two basic matters we all need to learn. First, we should not care about being criticized or judged by others. Most Christians find it unbearable to be judged or criticized. Certain sisters, if they learn that others have criticized them, may not be able to sleep well for a long period of time. This is true of brothers also. Suppose a certain brother who is an elder learns that someone has spoken critically of him. He may not be able to rest well that night, for he may say to himself, "I am one

of the elders in the church, but certain ones are criticizing me." If we are bothered by criticism, it indicates that it is a great thing, not a small thing, for us to be examined by others. We cannot yet say with Paul, "To me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you."

Forty years ago, I used to be quite bothered whenever I was criticized. Sometimes it affected my sleeping or eating. But after many years of experience, I am hardly ever bothered by criticism. I do not say that criticism never bothers me. However, I can testify that it disturbs me very little, if at all. In fact, to be judged and criticized has become rather common, rather ordinary. If I am not criticized, I would wonder if I am faithful to the Lord's commission. Anyone who is living and active will eventually be criticized. The best way to avoid criticism is to do nothing. As long as we are active in caring for the church, we must be prepared for criticism.

I would advise all the elders in the churches to ask for the Lord's mercy to increase their capacity to withstand criticism. A brother who is new to the eldership may find it very difficult at first to bear the criticism of the saints. The elders are criticized not mainly by those outside the church, but primarily by the brothers and sisters in the church. However, after a period of time, an elder should become accustomed to criticism.

We may compare criticism to hot peppers: hot peppers are difficult to eat at first, but eventually one may become accustomed to them. Many elders have become quite good at eating and digesting the hot peppers of the saints' criticism. They have learned, with Paul, that it is a very small thing to be criticized by others.

The second matter we need to learn from these verses is not to criticize ourselves or examine ourselves. Early in my ministry I examined myself after every message. I spent much time to consider how others reacted to the message. Often, it would take days before I could be fully at rest concerning a message I had given. Then the time would come to give another message. Today I do not examine myself like this. I have learned that it is not a healthy

practice to engage in this kind of self-examination. Actually, we are not worthy of such examination. Furthermore, if we do not examine ourselves, we may seem to be all right. But if we engage in self-examination, we may become very disappointed. If the elders all examine themselves in this way, they will feel that they are not qualified to be elders and will certainly try to resign. Paul could say that he did not examine himself, and we need to learn of him in this matter.

In verse 4 Paul says, "For I am conscious of nothing against myself; but I am not justified by this; but He Who examines me is the Lord." Although Paul felt that he was right, he did not think that he was therefore justified. Knowing that the One who examines him is the Lord, he was willing to leave the matter of judgment with Him. Paul seems to be saying, "Let the Lord examine me. He will judge me in the day of His appearing."

In verse 5 Paul concludes, "Therefore do not judge anything before the time, until the Lord comes, Who shall both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the hearts, and then there will be praise to each one from God." The phrase "before the time" means before the Lord's day.

Paul's words in verses 2 through 5 indicate that he was a faithful steward. He did not care for the criticism of others, and he did not criticize himself. He left the entire situation with the Lord. This indicates his faithfulness.

If we care for others' criticism of us or if we examine ourselves, we are not faithful. On the contrary, we may be rather political and try to avoid criticism in order to feel better. We need to turn from this and leave judgment to the Lord. Then we shall be faithful.

II. A SPECTACLE BOTH TO ANGELS AND TO MEN

First Corinthians 4:6 says, "Now these things, brothers, I have applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to go beyond what has been written, that no one be puffed up on behalf of the one against the other." By "these things" Paul refers to the

things mentioned in the preceding passage, from chapter one to this chapter. The Greek word rendered "applied" literally means transfigured, transferred in a figure. It is a metaphoric term. What the apostle has written in the preceding passage, beginning with chapter one, gives a figure. Now he transfers that figure to himself and Apollos, that is, he applies it figuratively to himself and Apollos.

Some translators and expositors think that the expression "what has been written" refers to the writings of the Old Testament. We disagree. This phrase must refer to what has been written in the preceding chapters, such as: "Was Paul crucified for you?" (1:13), "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul?" They are simply ministers of Christ, a planter and a waterer (3:5-7). They are not Christ crucified for the believers. They are not God, who makes the believers grow. They should not be appraised beyond being ministers of Christ, planters and waterers. Otherwise, their appraisers, like the fleshly Corinthian believers, may be puffed up on behalf of the one against the other.

Verse 7 continues, "For who makes a distinction between you and others? And what do you have that you did not receive? And if indeed you received it, why do you boast as not receiving it?" It is God who makes a distinction between us and others. And what we have we received from God. Hence, all the glory should be ascribed to God, and we should boast in Him, not in ourselves or in any servants, such as Paul or Apollos, whom He has used. Here Paul seems to be saying, "Do you think that it is Peter, Paul, or Apollos who makes a distinction between you and others, or who makes you different from others? Don't think like this. Furthermore, what you received you received not from Paul, Cephas, or Apollos--you received it all from God. Therefore, you should not boast as if you have not received it. If you have something which makes you different from others or distinct from others, that is something you have received from God. Since God has given it to you, you should boast in Him alone, not in any man."

Verse 8 says, "Already you are filled; already you have

become rich; you have reigned without us; and I would that you really did reign, that we also might reign with you." The Corinthian believers, proud of what they obtained, became satisfied with what they had. They became self-sufficient and reigned independently of the apostles. This was altogether in themselves and in their flesh.

Once again Paul refers to the situation among those philosophical Greek believers at Corinth. They thought they were sufficient, that they were rich and full. They acted as if they were kings reigning without the apostles. Speaking very faithfully, Paul says to them, "I would that you really did reign, that we also might reign with you." This word is not sweet, pleasant, or sugar-coated in any way. It is a word that shows Paul's faithfulness.

In verse 9 Paul goes on to say, "For, I think, God has set forth us the apostles last of all, as doomed to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men." Paul says that God has set forth the apostles last, because the Corinthians were acting as if they were already kings. Here Paul is telling them that they had become kings before the apostles did. This means that God has set forth the apostles last; they would be the last to become kings.

In Paul's time, when criminals fought with wild beasts in the amphitheater for the entertainment of the populace, the criminals were exhibited last of all. The criminals were regarded as nothing, for they were the lowest of people, those who had committed crimes deserving the death penalty. The Roman government often would have them fight against wild beasts in the amphitheater as an exhibition. Whenever there was such an exhibition, the criminals were exhibited last of all. Paul uses this as a metaphor to illustrate that the apostles have been set forth by God to be the last show, the last exhibition. The Corinthians were not last; the apostles were those who were last. The apostles considered themselves as criminals doomed to death before the world, not as kings destined to reign like the Corinthians.

Paul also tells the Corinthians that the apostles had

become "a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men." This also is a metaphor, referring to fights between criminals and wild beasts in the Roman amphitheater. The apostles became such a spectacle to the world, seen not only by men but also by angels. Both men on earth and angels in the air were watching the exhibition of the apostles. Hence, they were a spectacle to the whole universe. As we shall see in the next message, this is related to their becoming "the offscouring of the world" and "the scum of all things" (v. 13).

By using these metaphors Paul was telling the Corinthian believers that they should not act as if they were kings or as if they were rich and had everything. Paul seems to be saying, "Don't behave like kings. God has made us, the apostles, last in the divine exhibition. We are as criminals doomed to death. This is our destiny. But you seem to be enjoying another kind of destiny. You are rich, you are full, and you are reigning. We, however, are a spectacle."

Paul's word to the Corinthians applies to us today in the Lord's recovery. We also should be like the apostles in verse 9--criminals doomed to death and a spectacle both to angels and to men. We should not consider ourselves those who are full, rich, and powerful. This attitude is altogether wrong. We in the recovery must give others the impression that we are as criminals condemned to death and a spectacle to the whole universe.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FIVE

STEWARDS OF THE MYSTERIES OF GOD

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 4:10-21

In 4:9 Paul says, "For, I think, God has set forth us the apostles last of all, as doomed to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men." It is significant that here Paul says "I think." This means that Paul was not fully assured. This is not a matter of humility; it is a matter of speaking according to the principle of incarnation. Paul does not say here, "Thus saith the Lord." Neither does he declare, "Brothers and sisters, don't you know that I am speaking in the spirit?" In today's Pentecostalism there is a practice of declaring, "Thus saith the Lord." However, such a practice is not according to the New Testament principle.

In this chapter Paul speaks soberly, yet in a very intimate way. He was rebuking, instructing, correcting, adjusting, and disciplining the believers, but he was doing all this in a very intimate manner. Then at a certain point he inserted the words "I think." I believe that Paul knew that his speaking was truly of God. Nevertheless, he said "I think" because he knew that the New Testament principle is the principle of incarnation. According to this principle, God speaks in our speaking. God and man become one. When man is mingled with God in doing a certain thing, that is simultaneously both God's doing and man's doing. Because the words "I think" illustrate this principle, I regard their insertion in verse 9 as very precious. How meaningful it is that God may speak in our speaking! The clause "I think" indicates that Paul was speaking. Nevertheless, in keeping with the principle of incarnation, Paul's speaking was God's speaking. Because

Paul and God were one, when Paul spoke, God spoke also. This is the significance of the words "I think" used in this verse.

In verse 9 Paul uses the phrase "last of all." This expression, commonly understood at the time, refers to the last part of the performance in the amphitheater. According to ancient custom, when criminals fought with wild beasts in the amphitheater for the entertainment of the populace, the criminals were exhibited last of all. The last act, the last show, was that of condemned criminals fighting with wild beasts for the entertainment of the people. The phrase "last of all" refers to this. In verse 9 Paul uses this expression metaphorically to convey the thought that God has set forth the apostles last of all, as if they were the lowest criminals condemned to death, to be entertainment for the people.

In Greek the word rendered "spectacle" is the word for theater. It refers to a show, a display, made in a theatrical way as entertainment. Thus, Paul was saying to the Corinthians, "You are already filled. You have become rich, and you have reigned without us. I would that you really did reign as kings so that we could reign with you. For, I think, God has set forth us the apostles last, as doomed to death."

When Paul says, "I would that you really did reign," he indicates that the Corinthian believers were not actually reigning as kings. On the contrary, they were in a dream. The fact that they were not yet kings is proved by Paul's word about the apostles being set forth last of all. Paul seems to be saying, "God has not made us kings in this age. Rather, He has set us forth as if we were criminals doomed to death, to fight with beasts." This metaphor presents a vivid picture of the apostles' situation. Far from reigning as kings, they were as criminals doomed to fight with wild beasts for people's entertainment. Today this is also our destiny in the sight of man. However, in the sight of God, our destiny is to enjoy Christ. We who enjoy Christ have become as criminals in the sight of man for their enjoyment. But in the sight of God Christ is our destiny for

our enjoyment. Many have ridiculed us and mocked us. But while they mock us for their entertainment, we are enjoying Christ. This shows that we have two destinies. Our destiny in the sight of God is to have Christ for our enjoyment. Our destiny in the sight of man is to be regarded as criminals condemned to death for others' entertainment. If we are faithful to the Lord, as Paul was, this will be our destiny before men. We shall be set forth last of all, and we shall be made a spectacle both to angels and to men.

III. THE OFFSCOURING OF THE WORLD AND THE SCUM OF ALL THINGS

Chapter four of 1 Corinthians is very intimate. Here we see a father rebuking, instructing, correcting, and even disciplining his mistaken children in an intimate way. As we read this chapter, we can sense the intimacy between the writer and the believers at Corinth.

After pointing out that the apostles have become a spectacle to the world, Paul goes on to say in verse 10, "We are fools because of Christ, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are glorious, but we are dishonored." The apostles were willing to be foolish by forsaking their human wisdom for the sake of Christ. But the fleshly Corinthian believers remained prudent in their natural wisdom, while claiming they were in Christ. Paul did not say that they were philosophers because of Christ; he declares that they were fools because of Christ. In a sense, every believer in Christ must become a fool. Many who were wise in this world have become fools of Christ. But although the apostles had become fools because of Christ, the Corinthians sought to remain prudent.

In verse 10 Paul also says, "We are weak, but you are strong." The apostles while ministering Christ appeared to be weak, for they used no strength or power of their natural being (2:3). But the fleshly Corinthian believers were strong, claiming prominence among the believers by exercising their natural ability.

In verse 10 Paul also tells the Corinthians, "You are glorious, but we are dishonored." The Corinthian believers were glorious, or honorable, in a display of splendor. But the apostles were dishonored and despised by the glory-seeking Corinthians. By this we can see that the Corinthians were altogether wrong in their way of running the Christian course.

In verses 11 through 13 Paul continues, "Until the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and beaten and wander without a home; and we labor, working with our own hands; being reviled we bless, being persecuted we bear it, being defamed we appeal." Defamed means insulted, spoken of injuriously. To appeal here is to entreat with exhortation, consolation, and encouragement in order to appease.

In verse 13 Paul says, "We have become as the offscouring of the world, as the scum of all things until now." Offscouring and scum are synonyms. Offscouring denotes that which is thrown away in cleansing; hence, refuse, filth. Scum denotes that which is wiped off; hence, rubbish, refuse. Both synonyms are metaphorically used, especially of condemned criminals of the lowest class, who were cast into the sea or to the wild beasts in the amphitheater. Here Paul likens himself to the lowest criminals, to offscouring, scum, rubbish, refuse. Compared to many of my friends from the past, I also am scum and offscouring. They have become very successful and have acquired much wealth. They regard me as a fool and wonder what I have been doing with my life. Occasionally I meet friends from many years ago. When they ask me what I have been doing, I am not sure how to answer. They have become extremely successful, but we have become the offscouring of the world and the scum of all things. We are qualified only to be cast aside as waste. This was Paul's estimation of himself with respect to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

IV. THE BEGETTING FATHER

Verses 14 through 21 are the most intimate portion of this chapter. Here we see that Paul was a begetting father.

He seems to be saying to the Corinthians, "Yes, I am scum and offscouring. But I am a father who has begotten many children. In Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

In verse 14 Paul says, "Not as shaming you am I writing these things, but as my beloved children I admonish you." If I had been one of the believers receiving this Epistle at Corinth, I would have been ashamed after reading the first thirteen verses of this chapter. I would have said to myself, "My spiritual father says that we are exalting ourselves, but he considers himself as offscouring and scum. This makes me feel ashamed." However, Paul says that he wrote these things not to shame them, but to admonish them as his beloved children.

In verse 15 Paul goes on to say, "For though you have ten thousand guides in Christ, yet not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." The Greek word rendered guides literally means child-conductors, as in Galatians 3:24 and 25. Guides, child-conductors, give instructions and directions to the children under their guardianship; fathers impart life to their children whom they beget. The apostle was such a father. He had begotten the Corinthian believers in Christ through the gospel, imparting the divine life into them so that they became children of God and members of Christ.

Verse 16 continues, "I appeal therefore to you, become imitators of me." The Greek word for appeal is the same as that used in verse 13. In appealing to the Corinthians to imitate him, Paul seems to be saying, "My children, don't be kings, but be willing to be despised as criminals in the sight of men. Don't be philosophers, but be offscouring and scum. Turn from what you were in the past and become imitators of me. Today we, the apostles, are despised before man for the sake of Christ. We have become fools because of Christ. We have been made a spectacle to angels and to men, we are like criminals sentenced to death, and we are scum and offscouring. But to you I am a begetting father."

In verse 17 Paul says, "Because of this I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful child in the

Lord, who will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church." The ways here refer to the ways in which the apostle conducted himself as he taught the saints in every church. The expression "everywhere in every church" indicates two things: first, that the apostle's teaching is the same universally, not varying from place to place; second, that everywhere equals every church and that every church equals everywhere.

This Epistle was brought to the Corinthians by Timothy. Thus, Paul not only wrote an Epistle; he also sent a co-worker to visit the Corinthians with this Epistle. By this we see that Paul had intimate and personal contact with the believers at Corinth.

In verses 18 and 19 Paul tells the Corinthians, "Now some have been puffed up as though I were not coming to you; but I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills." This was Paul's answer to those Corinthians who were asking why Paul himself did not come to them. Some were puffed up, thinking that he would not visit them. But Paul says that if the Lord wills, he will come to Corinth shortly. If it were up to him, he would definitely come. But, according to the New Testament way of speaking, Paul inserted the words "if the Lord wills" to indicate that the Lord may not send him there. Thus, if the Lord wills, he will come. But if the Lord does not will that he visit the Corinthians, there is nothing Paul can do about it.

In verses 19 and 20 Paul says, "I will know not the speech of those who have been puffed up, but the power; for the kingdom of God is not in speech, but in power." Paul's word about the kingdom of God refers to the church life. This implies that in the sense of authority the church in this age is the kingdom of God. Paul knew that the kingdom of God is not in speech, but in power. For this reason, he wanted to know the power of those who were puffed up.

Verse 21 is the conclusion of this chapter: "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness?" This word is spoken to the Corinthian

believers based upon the consideration that the apostle is their spiritual father. As such, he has the position and responsibility to chastise his children.

A spirit of meekness here refers to the apostle's regenerated spirit indwelt by and mingled with the Holy Spirit. The spirit of meekness is one that is saturated with the meekness of Christ (2 Cor. 10:1) to express the virtue of Christ.

According to Paul's word in verse 21, was he happy or unhappy, angry or meek? I would say that in this chapter he is unhappy and happy as well, angry and meek as well. This definitely does not mean, however, that Paul is two-faced. Rather, it reveals that a genuinely spiritual person can be meek and then immediately become angry. In fact, a spiritual person can be meek even while he is angry.

If you are not spiritual, it may take a few days for your anger to subside. But the anger of a spiritual person can vanish instantly. Suppose a brother offends you, and you become angry. If it takes a long time for your anger to go away, this proves that you are not a spiritual person. The faster your anger disappears, the more spiritual you are. Sisters, if you cannot be angry with your husband one minute and meek toward him the next, your spirituality is not genuine. If you need several hours to turn from your anger and become happy with your husband, you have only a man-made spirituality.

Paul was a person who could be angry one moment and happy the next. This shows that he was truly a spiritual person. Thus, it is correct to say that in this chapter he was both angry with the Corinthians and meek toward them.

Sisters, once you have become angry with your husband, how long does it take before your anger goes away? Will it be days before you speak to him again and are happy with him? Elders, if you are offended by another elder, how long will it take for you to get over this offense? Will it take a week before you can have pleasant fellowship with the one who offended you? The elders may give messages on spirituality, but they may not know how to be genuinely spiritual with one another. It certainly is

not true spirituality for a brother to take several days to get over an offense.

In 1 Corinthians 4 we see that Paul was quite unhappy with the Greek believers at Corinth. However, his unhappiness could suddenly vanish. He could ask in verse 21 whether they wanted him to come to them with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness. Is this a word of anger or of meekness? It is rather difficult to say, for Paul was actually angry and meek at the same time.

If we do not know how to be angry in a proper way, we cannot be genuinely spiritual. In fact, we cannot be truly human either. Instead, we shall be like statues, lacking human feeling. The more spiritual we are, the easier it will be for us to become angry. If you never get angry quickly, that is an indication that you are not truly spiritual.

Some may consider such a thought about spirituality as very mistaken. However, from experience I know that it is a fact that the more spiritual we are, the easier it will be to become angry. The reason for this is that when we are truly spiritual, we are genuine. We do not hide, and we do not pretend. If you live with me for a long period of time and are never angry with me, I will not have any confidence in you. Probably you are a good politician. I cannot believe that you could live with me for many months without being offended by me. I fully realize that certain things I do are offensive to others. If someone can stay with me and not be offended by me, it must be because his spirituality is not genuine. He must be a person without flesh and blood. But since we all are persons of flesh and blood, we all know what it is to be angry. However, if we are political with one another, we shall conceal our anger. But a truly spiritual person will not hide his anger. On the one hand, he may be quick to become angry; on the other hand, he will be just as quick to turn from his anger.

Consider again what Paul says in verse 21. He asks, "What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness?" Does this sound like a verse from the holy Scriptures? If this word were not in the Bible, none of us would accept such a statement as

worthy of being in the Scriptures. It may appear scriptural for someone to say, "The time is short, My people. I come quickly. I love you, and you must love Me. Thus saith the Lord." But does it sound biblical or spiritual to ask whether we should come with a rod or in love and a spirit of meekness? Verse 21 sounds like the writing of someone who is angry. Nevertheless, these words are recorded in the Bible. Once again we see that the Bible is different from any other book.

Suppose I am angry with a certain brother one minute and then, very soon afterwards, I am quite happy with him. He may be offended and criticize me for not being spiritual. However, his spirituality may not be genuine, whereas my spirituality may be real. To repeat, a person who is truly spiritual can quickly go from meekness to anger or from anger to meekness.

I have a deep appreciation for chapter four of 1 Corinthians. In this chapter we see a humanity which is very genuine, a humanity without pretense. Yet, this humanity is full of life. If we read Paul's words again and again, especially if we pray-read them, we shall touch life. Although verse 21 may not sound like a very scriptural way of speaking, it is a verse full of the weight of life. On the contrary, to utter certain words followed by, "Thus saith the Lord," may be completely lacking in life. Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 4 is full of the weight of life.

We all need to learn from Paul to have a genuine spirituality. If we are truly spiritual, we shall not hide, we shall not pretend, and we shall not play politics. Rather, we shall have a genuine humanity and simply be what we are in Christ. This is the kind of life which can dispense the unsearchable riches of Christ into the believers. Those who possess this kind of humanity are qualified to be stewards in God's family.

All the elders need to have the kind of humanity illustrated in this chapter. Only those elders with a genuine humanity can build up the church. Those who are clever, political, and who never offend others and never make mistakes cannot build up the church. However, I do

not mean that those who are careless can be useful in building up the church. My point here is that elders with a true humanity, a humanity without pretense, can build up the church. All the saints need to have this kind of humanity. Both in the church life and in married life, we need to be genuine. We should not hide or pretend, but, like Paul, have a genuine humanity and a true spirituality.

On the one hand, we need to be as offscouring and scum; on the other hand we need to be begetting fathers. If we are not offscouring and scum and also begetting fathers, our work will have little impact. We may preach the right things doctrinally, but with little result. A begetting father, one who imparts life to others, must be as a criminal condemned to death in the sight of man. He must be regarded as useless, as a fool, as offscouring and scum. If we live such a life before man, then we shall be fathers able to beget many children. This means that if we would impart life to others, we must be despised in the eyes of man. This is especially true today in the Lord's recovery. In order to be a life-imparter, you must be despised by religion. The worldly Christians should say that you are an offscouring, scum. Then you will become a life-imparting and begetting father.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SIX

DEALING WITH AN EVIL BROTHER

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 5:1-13

In 5:1-13 Paul turns to the matter of dealing with an evil brother. The first problem, dealt with in chapters one through four, is the matter of division, which is mainly related to the natural life of the soul. The second problem, dealt with in chapter five, the second section of the book, is the sin of fornication, which is related to the lust of the flesh. Morally speaking, this problem, involving incest between a brother and his stepmother, is more gross than the former. The former pertains to the strife that comes from pride. The latter is a gross sin that comes from lust.

Chapter five of 1 Corinthians has certain special characteristics. First, this chapter shows that even a genuine believer can commit a gross sin. Many who read the New Testament may think that, because of the grace of God, believers are not able to do evil things, especially certain evil things recorded in the Old Testament. But in this chapter we read of a brother in the church at Corinth who had committed the sin of incest with his stepmother. Paul's intention, of course, was to help the church to deal with this evil brother. By reading this chapter we see that it is definitely possible for a truly saved one, a real brother in the Lord, to commit such a sin. If we did not have this record in the New Testament, it probably would be very difficult for us to believe that a saved person could commit this kind of sin. Instead, we may think that after a person has been saved he could never be this sinful.

This chapter also shows us that once a church is diverted from the central vision of God's economy and gets into the soul, the door will be open for the lust of the flesh

to come in. This will open the way not only for jealousy and strife, but even for gross sins. Therefore, it is extremely dangerous for us to remain in the soul. In this Epistle Paul first deals with the soul and then with the lusts of the flesh. The dealing with the soul is primarily a dealing with division. The first four chapters of this book deal with the problem of division, which comes from the soul. Division is a soulish matter, mainly a matter of the mind. It is the result of opinion, and opinion issues from the mind. This is clearly indicated in the first four chapters. From reading these chapters we see that there were divisions among the Corinthians because they were very much in the natural mind. They turned from the spirit and exercised the soul. They departed from the central vision, and this opened the gate for the lust of the flesh to come in.

In the church life the soul should not be prevailing. Instead, we all must learn to deny the soul and renounce it and to live in the spirit. We should remain in our spirit and exercise our spirit in every situation. This will close the door to the lust of the flesh.

I. THE EVIL JUDGED

In 5:1 Paul says, "It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication which is not even among the nations, that someone has his father's wife." Here we see that a brother committed incest with his father's wife, with his stepmother. No sin is worse or more damaging to humanity than incest. As we shall see, although this chapter deals with such a terrible sin, it also speaks of keeping the feast.

Paul was a person who was full of Christ. He knew Christ experientially and not merely in a doctrinal way. Even as he deals with a gross sin, he still has the enjoyment of Christ within him.

In verse 2 Paul says, "And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that the one who has done this deed might be removed from your midst." Instead of mourning that such a gross sin was found among them, the

Corinthians were proud and puffed up. No doubt, verse 2 is a word of rebuke. In this verse Paul also indicates that the one who has committed this sinful deed should be removed from their midst; that is, he should be excommunicated from the fellowship of the church.

To remove someone from the fellowship of the church can be compared to removing a decayed or rotten piece of wood from a building. Suppose some wood in a house becomes rotten. This rotten part should be removed. Likewise, the evil brother mentioned in verse 1 should be removed from the fellowship of the church. The Corinthians, however, did not have this realization, for they were still proud and puffed up. For this reason, Paul lets them know that he was deeply concerned about the situation there.

In this chapter dealing with an evil brother there are two matters which are very positive and marvelous. The first concerns Paul's exercise of his human spirit, and the second concerns the feast. In verses 3 through 5 Paul says, "For I, being absent in the body, but present in the spirit, have already judged as being present him who so did this, in the name of the Lord Jesus, when you and my spirit are assembled, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one to Satan for destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." In verse 3 Paul says that although he was absent in the body, he was present in the spirit. The apostle, as a spiritual person, behaved in his spirit, in contrast to the Corinthians, who behaved either in the soul or in the flesh. Although Paul was absent from them in the body, he was still present with them in the spirit and exercised his spirit to judge the evil person among them. In verse 4 Paul even says that his spirit was assembled with them. The apostle's spirit was so strong that it attended the Corinthian believers' meeting. His spirit was assembled with them to carry out his judgment upon the evil person.

In verses 3 and 4 Paul seems to be saying, "You did not remove the evil person from among you. But through the exercise of my spirit I have already judged him. Although I am absent from you physically, I am present with you in

my spirit. I even attend your meetings in my spirit. Thus, by my spirit I have already judged this one."

In verse 4 Paul clearly says, "When you and my spirit are assembled." By this we know that Paul's spirit attended the meeting in Corinth. This does not mean, however, that his spirit actually traveled to Corinth. This has absolutely nothing in common with witchcraft, which claims that a person's soul can leave his body and visit other people. According to this verse, Paul's spirit was so strong that he could somehow attend the meeting in Corinth. When they were gathered together, his spirit was with them to deliver the evil one to Satan. This is altogether a spiritual matter, something wholly in the spirit.

We should never think that Paul's spirit actually went to Corinth and attended the meeting. Nevertheless, as the Corinthian believers were meeting together, Paul exercised his spirit to be with them and to judge the evil one and to remove him. We also may learn to visit a brother by our spirit. While we remain at home, it is possible for our spirit to visit a brother. This is what Paul's spirit did regarding the situation at Corinth.

In verse 4 Paul refers to the name of the Lord Jesus and the power of the Lord Jesus. Both in the name of the Lord and with the power of our Lord Jesus modify deliver in verse 5. The apostle, in his spirit, applied the mighty name of the Lord and exercised His power to deliver the evil person to Satan for destruction of the flesh. I definitely believe that this actually transpired and that the evil one was delivered to Satan.

To deliver a sinful person to Satan is for discipline. The destruction mentioned in verse 5 mainly refers to the affliction with a certain disease (2 Cor. 12:7; Luke 13:11, 16). The flesh refers to the lustful body, which should be destroyed. Certain diseases come from Satan. Such a disease could bring about the destruction of the flesh so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. This indicates that the sinful one among the Corinthian believers was a brother who had been saved once for

eternity (John 10:28-29). He could never perish because of any sin. However, because of his sinfulness, he needed to be disciplined by the destruction of his sinful flesh so that he may be kept in the condition to be saved in the day of the Lord. Hence, the destruction of the flesh is a necessary preparation for the saving of the spirit.

As we consider these verses, we see that Paul dealt with the church not only by writing and by sending Timothy to them but also by exercising his spirit. This proves that he was a person who lived in the spirit. It also reveals how strong his spirit was. Paul's spirit was so strong that it could even attend a church meeting far away. He exercised his spirit to condemn the evil one and deliver him to Satan. This delivering was the removing of that one from God's holy temple.

We all must learn from Paul to do everything with our spirit. Many things we do are not done with the spirit. Paul, however, dealt with the situation described in chapter five wholly with his spirit. By his spirit he condemned, and by his spirit he delivered the evil one to Satan.

II. KEEPING THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" The Corinthian believers, in spite of the confusions and such a gross sin as incest among them, were boasting and glorying. The apostle's Epistle should humble them by pointing out the sinful things among them, thus making them realize that their boasting is not good.

In speaking of a little leaven, Paul's thought here may be that there is no need to have such a gross sin as that which existed among them; just a little leaven, a little sin, leavens and corrupts the whole lump, the whole church.

In verse 7 Paul continues, "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. For indeed our Passover, Christ, has been sacrificed." The word new in this verse literally means young, new in time.

A new lump refers to the church, composed of the believers in their new nature.

To say that Christ is our Passover indicates that the apostle considers the believers God's chosen people, who have had their Passover, as typified by the one in Exodus 12. In this Passover Christ is not only the Lamb, but also the entire Passover. To be our Passover, He was sacrificed on the cross for our redemption and reconciliation to God. Thus, we may enjoy Him as a feast before God. In this feast no leaven is allowed to be present. Sin and the redeeming Christ cannot go together.

In verse 7 Paul says that the believers at Corinth are unleavened. Is this not difficult to believe? How could the Corinthian believers have been unleavened? In the first four chapters of this Epistle they were rebuked by Paul for their divisions. Is divisiveness not leaven? Are not jealousy, strife, and pride sinful things? How, then, could Paul say that the believers there were unleavened? This seems to be a contradiction. Actually, there is no contradiction here at all. The Bible always gives us a complete view of a matter, especially of our history as believers. This means that the Bible reveals both sides of a matter. On the one hand, we have the side of Christ; on the other hand, we have the side of what we are in our fallen nature. According to one side, the side of Christ, we are holy. We are saints in Christ. In 1:2 Paul pointed out that we are "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints." Thus, in Christ we are unleavened. But according to the other side, the side of our natural being, we are full of leaven. The crucial question is whether we eat unleavened bread or leavened bread. In other words, do we live Christ or do we live ourselves? If we live Christ, then we eat unleavened bread. But if we live ourselves, then we eat leavened bread.

In verse 7 Paul charges us to purge out the old leaven that we may be a new lump, even as we are unleavened. We need to be a new lump according to Christ's side. We are unleavened in Christ, and should live according to Him, not according to ourselves.

In verse 8 Paul says, "Let us therefore keep the feast,

not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and evil, but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." The feast here refers to the feast of unleavened bread as the continuation of the Passover (Exo. 12:15-20). It lasted for seven days, a period of completion, signifying the entire period of our Christian life, from the day of our conversion to the day of rapture. This is a long feast, which we must keep, not with the sin of our old nature, the old leaven, but with unleavened bread, which is the Christ of our new nature as our nourishment and enjoyment. Only He is the life supply of sincerity and truth, absolutely pure, without mixture, and full of reality. The feast is a time for the enjoyment of a banquet. The entire Christian life should be such a feast, such an enjoyment of Christ as our banquet, the rich supply of life.

From verses 7 and 8 we realize that here we have two feasts. When we were saved, we enjoyed the feast of the Passover. But now throughout our entire Christian life we should enjoy the feast of unleavened bread. In typology, the seven days of the feast of unleavened bread signify our whole Christian life. Without 1 Corinthians 5, we would not think of the Christian life as such a feast. But according to verse 8, we see that the Christian life is a feast of unleavened bread, a feast of the enjoyment of Christ as our life supply without any leaven.

In the book of 1 Corinthians Paul compares the believers at Corinth, and himself as well, to the children of Israel. He takes the history of the children of Israel as a background for this Epistle. This gives us the ground to say that the history of the children of Israel is a full type of our Christian life in the church. In verse 7 Paul speaks of "our Passover, Christ." If Christ was Paul's Passover, then He must be the Passover for every believer. The children of Israel did not live individualistically; on the contrary, they lived, camped, traveled, and fought battles together. Their corporate life typifies our life in the church. Therefore, when we read the history of the children of Israel, we should realize that we are reading our own history. What happened to them is a type of our experience today. They

ate manna in the wilderness; we also eat manna. They drank of the living water; we also drink the living water. They had a rock which went with them; we also have a rock. They experienced the Passover; we also have a Passover, a Passover that is Christ Himself. Furthermore, after the Passover, they kept the feast of unleavened bread. This indicates that we also should keep this feast. The church life is a feast of unleavened bread. For this reason, any leaven must be purged out of the church.

Unleavened bread indicates a living which is without sin, without leaven. In ourselves we cannot possibly have this kind of living. However, in Christ it is possible to live a sinless life. We have been put into Christ, and now we must learn to live in Christ and by Christ. Then He will become our unleavened life supply. He will become the source, the fountain, of a sinless life and living. Because we have such a source and supply, it is possible for us to live a sinless life.

If we would live a life without sin, we must daily eat Christ as unleavened bread. Dietitians tell us that we are what we eat. If we eat unleavened bread, we shall eventually become constituted of unleavened bread. Then we shall live an unleavened life. Although in ourselves it is impossible ever to be sinless, in Christ we can become sinless by eating Him as the source and supply of a sinless life. Since Christ, our source, is unleavened, if we feast on Him daily, we can have an unleavened church life.

In writing this Epistle, Paul was endeavoring to bring the distracted Corinthians back to the central vision of God's economy. He knew that once they were brought back, they would be all right. But if they remained away from this vision, they would still be sinful in their living. This principle applies both to the church corporately and to the believers individually.

We need to learn to bring others back to the central vision, not just to deal with their failures and sins. In the first two chapters of this book Paul lays a solid foundation for all the matters he later covers. Everything Paul deals with in this Epistle has the first two chapters as its basis.

This indicates that all our dealings with the church and the saints must be based on the need to come back to Christ and to the central vision. We must help others see that the reason they have been distracted is that they have turned from the central vision to something else. If they come back to Christ, they will come back to the feast of unleavened bread.

III. EXCOMMUNICATING THE EVIL ONE FROM THE CHURCH

In verses 9 through 13 we see that the evil one must be excommunicated from the church. In verse 13 Paul says, "Remove the evil man from among yourselves." This is to excommunicate him from the fellowship of the church, as typified by the separation of a leper from the people of God (Lev. 13:45-46). This is an extremely serious matter. Paul had already judged such an evil one, and he expected the believers at Corinth to do the same and to remove that one from their midst.

Verse 11 says, "But now I have written to you not to associate with anyone who is called a brother, if he is a fornicator or an avaricious man or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or a rapacious man; with such a one not even to eat." Here Paul mentions not just one kind of evil person, but several different kinds. Furthermore, Paul does not simply deal with a certain sin; he deals with the person who lives in that kind of sin. There is an important distinction here. For example, to commit fornication is different from being a fornicator, one who lives in that sin and remains in it. A fornicator is not merely one who commits fornication as David did in the Old Testament; he is a person who lives in that sin. That sin becomes his living. Thus, such a person becomes a fornicator. In this chapter Paul is dealing with the person, not merely with the sin. This means that he is not simply removing sin from the church; he is judging and removing a sinful person. Suppose, due to weakness, a brother commits a particular sin. We should help him to repent, to forsake that sin, and to return to the Lord. If he is willing to do this

and if he brings forth the fruit of repentance, the church will certainly forgive him. However, if he remains in that particular sin and becomes a kind of person who lives in it, he must be removed from the fellowship of the church. Otherwise, the entire church will be leavened.

In this chapter we have a number of important points. First, the church must be pure, unleavened, and it must not tolerate a sinful person. Second, we must learn to exercise our spirit and to use our spirit in every situation. Third, we need to see that, as those who have experienced the Passover, we should now enjoy continually the feast of unleavened bread. Finally, if a person truly becomes an evil one and refuses to repent, he must be removed from the church life. However, if such a person eventually repents and brings forth the fruit of repentance, the church should forgive him and receive him back into the fellowship. If we consider all these matters, we shall have a clear understanding of how to deal with an evil person in the church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SEVEN

DEALING WITH GOING TO SECULAR LAW

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 6:1-11

In 6:1-11 Paul covers the matter of going to secular law. As we read this portion of 1 Corinthians, we need to get into the depths of these verses and not only care for what is written in black and white, but also touch the burden in Paul's spirit as he was writing.

The third problem this Epistle deals with is the matter of one brother going to law against another. This is not a sin like division, which is initiated by the soul, nor a gross sin like incest, which is carried out by the lustful body. This is a case of one claiming his legal rights, not willing to suffer wrong, not willing to learn the lesson of the cross.

We have pointed out that Paul in this book covers at least ten different problems. The first is the problem of division, and the second that of the gross sin of incest. Third he deals with the problem of a brother who took another brother to a secular law court. Why does Paul make this the third case he deals with and not the second or the fourth? If we would answer this question, we must look into the depths of this book.

Paul's burden in writing this Epistle is to deal with the replacements for Christ. The Corinthian believers were replacing Christ with their Greek culture, philosophy, and wisdom. These were all good things, the leading products of society. If we do not have culture, we shall be unrestrained. If we do not have philosophy and wisdom, we shall be foolish. Every human being needs culture, wisdom, and philosophy. The problem among the believers at Corinth was that these good things were replacing Christ.

Therefore, the burden in Paul's spirit was to bring these believers back to Christ, God's unique center.

God's intention is to work Christ into His chosen people so that Christ may become their life and everything to them and that they may live Christ and thereby in experience become the members of Christ. In this way Christ will have the Body, the church. This vision was in Paul's spirit as he was writing 1 Corinthians. In this Epistle Paul first deals with the problem of division. Division has its source in the soul, in particular, in the mind. For this reason, Paul deals with the philosophical mind of the Corinthian believers. Then he goes on to deal with a gross sin. This sequence indicates that if Christians live by the soul and by culture instead of Christ, the door will be opened to the lusts of the flesh.

It is common for Christians today to take various soulish things as replacements for Christ. This opens the way for the lusts of the flesh to come in. Thus, among God's redeemed people there are the problems of the soul and of the lusts of the flesh.

Soulish things are more refined than the lusts of the flesh. Culture enables people to become refined. To be cultured is simply to be refined. The lusts of the flesh, on the contrary, are crude and gross. Nevertheless, whenever people live in the soul, the door is opened wide to the lusts of the flesh. In fact, many times the most sinful and lustful things are done by those who are the most cultured. Often those who are not as highly cultured are not as sinful in their living. It is a fact that in many cases those who are most given to the exercise of the soul are very sinful. On the one hand, they live a soulish life; on the other hand, they indulge in the lusts of the flesh. Many of today's Christians also follow this trend.

We have seen that after dealing with the soul and the lustful flesh, Paul turns to the matter of going to secular law. This is a matter of claiming our rights and of not being willing to suffer loss. When we are soulish and fleshly, we shall always claim our rights. We shall not be willing to be wronged by anyone. For this reason, Paul makes the third

dealing in this Epistle that of claiming one's personal rights. This problem was found among the believers at Corinth.

The problem of claiming our rights is found not only in society and in the church, but also in married life. If a husband and wife live in the soul and according to their lusts, both will claim their rights. Neither will be willing to give in to the other. Only when we live in the spirit are we willing to give in and not insist on our rights. When we have a life by the mingled spirit, we shall not claim any rights for ourselves. It may seem to us that we do not have any rights to claim. The reason we claim our rights is that instead of living by the mingled spirit, we live in the soul and in the flesh. Because the soulish life was prevailing and because the door was open to the lusts of the flesh, there were lawsuits among the believers in Corinth. The sequence is that first we have a soulish life, then the lusts of the flesh, and then the claiming of our rights.

I. BELIEVERS TO BE JUDGED BY THE CHURCH

A. The Saints to Judge the World

In 6:1 Paul asks, "Does any one of you, having a case against another, dare to be judged before the unrighteous and not before the saints?" The unrighteous are the unbelievers, who are unjust before God.

In verse 2 Paul continues, "Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy of the smallest judgments?" In the coming kingdom age the overcoming saints will rule over the nations of the world (Heb. 2:5-6; Rev. 2:26-27). As co-kings with Christ, these overcoming saints will judge the world in the coming age. Since the world will be judged by the saints, they are certainly worthy of the smallest judgments. These judgments are those carried out by a number of saints judging cases among themselves, cases which are trifling compared to the ruling of the world. Here Paul seems to be saying, "If you will be able to judge great things, are you not able to judge the small things

today? Why don't you let the saints judge your cases? Why do you bring your case to unbelievers for judgment?"

B. The Saints to Judge Angels

Verse 3 says, "Do you not know that we will judge angels, not to mention things of this life?" "Things of this life" indicates that judgment over the angels by the saints will be in the future, not in this age. This probably refers to the judgment over the angels revealed in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. The angels mentioned in these verses and those referred to in Ephesians 2:2; 6:12; and Matthew 25:41 must be the evil angels. Thus we, the believers of Christ, will judge not only the human world, but also the angelic world in the future.

C. Going to Law before Unbelievers Being Condemned

In verse 4 Paul says, "If then you have judgments as to things of this life, do you set them to judge who are little esteemed in the church?" This refers to the unbelievers, who are little esteemed in the church. Thus, going to law before unbelievers is condemned.

D. A Case between Brothers Should Be Judged by the Saints

In verse 5 Paul goes on to say, "I say this to your shame. Thus there is not even one among you, no one who is wise, who will be able to discern between his brothers!" In chapter four Paul said that he was not shaming the saints. But here he says that what he writes is to their shame. He fully disagreed with brother going to law with brother, and that before unbelievers (v. 6).

E. A Defeat to Have Lawsuits among Brothers

In verses 7 and 8 Paul says, "Already, therefore, it is altogether a defeat for you that you have lawsuits among yourselves. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? But you wrong and defraud, and this your brothers." When Paul says that it is already a defeat for

believers to have lawsuits among themselves, he means that it is a failure, implying defect, fault, loss, and falling short (in the inheritance of the kingdom of God--v. 9). Willingness to be wronged or defrauded is willingness to suffer loss, to learn the lesson of the cross, to keep the virtue of Christ at some cost. Hence, Paul asks why the believers were not willing to be wronged, why they were not willing to learn the lesson of the cross. Instead of suffering loss, they were actually wronging others and defrauding them. To be sure, Paul's words here are very strong.

Once again I wish to point out that the dealing here concerns claiming our rights. The claiming of rights issues from the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the flesh results from living in the soul. Thus, when we live in the soul, the lusts will come in, and when the lusts come in, we shall insist on our rights and claim them. No doubt, Paul deliberately dealt with the first three problems in a particular sequence. First he deals with division, which comes from the soulish life. Second, he deals with gross sin, which comes from the lust of the flesh. Third, he deals with the claiming of rights.

Both in the church life and in the family life we have this problem of the claiming of our rights. Two brothers may have a problem with each other, and each may claim his rights in the matter. In 6:1-11 Paul was burdened by this claiming of our personal rights. This is hidden within all of us. We all have the tendency to claim our rights in certain matters. Some may argue that they have never taken anyone to court or never brought anyone to the elders of the church. Although they may not have done such things, within them they have the intention to claim their rights. For instance, they may say to themselves, "Why did this brother treat me like that?" To say this proves that we are claiming our rights. In the sight of God to claim our rights in our heart is the same as taking a brother to the law court. This claiming of rights needs to be uprooted and thoroughly dealt with. This was Paul's aim in writing these verses.

II. SINFUL BELIEVERS NOT QUALIFIED TO INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In verse 9 Paul asks a question related to the kingdom of God: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?" To inherit the kingdom in the next age is a reward to the saints who seek righteousness (Matt. 5:10, 20; 6:33).

When Paul speaks of the unrighteous, to whom does he refer--to the one who wrongs others or to the one who is wronged? It seems to me that he is referring to the one who wrongs others. If we wrong a brother, we are unrighteous. Believers who are not righteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. According to the Lord's word in Matthew, we must be absolutely righteous if we are to inherit the coming kingdom as a reward. The Lord even says that our righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees. Because God's kingdom is established upon righteousness, we must be righteous in order to inherit it. Therefore, we should not wrong or defraud our brother. To do this is to be unrighteous, and if we are unrighteous, we shall lose the inheritance of the kingdom.

In verses 9 and 10 Paul says, "Do not be led astray: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the avaricious, not drunkards, not revilers, not the rapacious will inherit the kingdom of God." No sinful person or unrighteous person can have any part in the coming kingdom of God.

It is significant that in verse 9 Paul speaks of inheriting the kingdom. The word inherit implies enjoyment. To inherit a certain thing is to enjoy that thing. Thus, to inherit the coming kingdom means to enjoy the kingdom. The coming kingdom will be a joyful inheritance to the overcomers. According to Matthew, the manifestation of the kingdom will be a reward to the overcoming saints as their enjoyment with the Lord. To inherit the kingdom is not just to enter the kingdom; it is to receive the kingdom as a reward for our enjoyment. This should be an incentive for us to live an overcoming life, a life that is sinless and

righteous. If we would live this kind of life, we need to have the feast of unleavened bread. Then we shall have a life without leaven, a life without sin. By living a righteous life we shall be qualified to inherit the coming kingdom.

In verse 11 Paul continues, "And these things were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." Here washing, sanctifying, and justifying are not by the blood in an objective way, as in 1 John 1:7, Hebrews 10:29, and Romans 3:24-25. These are the subjective washing of regeneration as in Titus 3:5, the subjective sanctifying by the Spirit as in 1 Peter 1:2, and the subjective justifying in the Spirit as in this verse. All these items of God's salvation were accomplished in us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is, in the Person of the Lord, in organic union with the Lord through faith, and in the Spirit of God, that is, in the power and realization of the Holy Spirit. First, we are washed from sinful things; second, we are sanctified, separated unto God; and third, we are justified, accepted, by God.

It is not easy to understand how we can be washed in the Lord's name. If Paul had said that we were washed, sanctified, and justified in the precious blood of Christ, this would be much easier to understand. But what does it mean to be washed in the Lord's name and also in the Spirit? Furthermore, Paul uses the past tense and says that the Corinthians were washed, sanctified, and justified. We may find it hard to believe that certain of the Corinthians had actually been washed, sanctified, and justified.

At the time a person believes in the Lord Jesus and receives Him, he is washed in the blood and also sanctified and justified by the blood. However, this washing, sanctifying, and justifying are all objective; they are not subjective. We also need to experience a subjective washing, sanctifying, and justifying. We did experience these things immediately after we were saved, but only for a short period of time. For at least a few days, we lived a clean, pure, sanctified, and justified life. The objective

washing, sanctifying, and justifying are all in the blood of Christ. But when we live a life that is clean, sanctified, and justified, we experience something subjective regarding these things. This subjective experience is not in the blood; it is in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Spirit.

I have the assurance that every genuinely saved one has had some subjective experience of being washed, sanctified, and justified. After you were saved, did you not have a living, at least for a period of time, which was clean and pure? Were you not holy, sanctified, separated unto the Lord? Did you not live in a way which was justified and which could not be touched by anything unrighteous? However, in most cases believers do not live this way very long. It usually lasts only a few days. If you recall your experience after you were saved, you will realize that you did have a subjective washing, sanctifying, and justifying in the name of the Lord and in the Spirit.

In the New Testament "in the name of the Lord" actually means in the Lord Himself, for the name denotes the Person. If a person with a certain name does not exist, then the name is vain. But when we call a living person by name, that person responds. In like manner, when we say, "Lord Jesus," we experience the Person of the Lord. The Lord is a living Person, not merely a name. Therefore, whenever we call on the name of the Lord Jesus, we call on the Person of the Lord. He is real, living, present, and available. Whenever we call on Him, He responds. We can testify that the Lord Jesus is real, living, and present. Whenever we call on Him, He comes to us.

At the time we were saved, we probably called on the Lord's name spontaneously and unconsciously, without being taught to do this. In this name, which is the reality of the living Person of Christ, we were washed, sanctified, and justified. However, when we no longer called on the Lord, the subjective experience of the washing, sanctifying, and justifying was no longer ours.

According to verse 11, we are washed, sanctified, and justified not only in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but also in the Spirit of our God. The name is the Person, and

the Person is the Spirit. We cannot separate the name of the Lord from His Spirit, for the Spirit is His Person. According to chapters fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen of the Gospel of John, the name cannot be separated from the Spirit. The reason for this is that the name is the Person, and the Person is the Spirit. When we call, "O Lord Jesus," the Lord comes. But when He comes to us, He is the Spirit. Paul certainly experienced this. He knew that when he called on the Lord's name, the Lord came to him as the Spirit. In the name and in the Spirit he experienced the subjective washing, sanctifying, and justifying. This also is our experience when we call on the Lord's name and contact the Spirit, who is the Person denoted by this name.

It requires much experience to understand Paul's word in verse 11. Many years ago I did not know how to apply this word, because I was not enlightened regarding the significance of calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. I did not see the connection between the name of the Lord, the Person of the Lord, and the Spirit. I did not realize that when we call on the name of the Lord, the Person comes and that this Person is the Spirit. But by experience we know that when we call on the name of the Lord, we get the Person of the Lord and that the Person of the Lord is the Spirit. Furthermore, if we continue to call on the name of the Lord, enjoying His name and His Spirit, we are daily washed, sanctified, and justified. Then, we become qualified and prepared to inherit the coming kingdom.

Thus far we have seen that in these chapters the soul is dealt with, that the lusts of the flesh are dealt with, and that the claiming of rights is also dealt with. Now we should be saints who are subjectively washed, sanctified, and justified and are prepared to inherit the coming kingdom.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-EIGHT

DEALING WITH THE ABUSE OF FREEDOM IN FOODS AND IN THE BODY

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 6:12-18

In 1 Corinthians Paul deals with matters in a particular sequence. First he deals with soulish desires and aspirations; second, with the fleshly lusts; and third, with the claiming of rights. As we have pointed out, this sequence is very meaningful. In this message we come to Paul's dealing with the abuse of freedom in foods and in the body, the fourth matter covered in this Epistle.

Foods for man to exist and marriage for man to propagate himself are both necessary and ordained by God. Man has the right to use them. However, he should not abuse them, nor should he be under their power, controlled and enslaved by them. Abusive eating, like the eating of sacrifices to idols, causes the weak brothers to stumble (8:9-13; 10:28-30, 32), and excessive eating damages our body. Both foods and our belly will be done away with; God will bring both to nothing (6:13). The abuse of sex is fornication. It is not only condemned by God; it also destroys our body (v. 18), which is for the Lord.

Both eating and marriage have been ordained by God and are necessary for the existence of mankind. If mankind is to continue on earth for the fulfillment of God's purpose, there is the need for eating and for marriage. Food is not only created by God, but also ordained by Him for our existence. Marriage is for the propagation of mankind. Because eating and marriage are both ordained by God, both are legal. In each case we have freedom, the freedom to eat and the freedom to marry. However, fallen man has

abused his freedom in these matters. For this reason, after dealing with soulish aspirations, fleshly lusts, and the claiming of rights, Paul turns to the matter of the abuse of freedom.

Some teachers of the Bible do not regard 6:12-18 as a separate section. Instead, they place it with the following two sections, the sections on marriage and the problem of eating idol sacrifices. This portion is considered an introduction to the following two sections, since these verses deal with eating and marriage. Many years ago, I did not think that 6:12-18 was an individual section. But after reading this book again and again over many years, I now believe that these verses are a separate section dealing with the abuse of human freedom.

We have seen that soulish people open the door to the lusts of the flesh and that fleshly people will insist on claiming their rights. Following this comes the abuse of freedom. In the church the soul must be denied. This is the basis for the church life on the negative side. On the positive side, the basis of the church life is the truth regarding Christ and His cross. In the church life we all must learn to deny the soul; that is, not to give any ground, occasion, or opening for the soul to do anything. Once the believers in a church become soulish, the church life is terminated, for the door will be open to the lusts of the flesh, and these lusts will give rise to the claiming of rights. There will even be the building up of a base both for claiming rights and for the abuse of human freedom. As we consider these matters, we realize that the sequence in which Paul deals with the problems in Corinthians is marvelous.

I. A BASIC PRINCIPLE

A. All Things Lawful but Not All Things Expedient

Paul opens this section with these words: "All things are lawful to me, but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything." The Greek word rendered lawful literally means under my power of choice to do; hence,

permissible, allowable, lawful. The word for expedient means profitable (not merely convenient), advantageous, good, worthwhile. This Greek word means profitable, economical, convenient, helpful in reaching the goal quickly. It also refers to things that are good. Here Paul's thought may be that all things are lawful, but not all things help us to remain in the central lane of God's economy. All things are lawful, but not all things help us in bearing the cross or are profitable in experiencing Christ.

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

B. Not Brought under the Power of Anything

In verse 12 Paul twice says, "All things are lawful to me." The first use of these words is somewhat objective; the second use is very subjective. Paul says, "All things are lawful to me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything." Literally the Greek words rendered "be brought under the power of" mean to be brought under the authority of. All things are under my power, but I will not be brought under the power (authority) of anything. All things are permissible, allowable, lawful, to me, but I will not be ruled (enslaved) or brought under the authority, the control, of any. Verse 12 may be considered a proverb that

governs the apostle's dealings with some problems in the following section, from 6:13 through 11:1.

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

II. OUR BODY FOR THE LORD

A. Foods for the Belly, and the Belly for Foods

In verse 13 Paul goes on to say, "Foods are for the belly and the belly for foods; but God will bring to nothing both it and them." Foods and the belly are for the existence of the body. By themselves they do not mean anything; God will bring them to nothing.

Paul's composition here may seem awkward. He says, "God will bring to nothing both it and them." If we were writing this verse, we might say, "God will bring both to nothing." However, if the verse were written in this way, the meaning and significance would be lost. By referring to "both it and them," Paul means both the belly and the foods. He refers to the belly first because God will bring it to nothing before He brings foods to nothing. The reason for this is that the abuse of freedom in the matter of eating is not caused by the food; it is caused by the belly. The problem comes not from the food itself, but from the belly. After a person's belly has been brought to nothing, food will no longer be a problem. Food is for the belly, and the belly is for food. God uses these things so that we may exist for the fulfillment of His purpose. But one day God will bring both the belly and the foods to nothing.

B. The Body Not for Fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the Body

In verse 13 Paul also says, "But the body is not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."

Our body was created for the Lord, and the Lord within us is for our body. He feeds it with material food (Psa. 103:5) and gives it His resurrection life (Rom. 8:11), which swallows its death element with its weakness and sickness. Eventually He will transfigure it, conforming it to His glorious body. We should not abuse it by fornication.

On the one hand, Paul says that the belly is for food; on the other hand, he tells us that the body is not for fornication. We are free to eat what we choose, but we may not commit fornication. However, if we eat excessively, we shall cause damage to our body. Thus, although we are free to eat, we should be careful to eat in a healthy way. Our appetite easily runs wild. Thus, it needs to be bridled, restricted.

Although Paul says that the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body, he does not say that God is either for the belly or for foods. God will bring both the belly and the foods to nothing, but the Lord will not bring our body to nothing. Our body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for our body.

C. Our Body to Be Raised Up by God through His Power

In verse 14 Paul says, "And God has both raised up the Lord and will raise up us through His power." God raised up the Lord bodily. Our body is destined to participate in the Lord's glorious body in resurrection (Phil. 3:21) and to be raised incorruptible (1 Cor. 15:52). This will be the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:23). Even now the Spirit of the resurrected Christ, who dwells in us, gives life to our mortal body (Rom. 8:11), making it a member of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15) and a temple of God indwelt by His Holy Spirit (v. 19).

I am thankful not only that the Lord is for our body, but also that God will raise up our body, even as He raised up the body of the Lord Jesus. We all have some physical defects, and none of us is absolutely healthy. We become tired and sometimes we become ill. These weaknesses help us appreciate the Lord's promises concerning our body.

In verses 13 and 14 we have a dual promise: first, that the Lord is for the body; second, that God will raise up the body. We know from Romans 8:11 that even today our mortal body can receive the supply of resurrection life and be sustained by it. Sometimes He heals us. The first aspect of the dual promise concerning our body is that the Lord is for it and sustains it.

From experience I have learned that the Lord is for our body. In 1943 I became seriously ill with tuberculosis and I was charged to have a complete rest. For a long period of time I had to lie in bed. One day my firstborn child, who was thirteen years of age, came to visit me. As I looked at him, I came very close to weeping. I prayed, "Lord, will You grant me another fifteen years? Lord, look at my child, my firstborn. In fifteen years he will be twenty-eight. If you will give me another fifteen years, I shall be content and willing to die when these years are over." I praise the Lord that more than thirty-eight years have passed since I prayed to the Lord in this way. My body fully recovered from that illness, and during all these years I have been able to work hard. The Lord truly is for our body.

Although the first aspect of the dual promise is for the present, the second aspect is for the future. The Lord is for our body today, but God will raise up our body in the future. This raising up of the body refers to its transfiguration. When our body is resurrected, it will be transfigured.

In verse 15 Paul goes on to say, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then, taking the members of Christ, make them members of a prostitute? Certainly not!" Here Paul says clearly that our bodies are members of Christ. This is not an illustration, a metaphor, or a parable. On the contrary, it is a statement of fact. Our bodies are actually members of Christ. How marvelous!

In verse 15 Paul says that our bodies are members of Christ, and in verse 17 he says that he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. How can we reconcile these two matters? Are we one with the Lord physically or

spiritually? If we say that we are not one with Him physically, then how can our bodies be His members? But if we claim that our oneness with the Lord is physical and not spiritual, we fall into serious error, even heresy. Our oneness with the Lord is both spiritual and physical. Although we may not realize much of this now, one day it will be fully manifested that we are actually one with the Lord in body, soul, and spirit. Then according to 1 John 3:2, we shall be fully like Him not only in spirit, but also in our body. First John 3:2 is a verse which emphasizes our likeness to the Lord in body. Philippians 3:21 has the same emphasis. This verse says that the body of our humiliation will become the same as the Lord's glorious body. These verses indicate that we are one with the Lord both physically and spiritually. Our body will one day be absolutely like the Lord's glorious body in resurrection.

Our physical body can be likened to a seed sown into the soil. According to 1 Corinthians 15, resurrection is actually the growth of a seed which has been sown into the ground. When a seed is sown, it is simply a seed. But when the seed grows and blossoms, it takes on a very different appearance. Today our body is a seed sown into Christ. But one day this seed will grow up through resurrection. When it grows in this way, it will change in appearance, although it will still be our body. When a grain of wheat is sown into the soil, it is wheat. When this seed grows up, it is still wheat even though it is very different in appearance. At present, our physical body does not have a good appearance. For this reason, we do not appreciate our body so much. However, because our body is a member of Christ, it is dear and precious. Eventually, in resurrection, this body will become exactly the same as Christ's glorious resurrected body.

In verse 18 Paul says, "Flee fornication. Every sin which a man may do is outside the body, but he who commits fornication sins against his own body." Fornication is a sin against our own body, which is a member of Christ. This is a serious warning not to abuse our body.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-NINE

DEALING WITH THE ABUSE OF FREEDOM IN FOODS AND IN THE BODY

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 6:13-20

In 6:15, 17, and 19 there are three crucial matters: first, that our bodies are members of Christ; second, that we are one spirit with the Lord; and third, that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. In the context of dealing with the abuse of freedom in foods and in the body, Paul opens up these matters in a marvelous way.

MEMBERS OF CHRIST

Verse 15 says, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" Because we are organically united with Christ (v. 17), and because Christ dwells in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22) and makes His home in our heart (Eph. 3:17), our entire being, including our purified body, becomes a member of Him. Hence, to practice such membership we need to offer our body to Him (Rom. 12:1, 4-5).

ONE SPIRIT WITH THE LORD

In verse 17 Paul says, "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." The word joined in this verse refers to the believers' organic union with the Lord through believing into Him (John 3:15-16). This union is illustrated by that of the branches with the vine (John 15:4-5). It is a matter not only of life, but also in life, the divine life. Such a union with the resurrected Lord can only be in our spirit.

The expression "one spirit" indicates the mingling of the Lord as the Spirit with our spirit. Our spirit has been regenerated by the Spirit of God (John 3:6), who is now in

us (1 Cor. 6:19) and is one with our spirit (Rom. 8:16). This is the realization of the Lord who became the life-giving Spirit through resurrection (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17), and who is now with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). This mingled spirit is often referred to in Paul's Epistles, as in Romans 8:4-6.

A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In verse 19 Paul says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, Who is in you, Whom you have from God, and you are not your own?" The Holy Spirit is in our spirit (Rom. 8:16), and our spirit is within our body. Hence, our body becomes a temple, a dwelling place, of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 20 Paul concludes, "For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." The price mentioned here is the precious blood of Christ (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Rev. 5:9). To glorify God in our body means to let God who dwells in us (1 John 4:13) occupy and saturate our body and express Himself through our body as His temple, especially in the two matters of eating and marriage, according to the context of this section from 6:13 through 11:1. For this, we need to exercise a severe and strict control over our body, bringing it into subjection (1 Cor. 9:27) and presenting it to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).

THE NEED FOR THE PROPER CAPACITY

These verses in 1 Corinthians 6 are the only verses in the New Testament which tell us that our bodies are members of Christ, that we are one spirit with the Lord, and that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. When we read these verses, however, we may take them for granted and may not spend adequate time to study them and the important matters revealed in them. How much time have you spent on verse 15, which says that our bodies are members of Christ? Very few believers have paid the proper attention to this verse. Yes, messages have been given on verse 19, messages on the believers' body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. But before you came into the Lord's recovery, did you ever hear a message on being one

spirit with the Lord? Did you ever hear a message on being joined to the Lord as one spirit? These three matters deserve thorough study. I do not mean merely the study of the black and white letters of the Word, but a study in the light of experience.

Rarely do Christians today practice being one spirit with the Lord. Do you know of a book, or even a message entitled "One Spirit with the Lord"? Due to the influence of traditional theology and practice, most Christians are not able to digest a verse like 6:17. There seems to be no room in them for the vital matter of being one spirit with the Lord. However, they may have a great deal of room in them for such matters as holiness, victory, power, miracles, and speaking in tongues. Certain Christians in Pentecostalism place great emphasis on speaking in tongues. In some cases they do not care whether or not the tongues-speaking is genuine. Because they are so fond of speaking in tongues, they do not care much for proper prayers and do not care at all for the central vision of Paul's completing ministry. If someone speaks in tongues, these believers easily become excited. But if someone prays, "Lord, thank You for Your mercy and grace," they quickly become disinterested. They have no heart for this kind of prayer. Furthermore, should you speak to them of the vision of God's economy, they would not be able to understand what you are saying. Do you think it is possible for such persons to know the Word of God? No, they cannot know the Word, for there is no room in them for the crucial matters of God's revelation.

The situation of many Christians today is similar to that of the disciples of the Lord Jesus who did not have the capacity to take in the Lord's word regarding the bread of life. The Lord said that He was the bread of life, that He came down from heaven to give life, that His flesh was edible and His blood drinkable, and that whoever ate Him would live by Him (John 6:33, 35, 55, 57). Those who could not receive the Lord's word said, "This is a hard word; who can hear it?" (John 6:60).

We also may be very limited in our capacity to receive God's revelation. Due to the drugging influence of religion

and tradition, we may not be able to take in Paul's word about being one spirit with the Lord, or his word about our bodies being the members of Christ. We may be like a person who eats garlic or who stays in a room filled with the smell of garlic, and thus becomes insensitive to the taste and smell of garlic. Such a person's sense of smell may become so accustomed to garlic that he regards this smell as normal. In the same principle, our spiritual senses of smell and taste, in fact, our whole inner being, may be so much under the influence of traditional Christianity that we do not have the ability to perceive certain crucial matters of God's economy. If this is our situation, we may read 1 Corinthians 6 again and again without being impressed by verses 15 and 17.

For many years I also read 1 Corinthians 6 without seeing the crucial significance of verse 17. But one day this verse began to be opened up to me. It was as if I had never read this verse before. I asked myself if such a verse was actually in the Bible. In verse 17 Paul clearly says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." From that time onward, I began to give a great deal of attention to this verse and to exercise myself to experience it.

In 1947 and 1948 Brother Nee often stressed the need to exercise the spirit and release the spirit. He often said that in all we do, preaching the gospel, contacting the saints, and ministering the Word, we must exercise our spirit and release our spirit. He also pointed out that the part of our being which we use the most is the part that we emphasize. For example, if a person lives in the mind, his mind will be prominent whenever he speaks. Likewise, a person who lives in the emotion will express his emotion. I was greatly helped by this fellowship, and from that time onward, I endeavored to exercise the spirit and to release the spirit. However, I had not yet been impressed with 6:17.

In 1958 the Lord began to open the matters of eating the Lord, drinking the Lord, and enjoying the Lord. At that time I began to see John 6:57, where the Lord Jesus says, "He who eats Me shall also live because of Me." I also realized that if we would eat the Lord, drink the Lord, and

enjoy the Lord, we must know our spirit. Apart from knowing the spirit, we cannot contact the Lord. In one message I pointed out that only when we know the nature of a particular food do we know how to eat that kind of food. In like manner, if we want to eat the Lord, we must know the nature of the Lord. Today the Lord is the life-giving Spirit. This means that the nature of spiritual food is spirit. We can contact the Spirit only by means of our spirit. John 4:24 says, "God is Spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and reality." According to this verse, only spirit can touch the Spirit, and only spirit can worship Spirit.

In 1960 the burden, the light, and the utterance concerning the spirit became intensified. As a result, message upon message was given on the spirit. When I began the ministry in this country, I also emphasized the spirit. If you read the early issues of *The Stream* magazine, you will see many of the messages are centered on the spirit. I can testify that seeing 1 Corinthians 6:17 has greatly affected the ministry given to me by the Lord.

A GREAT MYSTERY

We the believers are joined to the Lord as one spirit. This is a great mystery, perhaps the most mysterious matter revealed in the Bible. Who can explain such a mystery? Can you explain how it is possible for us to be one spirit with the Lord? Although we cannot explain it, we can surely experience it. Often I pray in the morning, "Lord, thank You for another day in which to practice being one spirit with You." What a wonder that sinners such as we can be one spirit with the Lord! The more we consider this matter, the more we realize how wonderful it is.

In 6:17 Paul plainly declares the fact that we are one spirit with the Lord. But few of us have paid adequate attention to this. We need much time to study this verse and explore it in an experiential way. We need to

experiment and learn how to be one spirit with the Lord in our speaking and in all that we do. As we do various things, we need to consider whether or not we are one spirit with the Lord.

Because I have seen the vision of being one spirit with the Lord according to 6:17, I have come to realize that what Brother Lawrence practiced was altogether an Old Testament matter. He exercised to be in the presence of God, but he did not practice being one spirit with the Lord. There is a great difference between being in the presence of God and being one spirit with the Lord.

We have seen that in chapter six Paul covers three vital matters. These matters are so great that it takes much exercise of the spirit for us to assimilate them adequately. How marvelous that our bodies are members of Christ, that we are one spirit with the Lord, and that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit! The vision concerning this is becoming so clear that sometimes I can hardly contain myself. The burden of this vision is so heavy that I can hardly bear it. I cannot bear to think that some churches and some saints may go on in an old way, carrying on a Christian work but neglecting the central vision of Paul's completing ministry. We urgently need to see the vision that our bodies are members of Christ, that we are one spirit with the Lord, and that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.

SEEING THE CENTRAL VISION

I am troubled by the situation among Christians today and also by the situation among us. Everywhere Christians are listening to sugar-coated sermons, sermons that distract and even drug them. Even some among us have been distracted by scriptural messages. Certain brothers may use parts of the Life-study Messages as materials for speaking, but still not see the central vision. As a result, both the speakers and the listeners may miss the mark. The meetings may seem very good and even helpful, but are the saints being helped by the central vision of Paul's completing ministry or by John's mending ministry? In

some cases this is doubtful. It is possible that we are missing the mark in our ministry, work, and effort to help the churches. If we pay attention to things other than God's economy, there is the danger that we would actually help the saints to be distracted. What the Lord desires today is a remnant who see the vision He has shown to his faithful steward, the apostle Paul, and who carry out the completing ministry concerning Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ. However, these matters should not be presented to the saints as mere doctrines; they must be ministered as a reality. If we would minister the reality of these things to others, we must first touch the reality ourselves.

Because of the vision and the burden, I have no heart for messages that contain nothing but doctrine. The three crucial matters covered in this message should not remain doctrines to us. I am deeply concerned that some among us have not yet touched the reality of these things and thus do not have an experiential realization concerning our bodies being members of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit and of being one spirit with the Lord. If the brothers who minister in the churches see this vision, their speaking will be radically changed. They would never again speak in a way of giving mere doctrines to others. Spontaneously they would determine not to know anything other than Christ and His Body.

It is not my burden in these messages to teach doctrines. Forty years ago I would have given many messages on subjects such as the reward, the suffering of loss, being saved through fire, and the various categories of people who should be excommunicated from the church. But I have no burden to give messages on these things. Instead, I am burdened that the saints enjoy Christ as their feast of unleavened bread. I am especially burdened for those who have been in the recovery for years and still do not see the central vision. Instead of grain, these ones only have husks, and they minister these husks to others. Those under their training do not receive any nourishment, any life supply, and as a result do not grow. If we would all

see the vision, our situation will be altogether different. We shall testify that we are one spirit with the Lord and that our bodies are members of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. However, we are still short of experience, still very limited in our capacity to receive these things and understand them. Thus, we all need to humble ourselves before the Lord and say, "Lord, I don't know what to do. I don't know how to repent, I don't know how to confess, and I don't know how to pray. Lord, I am simply here before You. Have mercy on me. I need to see a clear vision of Your economy. Have mercy on me, Lord, that I may touch the reality of this vision and help others to do the same." Let us all look to the Lord for His mercy that we may see the vision shown to Paul. Only when we see such a vision can we be kept from the abuse of freedom in foods and in the body.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY

DEALING WITH THE ABUSE OF FREEDOM IN FOODS AND IN THE BODY

(3)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 6:13-20

TWO GROUPS OF PROBLEMS

As Paul was writing this Epistle, he must have been exercised to consider in what sequence he should deal with the different problems among the believers at Corinth. The order in which Paul deals with the problems is not careless or insignificant. On the contrary, the sequence is full of significance. First, Paul deals with the soulish desires and aspirations; second, with the fleshly lusts; third, with the claiming of rights; and fourth, with the abuse of human freedom in the God-ordained matters of eating and marriage. As we shall see, Paul goes on in chapter seven to deal with married life and in chapters eight, nine, and ten, to deal with the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. These six dealings form a group. Every matter in this group is a matter of life. The soul, the flesh, rights, freedom, marriage, and eating are all related to human living.

In chapters eleven through sixteen Paul deals with five other problems. In chapter eleven he deals with head covering and the Lord's table. Head covering is related to Christ as the Head, and the Lord's table is related to the church as Christ's Body. In chapters twelve, thirteen, and fourteen Paul deals with spiritual gifts; in chapter fifteen he covers the doctrine of resurrection; and in chapter sixteen he comes to the last matter, the giving of material things. These five matters form a second group and are all related to spiritual things concerning God's administration.

The more we consider the sequence in which Paul deals with problems in this Epistle, the more we realize the significance of this sequence. We shall see that the first six problems are a group related to human life and that the last five are a group related to spiritual things, in particular related to God's interests on earth.

One way to study 1 Corinthians is to trace the sequence of the eleven problems dealt with in this book. This is not merely to study the Bible according to the black and white letters; it is to see the light which brings in life. When we see light in the Word and receive life, we shall grow.

KEEPING THE FEAST

In chapters five and six Paul deals with the matters of gross sin, the claiming of rights, and the abuse of human freedom. But when he deals with these things, he uses certain excellent expressions and utterances to present matters that are not covered elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, in 5:8 Paul says, "Let us therefore keep the feast." We have seen that this feast refers to the feast of unleavened bread as a continuation of the Passover (Exo. 12:15-20). It lasted seven days, a period of completion, signifying the entire period of our Christian life, from the day of our conversion to the day of rapture. This indicates that the entire Christian life should be a feast, an enjoyment of Christ as our banquet.

Although keeping the feast of unleavened bread is a matter of great importance, most Christians pay little attention to Paul's word concerning it. Instead, they concentrate on Paul's commands for wives to submit themselves to their husbands and for husbands to love their wives. These concepts are already part of the natural understanding both of believers and of unbelievers. The Chinese began to practice these things thousands of years ago. If from the Bible you teach certain ethical Chinese that wives should submit to their husbands and that husbands should love their wives, they may tell you that they already know these things and practice them.

Although Christians pay attention to verses about

submission and love, who pays adequate attention to Paul's word about keeping the feast? Do the professors in Bible schools and seminaries teach their students what it means to keep the feast and how to keep the feast? It is doubtful that any professor instructs his students concerning these things. Furthermore, I doubt that anyone has ever told you what it means for your body to be a member of Christ, to be joined to the Lord as one spirit, or for your body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. How sad that today's believers have been distracted from these crucial matters! We also have been hindered by the influence of our religious background. Thus, there is the need for us to get into verses 15, 17, and 19. We can no longer afford to neglect such verses; these are some of the deepest verses in the Bible.

LIFE IMPARTED TO OUR MORTAL BODIES

In 6:13 and 14 Paul says, "Foods are for the belly, and the belly for foods; but God will bring to nothing both it and them. But the body is not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God has raised up the Lord and will raise up us through His power." Our body was created for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. God has raised up the Lord bodily, and our body will participate in the Lord's glorious body in resurrection (Phil. 3:21) and be raised incorruptible. This will be the redemption of our body.

Speaking of the resurrected Christ, Acts 2:24 says, "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." According to Romans 6:9, "Christ having been raised from among the dead dies no more; death lords it over Him no more." In 2 Corinthians 4:14 Paul says clearly that the One who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up: "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you." Furthermore, in John 6:39 and 40 the Lord Jesus promises that He will raise us up in the last day. But even today the Spirit of the resurrected Christ gives life to our body,

thereby making it a member of Christ and a temple of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

If we would understand how the Lord today is for our body and how in the future God will resurrect our body, we need to understand Romans 8:11. This verse says, "But if the Spirit of Him Who raised Jesus from among the dead dwells in you, He Who raised Christ Jesus from among the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit Who indwells you." In this verse, one of the greatest verses in the Bible, we see that through the indwelling Spirit of the very God who raised up Jesus from among the dead, life is imparted into our mortal body. This may be the present experience of all who seek the Lord. If you truly seek the Lord, something marvelous is taking place within you: the Spirit of the resurrecting God is imparting life into your body.

This imparting of life may be illustrated by the transmission of electricity. The current of electricity is actually electricity in motion. If you look at the electric meter in the meeting hall, you will realize that electricity is being transmitted into the building. As we meet in the hall to pray and fellowship, electricity is flowing into the building. In the same principle, the heavenly electricity of Christ's resurrection life is flowing into our mortal bodies. As we seek the Lord day by day, we can have the full assurance that the divine current is flowing within us. This current is the resurrection life imparted into us through the indwelling Spirit.

I often experience this transmission when I am physically tired. Many times I must speak even when my body is very tired. But while I am speaking, the Spirit is infused into me, and the resurrected Christ becomes my life supply. As a result, my spirit is strengthened and my weak, tired body is enlivened.

UNITED WITH CHRIST ORGANICALLY

In verse 15 Paul says, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" Notice that here Paul does not say merely that we are members of Christ; he declares

that our bodies are members of Christ. The subject of these verses is the abuse of freedom in foods and in the body. Thus, Paul's concern is the believers' body.

Because we are organically united with Christ and because Christ dwells in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22) and makes His home in our heart (Eph. 3:17), our entire being, including our purified body, becomes a member of Him. Verse 17 indicates that we are organically united with Christ. To be one spirit with the Lord is to enter into an organic union with Him, to be united with Him organically. This organic union makes it possible for our bodies to be the members of Christ. Christ indwells our spirit, and from our spirit spreads throughout our inner being, thereby making His home in our hearts. Furthermore, according to Romans 8:11, from our inner being He seeks to impart Himself as life into our physical body. Therefore, Christ spreads from the spirit to the soul and from the soul to the body. In this way our bodies become His members.

This matter is deep, mysterious, and abstract. But praise the Lord for the solid word in 1 Corinthians 6 revealing such a mysterious matter! It is crucial that we dig into this word.

In 6:17 Paul says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." I wish to emphasize once again that this refers to the believers' organic union with the Lord through believing into Him (John 3:15-16). Such a union with the resurrected Christ can only be in our spirit, for Christ today is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) and is now with our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22).

THREE ASPECTS OF ONE REALITY

We have seen that in verses 15, 17, and 19 Paul covers three crucial matters: that our bodies are the members of Christ; that we are joined to the Lord as one spirit; and that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. In actuality and practicality these three are one. The key to all three is in verse 17. Apart from being joined to the Lord in our spirit, it is impossible for our bodies, which are sinful and lustful, to become the members of Christ. Another crucial

matter related to this is Paul's word in 6:14 that the Lord "will raise up us through His power." We have pointed out that even now the Spirit of the resurrected Christ who dwells in our spirit gives life to our body. This impartation of life makes our bodies the members of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever wondered how our bodies can become the members of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit? The key is that the indwelling Spirit of the resurrected Christ imparts life into our mortal bodies.

Since this is the key, we must exercise and practice to experience the Lord as the life-giving Spirit dwelling in our spirit. This is to practice being one spirit with the Lord. If we exercise ourselves to experience this and enjoy it, we shall open the door for the Lord to impart life to our physical bodies. Then our bodies will be full of the resurrection life of Christ and will become the members of Christ. When our body becomes a member of the indwelling Christ, it automatically becomes the temple, the dwelling place, of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in our experience the three matters of our bodies being members of Christ, of being one spirit with the Lord, and of our body being the temple of the Holy Spirit are three aspects of one reality.

The way Paul deals with the problems among the Corinthian believers is not shallow or superficial. On the contrary, it is deep and profound. As Paul deals with the different problems, he brings us back to the central vision of God's economy--to the Triune God as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit dwelling in our spirit. The Spirit today is the processed Triune God indwelling our whole being. All the problems among the believers are caused by the shortage of the experience of this indwelling Spirit. To repeat, Christians have problems because they lack the experience of the all-inclusive, life-giving indwelling Spirit. For this reason, Paul eventually brings us back to this Spirit in our spirit.

GLORIFYING GOD IN OUR BODY

In 6:20 Paul says, "For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." The way to glorify God

in our body is to have our body occupied by God and thoroughly saturated with Him. Then we shall express Him in our body. As the Lord spreads from our spirit, through our soul, and into our body, we glorify God in our body. Thus, to glorify God in our body is to have our body one with the Triune God. This is to understand Paul's word in verse 20 according to the central vision of God's economy.

We should not think that 1 Corinthians is a shallow book dealing with problems in the church. Yes, in this book Paul does deal with many problems. But at the same time he brings us into the central vision of God's economy, for he brings us back to the Spirit as the ultimate consummation of the processed Triune God.

If you get into the depths of these verses, your life, ministry, and service in the church will be affected in a revolutionary way. Your inner being and your entire church life will be radically changed. May we all pray about these verses until such a change takes place within us.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-ONE

DEALING WITH MARRIAGE LIFE

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 7:1-40

In 7:1-40 Paul comes to the fifth problem dealt with in this Epistle--the matter of marriage. This is treated according to the principles established in the preceding section (6:12-20).

Many times those who are most cultured are the ones who have the most problems in married life. Those who are simple and uncultured may not have as many marriage problems. If you study the statistics related to divorces in this country, you will find that a large percentage of divorces is among those who are highly educated and among professional people. It seems that the more educated a person is, the greater is the possibility of divorce. Because the Corinthians were so devoted to their culture and philosophy, they had many questions about marriage. Paul answers these questions in chapter seven.

First Corinthians 7:1 begins in this way: "Now concerning the things of which you wrote." This indicates that the Corinthians had written to Paul about various matters, including marriage. The believers at Corinth had many questions because they were philosophical. They philosophized about everything. It is dangerous, however, to philosophize about our married life, for this can lead to separation or even divorce. Brother Nee once advised us that after we get married, we should be blind regarding our spouse. If we do this, we shall enjoy married life. But if we are watchful over our husband or wife in a critical, philosophical way, we shall have serious problems. To analyze our married life is to philosophize concerning marriage. Instead of analyzing our married life, we should

simply enjoy it, praising the Lord and thanking Him for the spouse He has given us. The more we praise the Lord in this way, the more we shall enjoy married life.

Probably all those who are married have spent some time analyzing their marriage. We may have said to ourselves, "Was it really of the Lord that I marry this one? Perhaps I was influenced too much by others. Maybe I should have waited a little longer." If we are honest, we shall admit that we have asked questions such as these. These questions arise because, deep within, we are not wholly satisfied with our married life. Just as every Christian has had doubts concerning his salvation, so every married person has had doubts about married life. Of course, I do not encourage you to question your married life. I am simply pointing out the fact that questions seem to be unavoidable, especially among those who are educated and highly cultured.

I. BASIC PRINCIPLES

The best way to approach Paul's treatment of married life in this chapter is to consider the basic principles. I believe that this is the best way to understand the many points covered in chapter seven.

A. Good for a Man Not to Touch a Woman

The first basic principle is found in verse 1. In this verse Paul says, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." This depends upon the gift from God (v. 7).

B. Devoting Ourselves to Prayer

Speaking to married believers, Paul says in verse 5, "Do not deprive each other, except by agreement for a time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer and again be together, that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." The Greek word rendered devote literally means have leisure, be free for; hence, to give oneself to. Prayer requires that we be free from persons,

matters, and things. Any prayer that requires staying away from the spouse for a time must be special and heavy.

Married life often distracts us from prayer and interferes with our prayer life. It may even keep us from praying altogether. However, there are unusual cases where a husband and wife help one another in the prayer life. But for the most part, marriage is a distraction from the prayer life.

C. Giving No Occasion to Satan

In verse 5 Paul warns the married ones not to be tempted by Satan because of their lack of self-control. The tempter, Satan, is crouching to capture the believers. Their lack of self-control may give him the opportunity to do this.

D. Depending upon the Gift We have Received from God

In verse 7 Paul says, "But I wish all men to be even as myself; but each has his own gift from God, one of this kind, another of that." Since the Apostle Paul is so absolute for the Lord and His economy, he wishes all men to be as he is (v. 8). He desires them not to marry but to remain as he that they also may be absolute for the Lord's interests without distraction (vv. 33, 35). In this wish he expresses the Lord's aspiration concerning His called ones.

For a believer in Christ to be able not to marry is a gift from God (Matt. 19:10-12). For those who have not received such a gift, it is better to marry (1 Cor. 7:9). It all depends upon the gift we have received from God. If a person does not have the gift not to marry and yet deliberately refrains from marrying, he will face difficulties and may damage himself. Married life is troublesome. But if anyone does not have the gift, the ability, not to marry, that one should marry and accept its troubles. Otherwise, by choosing not to be married, he may have even greater difficulties.

E. Good to Remain Unmarried

Verse 8 says, "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows, It is good for them if they remain even as I." This

was the apostle's wish and opinion in his earlier ministry (vv. 7, 25, 40). Later, after witnessing the actual outcome, he charged young widows to marry (1 Tim. 5:11-15).

According to Paul's word in this verse, it is good for a believer to remain unmarried. However, we are not able to fulfill this word without receiving the necessary gift from the Lord.

In verse 26 Paul says, "I consider then that this is good because of the present necessity, that it is good for a man to be as he is." Here Paul indicates that, because of the present necessity, it is good for virgins not to marry. The Greek word for present may also mean that the presence of a certain thing foreshadows and inaugurates something to come. The present necessity or distress indicates more anguish to come, as prophesied by the Lord in Matthew 24:8, 19, and 21. The word rendered necessity means force, constraint; hence, distress, anguish. It refers to the needs of the life in the present age, the demand of which constrains and presses people and becomes a distress and anguish to them. Therefore, it is good to remain unmarried (vv. 27, 40a).

F. Better to Marry If Lacking Self-control

In verse 9 Paul says, "But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." According to this verse, if someone does not have self-control, it is better for that one to marry. The Greek word for self-control here also means continency. The same Greek word is used in 9:25 for athletes abstaining from sensual indulgences during preparation for the games.

G. Remaining in Marriage That the Unbelieving Party May Be Saved

In verses 13 and 14 Paul says, "And a wife who has an unbelieving husband and he consents to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the brother; otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy." In verse 16 Paul refers to

the possibility of a wife saving her husband, or of a husband saving his wife. Here we have the principle of remaining in marriage that the unbelieving party may be saved. This means that a believer who is married to an unbeliever should not take the initiative to give up that marriage. Instead of seeking to change his status, he should remain in the married life in order to save the unbelieving party.

In verse 14 Paul speaks of an unbelieving husband being sanctified by the wife and an unbelieving wife being sanctified by the husband. To be sanctified is to be made holy, separated unto God for His purpose. As the believing wife is of the Lord and for the Lord, so her unbelieving husband is made holy, sanctified, separated unto God, because he is for his wife, who is of and for God. It is similar to the temple and the altar making the common things holy when they are attached to them (Matt. 23:17, 19). The same principle applies to the unbelieving wife and the children. To be sanctified in this way does not mean the person is saved, just as the sanctification of food through the saints' prayer has nothing to do with salvation (1 Tim. 4:5).

H. The Unbelieving Party Being Allowed to Leave So That the Believing Party May Live in Peace

In verse 15 Paul goes on to say, "But if the unbelieving one separates, let him be separated; the brother or the sister is not enslaved in such cases; but God has called us in peace." To be not enslaved here means not under bondage, but freed from the marriage of a believer with an unbeliever, when the unbeliever leaves the believer.

According to this verse, "God has called us in peace." God in His salvation has called us to Him in the sphere and element of peace. Hence, we should live in this peace. If the unbelieving party in our marriage desires to leave, we should allow it. But in order that we may live in the peace in which God has called us, God does not want us to initiate any separation as long as the other party consents to remain (v. 13). The following verses (vv. 16-24) are based

upon this, that God has called us in peace. The word "for" at the beginning of verse 16 indicates that verses 16 through 24 are an explanation of the statement that God has called us in peace. To remain in this peace we must keep the word in verses 16 through 24.

In verse 16 Paul asks, "For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?" Since we do not know whether we shall save our unbelieving husband or wife, we should not insist that they remain with us, nor that they leave. God wants us to remain in the state in which He called us (vv. 20, 24), not to initiate any change. Therefore, we should leave the entire matter to the unbelieving party.

I. Remaining in the Status of Our Calling

In verse 20 Paul declares, "Each one, in the calling in which he was called, in this let him remain." Here we see that we should remain in the status of our calling. If we were married when called, we should remain in marriage. Likewise, if we were unmarried when called, it is better, if possible, to remain unmarried.

Verse 24 says, "Each one, brothers, in what state he was called, in this let him remain with God." After being called, the believers do not need to change their outward status, but they do need to have a change in their inward condition, that is, from being without God to being with God, in order to be one with God and have God with them in their state, whatever it may be.

J. Seeking to Care for the Things of the Lord without Other Cares

Another principle here is to care for the things of the Lord and for the Lord's interests without having any other care. Verse 32 says, "But I desire you to be without care. The unmarried cares for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord." In verse 33 Paul points out that the one who is married cares for the things of the world and how to please his wife. As a result, he is distracted. The

Greek word translated distracted literally means divided. A man who would please his wife is distracted, divided, from the things of the Lord (v. 35).

K. Waiting on the Lord without Distraction

Verse 35 says, "But I say this for your own profit, not that I may put a noose on you, but for that which is comely and waiting on the Lord without distraction." The Greek word rendered "put a noose on" means to entangle with a snare, to constrain to obey one's word. It was not Paul's intention to put a noose on the saints, but that they may wait on the Lord without distraction. There are distractions in married life. A married person will always have distractions.

L. Doing Well by Giving One's Virginity in Marriage, and Doing Better by Deciding to Keep One's Virginity

In verses 37 and 38 Paul says, "But he who stands firm in his heart, not having necessity, but has authority over his own will and has decided this in his own heart to keep his own virginity, he will do well. So then both he who gives his own virginity in marriage does well, and he who does not give it in marriage will do better." In verses 36 through 38 virgin refers both to male and female, as in verse 25. According to verse 36, there is nothing wrong, if need requires, for one to give his virginity in marriage.

Verses 36 through 38 have also been translated as follows: "But if anyone thinks that he is behaving unbecomingly toward his virgin *daughter*, if she be past the bloom of youth and need so requires, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let them marry. But he who stands firm in his heart, not having necessity, but has authority over his own will and has decided this in his own heart to keep his own virgin *daughter*, he will do well. So then both he who gives his own virgin *daughter* in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better." Most translators prefer this translation. But

according to the expressions in these verses and the context of the chapter, especially verses 25 through 28, the translation in the Recovery Version is more logical. John Nelson Darby in his *New Translation* of the Bible takes this view.

If need requires, a virgin, male or female, may give oneself to marriage. This is to do well. However, to keep one's virginity is to do better. Paul's word indicates that it is better to remain unmarried. However, we must remember that this depends upon the gift each one has received from the Lord.

M. After the Death of Her Husband a Wife Being Free to Be Married Only to One in the Lord

Concerning remarriage, Paul says in verse 39, "A wife is bound for so long a time as her husband lives; but if the husband should sleep, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord." After her husband dies, a wife is free to be married to another, only in the Lord. This is another basic principle concerning married life.

By setting forth all these principles, Paul answered the questions concerning marriage raised by the philosophical believers at Corinth. The answers to the various questions are found in the principles. For this reason, it is profitable for us to study these principles. This will answer many of our questions about marriage.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-TWO

DEALING WITH MARRIAGE LIFE

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 7:1-40

In married life there are many blessings. However, in 1 Corinthians 7 it is not Paul's intention to stress the blessed side of marriage. On the contrary, his emphasis is mainly on the troubles and distractions related to married life. The reason for this emphasis is that here he is answering questions raised by the Corinthians. As we have pointed out, thoughtful, philosophical people have many questions about marriage. To answer the questions raised by the Corinthian believers, Paul sets forth a number of basic principles concerning married life. It is profitable to consider these principles, for they help to answer our questions and also bring us into the enjoyment of blessing in our married life.

In the foregoing message we pointed out that these basic principles include the following: it being good for a man not to touch a woman (v. 1); devoting ourselves to prayer (v. 5a); giving no occasion to Satan (v. 5b); the gift we have received from God (v. 7); remaining unmarried (vv. 8, 26-27, 40); better to marry if we lack self-control (v. 9); remaining in marriage so that the unbelieving party may be saved (vv. 13-14, 16); allowing the unbelieving party to leave so that the believing party may live in peace (v. 15); remaining in the status of our calling (vv. 20, 24); seeking to care for the things of the Lord free from other cares (vv. 32, 34); waiting on the Lord without distraction (v. 35); a virgin giving his virginity in marriage doing well, and one

deciding to keep his virginity doing better (vv. 36-38); a wife being free, after the death of her husband, to be married to another in the Lord (v. 39).

As we read this chapter and pay attention to these principles, we also need to touch the spirit of the writer. Paul's spirit is expressed in what he writes. For this reason, we should not only be familiar with the principles, but also touch the apostle's spirit. If we do not know the spirit of the writer in this chapter, this indicates that we have not adequately considered all the principles.

We have pointed out that 1 Corinthians 7 is an answer to questions written to Paul by the philosophical believers at Corinth. In this chapter many points are covered, each of which is an answer to a question asked by the Corinthians. Thus, the many points in this chapter indicate that the Corinthian believers certainly had many questions concerning their married life.

ABSOLUTE FOR THE LORD

Nothing is more representative of human life than married life. In a sense, human life is simply married life. The matters involving our work and daily living are related to married life. For this reason, we may say that married life represents human living.

In answering the questions raised by the Corinthians concerning married life, Paul was simple, direct, frank, and genuine. He did not say anything ambiguous or speak in a political way. Furthermore, he answered all the questions according to his Christian experience. This is why he says in verse 7, "I wish all men to be even as myself." In verse 8 he declares, "It is good for them if they remain even as I." This indicates that Paul answers the questions concerning marriage according to what he is in his being and living. Thus, if we would have a thorough understanding of this chapter, we need to ask what Paul lived for. Paul was an absolute person. His spirit was absolute for the Lord and His economy. As we read this chapter, we realize that Paul's aspiration was for all the believers to imitate him and follow him in being for the Lord. Here Paul seems to be saying, "I am absolute for the

Lord, and I hope that you will all be the same. In this matter I want you all to follow me."

NOT INITIATING ANYTHING

Paul was not only absolute for the Lord, but he was also absolutely one with God. Because Paul was one with God, he answered the questions in such a way that the Corinthians would be helped to be one with Him in every circumstance, condition, and situation. We know this by the fact that in answering certain questions Paul followed the principle of not initiating anything or changing anything. He made it very clear to the Corinthians that they should not initiate any action or change their status in any way.

If we change our status or initiate any action, this is an indication that we are not one with God and that we do not want to be one with Him. If we like to be one with God and are actually one with Him, we shall not initiate any change, especially change related to married life. On the contrary, our attitude will be, "If God wants me to marry, let Him initiate it and work it out. If God does not want me to marry, surely He will grant me the gift I need to remain unmarried." This gift will produce a willingness, even a desire, to remain unmarried; it also will supply the ability to remain single. However, no one should make such a decision on his own. It must be God who takes the initiative and who grants us both the desire and the gift to remain unmarried. Paul was not married. However, he did not make this decision on his own. Rather, it was initiated by God, and God gave Paul the necessary desire and ability. This was the gift he received from the Lord. To repeat, whether we should marry or not, we should not initiate anything. We must leave this matter to the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul makes it very clear to the Corinthians that they should not change their status or initiate anything. In verse 12 he says, "If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she consents to dwell with him, let him not leave her." In verse 13 Paul says the same thing to

a believing wife: "And a wife who has an unbelieving husband and he consents to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband." In verses 17 through 24 we see that we should remain in the status of our calling. In verse 17 Paul strongly charges us to remain in the state of marriage in which God has called us: "Only as the Lord has allotted to each one, as God has called each one, so let him walk." In verse 20 Paul goes on to say, "Each one, in the calling in which he was called, in this let him remain." Then in verse 24 he concludes, "Each one, brothers, in what state he was called, in this let him remain with God." This indicates that the believers must be one with God and have God with them in their situation, no matter what it may be. These examples indicate that Paul was absolutely one with God and wanted the Corinthian believers to be one with Him and not to initiate any change or action.

The Corinthian believers, however, were very different from Paul. Instead of being absolutely one with the Lord, they exercised their wisdom and philosophy. They philosophized about everything, including marriage. Some thought that it was better not to get married, whereas others strongly preferred married life. The way the Corinthians thought and spoke about marriage indicated that among them there was a great deal of human initiative. Therefore, in answering their questions, Paul indicates strongly that in the matter of marriage we should not initiate anything.

In this chapter we see that Paul's spirit was absolutely one with God. Paul was not willing to change anything or to initiate anything. This was the reason he could tell the Corinthians not to change their status as far as marriage was concerned. Those who were married when called by the Lord should remain married. This principle applies even to marriage with an unbeliever. The married believer should not initiate any change. On the contrary, the entire matter should be left with God. Whether the unbelieving party remains or leaves, the believing one should take the situation from the Lord. Everything depends on God and on the situations, circumstances, and conditions arranged by Him.

A believer who is absolute in the same way Paul was should be able to say, "I do not have any problem with the situation or circumstances related to my married life. If my unbelieving spouse remains with me, I praise the Lord. If my spouse prefers to leave, I also take this from the Lord. In either case, I do not have any problems, and I do not fight with the Lord or struggle against Him. I realize that everything depends on God. I do not want to initiate anything." This is the attitude of a person who is both absolutely for God and one with Him. This is a person who does not initiate anything or try to change anything.

Paul even applies this principle to those who were slaves when they were called by the Lord. "Were you a slave when called? Let it not concern you; but, if even you are able to become free, use it rather" (v. 21). This word indicates that a slave should not seek to change his status. Instead, he should use his status as a slave to glorify God, that is, to remain in it with God for God's glory. Even if he is able to become free, he should remain in his slavery. He should not try to change anything. However, should God arrange circumstances which thrust him out of the condition of slavery, he should not fight against such a change and insist on remaining as a slave. Since God has arranged for a change, he should accept it. In either case, his attitude should be that he is one with God.

It is important to see this principle of being absolutely one with the Lord in all circumstances, situations, and conditions. If we are mindful of this principle as we read 1 Corinthians 7, we shall see that Paul is utterly one with the Lord and that in his instructions and answers he spontaneously and unconsciously expresses such an absolute spirit. Because Paul had this kind of spirit, he could answer the Corinthians' questions in a clear and absolute way, in a way that would help them also to become one with God in their situation.

Paul's answers are very different from those given by marriage counselors. The advice given by marriage counselors reveals that they are independent of God and even rebellious against Him. In their instructions, advice,

and answers they are altogether apart from God. Paul, on the contrary, was absolutely under God, for God, and one with God.

ACCEPTING OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

Another very important point revealed in this chapter is that those who love the Lord, who are for Him, and who are one with Him must be willing to accept any kind of circumstance or situation. For example, if a brother's unbelieving wife desires to remain with him, he should accept this situation. But if she decides to leave, he should also accept this circumstance.

It is very important for us to see that God is always in our circumstances. We may say that the circumstances are actually God coming to us in disguise. Apparently we are in a particular circumstance; actually that circumstance is God coming to us and God with us. In verse 24 Paul says, "Each one, brothers, in what state he was called, in this let him remain with God." Notice the words "with God." They indicate that when we take our circumstances we take God. Both within the circumstances and behind them, God is present.

Once again we see that Paul had an excellent spirit, a spirit which was submissive, content, and satisfied. Paul did not have any complaints. In his spirit he was very submissive and content with his situation. No matter how he was treated, he did not complain. To him, every situation was of the Lord, and he would not initiate anything to change it. Paul could say, "To me, everything works for good. This is the reason I don't want to change anything. I know that when I take my circumstances, I take my God. In every situation is my God, the One whom I love and the One to whom I belong absolutely." What an excellent spirit is displayed in this attitude!

In 1 Corinthians 7 Paul's spirit is expressed in the way he deals with the questions asked by the Corinthian believers. When we read this chapter, we need to sense Paul's spirit and even touch his spirit.

The way we answer others or respond to a situation

always indicates the kind of spirit we have. Suppose a brother is very happy in the morning. When his wife calls him for breakfast, he says, "Praise the Lord!" His response reveals his spirit. But suppose his spirit is heavy when his wife calls him. He may respond in a very different way, in a way which indicates that he is not happy. His reaction may indicate that he is unhappy with his wife and that he has a problem with the Lord. The principle here is that our answers and responses always express our spirit.

I appreciate 1 Corinthians 7 not primarily for all the answers it gives, but because this chapter conveys the spirit of a person who loves the Lord, who cares for the Lord's interests on earth, who is absolutely for the Lord and one with the Lord, and who in every respect is obedient, submissive, and satisfied with God and the circumstances arranged by Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-THREE

DEALING WITH MARRIAGE LIFE

(3)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 7:6, 10, 12, 29, 35, 25, 40

In the foregoing messages we have covered the basic principles in chapter seven concerning marriage life. In this message we shall consider the very important matter of the apostle's teaching.

II. THE APOSTLE'S TEACHING

A. In the Principle of Incarnation

The Apostle Paul's teaching is absolutely different from the teaching of the prophets in the Old Testament. We are told that when the prophets spoke for God in Old Testament times, the word of the Lord came to them and enabled them to speak on God's behalf. Often the prophets would say, "Thus saith the Lord." Many of those in today's Pentecostalism follow this Old Testament practice. Catholicism brings people back to the Old Testament in ritual, but Pentecostalism brings the believers back to the Old Testament in the way of prophesying. Furthermore, according to my experience, Pentecostal believers more often sing portions of the Old Testament than they do portions of the New Testament. In particular, they sing verses from Psalms or Isaiah. Although they are New Testament believers, certain of their practices are according to the Old Testament. To say, "Thus saith the Lord," in the Old Testament way is shallow and superficial. The New Testament way of speaking for the Lord is very different.

The New Testament has two outstanding characteristics--it is mysterious and deep. The New

Testament is a book of mysteries and depths. It is very superficial to prophesy according to the Old Testament way. But to prophesy in the way of building up the church is deep. Likewise, to sing portions from the Psalms or Isaiah may be superficial, but to sing the third chapter of Ephesians, especially those verses about Christ making His home in our hearts so that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God, is to sing about things that are deep, profound, and mysterious. Do you know of any Christians today who sing about being one spirit with the Lord, or about their bodies being members of Christ? As we have seen, Paul speaks of such matters in 1 Corinthians 6. Nevertheless, to many believers Paul's words are like a foreign language. These believers live on the surface; they have never touched the depths of the divine revelation in the New Testament.

First Corinthians 7 is mysterious and deep. In this chapter Paul never utters the words, "Thus saith the Lord." The reason Paul does not use such an expression is that the apostles' teaching in the New Testament is altogether based on the principle of incarnation. According to this principle, God speaks in man's speaking. When the Lord Jesus spoke, it was difficult for others to discern who was speaking. To be sure, it was a man who was speaking. However, this man did not declare, "I am a prophet from Nazareth. Last night, the word of God came to me, and now I want to speak this word to you. Thus saith the Lord." When the Lord Jesus spoke to the Pharisees, it seems that He was an ordinary person from Nazareth. There was no indication that He was different, and the Pharisees regarded Him as a man without learning. But the Lord Jesus is God incarnate. With Him there is the reality of incarnation. Thus, while He was speaking, God spoke also. Actually, His speaking was God's speaking. God spoke with Him. This means that in the Lord Jesus God and man spoke together as one. This is the principle of incarnation.

On the day of Pentecost the apostles and disciples also began to speak according to the principle of incarnation. This is the reason the writings of Peter, John, and Paul

recorded in the Bible could become God's words. Furthermore, these words are among the contents of the New Testament. Although Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7 that certain things he says are not the Lord's word or the Lord's commandment, everything spoken by Paul in this chapter has nonetheless become part of the divine revelation in the New Testament. This is because Paul was a person absolutely one with God. Even when he says that he does not have a word from the Lord, the Lord speaks in his speaking. Because Paul was one with the Lord, when he spoke, the Lord spoke with him. Thus, with Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 we have an example of the principle of incarnation. It is very important that we see this principle and understand it.

B. Some Teaching by Way of Concession, Not by Command

In 7:6 Paul says, "But this I say by way of concession, not by command." The word command here implies that the apostle in his teaching has authority to give commands to the believers. However, what Paul says in 7:1-5 is by way of concession, not by command.

C. In Some Matters Paul Charging, Yet Not He but the Lord

Verse 10 says, "But to the married I charge, not I but the Lord, A wife should not be separated from her husband." We have seen that the Old Testament principle of speaking for God, of prophesying, is, "Thus saith the Lord" (Isa. 10:24; 50:1; Jer. 2:2; Ezek. 2:4). But the New Testament principle of incarnation is "I charge;" that is, the speaker charges. The speaker and the Lord are one. Hence, Paul also says, "Not I but the Lord." The Greek word for charge may also be translated enjoin or command.

The words "I charge, not I but the Lord," indicate two things: first, that the apostle is one with the Lord; hence, what he commands, the Lord commands. Second, his commandments are the Lord's. What Paul commands here

the Lord had already commanded in Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-9. Divorce is altogether not allowed by the Lord.

The principle in 7:10 is the same as that in Galatians 2:20, where Paul says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." In both verses we see the principle of incarnation; two persons living as one person. In 7:10 we have two persons, the Lord and Paul, speaking as one. This is the reason Paul says, "I charge, not I but the Lord." Why does Paul not say in this verse, "But to the married the Lord charges"? Why does he say that he charges, yet not he but the Lord? The answer to these questions is that Paul realized that he was one with the Lord and that what he spoke was the Lord's word. Even when he did not claim to have a word from the Lord, because he was one with the Lord, whatever he said was the Lord's word.

D. In Some Matters Making It Clear That It Is He Who Says, Not the Lord

In some matters Paul makes it clear that it is he who speaks, not the Lord. For example, in verse 12 he says, "But to the rest I say, not the Lord, If any brother has an unbelieving wife and she consents to dwell with him, let him not leave her." This word also is based on the New Testament principle of incarnation. Although Paul is careful to add, "not the Lord," whatever he says in the following verses is part of the divine revelation in the New Testament. It is his opinion in the Lord, not the Lord's commandment, yet it still expresses the Lord's mind.

Can you sense Paul's spirit in these verses? Here Paul seems to be saying, "Even though I realize that this is my word, not the Lord's word, I still believe that this is pleasing to the Lord. The Lord is pleased by keeping the peace. Even though the Lord does not say such a word, I have the assurance that it pleases Him. Therefore, I say that a brother should not leave an unbelieving wife if she consents to dwell with him. Likewise, a sister should not leave an unbelieving husband if he consents to dwell with her. However, if an unbelieving husband desires to leave a sister or if an unbelieving wife should leave a brother,

neither the sister nor the brother should fight. Rather, each should let the other party go, for God has called us in peace. I am the one who is saying this, not the Lord. Yet I believe that such a saying is pleasing to the Lord."

Here we see a person who is one with the Lord. Because he is one with Him, he knows the Lord's heart, mind, and pleasure. For this reason, he has the boldness to utter something which the Lord has not spoken.

In verses 29 and 35 Paul also makes it clear that he is the one who speaks, not the Lord. In verse 29 he says, "But this I say, brothers, the time is shortened, that henceforth both those that have wives may be as though they had none." In verse 35 Paul writes, "But I say this for your own profit, not that I may put a noose on you, but for that which is comely and waiting on the Lord without distraction." In both verses it is clear that Paul is the one speaking. Nevertheless, the Lord speaks in Paul's speaking.

E. Having No Commandment of the Lord concerning Certain Matters, but Giving His Opinion

Verse 25 says, "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give my opinion as having received mercy of the Lord to be faithful." A wife should not be separated from her husband. This, the apostle says, is the Lord's commandment (v. 10). But concerning virgins not marrying, he says he has no commandment of the Lord, but he gives his opinion in the following verses. He dares to do this because he has received mercy of the Lord to be faithful to the Lord's interests, and he is really one with the Lord. His opinion expresses the Lord's desire. This is again based on the New Testament principle of incarnation.

Some readers of 1 Corinthians may think that Paul was too strong in giving his opinion when he had no commandment from the Lord. Which one of us would dare to say that we have no commandment of the Lord

concerning a certain matter, but that we give our opinion? Yet this is the very thing Paul does in verse 25. Here we see the highest spirituality, the spirituality of a person who is so one with the Lord that even his opinion expresses the Lord's mind. Paul was absolutely one with the Lord and thoroughly saturated with Him. Because his entire being was permeated with the Lord, even his opinion expressed the mind of the Lord. For this reason, we say that verse 25 expresses the highest spirituality.

In verse 26 Paul gives his opinion: "I consider then that this is good because of the present necessity, that it is good for a man to be as he is." We have pointed out that the Greek word for present may also mean that the presence of a certain thing foreshadows and inaugurates something to come. The Greek word for necessity refers to the needs of the life in the present age, the demand of which constrains and presses people and becomes a distress and anguish to them. Paul realized that the present age is a pressing age, an age full of necessities. Those who are married and have children are pressed by necessities more than those who are not married. To be sure, there are many blessings in married life. But if we are honest, we shall admit that in married life we are pressed again and again. Those who have children and grandchildren can testify of this. On the one hand, our children make us happy; on the other hand, they cause us to suffer.

Because of the present necessity, Paul thought it was good for others to remain as he was. He realized that if a brother or a sister remained unmarried, that one would be spared the pressing caused by the present necessity.

F. Thinking That He Also Has the Spirit of God, Even in Some Teaching Which Is according to His Opinion

In verse 40 Paul says, "But she is more blessed if she so remains, according to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God." In verse 10 the apostle says, "I charge, not I but the Lord." In verse 12 he says, "I say, not the Lord." In verse 25 he says, "I have no commandment of

the Lord, but I give my opinion." Here he says, "According to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God." All these words indicate the New Testament principle of incarnation, that is, God and man, man and God, becoming one. This differs drastically from the principle of Old Testament prophecy--speaking for God. In the Old Testament, as we have pointed out, the word of Jehovah came unto a prophet (Jer. 1:2; Ezek. 1:3), the prophet being simply the mouthpiece of God. But in the New Testament the Lord becomes one with His apostles and they become one with Him. Both speak together. His word becomes their word, and whatever they utter is His word. Hence, the apostle's charge is the Lord's charge (v. 10). What he says, though not by the Lord, still becomes a part of the divine revelation in the New Testament (v. 12). He is so one with the Lord that even when he gives his own opinion, not the commandment of the Lord (v. 25), he still thinks that he also has the Spirit of God. He does not claim definitely to have the Spirit of God, but he *thinks* that he *also* has the Spirit of God. This is the highest spirituality; it is based on the principle of incarnation.

We need to see the principle of incarnation illustrated here and receive mercy and grace from the Lord to speak in a genuine and frank manner without any pretense. In order to speak like this we need to be saturated with the Spirit. Then what we utter or express will be our thought, our opinion, but it will also be something of the Lord because we are one with Him.

G. The Apostle's Teaching Becoming the Word of God in the New Testament

Whatever the apostle teaches, regardless in what way, becomes the word of God in the New Testament.

Once again I would emphasize the importance of touching Paul's spirit in 1 Corinthians 7. In his answers to the questions raised by the Corinthian believers, Paul expresses his spirit. This makes it possible for us to sense his spirit. Paul certainly was absolutely for the Lord and one with Him. Even in expressing his opinion, he had the

feeling that he also had the Spirit of God. This is the New Testament teaching, and the way we should follow today. Do not follow the superficial Pentecostal way to copy the Old Testament manner of prophesying. Instead, follow Paul's way to touch the depths of the New Testament mystery. This mystery is that the Lord and we, we and the Lord, have become one spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-FOUR

DEALING WITH EATING OF SACRIFICES TO IDOLS

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 8:1-13

We have seen that 6:12-20 may be considered an introduction to Paul's dealing with married life and to his dealing with the eating of sacrifices to idols. Both marriage and eating have been ordained by God. Therefore, concerning marriage and eating we have our freedom. However, we must use these things in God's way and for God's purpose, not for our lusts. Furthermore, marriage and eating are related to our physical bodies. Paul says in 6:13 that the body is for the Lord; in 6:15, that our bodies are members of Christ; and in 6:19, that our bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit.

As human beings, we are a complete entity composed of spirit, soul, and body. In order for our body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit our entire being--spirit, soul, and body--must be involved. Since we are a whole entity, none of the parts of our being should be separated from the others. On the one hand, it is our bodies that are members of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, our spirit is also involved. For this reason, in the passage where he emphasizes that the body is a member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, Paul tells us that we are one spirit with the Lord (6:17).

In chapter seven Paul comes to the matter of marriage. Married life surely involves our whole being. According to what Paul says in this chapter, we need to be those who are for the Lord, one with Him, submissive to Him, committed to Him, and content in Him with our

circumstances. We need to take our circumstances from the Lord and be with Him in every kind of situation. This requires that we exercise our spirit to practice being one spirit with the Lord. This is also to have a life where our bodies are the members of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. If we touch the depths of chapter seven, we shall see that the answers to the questions about marriage consummate in the description of a person who is one with the Lord and who lives in such a way that his entire being is the Lord's dwelling place. Because his body is a member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, he will not use it for any purpose other than that ordained by God. Furthermore, he will be submissive to the Lord and to His leading, always remaining in the circumstances arranged by the Lord without initiating any change. He is thus a person who is one with the Lord for His purpose.

In chapter eight Paul deals with our eating, a matter that is even more practical than the matter of married life. We can live without being married, but not without eating. Eating is an absolute necessity. God created us in such a way that we must eat in order to stay alive. This is God's ordination.

As we proceed from chapter one to chapter eight, we find that Paul's dealings become more and more practical. The eating mentioned in chapter eight is much more practical than the philosophy referred to in chapter one. Philosophy involves abstract concepts, whereas eating is extremely concrete and practical.

We have seen that in the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians a number of spiritual things are revealed. The principle is the same in the dealing with eating of sacrifices to idols. Three chapters are occupied with this. In these chapters there are a number of important spiritual highlights.

In chapter eight Paul speaks of an eating that is not advisable, pointing out in verses 1 through 3 that such an eating is not according to love that builds up. Verses 4 through 7 indicate that idols are nothing, and verse 8 says that food does not commend us to God. Finally, in verses 9

through 13, Paul speaks about causing weak brothers to stumble.

I. AN INADVISABLE EATING

A. Not According to Love That Builds Up

In 8:1 Paul says, "Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." In this chapter two Greek words are used for know. One is *oida* (vv. 1, 4), signifying the inward, subjective consciousness, the intuitive knowledge, as used in John 8:55 (the second one); 1 Corinthians 12:2; 2 Timothy 1:12; 3:14-15. It is the root from which the word for conscience is derived. The other is *ginosko* (vv. 2-3), signifying the outward, objective knowledge. The word knowledge in verse 1 and in verses 7 and 10 is the noun form of *ginosko*, referring to the outward, objective knowledge, which is common and general to all.

The outward, objective knowledge that puffs up comes from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the source of death. The spiritual, not fleshly, love, which is an expression of life as described in chapter thirteen, builds up. It comes from the tree of life, the source of life. This is the love of God (1 John 4:16) infused into us by faith which has brought us into the organic union with God. By this love we love God (1 Cor. 8:3) and the brothers (1 John 4:21), and according to this love we should walk (Rom. 14:15). Thus, our walk builds up (1 Cor. 10:23). The expression "builds up" in this verse refers not only to the edification of individual believers, but also to the building up of the corporate Body of Christ (14:4-5, 12; Eph. 4:16). This book stresses the matter of building up (3:9-10, 12; 10:23).

We have pointed out that the knowledge which puffs up and the love which builds up are related to the two trees in the garden of Eden. Knowledge here refers to the tree of knowledge, and love refers to the tree of life. When Paul wrote this Epistle, he probably had such an understanding of these two trees. Furthermore, in this book these two

trees are illustrated, although there is no direct mention of them. Actually 1 Corinthians deals with the tree of life which supplies life and the tree of knowledge which kills. Thus, in this book there are two lines, the line of life and the line of knowledge. Knowledge puffs up and even kills, but love supplies life and builds up others with life. Life is for the building, and the building is accomplished by life.

Verses 2 and 3 say, "If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he does not yet know as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him." In these verses the Greek word for know is *ginosko*. The love spoken of in verse 3 is the highest and noblest love. It must be spiritual, not fleshly, although it involves the exercise of man's entire being (Mark 12:30).

In verse 3 Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians that they do not need so much knowledge; instead, they need to love God. Loving God is the base of our Christian life. If we do not have such a love, we do not have the standing, the base, for the Christian life. As far as the Christian life is concerned, knowledge is like a vapor; it can disappear quickly. Loving God, however, is solid and substantial. Hence, it is the base of the Christian life.

In verse 3 Paul says that if we love God, we are known by Him. It is more necessary for us to be known by God than for us to know God. The expression "known by Him" is very meaningful. To be known by God means to be owned and possessed by Him. The one who is known by God becomes God's possession, joy, entertainment, and pleasure. Our knowledge does not please God. But if we love God, we shall make Him happy. He will know us, enjoy us, and be happy with us. He will even find in us His entertainment. All this is implied by the words "known by Him."

In verse 3 Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians, "You believers at Corinth need to realize that God does not know you. He is not pleased with you. To say that God does not know you means that He does not approve of your way." According to Matthew 7:22, many will say to the Lord Jesus at the time of His coming again, "Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out

demons, and in Your name do many works of power?" The Lord will answer, "I never knew you; depart from Me, workers of lawlessness" (v. 23). How can the omnipotent and omnipresent Lord say that He does not know someone when he knows everything about us? The reason the Lord can say such a thing is that the statement, "I never knew you," in Matthew 7:23 means, "I never approved of what you have done. I was never happy with you or took you as my joy and treasure." To be known by God implies that He approves of us, enjoys us, and possesses us as a treasure.

B. Idols Being Nothing

In verse 4 Paul goes on to say, "Concerning therefore the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no God but one." The Greek word for know here is *oida*. To realize that an idol is nothing and that there is no God but one requires an inward, subjective consciousness derived from our spirit through our mind. This is much deeper than the outward, objective knowledge that is merely in our mind.

In verses 5 and 6 Paul continues, "For if even there are so-called gods either in heaven or on earth, even as there are many gods and many lords, yet to us there is one God, the Father, of Whom are all things, and we unto Him." In verse 6 the words "to us" refer to the believers in Christ, the Christians. The one God in verse 6 is in contrast to the many gods in verse 5. Our God is uniquely one. In this verse Father is a designation for our God, who is the source of all things. This designation makes our God utterly distinct from the many false gods. Here the Father refers not to God as the Father of the regenerated ones, but to Him as the source of all things. This is proved by the words "of whom are all things." All things are out of God as the source. Hence, God is called the Father. Not only is He our Father in regeneration, but He is the Father of all created things, for all things have come out of Him.

Not only are all things of the Father, but we are "unto Him." Among all of God's creation, only we, the believers, are unto Him. This means that although all are out of God,

only we shall go back to Him to be unto Him. To be unto God indicates union with Him. The preposition "of" indicates source, but the preposition "unto" indicates union. As Christians, we are both of God and unto Him.

In verse 6 Paul also says that to us there is "one Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom are all things, and we through Him." The one Lord here is in contrast to the many lords in verse 5. Our Lord is uniquely one. Jesus Christ is the divine and human title of our Lord that distinguishes Him from the many lords. Our God, the Father, is the unique source of all things, and our Lord, Jesus Christ, is the unique means through whom all things came into being. Jesus Christ is not the source; He is the means. For this reason Paul uses the preposition "through" and says "through Whom are all things." According to John 1:3, all things came into being *through* Him. Thus, the Lord is actually not the Creator; He is the means through whom all things were created.

It is significant that concerning the Father Paul uses the prepositions "of" and "unto," but concerning the Lord he twice uses the preposition "through." The Father is the source, and we are of Him and unto Him. All things are of the source, the Father, and through the means, the Lord. Furthermore, through regeneration we return to the Father and are unto Him. On the one hand, all things are of the Father and through the Lord; on the other hand, we, the regenerated ones, will return to the Father through the Lord. As the Lord says in John 14:6, He is the way, and no one can come to the Father except through Him. With the source there is the need for the prepositions "of" and "unto." Thus, Paul says that we are of Him and unto Him. But concerning the Lord, all things are through Him in creation, and we are through Him in returning unto the Father. Therefore, all things are of the Father and through the Lord, but we are also unto the Father through the Lord. We came into being through the Lord, and we return to the Father also through the Lord. This is the reason that regarding the Father Paul says that all things are of Him and that we are unto Him, but concerning the Lord he says that all things are through Him and that we, in

the sense of returning to the Father as the source, are through Him.

In verse 7 Paul goes on to say, "But there is not in all this knowledge; but some being accustomed to the idol until now, eat it as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience being weak is defiled." A weak conscience is due to the lack of proper and adequate knowledge. This indicates that our knowledge has much to do with our conscience. The ex-idol worshippers who are now believers in Christ, being accustomed to the idol until now, lack the knowledge that an idol is nothing (v. 4). Thus, their conscience is weak concerning the matter of idols. The weak conscience is defiled when it is touched by any related matter of which it lacks adequate knowledge.

C. Food Not Commending Us to God

Verse 8 says, "But food will not commend us to God; neither if we do not eat are we lacking, nor if we eat do we excel." Those who eat idol sacrifices without having the proper knowledge will defile their conscience. After making this matter clear, Paul goes on to say that food does not commend us to God. Once again Paul reveals his spirit. Deep within his spirit Paul realizes that the things we do should commend us to God. Anything that does not commend us to God is not necessary. Yes, we may be free to do certain things, but those things do not commend us to God. Here the issue does not concern the matter of right or wrong, but whether or not a certain thing commends us to God. For example, it may not be wrong for a brother to wear his hair long. But according to the principle in verse 8, long hair does not commend him to God. Concerning hair styles, we do not have any regulations. But we all should style our hair in a manner which commends us to God. Paul's thought here is that eating does not commend us to God. We may have the freedom to eat sacrifices to idols, knowing that idols are nothing. This eating, however, does not commend us to God. We should learn to do what commends us to God. According to Paul, "Neither if we do

not eat are we lacking, nor if we eat do we excel." Since this is the case, what need is there for us to eat idol sacrifices?

D. Causing Weak Brothers to Stumble

In verses 9 through 13 Paul speaks about causing weak brothers to stumble. In verse 9 he says, "But beware lest somehow this right of yours becomes a stumbling block to the weak ones." The weak ones are those whose conscience is weakened by the lack of knowledge. In verse 10 Paul continues, "For if anyone sees you who have knowledge reclining at table in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, he being weak, be emboldened to eat the things sacrificed to idols?" The Greek word rendered emboldened literally means built up. The conscience of the weak believers will be built up with boldness to do what it dared not formerly do. This is a sudden building up without a logical and solid foundation. Hence, it is an improper building up that actually ruins. Although the weak believers' conscience is emboldened to eat sacrifices to the idols, this will eventually ruin them, because they do not have the adequate knowledge to support their emboldened yet still weak conscience.

Verse 11 says, "For the one who is weak is being destroyed by your knowledge, the brother because of whom Christ died." The words "being destroyed" signify perishing not for eternity, but in the Christian life. The weak believer may be destroyed by the carelessness of the stronger one's knowledge. A brother for whom Christ died may be destroyed in the Christian life by our improper eating.

In verse 12 Paul declares, "And thus, sinning against the brothers and wounding their weak conscience, you sin against Christ." The Greek word translated wounding literally means smiting unto damage. Because Christ died for the brothers; we sin against Christ if we wound them and cause them to stumble.

In verse 13 Paul concludes, "Wherefore if food stumbles my brother, I will by no means eat meat forever, that I may not stumble my brother." The Greek word for stumble

is

skandalizo, meaning to snare, to entrap. Hence, to stumble the brother is to snare him, to put a trap in his way. In order not to stumble a brother, Paul says that he will "by no means eat meat forever." The word meat refers to animal flesh, denoting the meat sacrificed to idols. Since meat is more tempting than other kinds of food, the apostle specifically mentions it.

It is important to touch Paul's spirit as revealed in this chapter. Here the burden in Paul's spirit is absolutely for Christ and His Body. Because Paul was for Christ and all the members of the Body, when he gave instructions concerning eating idol sacrifices, he did not say whether this practice is right or wrong, good or bad. Paul had a completely different view of the situation. His view was focused on Christ and the Body. Concerning the matter of eating idol sacrifices, Paul considered how this would affect the members of Christ, whether it would build them up or cause them to stumble. By this we see that Paul's heart and spirit were concerned for Christ and His members. He did not care about idols or idol sacrifices. He fully realized that idols are nothing and that sacrifices to idols are also nothing. Nevertheless, the way Paul dealt with the question of eating idol sacrifices indicates that his view of the matter is related to Christ and the Body. He wanted the saints to realize that they should consider whether the members of Christ would be caused to stumble or be built up by their eating. Paul wanted them to have regard for Christ and the members of Christ. Therefore, Paul answered the questions and gave instructions from the standpoint of Christ and the Body.

We all need to learn from Paul to have Christ and the Body in view when we consider various matters. However, we often talk with others about something with no consideration of this view. Instead, we focus on our own interest, profit, or loss. If this is our view, we are far off from the central vision of God's economy. In chapter eight we see once again that Paul did not deviate from the central lane of God's economy. Even in giving instructions concerning the eating of idol sacrifices he endeavored to

bring the believers back to the central lane, that is, back to Christ and the Body.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-FIVE

DEALING WITH EATING OF SACRIFICES TO IDOLS

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 9:1-15

The philosophical Greek believers at Corinth made everything complicated. In answering their questions, Paul simplified matters. He encouraged the Corinthians to take the Lord, His ordination, and His sovereign arrangement. Paul also realized that if we live Christ by being one spirit with the Lord and if we are submissive to the Lord and committed to Him, many complicated situations will be simplified. Complications in human life come from the philosophizing mind. For example, philosophizing about marriage can produce complications in married life. In today's society there are many complications regarding marriage. In the church life in the Lord's recovery, we need to follow the New Testament principles to simplify situations and eliminate complications. When we analyze our married life and family life, we become complicated. But when we turn to the spirit, everything is simplified.

I appreciate 1 Corinthians 7 because this chapter shows us a person, Paul, who was saturated with God, one with Him, and fully submissive to Him. There was no argument between Paul and God, and no discrepancy between him and God. He was happy with whatever circumstances God arranged for him. We know this not because he says so explicitly; we know it by the instructions he gives the Corinthians concerning married life. These instructions reveal the kind of person Paul was. Paul's writing in this chapter shows that he was a genuine God-man.

In chapter eight Paul deals with the problem of eating idol sacrifices. This problem seems to have a yes or no answer. However, in chapter eight Paul does not answer yes or no. The way he deals with this question shows that he is not a person who lives according to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but one who lives according to the tree of life. With the tree of life it is not a matter of yes or no; it is solely a matter of life, God's life, the divine, eternal life expressed through love which builds up. This life always commends us to God.

In 8:8 Paul introduces the thought of being commended to God. This is an excellent expression, even an extraordinary one. I doubt that such an expression can be found elsewhere in the Bible. Paul's answer in chapter eight certainly is not a matter of yes or no. On the contrary, it is related to doing things which commend us to God. According to Paul's realization, if a certain thing does not commend us to God, there is no need for us to engage in it.

Paul was so one with God and saturated with Him that his entire being was in God. Therefore, he answers the questions raised by the Corinthians not with a yes or a no, but according to what he is and according to his own practice. His practice was to have a life that was absolutely one with God. We all need to see this vision and practice it, even as Paul did.

In chapter eight Paul speaks of loving God (v. 3), of being commended to God (v. 8), of "the brother because of whom Christ died" (v. 11), and of sinning against Christ (v. 12). Eventually, he concludes this chapter by saying, "Wherefore if food stumbles my brother, I will by no means eat meat forever, that I may not stumble my brother" (v. 13). The expression "my brother" indicates that every brother was dear to Paul. He loved all the brothers. Paul was one with God and one with the Body of Christ. For this reason, he did not answer questions according to yes or no, according to the tree of knowledge. If everyone in a local church had a life and practice to match that of Paul, there would be no questions, problems, or complications. Questions come from the philosophizing mind. But when

we turn to the Christ who dwells in our spirit, the situation becomes simple.

II. THE APOSTLE'S VINDICATION

A. His Qualifications

Chapter nine is an insertion in the section on eating idol sacrifices. In this insertion the apostle presents himself to the Corinthian believers as a pattern that they may not cause others to stumble, but build them up by practicing the principle of considerate love in 8:13.

Verse 1 says, "Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?" The Apostle Paul is free from all men, enslaved to no one (9:19). As all believers in Christ should be, he is also free from the bondage of any particular way of eating, although he practices the principle of considerate love.

As he presents himself a pattern to the believers, Paul comes to his apostleship, which gives him authority to deal with all the problems covered in this book, serious problems concerning the church life and its fellowship. His handling of them is based not only on his teaching, but also on the authority inherent in his apostleship. To deal with the situation, Paul must take this standing and make this matter clear to the Corinthian believers. They had questioned his apostleship and were in a chaotic situation, mostly due to the foolishness of their worldly wisdom, self-confidence, and pride.

Apostle is an anglicized Greek word which means one who is sent. An apostle of the Lord is a believer who is sent out by Him with His authority to preach the gospel of God, to teach the divine truth, and to establish churches. Peter and John were such apostles among the Jews in the first section of the book of Acts, and Paul and Barnabas were such apostles among the Gentiles in the second section of Acts. Others, such as Silas and Timothy, also became apostles (1 Thes. 1:1; 2:6). As long as anyone has the power to preach the gospel, the gift to teach the divine truth, and the ability to establish churches, he is qualified and

confirmed to be an apostle sent by the Lord with His commission and authority.

In verse 1 Paul asks, "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"

This refers to Paul's seeing the Lord in His glorious resurrected body (15:5-8). This is a special privilege; it constitutes some dignity and glory to the seer, but it is not a requirement or qualification for being an apostle of the Lord. This is proved by the case of Barnabas, who was one of the apostles (Acts 14:14), yet did not see the Lord in this way. However, to know the Lord in spirit by spiritual revelation is definitely needed for being an apostle.

In verse 1 Paul also asks, "Are you not my work in the Lord?" The fruitful result of his work in the Lord is a proof of Paul's apostleship, not a qualification for it.

In verse 2 Paul goes on to say, "If to others I am not an apostle, yet surely I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord." Because Paul had begotten the Corinthian believers in the Lord through the gospel (4:15), he was surely an apostle to them. The fruit of his labor is evidence of his apostleship. The sufficient result of the apostle's efficient work is not only an evidence, a proof, but also a seal of his apostleship. It puts a distinctive mark on his apostolic labor that authenticates and certifies his apostleship.

In chapter nine Paul speaks about himself in a direct manner. The fact that he speaks about his apostleship indicates that the Corinthian believers also had a problem regarding Paul's apostleship. Some of them may have doubted whether Paul was truly an apostle. They may have discussed this matter and questioned Paul's apostleship. Paul must have learned of their doubts. Now in chapter nine he speaks about it in a way that is strong, direct, and frank. The four questions he asks in verse 1 illustrate Paul's frankness. Paul's spirit here is very clean. He is not in the least political. To play politics is to be impure. When we try to speak in a polite way, we may actually be political. Paul's questions in verse 1 certainly are not polite. Would you write a letter in which you asked such questions? Here Paul was not polite or political, but he was pure, genuine, and honest. We, however, may be polite or political because we are not pure in our motive or intention.

Paul was also frank and direct in verse 2. Here he tells the saints that if he is not an apostle to others, he is surely an apostle to them. He had begotten them in the Lord, and they were the seal of his apostleship in the Lord. Here Paul seems to be saying, "To others I may not be a begetting father, but surely I am such a father to you. I have begotten you through the gospel, and your existence is a seal of my apostleship. I have the apostleship, and you are the seal."

B. His Rights

In verse 3 Paul says, "My defense to those who examine me is this." We need to pay attention to the words examine and defense. The Corinthians were actually examining Paul; they were investigating him to determine whether or not he was an apostle. What a shame to them! This is just like children examining their father to see if he is a genuine father.

The colon at the end of verse 3 in the text indicates that the following verses are intended to be Paul's defense. Certain so-called spiritual people think that a believer should never make a defense for himself. They claim that Christians should always suffer, bear the cross, and refrain from defending themselves. However, sometimes the Lord Jesus defended Himself, and here Paul set forth his defense before the Corinthians.

In verse 4 Paul asks, "Do we not have a right to eat and to drink?" Literally the Greek word rendered right is authority. The same word is used in 8:9 and 9:18. The right here is that of eating and drinking for the gospel (v. 14) at the expense of the saints and the churches.

In verse 5 Paul continues, "Do we not have a right to take along a sister as a wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?" Once again, Paul's words are strong. The complicated philosophical believers at Corinth made it necessary for him to speak in such a strong, direct way.

Verse 6 says, "Or only I and Barnabas, have we not the right not to work?" Not to work here means not to have a job. Some of the apostles did not work at a job, but were

supported by the church or by the believers. Paul and Barnabas had the right not to work. But they worked with their hands in order to supply their needs.

In verse 7 Paul asks, "Who at any time carries on a war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who shepherds a flock and does not eat of the milk of the flock?" Paul's reference to carrying on a war implies that formerly the Corinthians were captives and that Paul had fought for them so that they might be released from Satan and set at liberty. Here Paul seems to be saying, "We have fought in a war to release you from captivity. Should we carry on such a war at our own expense? Is it fair that we must do so?" Furthermore, Paul's word about a vineyard and a flock indicates that the believers at Corinth were a vineyard to produce fruit and also a flock shepherded by the apostles.

Verses 8 through 10 say, "Am I speaking these things according to man? Or does not the law also say these things? For in the law of Moses it is written: You shall not muzzle a threshing ox. Is it for the oxen that God cares? Or does He say it assuredly for our sake? For our sake; for it was written that the plower should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope of partaking." Here Paul quotes the Old Testament in a wonderful way and applies it to the present situation. He also says that the plower should plow in hope and he who threshes, in hope of partaking. Here he again likens the church in Corinth to a farm. In 3:9 he had told them that they are God's farm. Paul plowed the ground and threshed in hope of partaking.

In verse 11 Paul says, "If we have sown to you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your fleshly things?" Once again Paul is quite strong. The Corinthians did not have a case against him.

In verse 12 Paul continues, "If others partake of this right over you, should not rather we? But we did not use this right; but we bear all things that we may not cause any hindrance to the gospel of Christ." The Greek word translated bear literally means to contain as a vessel, to conceal; hence, to cover as a roof. Paul was like a vessel containing everything the Corinthians had done to him

and also like a roof covering them. But they forced him to remove the covering and pour out the contents of the vessel. In all this Paul's concern was not to cause any hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

In verse 13 Paul again refers to the Old Testament when he asks, "Do you not know that those who labor on sacred things eat the things of the temple; those who attend to the altar partake with the altar?" In verse 14 he applies this principle to those who preach the gospel: "So also the Lord has ordained that those who announce the gospel live of the gospel."

In verse 15 Paul declares, "But I have used none of these things. And I did not write these things that it might be so with me; for it is good for me rather to die than that anyone should make my boast empty." Here we see that the apostle is desperately absolute for the Lord's interests. He is willing not only to sacrifice all his rights (vv. 12, 15a, 18), but also to pay the price even of his life. Paul definitely did not write these things in order to receive support or gifts from the believers at Corinth. On the contrary, he was willing even to die for Christ and the church.

If we look into the depths of 1 Corinthians 9, we shall see that Paul was not only a person one with God, but was also a person with a pure heart and spirit. No other portion of the Bible presents such a picture of a person who is clean and pure. If Paul had not been pure, he would not have been able to write all these verses.

Problems among Christians are caused not only by their complications, but even the more, by their lack of purity. For the most part, the complications are on the surface. Under the surface lies impureness. The elders, the co-workers, and the saints may not be pure in their motive or intention. To be pure is to be genuine, single, and altogether without politics.

In this chapter we should be deeply impressed by the fact that Paul was pure and genuine. The Corinthians, by contrast, were not pure. They examined Paul and had doubts concerning his apostleship. In their motives,

thoughts, and feelings they were impure. Some of the Corinthians even thought that Paul was defrauding them, that he was cheating them in a crafty way. Had they been pure even as Paul was pure, they would have had no doubts about Paul or his apostleship.

Brother Nee once said that those who are thieves are often worried that others will steal from them. If someone suspects that a person sitting nearby will steal from him, this may indicate that he himself is a thief. If he had not stolen from others, he would not have the fear that others might steal something from him. In the same principle, because the Corinthians were not pure, they suspected that Paul was not pure and that he was taking advantage of them. The fact that they had such thoughts about Paul proves that they were impure. This evil of impureness is hidden in us all. Because of our fallen nature, we are all impure.

Suppose a brother comes to me with a gift, and I suspect that this gift is presented with the intention that I do something for the brother. This thought is not sinful, but it is impure. Concerning the receiving of gifts, I have learned an important principle from the Lord. This principle is to accept every gift as genuine, having no thought that it may be given with a motive, and then not do anything for the one who gives the gift. To do something for a person who gives us a gift indicates that we have been bribed. A few times people have given me things out of an impure motive. At the time I had no thought that those persons were impure; only later did I learn that the motive was not pure. To repeat, thinking that a gift is given out of an impure motive indicates that we ourselves are impure. If we are pure, we shall not think like this.

I appreciate Paul's word in verse 15: "But I have used none of these things. And I did not write these things that it might be so with me." Such a word exposed those Corinthians who thought that Paul wrote in this way so that he would be given some support or supply. Paul closed the door on such impure thoughts by saying plainly that he did not write with the intention of receiving anything

from

the Corinthians. Once again we see that Paul was one spirit with the Lord and that he was absolutely pure. Because of his purity, he could be frank, direct, and straightforward. If Paul's purpose in writing chapter nine had been to be supplied by the Corinthians, Paul would have been impure. However, in writing this Epistle Paul was pure.

In the church life today many problems are apparently due to complications; actually, the problems are caused by impureness. It is impure to say or do anything with the aim that others will do something for us. It is also impure to think that others are trying to take advantage of us. In the church life we must close the door to impure thinking. If we are impure, we shall not be able to be bold, frank, or direct. Instead, we shall be political, polite.

In 1 Corinthians 9 we see that Paul's only motive and intention were related to Christ and His Body. Paul was pure to the uttermost. If we were pure in the church life in every respect, there would not be any problems. The underlying cause of problems in the church life is impureness. On the one hand, the Corinthians asked questions of Paul; on the other hand, they examined him. They welcomed him, but they also had doubts about him. This exposes their impureness. But even though the Corinthians were not pure, Paul conducted himself in a pure way as a begetting father. In writing to the believers at Corinth he revealed himself as a person who was one with God and absolutely pure. In the Lord's work he had no motive other than Christ and the Body.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-SIX

DEALING WITH EATING OF SACRIFICES TO IDOLS

(3)

We have pointed out that 9:1-15 reveals how pure Paul was. When we use the word pure here, we use it in a biblical sense. For example, the Lord Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). In this verse to be pure means to be single in motive in seeking after God. If our motive is single, we are pure. Otherwise, we are impure. When we say that Paul was pure and that the Corinthians were impure, we mean that Paul had a single motive in seeking after God, but that the Corinthians had mixed motives. Because they were not pure, they even doubted Paul's apostleship and wanted to examine him. Second Corinthians 12:16 indicates that some of the believers at Corinth thought that Paul was gaining material profit from them through craft. They could think this way about Paul because their motives were not pure.

Whether or not we are pure depends on our motive. Our motive may be related to our personal benefit, to something which would be a profit to us. The problems in the churches are often related to the seeking of some kind of personal gain. If a particular aspect of the church life is a benefit to you, you may be happy and very much for the church. However, if there is no personal gain for you in the church, you may be unhappy and find fault with the church. When we fail to receive what we expect, we may be unhappy with the church, the elders, or the saints. This indicates that we are not pure, that our motive is for our personal benefit.

We all love the Lord and the recovery. We may even

stand up in a meeting and declare that we consecrate ourselves to Christ and the church. We may say that Christ is marvelous and that the church is wonderful. But if our motives are not pure, we may begin to have problems with the church after making such a declaration and consecration. Regarding our motives, we need to be crucified with Christ. We need the cross to touch our motives.

Paul was pure because he knew experientially what it was to be crucified with Christ and to be one spirit with the Lord. He lived a crucified life, and he practiced being one spirit with the Lord. Therefore, he did not have any motive related to personal gain. His motive was wholly in Christ and for Christ. This was the reason Paul could be so pure. Because he was so pure, he could speak in 9:1-15 in a bold, frank, strong, and direct manner. Like a surgeon who has been cleansed of all bacteria, he could operate on the Corinthians. If Paul had not been pure, his impurity would have been imparted to the Corinthians. But because he was pure, he could perform spiritual surgery on the believers at Corinth without contaminating them.

C. His Faithfulness

1. Necessity Laid upon Him

Having seen Paul's purity in 9:1-15, let us go on in 9:16-23 to see his faithfulness. In verse 16 Paul says, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; for woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." By necessity Paul means a burden which becomes a pressure. Such a necessity, such a pressing burden, to preach the gospel was laid upon him. Thus, he could say, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." Paul did not care how the Corinthians treated him or how they reacted to him. He had a burden which pressed upon him to carry out the work of his ministry. His ministry to preach the gospel was a necessity. Paul knew that if he did not preach, he would suffer loss. This indicates Paul's faithfulness.

Like love, faithfulness can make us blind. If we are keen to know the attitude and reaction of others toward us, we may not be faithful. It is not faithful to preach the gospel only if others give us a favorable reaction. If we are faithful in preaching the gospel, we shall not care for the way others react or for the way they treat us, because we have a burden, a necessity, to fulfill our ministry. This faithfulness blinds the faithful one to the reaction of others.

2. Entrusted with a Stewardship

In verse 17 Paul continues, "For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship." This verse is not easy to understand. The words "not of my own will" mean not willingly. Even if Paul had not been willing to preach the gospel, he would have had no way to escape the Lord's burden, for he had been entrusted with a stewardship. This indicates that with Paul preaching the gospel was not a matter of choice. Paul had been caught by the Lord, drafted by Him, and entrusted with a stewardship. Whether or not he was willing, he had to fulfill the burden given to him. He had no choice about this. He could not escape the commission to preach the gospel.

In this verse Paul refers both to God's commission and to his own burden. Because God had commissioned him, he had a burden. He had no choice except to carry on the work of the ministry. Therefore, he could say to the Corinthians, "I don't care how you treat me, or how you doubt about me or examine me. I preached the gospel to you out of burden, out of necessity. I did not have any choice in the matter."

3. Having a Reward

In verse 17 Paul speaks of a reward. The book of 1 Corinthians was not written to help lost sinners be saved, but to help saved believers to grow (3:6-7), to build with the precious materials (3:10, 12-14), to care for the Lord's members (8:9-13), and to run the race (9:24). Hence, reward is mentioned repeatedly as an incentive to the believers' progress (3:14; 9:18, 24-25).

The Greek word rendered stewardship also means a household administration, household dispensation. The

apostle was not only a preacher but also a steward in God's house, a household administrator, dispensing Christ's salvation, life, and riches to His believers. Such a ministry is the stewardship with which he was entrusted and commissioned (Eph. 3:2; 2 Cor. 4:1).

Verse 18 says, "What then is my reward? That in preaching the gospel I may make the gospel without charge, so as not to use to the full my right in the gospel." Here we see that Paul did not use his right with respect to the Corinthians. This gave him ground to boast as mentioned in verse 16. Although Paul did not use his right with the Corinthians, he did use it with other churches. In 2 Corinthians 11:8 Paul even says that he robbed other churches in order to serve the Corinthians. Other churches supplied him, but the church at Corinth did not. According to 1 Corinthians 9:18, Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthians free of charge.

4. Enslaved to All

In verse 19 Paul continues, "For though I am free from all, I have enslaved myself to all, that I might gain the more." By the word all here Paul means all men. He was free from all men in the sense that he did not owe anyone anything. This means that he was free from the Corinthians, not owing them anything. However, being free from all, Paul enslaved himself to all in order to gain more people for the Lord.

In verses 20 and 21 Paul says, "And to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might gain Jews; to those under law, as under law (not being myself under law), that I might gain those under law; to those without law, as without law (not being without the law of God but within the law of Christ), that I might gain those without law." Here it seems as if Paul was not a Jew. Actually, he was a Jew, but he no longer lived a Jewish life. Instead, he lived a Christian life. But he became as a Jew in order to gain Jews. Likewise, to those under law, he became as one under law in order to gain those under law. In verse 20 Paul inserts the parenthetical statement "not being myself

under law" in order to indicate that he was not under law. He did not want the Corinthians to think that he was for the law. Although he was not under law, he became as one under law to those who were under the law.

According to verse 21, to those without law Paul became as one without law that he might gain those without law. Again he points out, parenthetically, that he was not without the law of God but within the law of Christ. In Greek the expression "in the law" is *ennomos*, in law, that is, in the sphere, the limit, of law; hence, under law, subject to law. It is the opposite of *anomos*, outlaw, that is, outside the sphere, the limit, of law, hence, without law. Within the law of Christ means under the ruling of Christ, subject to the regulation of Christ, that is, legitimately, legally, rightfully, duly subject to Christ, under law to Christ, lawful before Christ. The law of Christ denotes the higher and better law of Christ working through love (Rom. 8:2; John 13:34), which is Christ Himself as our life regulating us from within. Paul was no longer under the law of Moses, but he was under the law of Christ. To the Gentiles, who did not have the Mosaic law, Paul became as one without law, not being without the law of God, but within the law of Christ.

In verse 22 Paul declares, "To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak. To all men I have become all things, that I might by all means save some." To become all things to all men means that Paul adapts himself to all things, that is, to different ways of eating and different practices (v. 23), for the sake of all men. He was willing to live in the way followed by others. For example, when he was with vegetarians, he would not eat meat. With Jews, he would not eat pork. In this way he became all things to all men in order to save some.

Verse 23 says, "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow-partaker of it." The Greek word rendered fellow-partaker is rich in meaning; it also means a joint participant, cooperator, copartner. The apostle is not only a fellow-partaker, a joint participant, enjoying the gospel, but also a cooperator, a copartner

laboring for the gospel. However, here he refers to the enjoyment of the gospel. Hence, in the Recovery Version we use the word fellow-partaker.

To preach the gospel is to labor. But as we labor in preaching the gospel, there is a share, a portion, for our enjoyment. Paul was alert that in preaching the gospel to others he might participate in the enjoyment of the gospel. He was careful not to miss partaking of this enjoyment.

D. His Endeavor

1. Running the Race

In verse 24 Paul goes on to say, "Do you not know that those who run in a race-course all run, but one receives the prize? So run, that you may lay hold." This reveals that the Christian life is a race we must run successfully. The prize is a reward as an incentive. To lay hold is to obtain the prize.

Actually verse 24 should not be separated from verse 23, for verse 24 is the explanation of what it means to be a fellow-partaker of the gospel, as mentioned in verse 23. To run in a race-course is to labor, but to receive the prize is to have enjoyment. As we preach the gospel today, we are running the course. But to receive a reward, a prize, at the coming of the Lord is to have a particular enjoyment.

We have seen that in 9:17 Paul speaks of a reward. In Acts 20:24 he refers to the course: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Paul regarded his preaching of the gospel as the running of the Christian race. Verse 24 indicates that all believers are running a race. Here Paul exhorts us to run so that we may obtain, lay hold of, the prize.

We have seen that the Christian course involves the preaching of the gospel. To preach the gospel is to dispense Christ into God's chosen ones. Since God's chosen ones were to be found among the Gentiles, Paul preached the gospel to the Gentiles. If a person receives our preaching,

this proves that he has been chosen by God. We should dispense Christ into such receptive ones. In this way we run the Christian course. However, because many believers today are not running the race, we need Paul's word, "So run, that you may lay hold."

2. Exercising Self-control

In verse 25 Paul continues, "And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things; those, therefore, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible." All those who contend in the games, Paul says, exercise strict self-control. For instance, they watch their diet very carefully. If athletes exercise self-control in order to receive a corruptible crown, we should exercise self-control even more to obtain an incorruptible crown.

This incorruptible crown, which the Lord will award His overcoming saints who win the race, is a reward in addition to salvation. As believers, we have all received His salvation through faith in Him. This has been settled once for all. But whether we shall be rewarded by Him depends on how we run the race. Here in this chapter the apostle is running the course. In Philippians, one of his last Epistles, he was still running (Phil. 3:14). It was not until the last moment of his running, in 2 Timothy 4:6-8, that Paul had the assurance that he would be rewarded by the Lord at His appearing. With this prize in view, the apostle charged the Corinthian believers to run the race that they might obtain the reward.

3. Buffeting the Body and Leading It as a Slave

In verses 26 and 27 Paul says of himself, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so I box, not as beating the air; but I buffet my body and lead it as a slave, lest having preached to others, I myself should become disapproved." The Greek word translated buffet literally means to beat the face under the eye black and blue. This is not to ill-treat the body as in asceticism, nor to consider the body evil as in Gnosticism. This is to subdue the body and make it a conquered captive to serve as a slave for fulfilling our holy purpose. It is the equivalent of putting to death our

earthly members (Col. 3:5) and putting to death the practices of the body (Rom. 8:13), not allowing our body to be used for the indulgence of lust nor doing anything on our own except what is holy to God. The Corinthians misused their body by indulgence in fornication, not caring for God's temple (1 Cor. 6:19), and in the unrestrained eating of sacrifices to idols, not caring for weak believers (8:9-13).

Paul also tells us that he leads his body as his slave. This is a metaphor which means to read the vanquished one as a captive and a slave, to bring the captive into slavery and make him a slave to serve the conqueror's purpose. Our body should be such a captive, something vanquished to be a slave serving the purpose of the conqueror. This indicates that we need to conquer our body and subdue it. Our body has been captured by lusts. Now we must deliver it and bring it into captivity, into a very positive kind of slavery where our body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit and a member of Christ.

We need to practice buffeting our body and leading it as a slave, just as Paul did. For example, when your eyes do not want to read the Bible, you need to buffet them and subdue them so that they will serve your purpose in reading the Bible.

According to verse 27, Paul was concerned lest having preached to others, he himself would become disapproved. The context indicates that preaching here refers to the preaching of the reward as an incentive to the Christian runners. This is related to the kingdom, the manifestation of which will be a reward to the overcoming saints, those who win the Christian race.

The Greek word rendered disapproved also means disqualified, rejected, that is, unworthy of the prize. The apostle was surely saved by grace through faith in Christ. Not only so, he was also called to be an apostle to carry out God's New Testament economy. Nonetheless, in verse 27 he is very much on the alert to run his course (Acts 20:24) by subduing his body to serve his holy purpose, lest he be

disapproved and rejected at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) and be found unworthy of the reward of the coming kingdom.

The judgment which will take place at the judgment seat of Christ will determine whether we are approved by the Lord or disapproved, whether we shall be known by the Lord or be rejected by Him. In Matthew 7:22 the Lord Jesus says that on that day many will tell the Lord that they prophesied in His name, cast out demons in His name, and did many mighty works in His name. However, the Lord will say that He never knew them (v. 23). This means that He does not approve of what they have done. Their Christian life was not a pleasure or joy to Him. On the contrary, their work was done presumptuously according to their own will and choice. Therefore, instead of approving them, the Lord rejects them as far as the reward in the coming kingdom is concerned. Paul was afraid lest having preached the gospel regarding the reward to others, he himself would be disapproved by the Lord.

First Corinthians 9 reveals Paul's faithfulness. In his spirit he was utterly faithful to the Lord's charge and commission. The Lord had charged him to run the course, and he was endeavoring to run it. We also need to run the Christian course in such a way that we shall not be disapproved, rejected, disqualified, from the enjoyment in the coming kingdom as a reward.

This truth of the reward has been neglected by the majority of today's Christians. Some have even accused us of being heretical for teaching it. Brother Nee and others before him also spoke of the reward given to the overcoming believers. In the New Testament we are told definitely that God has prepared not only salvation for us, but also has a reward for the faithful ones. In 3:14 Paul says, "If anyone's work which he has built upon it shall remain, he shall receive a reward." The reward here is different from salvation. In the next verse Paul explains, "If anyone's work shall be consumed, he shall suffer loss, but he shall be saved, yet so as through fire." This indicates clearly that receiving a reward is different from

being saved. We may suffer loss and not receive a reward, but we shall never lose our salvation.

The fire in 3:15 refers to some kind of suffering or punishment. However, it is certainly not the purgatory heretically taught by Catholicism in its devilish interpretation of this verse. The principle of Roman Catholic teachings is to mix truth with error or heresy. Thus, the doctrines of Catholicism are often a mixture of truth and heresy. The Lord prophesied of this in Matthew 13 when he spoke of the woman adding leaven to the fine flour. We absolutely do not teach the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. We simply teach what is revealed in the Bible. The Bible tells us that if we are faithful, we shall receive a reward in addition to our salvation. If we are not faithful, we shall lose the reward and suffer punishment, but we shall not lose our salvation, for it is eternal and settled once for all.

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul was on the alert, concerned lest after preaching to others he would be disapproved. Paul certainly was faithful. In these verses we see a brother who was absolutely faithful to the Lord's commission and faithful in running the Christian course.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-SEVEN

THE TYPE OF ISRAEL

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 10:1-13

First Corinthians 10:1-13 is a special section of the Word, a portion written with the history of the children of Israel as the background. Paul wrote this Epistle not only according to the situation at Corinth, but also with the history of the children of Israel as the background. Israel is a complete type of the history of the church. The Bible contains two histories--the history of Israel and the history of the church. The history of the children of Israel is a type, and the history of the church is the fulfillment of the type. Thus, the entire Bible gives us one revelation, the revelation of God's economy. In the Old Testament we have a type, a picture, of God's economy, whereas in the New Testament God's economy is fulfilled.

In both 1 Corinthians and Hebrews Paul presents a clear view of the history of Israel as a type and portrait of the history of the church. We have seen that in 5:7 and 8 Paul refers to the Passover and to keeping the feast. The children of Israel experienced the Passover and kept the feast of unleavened bread. As Christians in the New Testament age, we also have our Passover and our feast of unleavened bread. In 10:1-13, part of the section which deals with the eating of sacrifices to idols, Paul again refers to the history of Israel, taking it as a type of the church.

I. AN ILLUSTRATION OF RUNNING THE RACE COURSE

If we would understand why in 10:1-13 Paul again refers to Israel as a type, we need to remember that chapter nine is an insertion related to Paul's own person.

The fact that 10:1-13 is a continuation of this insertion is proved by the word "for" in 10:1. This word indicates that what follows is a continuation and an explanation of what has gone before. Chapter ten is not only a continuation of chapter nine, but also a further definition of the race in 9:24-27, with the children of Israel in the wilderness used as an illustration. At the end of chapter nine Paul charges us to run the Christian course, and in chapter ten he uses the children of Israel as an illustration of running this course. The running of the Christian course ordained by God is typified by the history of the children of Israel. The Israelites ran the course from Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the good land. It took forty years for them to complete this course.

We have seen that in chapter nine Paul presents himself as a pattern of one who is pure and faithful. If we take Christ as our life and practice being one spirit with Him, we, like Paul, shall be pure and faithful. In chapter nine Paul seems to be saying, "Brothers, you should imitate me and take me as a pattern. I encourage you to take Christ as life and be one spirit with Him. This will enable you to be pure and faithful and cause you to care for your bodies, which are members of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. If you have a proper regard for your bodies, you will eat in a proper way and have the proper married life. Otherwise, you will damage your body, which is the temple of God. You may also destroy other members of the Body of Christ."

The way Paul deals with the practical problem of eating is full of life and spiritual understanding. He could deal with the problem in such a way because he was full of Christ, one with the Lord, and saturated with the life-giving Spirit.

After presenting himself as a positive pattern, Paul uses the children of Israel as a negative pattern. In doing this, he sounds a word of warning to the Corinthians and indicates that they should imitate him, the positive pattern, but not the children of Israel, who are a negative pattern.

II. BAPTIZED UNTO MOSES--CHRIST

In 10:1 and 2 Paul says, "For I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." The words "to be ignorant" refer to the question "Do you not know?" in 9:24. The word all indicates that all the children of Israel who had enjoyed the Passover entered into the race and began running the race from the time they left the land of Rameses (Exo. 12:37).

Why did Paul say "our fathers" when most of the Corinthian believers were Greeks and not Jews? The reason may be that Paul considered God's chosen people, both Jews and Greeks, one great family. Hence, the people of God in the Old Testament are our fathers.

Verse 1 says that all our fathers "were under the cloud." The cloud that covered the children of Israel typifies the Spirit of God being with the New Testament believers. Immediately after the New Testament believers take Christ as their Passover (5:7), the Spirit of God comes to be with them and lead them to run the Christian race, just as the pillar of cloud came to be with the children of Israel and to lead them (Exo. 13:21-22; 14:19-20).

In verse 2 Paul says that "all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." The children of Israel's passing through the Red Sea (Exo. 14:21-30) typifies the baptism of the New Testament believers (Rom. 6:4).

The children of Israel were baptized unto Moses to begin the holy race for the fulfilling of God's purpose, that is, to enter into the good land and build the temple so that God may have a kingdom with an expression of Himself on the earth. This typifies the New Testament believers being baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27) that God may have His kingdom with the church as His expression on the earth.

In the cloud signifies in the Spirit, and in the sea means in the water. The New Testament believers are baptized in the water and in the Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13).

According to Paul's allegorization of the Bible, to cross the Red Sea is to be baptized. He even says that the

children of Israel were baptized unto Moses. Moses, no doubt, should be regarded as a type of Christ. They were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and we are baptized unto Christ in the Spirit and in water. When we were baptized, both the Spirit and the water were around us. The cloud signifies the Spirit; this is related to life. The sea signifies the water of death. Hence, baptism is a matter of both life and death. It involves putting the old creation to death so that we may be generated in life.

III. EATING THE SAME SPIRITUAL FOOD

In verse 3 Paul goes on to say, "And all ate the same spiritual food." This refers to manna (Exo. 16:14-18), which typifies Christ as our daily life supply (John 6:31-35) for the Christian journey. We believers should all eat the same spiritual food, not eating anything other than Christ.

IV. DRINKING THE SAME SPIRITUAL DRINK

In verse 4 Paul says, "And all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ." The spiritual drink here refers to the living water that flowed out of the cleft rock (Exo. 17:6), which typifies the Spirit as our all-inclusive drink (John 7:37-39; 1 Cor. 12:13). For our race, we should all drink the same spiritual drink, not drinking anything other than the all-inclusive Spirit.

Literally, the Greek words rendered "a spiritual rock which followed" are "a spiritual following rock." The rock that was smitten and cleft to flow out the living water for God's chosen people (Exo. 17:6) was a physical rock. Yet the apostle calls it a spiritual rock because it typifies Christ smitten and cleft by God to flow out the water of life (John 19:34) to satisfy the thirst of His believers. Hence, the apostle says the rock was Christ. Because it was a spiritual rock signifying Christ, it was able to follow the children of Israel. This indicates that Christ as the real rock is following His believers.

Paul was bold to tell us that the physical rock of Exodus 17:6 was a spiritual rock and that this rock was Christ. Those who study the Word primarily in a mental way would never expound the Bible in such a way. They

would never call a physical rock a spiritual rock. Was the rock in Exodus 17 physical or spiritual? In actuality it was physical. However, we need to have a spiritual view of this physical rock and see through the physical into the spiritual. Yes, the rock was physical, but Paul viewed it according to his spiritual sight. Thus, in his eyes it was a not to change the Bible; it is to go beyond the black and white letters and touch the spirit. Because Paul did this regarding the physical rock, to him that rock was Christ. He was not cautious, and he did not say that the rock typifies Christ. He declared boldly that the rock was Christ, that it was a spiritual rock following the people. What we have here is the utterance of a man who is filled with the Spirit and who has the view of the Spirit. We also need to have a spiritual view when we read the Word.

V. MOST OF THEM STREWN ALONG IN THE WILDERNESS

A. God Not Well Pleased with Them

Verses 1 through 4 speak of the children of Israel in a positive way, but verses 5 through 11 picture them in a negative way. In verse 5, a strong word of warning, Paul says, "But with most of them God was not well pleased, for they were strewn along in the wilderness." Literally, this means that they were strewn down along the ground; that is, they were laid low on the ground by slaying. This refers to Numbers 14:16 and 29.

Of all the children of Israel who came out of Egypt, only two, Joshua and Caleb, entered the good land. This indicates that only a small number of the living Christians will be in the good land when the Lord Jesus comes back. Furthermore, the bodies of Joseph and Jacob were also brought into the land of Canaan. This indicates that a

number of deceased Christians will be resurrected and as overcomers will enter into the coming kingdom.

In verse 5 Paul tells us that with most of the children of Israel God was not well pleased. Because He was not well pleased with them, they were strewn along in the wilderness. Their dead bodies were scattered in the wilderness without a proper burial or funeral. In one day alone, more than twenty thousand were slain and strewn along the ground, their bodies scattered in the wilderness. This should warn us not to listen to the superficial and superstitious teaching that as long as a person believes in the Lord Jesus and is saved, everything will be all right. This is equal to saying that simply because the children of Israel had experienced the Passover, everything concerning them was all right. However, the very ones who struck the blood of the Passover lamb, who made their exodus from Egypt, who crossed the Red Sea, and who even received God's revelation at Mount Sinai and ate the manna and drank of the living water were strewn along in the wilderness. We cannot deny the fact that the children of Israel were redeemed and saved. Nevertheless, most of them fell in the wilderness.

Not even Moses and Aaron entered the good land. Aaron died because of his mistake, and Miriam died because of her rebellion. Even Moses died, not because of old age, but because he had done something serious against God's government. He was allowed to see the land, but he was not permitted to enter into it. Deuteronomy 34:4 says, "And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I sware unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed: I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither." The Lord loved Moses, regarding him as an intimate friend, but for the sake of His government He could not allow Moses to go into the land. Moses had done something against God's government, and the Lord had to uphold His government. For this reason He could not permit Moses to enter the

land. Here we see that Moses, one who was truly a man of God, was not allowed to enter the good land. Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, three leaders among the people, died in the wilderness. It surely is not good to die in this way.

B. Lusters after Evil Things

In verse 6 Paul continues, "Now these things occurred as types of us, that we should not be lusters after evil things, as they also lusted." Here Paul says that these things happened as types of us. Thus, he includes himself with all believers in the matter of running the Christian race. These types indicate that we should not be lusters after evil things, as the children of Israel lusted. The word "also" in verse 6 indicates that the Corinthians were lusting after evil things. Therefore, Paul warns them not to be those who lust.

Paul's use of the word types is very significant. The Greek word also means examples, figures of facts of spiritual truths. We have seen that 1 Corinthians takes the history of the children of Israel in the Old Testament as a type of the New Testament believers. In chapters five, seven, and eight they have experienced Christ as their Passover and have begun to keep the feast of unleavened bread. Here in this chapter they have been baptized unto their Moses (Christ), passing through their Red Sea (the death of Christ). They are now eating the spiritual food and drinking the spiritual drink that they may take their journey (the Christian race) toward their good land (the all-inclusive Christ). They are also warned here (v. 11) not to repeat the history of the children of Israel in doing evil against God, as illustrated in verses 6 through 11.

The goal of God's calling the children of Israel was to enter into the promised land to enjoy its riches that they might establish God's kingdom and be God's expression on earth. However, although all had been redeemed through the Passover, delivered out of the Egyptian tyranny, and brought to the mountain of God to receive the revelation of God's dwelling place, the tabernacle, nearly all fell and died in the wilderness, failing to reach this goal (Heb. 3:7-19) because of their evil doings and unbelief. Only Caleb

and Joshua made it into the good land (Num. 14:27-30). This signifies that although we have been redeemed through Christ, delivered out of Satan's bondage, and brought into the revelation of God's economy, we may yet fail to reach the goal of God's calling, that is, to enter into the possession of our good land, Christ (Phil. 3:12-14), and enjoy His riches for the kingdom of God that we may be His expression in the present age and participate in the fullest enjoyment of Christ in the kingdom age (Matt. 25:21, 23). This should be a solemn warning to all New Testament believers, especially to the Corinthians, who were in danger of repeating the failure of the children of Israel in the wilderness.

C. Becoming Idolaters

Verse 7 says, "Neither become idolaters, as some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." The abusive eating of the children of Israel was related to their idolatry in worshipping the golden calf (Exo. 32:1-6). The apostle's word here implies that the Corinthians' eating of idol sacrifices without any consideration was also somewhat related to idolatry.

In verse 7 we have the biblical interpretation of idolatry. Idolatry is to eat, drink, and play. When the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf, they sat down to eat and drink, and they stood up to play. Here to play means to have entertainment. Eating, drinking, and playing are equal to worshipping idols. Today people everywhere are committing idolatry in this way. Whenever there is a holiday or a long weekend, they give themselves to play, to the pursuit of various kinds of entertainment. Furthermore, in many of today's Christian services there is the practice of idolatry. In the sight of God, the music and the dramas found in certain services are idolatry. In many places Christians are not actually worshipping God--they are practicing idolatry. Their way of service is idolatrous in the eyes of God. We also must be careful in the way we use musical instruments in the meetings. Our singing should

be for worship, not for fun. When we sing in the meetings, we need to have a genuine spirit of worship. If our singing becomes mere entertainment, that is idolatry. The singing in the meetings of the church must not be play; it must be genuine worship offered to God.

D. Committing Fornication

Verse 8 continues, "Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in one day twenty-three thousand." Fornication accompanies idolatry (Num. 25:1-2). Hence, these two things are referred to together, as also in Acts 15:20, 29. Undoubtedly, the implication here is that these two evils also existed among the Corinthian believers. Hence, these are the main things dealt with in chapters five through ten.

In this verse Paul uses the word "fell." This means to be strewn along, to be laid low on the ground by being slain. Those who fell in this way were not properly buried. Instead, they were scattered in the wilderness.

E. Tempting the Lord

In verse 9 Paul goes on to say, "Neither let us tempt the Lord, as some of them tempted and were destroyed by the serpents." Literally, the Greek word for tempt means to try to the uttermost, to "tempt out," to tempt thoroughly. According to Numbers 21:6, those who tempted the Lord were destroyed by serpents.

F. Murmuring against the Lord

Verse 10 says, "Neither murmur, as some of them murmured and perished by the destroyer." The murmuring of the children of Israel (Num. 16:41) typified the negative speaking of the Corinthian believers against the apostle (1 Cor. 4:3; 9:3). The children of Israel who murmured perished; they were destroyed in death, laid low on the ground. The destroyer mentioned in verse 10 is God's executing angel (Exo. 12:23; 2 Sam. 24:16-17). No doubt, by referring to the murmuring of the children of Israel Paul

implies that the Corinthian believers should be careful about murmuring against him.

G. Types for Our Admonition unto Whom the Ends of the Ages Have Come

In verse 11 Paul explains, "Now these things happened to them as types, and were written for our admonition, unto whom the ends of the ages have come." Again Paul says that the things that happened to the children of Israel in the wilderness are types. These types were written for our admonition. Admonition here implies a warning.

In verse 11 Paul speaks of the ends of the ages. The Greek word for ends also means fulfillment or consummation. The ends of the ages here refer to the New Testament age, from the Lord's first coming to His second coming (Heb. 9:26). This implies that the New Testament age, in which we are, is the age of grace, when we may take the admonition concerning the history of the children of Israel. Following this age is the kingdom age, when these examples in the Old Testament age will no longer serve for our Christian race.

In this verse Paul seems to be saying, "This age, the age of grace, is the end of the ages. Brothers, you are all in the age of grace. What happened to the children of Israel is still a type as an admonition for you. If you do not heed the warning of this type and walk in the light of this warning, you will miss the opportunity. When this age is over, these types of the children of Israel will no longer serve you."

H. Taking Heed Lest We Fall

In verse 12 Paul says, "So then, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." Based upon the admonition in verses 5 through 11, the apostle warns the Corinthians not to think they are standing steadfast, with no danger of falling dead as the children of Israel did. The word "fall" here refers to the children of Israel who failed, those who fell and died in the wilderness. Some Corinthian believers did fall and die because of offending the Lord's body (11:27-30).

In verse 12 Paul tells the philosophical Corinthians to take heed lest they fall. They may think that they are strong, steady, and standing fast. But Paul warned them not to fall, as the children of Israel did. As we shall see, in chapter eleven Paul points out that those who offended the Lord in the matter of the Lord's table became weak, sick, and some even died. This is to fall. Any New Testament believer who dies without overcoming is one who falls. Paul died, but he did not die defeated. He did not fall in the wilderness. On the contrary, he died overcoming. He was like Joshua and Caleb, who did not die in the wilderness. However, most Christians die as defeated ones. For a Christian to die defeated by sin, the world, the flesh, lust, Satan, or anything evil is to fall in the wilderness. It is actually to be strewn along in the wilderness. This is a very serious matter.

Paul's warning in these verses is a word of righteousness (Heb. 5:13). Today where can you hear such a word of righteousness proclaimed among Christians? Instead of the word of righteousness, there are sugar-coated sermons which often encourage people to practice idolatry. This is a serious situation, and it requires a serious word of warning.

I. No Temptation That Is Not Common to Man

In verse 13 Paul goes on to say, "No temptation has taken you except that which is common to man; but God is faithful, Who will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able, but will with the temptation make also the way out, that you may be able to endure it." This verse is a continuation of the warning given in verse 12, indicating that, on the one hand, we should take heed not to be tempted lest we fall and die. On the other hand, God in His faithfulness will not allow any temptation to befall us beyond what we are able to endure, but will always make a way out for us. This word of encouragement follows the strong warning given in the foregoing verses.

Some readers of 1 Corinthians think that the word temptation in verse 13 means trial or trouble. According to

their understanding, this verse is saying that whatever trial we suffer is common to all men. Actually, here Paul does not mean trouble; he means temptation. In Matthew 6:13 the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray both to be delivered from evil and also not to be led into temptation. The evil here includes troubles such as accidents. Temptation refers to things around us which tempt us. Thus, we need to pray that the Lord would daily deliver us from troubles and not lead us into temptation. We realize that we are weak and cannot bear temptation. In 10:13 Paul is speaking of temptation, not troubles or trials.

Paul's word in verse 13 is both a comfort and a correction to the Corinthians. The Corinthians may have thought that the temptations were too strong to be resisted. But Paul points out that no temptation has taken them except that which is common to man. He also says that God is faithful and will not allow them to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear, but with the temptation will provide a way out so that they may be able to endure it. This is a word of promise and of encouragement. However, it leaves the responsibility for being tempted with us, not with God. When we are tempted, we should never blame God for the temptation. According to this verse, the responsibility for being tempted rests on our shoulders. At the same time, we may be encouraged to know that the faithful God will provide a way out for us.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-EIGHT

GROWING INTO THE FULL POSSESSION AND ENJOYMENT OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: Heb. 5:11-14; 3:6-19; 6:1; 1 Cor. 3:1-3, 6-7; 2:14

In this message we shall see from Hebrews and 1 Corinthians that we need to grow into the full possession and enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ.

THE HEBREWS AND THE CORINTHIANS

Paul applies the history of the children of Israel to the New Testament church life. In Hebrews and 1 Corinthians he points out clearly that what happened to the children of Israel is a type of us. The entire history of Israel is a story of the church. As we have seen, in 10:6 Paul, referring to the children of Israel, says, "Now these things occurred as types of us."

The situations of the believers addressed in Hebrews and 1 Corinthians were different. The Hebrew believers were infants in doctrines concerning Christ, and they were frustrated from entering into the full rest of the promised land because of their shortage of faith (Heb. 5:11-14; 3:6-19; 6:1). Thus, they needed the growth in faith. They were short of adequate faith in the proper knowledge of the truth. Paul refers to this deeper truth as the word of righteousness, as solid food (Heb. 5:12-14).

The Corinthian believers were infants in the experience of Christ and were frustrated from entering into the full enjoyment of Christ because they were soulish and fleshly. Thus, they needed the growth in life (1 Cor. 3:1-3, 6-7; 2:14). With the Hebrews there was a shortage of faith, and with the Corinthians there was a shortage of the growth in

life. In both Hebrews and 1 Corinthians Paul encourages the believers to go on, to progress. The one group, the Hebrew believers, needed to progress, to increase, in the proper faith in the deeper truths; the second group, the Corinthian believers, needed to progress in the growth in life.

The Corinthian believers had Christ as their portion (1:2), for they had been called into the fellowship of Christ (1:9). God had made Christ to them power and wisdom: righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1:30). Furthermore, the Corinthian believers had experienced and enjoyed Christ as their Passover (5:7), their holiness for sanctification (6:11), their righteousness for justification (6:11), the unleavened bread for their Christian life as a feast (5:8), their spiritual food (10:3), their spiritual drink (10:4a), and their spiritual rock (10:4b). Their experiences of Christ were all by their regenerated spirit mingled with the Spirit, who is the resurrected Christ (2:14; 6:17; 15:45b). In the future, they will enjoy Christ as their glory for glorification (2:7-8). That will be the redemption of their body (1:30). They were in the participation in Christ's blood and Christ's body (10:16). Nevertheless, they were admonished not to fall in the Christian race, as most of the children of Israel did in the wilderness, but rather to grow into the full possession and enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ, God's promised land.

THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

The history of Israel can be divided into three sections. We may call the first of these sections the section of salvation. According to the book of Exodus, the children of Israel, although they were God's chosen people, were in a fallen condition and were under the tyranny of the Egyptians. But they were saved out of that fallen situation and brought to the mountain of God and to the dwelling place of God. They also received the divine provisions to supply their need. When they needed food, the heavenly manna came. When they needed drink, the living water flowed to them out of the cleft rock. All their needs were

met by God. Thus, they had the divine provisions which enabled them to enter into the good land. After coming into the land, they enjoyed the riches of the land. In Deuteronomy 8:7-9 we have an excellent view of the riches of the good land. Every aspect of these riches typifies an aspect of the riches of Christ.

In the previous message we gave a word of warning. In that message not much encouragement was given. Now in this message we shall consider something very encouraging. Actually the history, or the type, of Israel is not disappointing. Yes, it is true that only two who came out of Egypt entered into the good land. Of the more than two million who came out of Egypt only Joshua and Caleb, along with the bodies of Jacob and Joseph, entered into the good land. However, along with them, all those of the new generation came into the good land. On the human side we see failure, but from God's side we see victory. We must take note of the fact that eventually God's chosen people entered into the good land; conquered, subdued, and drove out the usurpers; gained the land; and enjoyed all the riches in the land. They established the kingdom, and within the kingdom a temple was built. Therefore, among His people in the good land with the kingdom and the temple, God had His expression. This marks the end of the section of the history of Israel called the section of salvation.

In the Bible God's full and complete salvation includes the Passover, the exodus, the crossing of the Red Sea, the journey in the wilderness, the supply of the divine provisions, fellowship with God at His mountain, receiving divine revelation, and the building up of God's dwelling place.

As we consider the scope of this full and complete salvation, we must realize that God can never be defeated. We may think that it is impossible for God to gain one hundred forty-four thousand overcomers (Rev. 14:1). To us this may seem impossible. But what is impossible with man is altogether possible with God. Our God is a victorious God. He cannot be defeated, and His purpose, His plan, cannot be defeated either. God is great, and His

view is vast. He had a way to bring His people out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the good land.

Were the children of Israel defeated, or did they gain the victory? The correct answer to this question is that they were defeated temporarily, but ultimately they were victorious. They gained the good land and received God's full salvation.

It is common for Christians, under the influence of traditional theology, to ask others if they have been saved. To give a proper answer to this question, we need to consider the scope of God's complete salvation and to realize that it includes the entire experience of the children of Israel from the Passover to the building of the temple in the good land. The enjoyment of the Passover certainly was an aspect of God's salvation. However, it was simply the beginning of full salvation; it was not the completion of this salvation. Only after the children of Israel had crossed the Red Sea, journeyed through the wilderness, gained possession of the good land, and built the temple, which was filled with the glory of God, did they have the completion of God's full salvation.

The next time someone asks you if you have been saved, you should answer in a wise way. You need to inquire what is meant by God's salvation and what this salvation includes. You may reply, "You ask me if I have been saved. Before I answer, I would like you to tell me what is the span, the scope, of God's salvation." Yes, the children of Israel experienced salvation at the time of the Passover. A member of the tribe of Benjamin, for example, could have testified confidently that because he had enjoyed the Passover, he had been saved. God's salvation, however, includes much more than the Passover. As we have pointed out, it includes God's habitation, His dwelling place. Not only is salvation for God's habitation; it even includes this habitation. If we have not yet experienced God's dwelling place, our salvation is not complete. To be saved in a full and complete way means to enjoy the Passover, to experience the exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea, to

be supplied with the divine provisions, to gain possession of the good land, and to be built up as a temple of God, His habitation on earth. God's glory will then fill this temple. This is full salvation. The entire history of the children of Israel from the Passover to 1 Kings 8 is a type of the church. However, many Christian teachers take only particular aspects as types, not the complete history.

In this message we are not concerned with the second and third sections of the history of Israel. Thus, it is sufficient simply to say that the second section includes everything from the degradation that followed after the building of the temple until the recovery of Jerusalem in 1967. The third section, the millennium, will not begin until after the Lord's coming back. The first and second sections of Israel's history are a type of the church. In the sight of God, Israel and the church are on a parallel course.

APPLYING THE FIRST PORTION OF ISRAEL'S HISTORY

I wish to emphasize the fact that in gaining the good land the children of Israel were not defeated. They entered the land, they conquered the land, they fully possessed the land, and they had the enjoyment of the rich produce of the land. My burden in this message is to apply this section of the history of Israel to us. For this reason the message is entitled, "Growing into the Full Possession and Enjoyment of Christ."

In the first section of the history of Israel every positive thing is a type of Christ or of something related to Christ. The Passover with the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs typifies Christ. The Red Sea is a type of the death of Christ, and the cloud is a type of the Spirit of Christ. Likewise, the manna, the smitten rock, the living water, and the tabernacle with its utensils and furnishings are all types. But the ultimate type of Christ, the greatest and all-inclusive type, is the good land. The children of Israel entered the good land, possessed it, and enjoyed it. We need to apply this part of their history to our experience today.

As we consider this portion of their history, we shall see that the children of Israel were not defeated. On the contrary, they were victorious: they gained the land, entered it, possessed it, and enjoyed it. This should encourage us not to be disappointed by the situation among Christians today. We must believe that our God is still the God of victory and that He has a way to carry out His purpose. Furthermore, we also believe that the recovery is needed for God to fulfill what is typified by that portion of the history of Israel concerned with entering the land, possessing it, and enjoying it.

TWO GENERATIONS

With the children of Israel from the Passover to the entering of the good land, there were two generations. The first generation was made up of those who came out of Egypt, and the second, of those who entered the good land. This indicates that we believers have two generations. We were saved with the first generation, but we shall enter the good land with the second generation. The first generation is our old man, and the second generation is our new man.

With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, who had another spirit, the first generation died out. Joshua and Caleb belonged to the new generation, not to the old generation. That is why they experienced a double baptism, the first baptism when they passed through the Red Sea and the second when they crossed the Jordan River. The old generation passed through the Red Sea, but it was the new generation that crossed the Jordan.

When the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea, I doubt that they realized that they were experiencing a baptism. But although they may have lacked understanding, in the sight of God they were in fact baptized at that time. However, after their baptism they were still in a very poor situation. In principle, the same may be true of believers today. After we are baptized, our church life may still be in confusion. Therefore, we need to pass through the Jordan River. The first baptism did not actually terminate the children of Israel. Rather, it buried

Pharaoh and the Egyptian army. It was the baptism in the Jordan River that buried the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, represented by twelve stones placed in the bottom of the river (Josh. 4:9).

Between the first baptism at the Red Sea and the second baptism at the Jordan River, the children of Israel were experiencing transformation. If you could have visited them after they had passed through the Red Sea, you may have wondered how they could be God's people. Perhaps you would have thought that Moses was mistaken in helping them to enjoy the Passover. They were fighting, murmuring, and criticizing. But during the forty years between passing through the Red Sea and crossing the Jordan River, there were many dealings related to transformation. This means that, spiritually speaking, during this time the children of Israel were transformed. Yes, the old generation was strewn in the wilderness, and this is a warning to us. But a new generation came forth. This is transformation. After they crossed the Jordan, they became a mighty army.

THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

If we consider the history of the children of Israel, we shall not be disappointed with ourselves. Instead, we shall realize that we can be compared to caterpillars in a cocoon undergoing the process of transformation. Do not be disappointed, but worship the Lord from within your "cocoon." We all are "caterpillars" experiencing the divine work of transformation. The more this work progresses, the more we emerge from our cocoon. Some of the young ones may have only a small part free from the cocoon, whereas other saints have a greater percentage of their being outside the cocoon. Praise the Lord that the caterpillars are being transformed and that the cocoons are gradually disappearing! This is the real situation in the church life in the Lord's recovery.

Because we are partly in the cocoon and partly out of it, sometimes we are discouraged and at other times we are encouraged. When we are mindful of the cocoon or of the caterpillar in the cocoon, we become disappointed. But

when we see the butterfly emerging from the cocoon, we are encouraged and happy. In the Lord's recovery we are gradually coming out of our cocoons. Many of us can testify that, by contrast, when we were in organized religion, we did not know anything about transformation, nor did we have any concept of caterpillars in cocoons being changed into beautiful butterflies. The Lord's recovery certainly is necessary to bring the saints into the real experience of transformation.

If we are faithful to the Lord, the recovery will become more and more prevailing. Recently I gave a number of messages on the world situation. If we have the proper insight into the world situation, we shall see that the time is right for the Lord's recovery to spread throughout the earth. Even all the modern means of transportation and communication can be used of the Lord for His recovery. Therefore, the time is ripe for us, especially the younger ones, to spread the Lord's recovery. Where can Christians today hear both the Lord's word of grace and His word of righteousness? In so many places the people practice idolatry; they eat, drink, and rise up to play. But in the recovery God is speaking. I believe that in the coming years the recovery, the Lord's ultimate move on earth, will be very prevailing. The Lord desires to gather those who love Him and who seek Him and make them His living testimony.

OUR NEED TO GROW IN LIFE

We in the Lord's recovery need to grow in life. To grow is to come out of the cocoon. To grow in life is also to eliminate the old generation and to be renewed in our mind, emotion, and will. This involves transformation. Transformation is a matter of eliminating the old generation, the old man, and putting on the new generation, the new man. This is to fully come out of the cocoon and be released as a butterfly.

Today we are enjoying Christ, but we have not yet possessed Him as the all-inclusive land. If we would possess Christ in this way, our old man must die out, and the new man must come forth. Praise the Lord that the old

man is dying out day by day! Many of us can testify that since we have come into the Lord's recovery, a change has taken place within us. This change is the dying out of the old man and the growing up of the new man. This is transformation, the growth in life.

Paul's intention in writing this Epistle to the Corinthians was to help them to experience the dying out of the old man and the growing up of the new man. He uses the word grow in chapter three, saying that he planted, Apollos watered, and God gives the growth.

When some saints hear of the growth in life, they may say, "I have been in the Lord's recovery for many years, but I haven't noticed any growth in me." If this is your feeling, I would encourage you to compare the way you are today with what you were several years ago. If you make this comparison, I believe that you will worship the Lord and thank Him for what He has been doing in you. You will praise Him for the fact that the butterfly, your new being, has been gradually emerging from its cocoon. Praise the Lord that we are growing! By growth and transformation we are putting off the old man and putting on the new man.

We must be careful, however, not to try to pull off the cocoon ourselves. To do this is to cause damage. The cocoon protects us while the growth in life is taking place. Never try to pull off your cocoon without the adequate growth in life. The principle here is illustrated by a word in Exodus 23:27-30 concerning occupying the good land and driving out the Canaanites. God told the children of Israel that He would not drive out the Canaanites all at once. Otherwise, wild beasts would come in to destroy. God would even use the Canaanites as a protection to the children of Israel. This indicates that we should not try to deal with our old man apart from the growth in life. I repeat, do not try to remove your cocoon. Instead, simply live a normal church life in the Lord's recovery. If you do this, you can be assured that you are steadily growing in life.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-NINE

THE LORD'S TABLE

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 10:14-22

In 10:14-22 Paul speaks about keeping the Lord's table from idolatry. In verses 14 through 18 he speaks of the fellowship of the Lord's blood and body, and in verses 19 through 22, the separation of the Lord's table from the table of demons.

FLEEING IDOLATRY

In verse 14 Paul says, "Wherefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." The word "wherefore" at the beginning of this verse indicates that the following section to verse 30 is a conclusion to the preceding section, from 8:1, concerning eating sacrifices to idols. Literally, the Greek words rendered idolatry are "the idolatry," referring to the idolatry involved in eating sacrifices to idols.

In his understanding of the holy Word, Paul is able to see through the physical things and through the black and white letters and to see Christ. For example, in 10:4 he speaks of a physical rock as Christ. This indicates that in this rock he sees Christ. In the same principle, by the word idolatry Paul does not merely mean graven images, but something much broader and more inclusive. As we shall see, idolatry here implies a great deal.

In verse 15 Paul continues, "I speak as to prudent men; you judge what I say." Paul expected that the readers would not stop at the black and white letters, but dig into what he says and then investigate, discern, and judge it. He wanted them to carefully examine and judge what he was saying.

FELLOWSHIP OF THE BLOOD AND BODY

In verse 16 Paul suddenly speaks of the cup of blessing: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a fellowship of the body of Christ?" Apparently there is no flow of proper continuation between verses 15 and 16. Without any transition, Paul begins to speak of the cup of blessing, indicating that it is a fellowship of the blood of Christ. He also speaks concerning the bread, indicating that it is a fellowship of the body of Christ. We should not take this verse for granted, assuming we understand it when we actually understand very little, if anything. We need to investigate the meaning of the expressions "a fellowship of the blood of Christ" and "a fellowship of the body of Christ."

The Greek word rendered fellowship also means joint participation. Fellowship here refers to the believer's communion in the joint participation in the blood and body of Christ. This makes us, the participants of the Lord's blood and body, not only one with one another, but also one with the Lord. We, the participants, make ourselves identified with the Lord in the fellowship of His blood and body. The apostle's thought here is to illustrate how eating and drinking make the eaters and drinkers one with what they eat and drink. The Corinthians should realize that their abusive eating of idol sacrifices actually makes them one with the demons behind the sacrifices.

ONE BREAD, ONE BODY

In verse 17 Paul speaks a strong word concerning the one bread and the one Body: "Seeing that we who are many are one bread, one Body; for we all partake of the one bread." We are all one bread, one Body, because we all partake of the one bread. Our joint partaking of the one bread makes us all one. This indicates that our partaking of Christ makes us all His one Body. The very Christ of whom we all partake constitutes us into His one Body.

Partaking of the one bread, that is, eating of it (vv. 28-30), identifies us with it. This means that our partaking of

Christ, our enjoyment of Christ, identifies us with Him, making us one with Him.

THE ALTAR AND THE TABLE

In verse 18 Paul again refers to Israel: "Look at Israel according to the flesh; are not those who eat the sacrifices fellowshippers of the altar?" We have seen that in 10:1-13 Paul presents Israel as a type of the believers today. We should not think that the remainder of chapter ten has nothing to do with the type of Israel in verses 1 through 1. On the contrary, the second portion of this chapter is a continuation of the first portion; it is not separate from it.

The Greek word translated fellowshippers also means joint participants. Those who eat the sacrifices of the altar are not only fellowshippers with one another and with the altar, but also joint participants of what they eat. Their participation in what they eat makes them one with the sacrifices of the altar. Since the altar is the base of the sacrifices offered to God, eating the sacrifices of the altar makes the eaters its fellowshippers, its joint participants. This also illustrates the fact that eating makes the eater one with what he eats. Eating sacrifices to idols does the same: it identifies the eaters with the demons behind the sacrifices.

In verse 18 Paul surely means that the fellowship of the altar is a type of the fellowship of the blood and body of Christ. To put it simply, it is a type of the fellowship of the Lord's table. Hence, the fellowshippers of the altar are types of the fellowshippers of the Lord's table. Israel had an altar, but we have a table. On the altar there were the offerings; on the table there are the blood and the body. The one is the type, and the other is the fulfillment. Whereas the children of Israel were fellowshipping around the altar, we are fellowshipping around the table.

IDOLS AND DEMONS

In verses 19 and 20 Paul says, "What then am I saying? That what is sacrificed to an idol is anything? Or that an

idol is anything? But that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become fellowshippers of demons." Here Paul's composition takes another leap, apparently without any transition.

In verses 19 and 20 Paul speaks of idols, sacrifices to idols, and demons. An idol and a sacrifice to an idol are nothing (8:4). But behind them are the demons, who are abominable and hateful to God. The believers who worship God should abstain from identifying themselves with demons and becoming fellowshippers of demons through eating sacrifices to idols. Since demons are the reality of idols, so the eating of sacrifices to idols makes the eaters their fellowshippers, their joint participants. The eaters of sacrifices to idols become not only fellowshippers with demons, but also joint participants of demons, making themselves one with demons.

TWO TABLES

In verse 16 Paul speaks of the fellowship of the blood and body of Christ; in verse 18, of fellowshippers of the altar; and in verse 20, of fellowshippers of demons. Then in verse 21 he goes on to say, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons." Here we see that there are two tables: the table of the Lord and the table of demons. To partake of a table is to eat of it. To drink the cup of the Lord and partake of the table of the Lord is to identify ourselves with the Lord. To drink the cup of demons and partake of the table of demons is to make ourselves one with demons.

In verse 22 Paul concludes this portion of chapter ten by saying, "Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" The Lord is the jealous God (Exo. 20:5). Idolatry is utterly abominable to God and hated by Him. If we participate in fellowship with demons, making ourselves one with them, we shall provoke the Lord to jealousy. Hence, we must flee from idolatry.

THE MEANING OF IDOLATRY

Do you have an adequate understanding of 10:14-22? You may say that here Paul speaks concerning the Lord's table. Why, then, does he open this section with a charge to flee from idolatry? In verse 14 he does not say, "Wherefore, my beloved, attend the Lord's table every Lord's day." Instead, he says, "Wherefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry." The correct understanding of this section is that Paul talks about the Lord's table using idolatry as a background.

We have pointed out that in 10:15 Paul encourages the saints, as prudent men, to judge what he says. He appeals to them as those who can discern, investigate, realize, and apprehend. If we read Paul's word in a discerning way, we shall want to know why he tells us to flee from idolatry. We shall also want to know what he means by the term idolatry. Is Paul's meaning limited to the actual worship of a graven image? To be sure, Paul's meaning is not this restricted. In 10:7 he says, "Neither become idolaters, as some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." This is a definition of idolatry.

There is a difference between idol worship and idolatry. Idol worship involves bowing down before an idol and worshipping it. Idolatry is wider in scope, for it involves eating, drinking, and playing. In this country people may not worship idols, but they may practice idolatry. On the holidays or on weekends they may give themselves over to various forms of amusement and entertainment. They may eat and drink and rise up to play. This is idolatry. Even to eat sacrifices to idols in an abusive way is to become involved with idolatry. We should neither worship idols nor become involved with idolatry. As we have seen, the meaning of idolatry is much broader than the meaning of idol worship.

THE ENJOYMENT OF THE GOOD LAND

With this understanding of idolatry as a background, we need to ask what Paul means by the expression "the Lord's table." Our understanding of this may be too

narrow. What is the Lord's table? The Chinese version of the Bible speaks of the Lord's feast. According to this translation, the table is a feast. However, not even the word feast conveys the full significance of the Lord's table. What is included in the term the Lord's table is a matter of great significance. As we shall see in the next message, the Lord's table is actually the good land.

The first section of chapter ten is a record that shows how the history of Israel is a type of the church. In verses 1 through 11 Paul describes this type in its various aspects. Then in verse 12 he says, "So then, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." In verse 13 he goes on to give a word of encouragement and comfort. If we study this chapter carefully, we shall realize that there is a gap between verses 13 and 14. At the end of verse 12, Paul seems to make a sudden stop, and then he gives a word of encouragement. The careful reader of this chapter, however, will realize that Paul has not yet finished describing how the history of Israel is a type of the church. Thus, we have the definite impression that Paul has not finished this matter. Perhaps he did not have the time to go on in more detail. Nevertheless, he did have the burden to present the consummate thought regarding Israel as a type. This consummate thought is the children of Israel entering into the enjoyment of the good land.

The enjoyment of the good land is the goal of God's salvation. Would you be happy with a God who simply delivered His people out of Egypt, brought them into the wilderness, and then allowed them to fall in the wilderness? I would not be happy with such a God, for this would not be a saving God. God had promised to bring His people out of the land of Egypt into a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey. This promise had been made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If God had not brought the people into this good land, He would not have fulfilled His promise.

As far as the children of Israel were concerned, the enjoyment of the land flowing with milk and honey was the

ultimate goal of God's salvation. But as far as God was concerned, the ultimate goal was not reached just by the enjoyment of the land. There was still the need for the kingdom and the temple. The children of Israel needed the enjoyment, but God needed a kingdom and a temple.

Because Paul wrote in a very economical way, he made a leap in his composition from the failure in the wilderness to the enjoyment of the good land. If we get into the depths of this chapter, we shall realize that this is Paul's concept. Both idolatry and the Lord's table are much more inclusive in meaning than what is indicated by the letters in black and white.

BECOMING WHAT WE EAT

First Corinthians 10:12-22, we need to remember, is part of a long section which deals with the matter of eating. Eating is related to enjoyment. Whenever you eat something, you enjoy it. Furthermore, what we eat becomes us. On the one hand, eating is for our enjoyment; on the other hand, we become what we eat. These basic concepts should be applied in understanding this portion. To eat idol sacrifices actually means to enjoy idols and eventually to become one with idols. In the same principle, to partake of the Lord's table is to enjoy this table and to become one with it; that is, to enjoy the Lord and become one with Him. In these verses Paul first speaks of one kind of table and then, apparently making a leap, of another kind of table. In verse 21 he clearly says, "You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons." Actually, in this portion there are three tables: the altar (v. 18), the table of demons, and the table of the Lord. All these terms are inclusive, and we should not understand them in a narrow way.

A RICH UNVEILING OF CHRIST

As we read this Epistle, we realize that Paul was truly a marvelous writer. His aim, his purpose, in writing 1 Corinthians was to bring the distracted Corinthian

believers back to Christ and back to the central focus of God's economy. As we have seen, in dealing with divisions, Paul unveils a great deal concerning Christ. In no other book is Christ unveiled in such a rich way as He is in the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians. Even when Paul deals with a problem involving gross sin, the matter of incest, he reveals Christ in a marvelous way. Furthermore, we have pointed out that in dealing with married life, Paul also covers important matters related to being one spirit with the Lord. But in chapters eight, nine, and ten, a section concerned with the eating of idol sacrifices, the revelation reaches the peak. It comes to a consummate point. Most readers of 1 Corinthians, including Bible teachers and theologians, have not touched the full significance of what Paul deals with in this section. Therefore, it is crucial that we do not take these chapters for granted, but get into them in a thorough way in order to see the marvelous revelation presented here.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY

THE LORD'S TABLE

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 10:14-22

As we read 1 Corinthians, it is very important that we understand Paul's central thought. Paul realized that the philosophical Greek believers had gone astray from Christ. Although they were genuine Christians, they were missing the mark concerning Christ. Instead of living a Christian life by living Christ, they were living their Greek culture. Therefore, Paul was burdened to rescue them and bring them back to Christ.

THE DEEP AND MYSTERIOUS CHRIST

Paul was not a shallow person, and in his writing he did not carry out the rescue of the believers at Corinth in a shallow way. On the contrary, Paul's way of rescuing them involves matters that are deep and profound. As he wrote to the Corinthians with the aim of rescuing them from what was distracting them from Christ, Paul unveils the depths of God, the deeper things concerning Christ. If we did not have the first three chapters of 1 Corinthians, we would not know that Christ has become wisdom to us from God; neither would we know that this wisdom includes Christ as righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Paul's thought here is very deep. The problems he deals with in this Epistle may seem rather shallow, but the way he deals with these things is profound. In particular, the eating of idol sacrifices is a shallow matter. But Paul's way of dealing with this problem is related to the deep, mysterious, all-inclusive Christ.

The depths of God are related to the mysterious Christ. Because what we are teaching and experiencing regarding Christ is mysterious, unbelievers cannot understand what we are talking about. To them Christ is simply a historical figure. But to us Christ is real, living, present, and precious; He is mysterious, deep, and all-inclusive. He is far beyond our comprehension, so deep that we cannot fathom Him.

In his Epistles, Paul did not have a vocabulary adequate to describe the all-inclusive Christ. In Ephesians 3:18 he speaks of apprehending with all the saints "what is the breadth and length and height and depth." Here Paul refers to the dimensions of Christ. What is the breadth? And what are the length, the height, and the depth? These are the immeasurable dimensions of Christ. Christ Himself is the breadth, length, height, and depth. His dimensions are more vast than the dimensions of the universe. Such a marvelous Christ is beyond our apprehension.

ENJOYING CHRIST

According to Paul's word in 1 Corinthians, this wonderful Christ is ours. In 1:2 we are told that Christ is "theirs and ours." In 1:9 Paul says that we have been called into the fellowship of Christ. This means that Christ is our portion for our enjoyment.

For us, as those who have been called into the fellowship of Christ, it is not sufficient only to believe in Him, trust in Him, and rely on Him, as Christians today are often taught to do. Of course, we must trust in the Lord and rely on Him. But we may do this and still miss the central matter of enjoying Christ and possessing Him as our portion. In the past, many of us were taught to believe in Christ, trust in Christ, rely on Christ, and pray to Christ. One very important matter, however, was neglected--the enjoyment of Christ. Before you came into the Lord's recovery, did you ever hear a message about enjoying Christ? Where is such a word spoken among the Lord's people today? Christians do not have this terminology because they do not have this spiritual

culture. They do not speak of eating Christ or of drinking Him, even though these matters are mentioned in the Bible.

Paul's purpose in writing 1 Corinthians was not merely to help us trust in Christ or rely on Him. His goal was to encourage us to enjoy Christ. Hallelujah, Christ is ours! The simple phrase "theirs and ours" in 1:2 implies enjoyment. For Christ to be ours means not only that we trust in Him, but also that we enjoy Him. How wonderful that Christ is ours to enjoy!

THE FELLOWSHIP OF GOD'S SON

God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Do you have a proper understanding of the fellowship of God's Son? As we have pointed out, fellowship involves participation. Now I wish to say that fellowship includes enjoyment. It is correct to interpret 1:9 in this way: "By Whom you have been called into the enjoyment of His Son." To enter into the fellowship of the Son is to come into the enjoyment of Him.

In 10:16 Paul again refers to fellowship: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a fellowship of the body of Christ?" In 1:9 the fellowship is the fellowship of a Person. Here in 10:16 the fellowship is of that Person's blood and body. When the Lord Jesus ate with His disciples and established the table, He "took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body" (Matt. 26:26). Then taking the cup and giving thanks, "He gave it to them, saying, Drink of it, all of you" (v. 27). Today the Lord invites us to His table and says of the bread and the cup, "This is My body; take and eat.... This is My blood; take and drink." However, we may take these matters for granted, not realizing that by speaking in this way concerning His body and blood, the Lord is presenting Himself to us for our enjoyment. He gives Himself to us as our food supply so that we may enjoy Him. Oh, may the Lord open our eyes! He, the all-inclusive One, has given His body for us to eat and His blood for us to drink. He has

given us Himself so that we may partake of Him and enjoy Him by eating and drinking Him.

As the all-inclusive One who presents Himself to us for our enjoyment, Christ is the embodiment of the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. He is the very God incarnate, the One who lived on earth as a man for thirty-three and a half years, who died on the cross to terminate the old creation, who was resurrected physically and spiritually, and who became through resurrection the life-giving Spirit. Today the One who presents His body and blood to us is Christ as the life-giving Spirit. This wonderful Christ is everything to us for our enjoyment. All that He is, is for our participation and enjoyment.

THE TABLE AND THE GOOD LAND

Whenever we come to the Lord's table to enjoy Christ as the all-inclusive One, in our experience we are in the good land enjoying the riches of the land. This means that the good land has become a table, a feast, for our enjoyment. At this table, this feast, we are satisfied, and God is satisfied also. If we see this, we shall realize that to enter into the good land is to come to the Lord's table. This is a most encouraging word. Praise the Lord that when we come to the table, we enter into the good land!

Our understanding of the Lord's table has been limited by the influence of our religious background and also by our natural concepts. Because of this influence, we may think that to come to the Lord's table is merely to attend a meeting centered around a table with a loaf and a cup. We may not have any realization in our spirit that by coming to the table and enjoying it, we are enjoying Christ as the all-inclusive land.

Do you know how the children of Israel established the kingdom of God on earth and how they built the temple of God? They did this through the enjoyment of the riches of the good land. Because the children of Israel enjoyed these riches, they could defeat their enemies. The riches of the land not only enabled the people to live; they also equipped them to fight and bring in the kingdom of God.

Furthermore, the riches of the land supplied them with what they needed to build God's temple. Therefore, both the kingdom of God and the temple come into being through the enjoyment of the riches of the good land. The riches of the land were the source of the living of the children of Israel. These riches were also the supply for them to defeat the enemy, establish the kingdom of God, and build the temple of God. One day the glory of God descended and filled this temple. That was the consummate result of the enjoyment of the riches of the good land.

The experience of the children of Israel in the good land typifies our enjoyment of Christ today. Christ is our good land, and the various aspects of the riches of Christ are typified by the produce of the land. If we enjoy the rich supply of Christ, we shall be able to live Christ. We shall also be empowered to defeat the enemies. The enemies are always defeated when we enjoy Christ. Furthermore, through the enjoyment of the riches of Christ, the kingdom of God is established in the church, and the temple is built for God's dwelling place. All these matters--living the Christian life, defeating the enemies, establishing the kingdom of God, and building the house of God--issue out from the enjoyment of the riches of Christ.

Now we must see that these riches are displayed on the Lord's table. Therefore, the table is a feast for our enjoyment. Many of us have been attending the Lord's table for years, but we have never had this understanding of the table. It is crucial for us to understand that to come to the table is to enjoy Christ as the good land.

THE TWO TABLES

If we have this realization concerning the Lord's table, we shall be able to understand 1 Corinthians 10. Paul's concept here is that whenever a person eats of idol sacrifices, he enjoys something related to an idol. Furthermore, what he enjoys gets into him and causes him to become an expression of that thing. This is based on the principle that eating is a fellowship, a participation. Paul uses the word fellowship with the meaning of

participation. According to this view, to eat the sacrifices offered to idols is to have fellowship with idols. Moreover, it is to become involved with idols and eventually to become one with them. This is in keeping with the fact that we are what we eat, that what we eat becomes us. Because demons are behind idols, to be one with idols is to be one with the demons behind them. This is an explanation of Paul's concept in chapter ten concerning the eating of idol sacrifices. The result of eating sacrifices to idols is that a person becomes one with demons and even filled and saturated with them.

In the same principle, to eat the body of Christ is to have the fellowship of Christ. It is to participate in Christ and to become one with Him. This is not simply a doctrine or principle; it is a reality.

Christ today is the life-giving Spirit. Demons also are spirits. The life-giving Spirit is rich and all-inclusive. The demonic spirits, on the contrary, are evil and unclean. One can be saturated and occupied either by a demon, an evil spirit, or by Christ as the life-giving Spirit. We live according to that with which we are occupied and saturated. If we eat Christ and are saturated with Him as the life-giving Spirit, we shall live Christ. In like manner, if we eat the sacrifices to demons and are saturated with demons, we shall live demons. Ultimately, in the entire universe there are only two tables: the table of demons, which causes people to be one with demons, and the table of the Lord, which causes the believers to be one with the Lord. In either case, we are what we eat.

What is called communion in today's Christendom is not pure. Behind it there are some things related to idols, and demons are behind the idols. Those who partake of the table of demons come in contact with demons. This means they actually touch the reality of the demons behind the table of the demons.

The principle is the same with the dear saints who come to the Lord's table in the spirit. They touch the reality of the Lord as they partake of His table. Often in the words of these believers we can sense something of the

Lord. We realize that in the words of a certain brother or sister we can hear the word of the Lord. These saints can speak such a word because they have been saturated with the Lord.

If there is a problem among the saints when they come to the Lord's table, the church life will be damaged. There can be no building up of the church in such a situation. But if the saints in a local church have no problems when they come to the Lord's table, and if everyone fellowships with the Lord and with others in spirit, that is a church, a temple, which has truly been built up. Furthermore, with the temple of God there is the kingdom of God. Those who have become the temple and the kingdom through the enjoyment of Christ are surely those who live Christ.

If we read 1 Corinthians 10 in this light, we shall have a proper understanding of this chapter. We shall realize that idolatry involves the enjoyment of something other than the Lord Himself. Today people everywhere are practicing idolatry, for they are enjoying many things which are not the Lord Himself. The living of worldly people is a living in idolatry. They sit down to eat and drink, and then they rise up to play. Those who engage in worldly entertainments and who purchase many of the worldly things sold in department stores are practicing idolatry.

Idolatry is the enjoyment of something in place of the Lord. But the Lord's table is the true enjoyment of the Lord Himself. The Lord's table is not only a matter of a meeting on the Lord's Day; this table should be our enjoyment every day, even continually. Day by day, the Lord is our good land, our feast, our table.

If we come to the Lord's table with this understanding, we shall come with a different spirit and a different realization. The cup of blessing which we bless is certainly the fellowship of the blood of Christ, and the bread which we break is the fellowship of the body of Christ. Today we are those gathered around the altar, enjoying whatever is offered on the altar for God's satisfaction. As we are feasting, we satisfy the Lord whom we worship. This is the proper dealing with the matter of eating.

The proper way to deal with eating is to feast on the Lord. Do not eat anything other than the Lord, and do not enjoy anything in place of Him. We should not have any enjoyment other than Christ. Christ is our table, our feast, our land. As the good land, Christ is a rich feast for our enjoyment. When we feast on Him, we live Him. Then we are able to defeat the enemies, establish the kingdom of God, and build up His temple. This is God's goal and the fulfillment of His eternal purpose.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-ONE

THE PROPER EATING

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 10:23--11:1

In 10:23--11:1 we have the conclusion of the section on the eating of idol sacrifices. In these verses Paul speaks of the proper eating.

In dealing with the matter of eating, Paul's thought is very profound. Using the history of the children of Israel as a background, Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers in an urgent way. His composition indicates a sense of urgency. There is also the indication that he did not have the time to cover everything in detail.

EATING AND ENJOYMENT

We have seen that Paul likens our enjoyment of the Lord's table to the enjoyment of those Israelites who ate the sacrifices and who thus were fellowshippers of the altar (v. 18). We need to be impressed with the fact that eating is related to enjoyment. If our enjoyment is of something other than Christ, then in the sight of God that enjoyment is idolatry. We need to simplify and purify our enjoyment so that we enjoy only the Lord Himself.

Christ is the Lord and He is also the table. When we say that Jesus Christ is Lord, we mean that He is everything. As our everything, He is our table. The table is typified by the good land, which was a table to the children of Israel. When they dwelt in the good land, they feasted on the table, enjoying all the rich produce of the land. The various aspects of the produce of the land are types of the riches of Christ. Furthermore, Christ Himself is to us the good land as the table. If we see this picture clearly, we shall know how to enjoy the Lord as the good land with all the riches.

We have given many messages on the riches of Christ, especially a series printed in the book *The All-Inclusive Christ*. We also had much to say concerning Christ's riches in the Life-studies of Colossians and Philippians. I encourage the saints to read these messages and to lay hold of the items of the riches of Christ. Then these riches will become the foodstuffs for our enjoyment.

In 10:23 Paul says, "All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient; all things are lawful, but not all things build up." Verses 14 through 22 deal with eating idol sacrifices from the aspect of not making oneself one with demons. From verse 23 through 11:1 this matter is dealt with from the view of building up others to the glory of God (v. 31).

The first part of verse 23 is identical to the first part of 6:12. The Greek word rendered lawful literally means under my power; hence, permissible, allowable, lawful. The word for expedient means profitable (not merely convenient), advantageous, good, or worthwhile. The parallel verse, 6:12, ends with not being brought under the power of anything. This verse ends with not building up. The former concerns ourselves; the latter, others. In 6:12 Paul's concern is personal, but in 10:23 it is corporate.

FOUR PRINCIPLES

If we put together 6:12 and 10:23 and 31, we have four principles concerning the believers' walk. First, all things are lawful to the believers, but all the things they do must be expedient. This means that the things must be profitable, that is, not causing the suffering of any loss. Second, the believers must not be brought under the power of anything. Third, all things the believers do must build up others. Fourth, whatever the believers do, they must do to the glory of God (10:31). Fully aware of these principles, Paul goes on to say in 10:24, "Let no one seek his own profit, but that of another."

ASKING NO QUESTIONS FOR CONSCIENCE' SAKE

25 says, "Everything sold in a meat market eat, asking

no question for conscience' sake." At the apostle's time, usually only a part of the sacrifices to idols were consumed as an offering. The rest was given to the priests or to the poor, or sold again in the market. Buyers might unknowingly purchase meat that had been offered to idols. Thus, when someone went to the market to purchase meat, he might buy meat which had been used in sacrifice to idols. Regarding this, Paul tells the believers to ask no questions for the sake of conscience. This means that they should not ask questions about the meat, but simply buy it and eat it.

In verse 26 Paul continues, "For the earth is the Lord's and the fullness of it." Fullness here means the riches and also the expression. All the riches of the earth are its fullness, its expression.

In verse 27 Paul goes on to say, "If any of the unbelievers invites you, and you wish to go, eat everything that is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake." On such an occasion, the believers should not investigate the situation. There is no need to ask questions. "But," Paul continues, "if anyone should say to you, This has been offered in sacrifice, do not eat, for his sake that pointed it out and for conscience' sake; conscience, I say, not your own, but the other's" (vv. 28-29a). Should someone point out that the meat has been offered in sacrifice to idols, then the believers were to refrain from eating for the sake of the conscience of the one who has pointed out this fact.

In the second part of verse 29 and verse 30 Paul asks, "For why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? If I partake with thanksgiving, why am I evil spoken of concerning that for which I give thanks?" The word partake in verse 30 denotes eating. This clearly indicates that eating is partaking (v. 17). Here "evil spoken of" means criticized with an evil purpose. If a believer is criticized in this way for eating meat sacrificed to idols, he should refrain from eating that meat.

In verse 31 Paul concludes, "Whether therefore you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

The word therefore in this verse indicates that 10:31 through 11:1 is a conclusion to this subsection, which began with verse 23.

I wish to say again that 6:12 and 10:23 and 31 give us four basic principles for regulating the conduct of the New Testament believers. All things are lawful, but whatever we do must be, as to the thing itself, profitable; as to ourselves, not brought under the power of anything; as to others, building them up; and as to God, glorifying Him. Otherwise nothing is permissible or acceptable. If a certain matter does not pass the test of these four principles, we should not do it.

GIVING NO OCCASION OF STUMBLING

Verse 32 says, "Give no occasion of stumbling both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God." The Greek words rendered, "Give no occasion of stumbling," may also be translated, "Do not become a stumbling block." The Greek word *aproskopos* is derived from the same root as *proskomma* for stumbling block in 8:9. It is different from *skandalizo*, the Greek word for stumble in 8:13.

In verse 32 Paul speaks of Jews, Greeks, and the church of God. In New Testament times people were of three classes: the Jews--God's chosen people; the Greeks--the unbelieving Gentiles; and the church--a composition of the believers in Christ. We should not be an offense, a stumbling block, to any of these three, that they might be saved (v. 33).

PLEASING ALL MEN IN ALL THINGS

In verse 33 Paul declares, "Even as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved." What a marvelous example the apostle has set for us!

It is possible to apply incorrectly Paul's word about pleasing all men in all things and about seeking the advantage of the many that they may be saved. Some of those who misapply this verse say that in order to bring people to the Lord, we must come down to their level. This

is to say that we must go back to the world in order to bring people to Christ. However, history has proved that this does not work. Rather, those who apply Paul's words in this way are more likely to be brought back to the world themselves than they are to bring others to Christ. In preaching the gospel we should not lower our standard. Instead of coming down from the mountain, we should remain on the mountain and call others to come up to where we are. We must be very careful of misusing this verse and forming it into a principle contrary to Paul's meaning.

IMITATING ONE WHO IMITATES CHRIST

In 11:1, a verse which actually belongs to the conclusion of chapter ten, Paul says, "Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ." Because Paul was a follower of Christ, it was right for the Corinthian believers, and all others, to follow him. If anyone is an imitator of Christ, we should be imitators of him. This makes us also imitators of Christ. Otherwise, we should be imitators of no man. Actually, in following anyone who is an imitator of Christ, we do not follow that person, but Christ.

FOCUSED ON THE CENTRAL VISION

I do not have any burden to speak on the four basic principles regulating the conduct of New Testament believers. Many years ago, I gave messages on each of these principles. Today my burden is that the Lord's people would be brought back to the central vision of Christ and the church. Thus, we need to apply these verses and these principles to the church. I would be unhappy to see the saints applying them as proverbs to humanity in a general way. In considering these principles and this section of 1 Corinthians, we need to be focused on the central vision of Christ and the church. We all need to pay our attention to this vision and pray more concerning it.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-TWO

AN OVERVIEW OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 15:45b; 12:13; 2 Cor. 3:6, 17-18; 1 Cor. 11:3, 20, 23-25; 12:1; 15:12; 16:1-2

In this message we shall present an overview, a bird's-eye view, OI 1 Corinthians. Before we do so, however, let us first consider four verses, two from 1 Corinthians and two from 2 Corinthians. First Corinthians 15:45b says, "The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." In 12:13 Paul declares, "For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." Second Corinthians 3:6 says that we are "ministers of a new covenant, not of letter, but of the Spirit." Finally, 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "And 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." Have you ever thought about the connection between these four verses? Two verses represent 1 Corinthians, and two, 2 Corinthians. Actually, these two books are books of the Spirit. Each of the four verses quoted above speaks of the Spirit. I believe that many Christians have not been adequately impressed with these verses.

THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT

According to 15:45b, Christ, the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit. Before you came into the Lord's recovery, did you know that there was a verse in the New Testament telling us that the last Adam, Christ, became a life-giving Spirit? This verse does not say that the last Adam became the Redeemer, the Savior, or the almighty Lord; it tells us that He became a life-giving Spirit.

BAPTIZED IN THE SPIRIT TO DRINK THE SPIRIT

To some extent, believers today are familiar with Paul's word in 12:13. Some make mention of this verse quite often. However, their emphasis is usually on the word baptized: in one Spirit we have all been *baptized*. Have you ever heard a message emphasizing the word *drink*, a message telling you that you have been baptized in the Spirit to drink of the Spirit? We have been baptized to drink. Therefore, we should not stop with the word baptize, but go on to realize that we have been baptized to drink. To be baptized is a matter once for all, but to drink is a continual matter. Even in eternity we shall still drink of the one Spirit.

The Lord Jesus as the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit so that we could be baptized into this Spirit. In what Spirit have we been baptized? We have not been baptized merely in the Spirit of God. Rather, we have been baptized in the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19). This Spirit of Jesus Christ is the life-giving Spirit.

If we were not baptized into the life-giving Spirit, how could we be baptized into one Body? The Body is not a matter of power or organization; it is an organism of life. We have been baptized organically into one Body in the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, not just the Spirit of God. If we did not have life and an organic element, how could we be living members of the Body? It would be impossible. To baptize a believer only in water does not involve life. After a person has been immersed in water, he is still a separate individual. But we have been baptized not only in water, but also in the life-giving Spirit. The water is a sign of the Spirit in which we are baptized. After a person has been baptized in the life-giving Spirit, he becomes part of the Body in an organic way.

Because we have all been baptized in one Spirit, we are organically one Body. The reason we love all the saints, regardless of race, culture, or nationality, is that we are organically united in life. We have an organic element within us, and we are one in the life of the life-giving Spirit.

After passing through a process, the Triune God has become such a life-giving Spirit. In such a Spirit we all have been baptized into one Body. How is it possible for us to be one Body? We can be one Body because we have been baptized in the wonderful life-giving Spirit, who is the ultimate consummation of the Triune God.

We have been baptized in this wonderful Spirit in order to drink of the Triune God. This means that baptism is not the end; rather, it is just the beginning. We who have been baptized once will drink of the life-giving Spirit for eternity.

There is a marvelous connection between 12:13 and Revelation 22:1, where we are told that the river of water of life proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. This river will flow throughout the entire New Jerusalem so that everyone may drink of the water of life. In eternity the water of life will be our drink. We have been baptized to drink the Spirit, the water of life, for eternity.

The book of 1 Corinthians teaches that the last Adam, God incarnate, has become a life-giving Spirit, and that in this Spirit we have all been baptized into one Body. Now, as those baptized in the life-giving Spirit, we need to drink the Spirit. Day by day, we should drink. Whenever we pray, pray-read, or call, "0 Lord Jesus," we may drink. As we fellowship with the saints, we should also drink of the Spirit. Sometimes when I drink of the Spirit, I am beside myself with joy. Hallelujah, we have been baptized into the one Body to drink of the life-giving Spirit! What a marvelous revelation!

MINISTERS OF THE SPIRIT

Eventually, by drinking the Spirit we are saturated with the Spirit. Then we become ministers of a new covenant, "not of letter, but of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:6). The new covenant is not of law, but of Christ who has become the life-giving Spirit.

Christ's becoming the life-giving Spirit implies all the steps of His process: incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. It also includes redemption. The goal of

this process is not incarnation, crucifixion, or even resurrection; the goal is the life-giving Spirit. This is the new covenant. Therefore, the new covenant implies incarnation; that is, it implies God becoming a man and living as a man on earth. The new covenant also implies that this incarnated One went to the cross and died for our sins, and even for ourselves, in order to terminate the old creation. After shedding His blood on the cross and dying for us, this One was buried and then entered into resurrection. When He came into resurrection He reached the destination--the life-giving Spirit.

In this wonderful Spirit we all have been baptized into one Body. Now as we drink this Spirit and are saturated with Him, we spontaneously become ministers of the new covenant, a covenant of the Spirit. Therefore, we should not minister mere doctrines and letters. On the contrary, we must minister the Spirit. We must serve others the heavenly drink with which we have been saturated. Let us all be ministers not of doctrines or letters, but of life and of the Spirit.

TRANSFORMATION FROM THE LORD SPIRIT

According to 2 Corinthians 3, not only should we be ministers of the Spirit, but we should also be "transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit" (v. 18). In all that we do in the church life--in meetings, in fellowship, in serving, in giving and receiving hospitality--we should be undergoing the process of transformation. We all are being transformed into the Lord's image from glory to glory, from one degree of glory to another. This is from the Lord Spirit.

I deeply appreciate these four verses. The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. We have been baptized in this Spirit and are now drinking the Spirit. Furthermore, as we are saturated with the Spirit, we become ministers of the Spirit. Moreover, we are in the process of being transformed from glory to glory even as from the Lord Spirit. First and 2 Corinthians certainly are books of the Spirit.

PROBLEMS IN THE REALM OF HUMAN LIFE

At this point it will be helpful to see the Epistle of 1 Corinthians as a whole, to have an overview, a bird's-eye view, of the entire book. When Paul wrote this Epistle, he was deeply burdened in his spirit. This book deals with the problems among the saints in a very disturbed and disorderly church. The saints at Corinth had been misled, and there was disorder among them. Hence, Paul, the apostle, burdened for that church, wrote this Epistle to clarify the situation by dealing with the problems one by one.

After much reading and studying, I have discovered that in 1 Corinthians eleven problems are dealt with by the apostle. (Some teachers only recognize ten.) These eleven problems are in two categories. The first group is composed of the six problems covered in chapters one through ten. The first of these problems is division, caused by living in the soul. There was division among the Corinthians because they were natural and lived according to their philosophical wisdom. They lived a soulish life, and as a result they were divided.

The second problem was the gross sin of incest dealt with in chapter five. This sin involves the indulgence of the flesh. The indulgence of the flesh comes from living by the soulish life. Those who are soulish will sooner or later indulge their flesh.

The third problem, covered in chapter six, is that of lawsuits. This involves the claiming of personal rights.

Fourth, also in chapter six, we have the problem of the abuse of human rights. God in His creation ordained that man should eat in order to exist and also that he should marry in order to propagate. Thus, eating and marriage, both of which are ordained by God, are human rights. But the soulish and even fleshly saints in Corinth abused these rights. The abuse of the right of eating is excessive eating, and the abuse of the right of marriage is fornication.

Fifth, in chapter seven Paul deals with the problem of marriage. This problem is related both to the soulish life and to the flesh. The more wise and philosophical a person is, the more problems he will have in married life. Less

educated people, on the contrary, seem to have fewer problems with married life.

The sixth problem, covered in chapters eight through ten, is that of the eating of idol sacrifices. Those who engaged in this practice among the Corinthians had no restriction; they did not care for others, for the Body of Christ, or for God's testimony. They cared only for their eating. This problem of the eating of idol sacrifices is also related to the Lord's table. One cannot have such unrestricted eating related to idols and at the same time come to the Lord's table. This is the reason that in dealing with the eating of sacrifices to idols Paul touches the matter of the Lord's table.

These six problems all belong to the realm of human life. Any believer who can solve these problems will truly be holy; he will certainly be sanctified. He will have no problems of division, the lusts of the flesh, the claiming of personal rights, the abuse of his rights in eating and marriage, and in married life itself. Furthermore, in his daily living, especially in the matter of eating, he will be restricted and care for others, the church, and God's testimony.

CHRIST--THE FACTOR TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS IN OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE

The factor needed for solving these problems concerning the proper daily Christian life is Christ. Christ is God's center and the One given to us as our unique portion. If we enjoy Christ according to the way He is revealed in the first ten chapters of this book, we shall have the necessary factor to solve these six problems. We shall solve the problems of division, the indulgence of the flesh, the claiming of personal rights, and the abuse of our rights. We shall also have the solution to the problems in our married life. If you have problems in your married life, that is an indication that you are short of Christ, that you are not adequately nourished with Christ. But if you enjoy Christ

in a full way, you will not have any problems in married life, or the other five problems covered in 1 Corinthians 1 through 10. Because Christ is the factor to solve these problems, these ten chapters place great emphasis on Christ. Christ is the all-inclusive One. He is the power of God, the wisdom of God, and even the depths of God. He is the unique factor to solve the problems in the realm of human life.

PROBLEMS IN THE REALM OF GOD'S ADMINISTRATION

The problems among the Corinthians, however, were related not only to human living, but even the more to God's administration. Among them there was no order, no authority. Therefore, they not only abused their rights in eating and marriage; they even abused the spiritual gifts. They excessively misused these God-given gifts in order to fulfill their self-seeking. This caused God's administration among them to be frustrated and, to some extent at least, to be damaged.

Some were even so mistaken with respect to God's administration that they went so far as to say that there was no resurrection (15:12). If there is no resurrection in this universe, then God becomes nothing. God Himself is resurrection. When God came in the flesh, He said, "I am the resurrection" (John 11:25). Hence, if there were no resurrection there would be no God, for there would be no God to be the source of life, the power of life, the shape of life, and the function of life. Without resurrection, the whole universe would be empty. Therefore, it is a very serious matter to say that there is no resurrection. This is to deny God and to annul the divine power for His administration in the universe. We must recognize that there is resurrection and that God is administrating the universe to fulfill His eternal purpose by resurrection and in resurrection.

If we are truly under God's administration in resurrection, we shall overcome money and material possessions. They will have no power over us, and they will not occupy us or possess us. Instead, we shall overcome them and reign over them.

In chapter fifteen Paul deals with the matter of resurrection. Then he opens chapter sixteen with a word about collecting material gifts on the first day of the week. The first day of the week signifies resurrection, for it is the day of resurrection.

The fact that material things are offered on the first day of the week indicates that they should be presented in resurrection, not in our natural life. Certain wealthy worldly people are able to write checks for large sums of money. But if they make a large donation, they usually make a name for themselves and advertise what they have done. This is not giving in resurrection. Our giving of money and material things must be in resurrection. This way of giving is a strong indication that we are under God's administration in resurrection and have overcome the possession of material things. As a result, God's administration will have a way to be carried on among us.

The first of the five problems related to God's administration is that of headship. Paul covers this in 11:2-16 when he deals with head covering. Head covering is related to the headship in God's universal, governmental administration.

The second problem in this group is that of the Lord's supper. The Lord's supper is not a thing in itself, for it concerns the Body. For God to administrate the universe He needs the Body. He needs a group of people formed organically into a Body. This Body is the means by which God carries out His administration.

The third problem in this category is the problem of the misuse of spiritual gifts. In chapter eleven Paul speaks of the headship and of the Body, and in chapters twelve through fourteen, of the gifts. The Body functions by means of the gifts. If the Body is to carry out God's administration, every member of the Body must have a gift for function according to God's operation. God administrates by operating, and God's operation can be carried out only by our function. Furthermore, our function

is possible only by our gifts. When we have a gift, we have our function. Then the service comes out of this function. This service is for God's operation, and this operation carries out God's administration. Therefore, first we have the headship, then the Body, and then the gifts for the services that God's administration may be carried out.

Resurrection is the fourth problem in the realm of God's administration. The headship, the Body, and the functioning of the members by the gifts should all be in resurrection. We should never deny the fact of resurrection. If there were no resurrection, there could be no gifts and no power for the divine administration.

Finally, Paul deals with material possessions. If we are under the headship, if we are in the Body, and if we have the gifts to function in resurrection, we shall certainly overcome the bondage to material things. The material things will be under our feet. Money or material possessions will not hinder or frustrate our function in the Body. Rather, what we have will be used for God's administration through the churches. If this is our situation, the Lord God will have a way to carry out His administration.

Now we have before us a bird's-eye view of the whole book of 1 Corinthians. Having this view enables us to remember what the sixteen chapters of this Epistle talk about. Chapters one through four deal with division; chapter five, with incest; chapter six, with the claiming of rights and the abuse of freedom in eating and in marriage; chapter seven, with married life; chapters eight through ten, with the eating of sacrifices offered to idols; chapter eleven, with the headship and with the Lord's supper related to the Body; chapters twelve through fourteen, with the spiritual gifts; chapter fifteen, with resurrection; and chapter sixteen, with the overcoming of material things.

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

We have pointed out that the eleven problems covered in 1 Corinthians are of two categories, two groups. To solve the six problems in the first category we need Christ as the

unique factor. To solve the five problems in the second category we need the church as the element to settle the matters. Therefore, this book first emphasizes Christ in chapters one through ten, and then it emphasizes the church as the Body of Christ in chapters eleven through sixteen. Therefore, what we see in 1 Corinthians is Christ and the church. Christ is the factor for solving all the problems in the realm of human life, and the church is the element for settling all the problems in the realm of the divine administration. We all need to see Christ in the realm of human life and the church in the realm of the divine administration.

The saints at Corinth had problems in both realms. The same is true of many Christians today. They have problems in the realm of human life, and they have problems in the realm of the divine administration. Therefore, all believers, including us, need 1 Corinthians. We all need to be under the headship in God's governmental administration. We need to be right with the Body of Christ so that God may have the means to work out His administration. We need to know how to use our gifts to function properly and to serve the Lord with ministry to carry out God's operation so that the divine administration may be effective on earth. We also need to know resurrection life, the resurrection power, and the resurrection principles so that we may function under the headship and in the Body rightly, properly, and adequately. Then we shall overcome money and material things. This means that we shall overcome all earthly ties. Then we shall truly live Christ. By living Christ we shall have a proper human life and we shall carry out God's administration. This is what the Lord desires and expects today. This was exactly the burden in the spirit and heart of Paul when he wrote this book. First Corinthians is not merely a book of teachings. This Epistle was written according to the burden in Paul's spirit concerning Christ in the realm of human life and the church in the realm of God's administration.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-THREE

DEALING WITH HEAD COVERING

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 11:2-16

In this message we shall consider 11:2-16, where Paul with head covering.

I. THE APOSTLE'S PRAISE

In 11:2 Paul says, "Now I praise you that in all things you remembered me, and hold fast the traditions even as I delivered them to you." Here Paul praises the Corinthians because they remembered him in all things and because they hold fast the traditions even as he had delivered them to them. The word traditions in this verse denotes instructions delivered by word of mouth or writing (2 Thes. 2:15).

II. THE HEADSHIP

In verse 3 Paul says, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God." This verse through verse 16 deals with the seventh problem, the problem concerning head covering. The first six problems, dealt with in chapters one through ten, may be considered one group. They are concerned with matters in the realm of human life. The last five problems, dealt with in chapters eleven through sixteen, are another group. They are concerned with matters in the realm of God's administration. The first is concerning the headship of Christ and of God in the divine government. In Ephesians 1:22 and 23 the headship of Christ over all things is to His Body, the church. Here the headship of Christ over every man is concerning individuals. Christ is both the Head corporately of the Body, the church, and individually of the

believers. He is the Head directly of every one of us. In the apostle's dealing with the Corinthians' problems concerning God's administration, this matter of the headship of Christ and of God is his first concern.

In verse 3 Paul points out that the head of the woman is the man. In the divine governmental ordination, woman is under the headship of man. God created the female in this way (Gen. 2:18-24; 1 Tim. 2:13). According to the nature (1 Cor. 11:14) created by God, woman is subordinate to man.

Paul also says in verse 3 that the head of Christ is God. Christ is God's anointed One, appointed by God. Hence, He is under God, and God as the originator is His Head. This refers to the relationship between Christ and God in the divine government.

In dealing with the problem of head covering, the apostle takes the headship of God, the headship of Christ, and the headship of man as strong ground for his instruction. His instruction concerning head covering is not based upon any religious practices or human customs, but based upon the headship in God's governmental administration. Such a strong base leaves no ground for any argument over the matter of head covering.

Soon after I was saved, I heard a great deal of talk about head covering. Some argued that Paul spoke concerning head covering because in his time there was such a custom among the people. Later, thorough study made it clear that there was no such custom either among the Greeks or the Jews. Actually, according to Jewish custom, it was the priests who were required to cover their heads. Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11 is not based on any custom found in the Mediterranean area. On the contrary, his teaching is according to divine revelation.

The reason we need head covering in the church is that head covering is related to the headship of God. This is the reason Paul speaks the way he does in 11:3, telling us that he wants us to know that the head of every man is Christ, that the head of the woman is the man, and that the head of Christ is God. Thus, head covering is related to the headship in God's government. In the universe, especially

in God's governmental administration, there is order. God is the head over Christ, Christ is the head over every man, and man is the head over the woman. Therefore, in the church meetings the sisters should wear a head covering to signify that we recognize God's authority and respect His headship and that we are not a people rebellious against God. Instead, we are absolutely submissive to Him and signify this by having a head covering. However, although this has been our practice for more than fifty years, we have never forced anyone to participate in such a practice. We do not want to make head covering a mere outward formality. But it is a fact that the Bible reveals that the church should have such a sign declaring that we are a people under God's headship.

III. THE HEAD COVERING

A. Every Man Praying or Prophesying Having His Head Covered Disgracing His Head

In verse 4 Paul goes on to say, "Every man praying or prophesying having his head covered disgraces his head." To prophesy here means to speak for God. Since man has the headship over woman and is God's image and glory (v. 7), he should keep his head manifested, unconcealed, uncovered, when he prays to God and speaks for Him in touching the throne of God's administration. Otherwise he dishonors or shames his head.

We should not think that praying or speaking for God by prophesying are insignificant matters. It is a great thing to speak for God. Both our prayer and our speaking for God are related to God's administration. They are related to God's authority and headship. Therefore, as those who are God's image and glory, the men should not cover their heads when praying or prophesying. To cover our head in this way is to shame our head.

B. Every Woman Praying or Prophesying with Her Head Uncovered Disgracing Her Head

In verse 5 Paul continues, "But every woman praying or prophesying with her head uncovered disgraces her head; for it is one and the same thing as she who is

shaved." Since woman is under the headship of man, she should keep her head covered, not exposed, when she touches the divine administration by praying to God and speaking for God. Otherwise she disgraces or shames her head, as if having her head shaved, because she denies the divine governmental ordination by exposing her head to the observing angels (v. 10) when she touches the authority of God.

Paul tells us that a woman who disgraces her head is the same as one who is shaved. This is a strong indication that for a woman to have her head shaved or her hair cut off is shameful (v. 6).

Verse 6 says, "For if a woman is not covered, let her hair also be cut off; but if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, let her be covered." This indicates that the head covering is a covering in addition to long hair. For a woman to have long hair, not having her head shaved, signifies that she does not reject God's governmental ordination; and for a woman to have a head covering in addition to her long hair is to say amen to the divine ordination.

IV. THE REASONS

A. Man Being God's Image and Glory, but Woman Being the Glory of Man

One reason for head covering is found in verse 7: "For a man indeed ought not to have his head covered, being God's image and glory; but the woman is the glory of a man." Man was made in God's image (Gen. 1:26) to express God and glorify Him. Since man bears God's image and glory and represents God, he ought not to have his head covered. If he does, God's image and glory will be

concealed. Since woman is the glory of man, she ought not to have her head expressed but covered. She should not express herself but the man, under whom she is. This is also a ground taken by the apostle for his teaching of head covering.

When a man prays or prophesies, touching the throne of God's authority, he should not have his head covered. But when a woman prays or prophesies, she should be covered.

B. Man Not out of Woman, but Woman out of Man

In verse 8 Paul gives us a second reason for head covering: "For man is not out of woman, but woman out of man." As a rib taken out of man, woman was made out of man (Gen. 2:21-23). God did not create a woman. He formed a male body from the dust of the ground and breathed into this body the breath of life. As a result, a man, named Adam, became a living soul. God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and then He opened his side, took out a rib, and used that rib to build a woman. Thus, woman was not created, but came out of man. This indicates that the woman's place is by the side of the man.

However, a man should not be proud regarding his position in relation to the woman. Notice what Paul says in verses 11 and 12: "However, neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman, in the Lord. For just as the woman is out of the man, so also is the man through the woman; but all things are out of God." In the Lord's plan and arrangement, neither is the woman apart from the man nor the man apart from the woman. Man is the source of the woman's existence. Hence, the woman is out of the man. But woman is the means through which the man is born. Hence, the man is through the woman.

Regarding the relationship between man and woman, Paul is balanced. On the one hand, he says that the woman is out of the man, for she was made from a rib out of Adam. On the other hand, Paul says that the man is through the

woman, for man comes into existence through his mother. We also should be balanced, realizing both that the woman is out of the man and that the man is through the woman.

C. Man Not Created for the Sake of the Woman, but the Woman for the Sake of the Man

Verse 9 says, "For also man was not created for the sake of the woman, but woman for the sake of the man." Here the apostle takes God's purpose in the creation of man and woman as another strong ground for his teaching of head covering. It is based not upon any human-made customs, but upon the divine purpose of creation. In creation woman was made for the purpose of matching man (Gen. 2:18, 24).

D. Woman Having Authority on Her Head for the Sake of the Angels

In verse 10 Paul continues, "Therefore the woman ought to have authority on her head for the sake of the angels." Authority here denotes the head covering, which signifies the authority of man's headship over the woman.

In this verse we have another ground for the teaching of head covering. Head covering is closely related to God's headship, God's authority. The archangel with his subordinates rebelled against God's headship (Ezek. 28:13-18; Isa. 14:12-15; Matt. 25:41), establishing his kingdom of darkness (Matt. 12:26; Col. 1:13), and became Satan, God's adversary. After God created man, Satan seduced man to follow him and rebel against God. Then God sent His Son to destroy Satan and rescue man out of his authority back to God's kingdom (1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14; Col. 1:13). Now when the believers worship God in praying to God and speaking for God, they should have signs that they are under God's headship, the divine authority, showing the observing angels (see 1 Cor. 4:9), who are concerned with this matter, that they (the believers) keep God's ordained order in His administration. For this sake, the sisters should have a sign, a covering, on their head.

It is significant that Paul says that the woman ought to have authority on her head for the sake of the angels. Satan, a chief angel, had been commissioned to control the universe for God. But he rebelled, and certain angels followed him. Of course, a good number of angels remained faithful to God. God created man to deal with the rebellious angels. But Satan seduced man, and man followed him. Then in redemption God came in to bring fallen man back to himself. God's redeemed people are now the church. As the church, we should declare to the angels, both to the rebellious and to the submissive ones, that as God's redeemed people we are not rebellious against His headship. Rather, we remain under the headship of God. Not only in the coming kingdom age in eternity shall we be under God's headship, but even in this rebellious age we submit to His authority. The covering on the sisters' head is a sign declaring this to the angels.

In verse 13 Paul asks, "You judge among yourselves: Is it fitting for a woman to pray uncovered to God?" Here Paul is indicating that, judging according to the reasons he has given, it is not fitting for a woman to pray uncovered to God.

E. Nature Itself Teaching Us That Long Hair Is a Dishonor to a Man, but Long Hair Is a Glory to a Woman

Verses 14 and 15 say, "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him; but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? Because the long hair has been given to her for a covering." When Paul says nature here, he is referring to our natural constitution according to God's creation. Nature itself tells us that man should not have long hair, but the woman should. The woman by her female constitution realizes that to have long hair to cover her head is a glory. This is also a strong ground for the apostle's teaching concerning head covering.

No matter how bold a sister may be, she would not feel peaceful if she were to assume authority over her husband.

There is no need for anyone to teach her to feel uneasy about this. By her natural constitution created by God, she knows that she should not assume authority over her husband. There can be no doubt that the female constitution is different from the male constitution. Therefore, even the feeling we have from our natural constitution supports Paul's teaching concerning head covering.

In verse 15 Paul says that a woman's long hair has been given to her for a covering. Some who debate about head covering claim that in chapter eleven head covering simply refers to a woman's long hair. According to their opinion, as long as a woman has long hair, she has a head covering. But if we read these verses carefully, we shall see that head covering is something in addition to a woman's long hair. For a woman to have her hair long indicates that she recognizes God's authority over her. When she puts on a head covering, this indicates that she says amen to God's governmental arrangement.

V. NO CONTENTION

In verse 16 Paul concludes the portion on head covering: "But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." Custom here denotes the custom of contention, disputation, and debating. Neither the apostles nor the churches tolerated any disputation concerning the apostles' teaching. Furthermore, the plurality of the churches in this verse indicates that all the local churches are independent of one another, yet they all act in the same way according to the apostles' teaching.

In speaking about head covering, it is not our intention for the sisters to accept an outward practice merely in a doctrinal way. From the time the Lord's recovery came to this country, I have never given a message charging the sisters to cover their heads. Had I given such a message, I would just have been encouraging a formality. We do not want to see an outward form. The wearing of head covering by women is widely practiced in Catholicism. Among the Arabs, women are also instructed to wear a

covering on their heads. However, in such cases, I do not believe that there is any understanding of what head covering signifies. When a sister puts a covering on her head, she needs to realize the significance of head covering.

The headship of Christ is a matter that concerns all the saints, both brothers and sisters. In 11:3 Paul says, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God." First, it is necessary for the brothers to realize that they must be under the headship of Christ. In particular, if the elders of a local church are not under Christ's headship, they should not expect the sisters or anyone else to be under their headship. In verse 3 Paul first says that the head of every man is Christ, and then he points out that the head of the woman is the man. Moreover, he traces the origin of head covering back to God Himself as the head of Christ.

We need to link Paul's word about head covering in 11:2-16 to the entire book of Revelation. In Revelation we see that Christ, the slain Lamb, is absolutely under the headship of God for the carrying out of God's administration. Revelation 4 and 5 show a picture that the slain, resurrected, and ascended Lamb is now in the heavens carrying out God's administration under God's headship.

Recently we have published a number of messages concerning the heavenly ministry of Christ. Christ's heavenly ministry is related to the heavenly administration of the divine government. Christ is the Administrator who is carrying out God's administration through His submission to God's headship.

According to Revelation 4 and 5, in the heavens, before the throne of God, there is no rebellion. Instead, as we have pointed out, the slain, resurrected, and ascended Lamb is taking the lead to submit Himself to the headship of God in the heavens. However, the earth is filled with rebellion. Satan takes the lead to rebel against God. But praise the Lord that in the midst of all this rebellion, there is a Body composed of those who have been redeemed and

into the Triune God! Baptism is not a formality. We have been baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). According to Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27, we have been baptized into Christ. To be baptized into Christ as the life-giving Spirit brings us into the Body in an organic way. Thus, on earth there is an organism, the Body, constituted of those who have been redeemed and baptized into the Triune God. This is the Body of the One in heaven who submits Himself to God's headship. Now, on earth, this Body must reflect Christ's submission in the heavens.

The Body of Christ on earth should reflect Christ as the Head submitting Himself to the headship of God. We must be a heavenly television expressing on earth what is taking place in the heavens. Christ is the One who became a man, who was slain for our sins, and who was resurrected to become the life-giving Spirit so that we may have life. Now this One is in the heavens submitting Himself to God's headship for the carrying out of the divine administration. As members of the Body, we have a heavenly television within us by which we can see what is going on in the heavens. Now we must be the television to reflect what is taking place in the heavens so that others can see in us what is happening there. This means that the church in each locality must reflect the heavenly vision and express Christ's submission to the headship of God for the carrying out of His administration.

Is there a heavenly television in the church in your locality? Does your local church reflect Christ's submission in the heavens? We praise the Lord that in many places there is a proper reflection of Christ's submission to the headship of God. Although the earth is filled with rebellion, we must be a people under God's headship reflecting through our submission to Christ His own submission to God.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FOUR

DEALING WITH THE LORD'S SUPPER

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 11:17-34

In chapter ten of 1 Corinthians Paul speaks concerning the Lord's table. In 10:16 he asks, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a fellowship of the body of Christ?" In verse 21 he goes on to say, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons." Since Paul has already begun to talk about the Lord's table, why does he not go on directly to speak concerning the Lord's supper? Why does he bring in the matter of headship, or head covering, after his word about the Lord's table and before that about the Lord's supper? This seems to be neither logical nor reasonable. However, there is a reason for this interruption.

In the first ten chapters of this Epistle Paul deals with problems related to the Christian life; he does not deal with God's administration. But in chapter eleven he begins to deal with matters related to God's administration. In the divine administration the first concern is God's headship. Whenever God's headship is honored, then all the matters related to God's administration will be proper. But when God's headship is dishonored, all these matters will be improper. This is the reason that Paul brings in the matter of headship before continuing to deal with the Lord's supper.

THE LORD'S TABLE AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Concerning the remembrance of the Lord, Paul uses the

term "the table of the Lord" in 10:21 and "the Lord's supper" in 11:20. There is an important difference between the Lord's table and the Lord's supper. We should not take these terms for granted. Rather, we should ask why Paul speaks of the Lord's table in chapter ten and the Lord's supper in chapter eleven.

The Lord's table refers to the enjoyment of the Lord in fellowship. Hence, the significance of the Lord's table is enjoyment for participation, enjoyment for fellowship. When we say that we take the Lord's table, we mean that we enjoy the Lord in the fellowship of Him. This is for our enjoyment and satisfaction. The Lord's supper, however, is for His satisfaction. It is for the remembrance of Him. Regarding the Lord's table and the Lord's supper, there is mutuality. The Lord's table is for our enjoyment, but the Lord's supper is for His enjoyment. Sometimes we may say, "Lord, we come to Your table and partake of it." This indicates that we are enjoying the Lord. At other times we may say, "We thank You that we can have Your supper." This indicates that we are remembering the Lord for His enjoyment and satisfaction.

THE PHYSICAL BODY AND THE MYSTICAL BODY

In 11:29 Paul uses the expression "the body." In the New Testament the Body denotes the mystical Body of Christ in the Spirit. However, since Paul in this portion is speaking about the Lord's supper, the body here must also denote the body of Jesus. In verse 24 Paul quotes the word of the Lord Jesus: "This is My body, which is for you; this do for the remembrance of Me." Does this refer to His physical body or to the mystical Body? The words "for you" indicate that the body here denotes the Lord's physical body. His physical body is for us, whereas the mystical Body of Christ is for Him. The church today as the mystical Body is not for us--it is for Christ. But the physical body of Jesus which was crucified is for us. Therefore, in remembrance of the Lord we partake of the bread which signifies His physical body.

First Corinthians 11:25 says, "Similarly also the cup

after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood; this do, as often as you drink it, for the remembrance of Me." The blood here surely refers to the physical blood, not to the mystical blood. We partake of the cup also in remembrance of the Lord.

Although the body in 11:24 denotes the physical body of Jesus, Paul uses the expression, "not discerning the body," in verse 29 to denote also the mystical Body. Some may argue that discerning the body in this verse means to discern only the physical body of Jesus from ordinary food. In this verse Paul mentions eating and drinking. Eating is related to the physical body and drinking to physical blood; however, at the end of verse 29 Paul does not speak of not discerning the blood and the body nor of not discerning the body and the blood. Rather, he speaks only of not discerning the body. Therefore, this discernment does not refer only to the discernment of the physical body and blood of Jesus from ordinary food and drink. The meaning of discerning the body here involves something more.

The physical body of Jesus was given on the cross to accomplish redemption for us. But that body has nothing to do with God's present administration. It is the mystical Body of Christ which is thoroughly and absolutely related to God's administration today. Apart from the mystical Body of Christ, God has no way, no means, to carry out His administration. This means that God's administration is being carried out through the mystical Body of Christ. What are we doing on earth as the mystical Body of Christ? We certainly are not working for the accomplishment of redemption, for redemption has been accomplished once for all by the Lord Jesus. Redemption has been fully accomplished by the offering of the physical body of Jesus on the cross. But Christ today has a mystical Body, and this Body is for the carrying out of God's administration.

When we come to the Lord's table, our concern is neither redemption nor the divine administration; our concern is for enjoyment. We all come to the Lord's table to enjoy the Lord in fellowship. We probably do not have any

thought of God's administration. The Lord's supper, however, is related to the Lord's enjoyment and satisfaction. We should not only care for our enjoyment at the table, but also care for the Lord's enjoyment at the supper. We may have a heart for our enjoyment of the table, the feast, but not have much of a heart for the Lord's remembrance. We may care for our satisfaction, but not care for the Lord's satisfaction. Therefore, we need more light from the Lord concerning the Lord's supper. This will cause our meetings around His table to be improved. We shall praise the Lord that the supper is for His remembrance, enjoyment, and satisfaction. We shall realize that we are not only for our satisfaction, but even the more for God to be satisfied by Him.

If we want the Lord Jesus to be satisfied at the Lord's supper, we should not only remember Him, but also care for God's administration carried out by Him. Today what satisfies the Lord the most is the divine administration. If we remember Him without caring for the divine administration, He will not be happy. If we want to make Him happy and satisfy Him, we must be able to say, "Lord, while we are remembering You, we discern Your Body for God's administration carried out by You. As we remember You, we do not forget what You are doing in the heavens. You are seated in the heavens to carry out God's administration."

UNTIL HE COMES

In chapter ten Paul does not say anything about participating in the Lord's table until He comes. But in 11:26 he says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you declare the Lord's death until He comes." The Lord's coming will bring in God's kingdom for His administration. His first coming was for our redemption, but His second coming will be for God's administration. When we take of the Lord's table, we care for our enjoyment. But when we take of the Lord's supper, we care for His remembrance and God's administration. The Lord's table is for our enjoyment. However, the Lord's supper is for His enjoyment and satisfaction. Furthermore,

His satisfaction is dependent on God's administration carried out by Him. Do you intend to give the Lord the best remembrance? If you do, then you must take care of the mystical Body, the means for Him to carry out God's administration on earth. We must remember Him in this way until He comes. We do this to carry out His administration until He comes back and brings His kingdom to earth.

DISCERNING THE BODY FOR GOD'S ADMINISTRATION

We have emphasized the fact that when we take the Lord's table we enjoy Him, and when we eat the Lord's supper we satisfy Him by remembering Him and caring for God's administration. But in what way do we take care of this administration? It is by discerning the Body. Many Christians have no idea what it means to discern the Body.

To discern the Body is first to realize that Christ has only one mystical Body. But look at the situation among Christians today. How many divisions there are! Each denomination and group has its own bread. Some even go so far as to insist that if you have not been baptized by them in their water, you will not be allowed to participate in their bread. When we come to the Lord's supper, we must discern the Body to determine whether the bread on the table represents the unique mystical Body of Christ. This is a matter of great importance.

The unique mystical Body of Christ is the means for God to carry out His administration. God's eternal purpose is to have a group of saved, redeemed, and regenerated people who have become one to be an organic Body to carry out His administration. But Satan's subtle device is to cut the Body into pieces. This frustrates God's administration. As long as we are in a division, we are through with God's administration. For this reason, today's Christianity has become useless as far as the carrying out of the divine administration is concerned. Christians may preach the gospel to save souls or teach the Bible to help others know the Word. But this is absolutely not adequate to carry out God's administration. The carrying out of the divine

administration needs the unique Body, the mystical Body. Because we realize this, we hate division and are absolutely opposed to it.

Divisions damage the mystical Body of Christ with respect to the carrying out of God's administration. Although Christians can preach the gospel and teach the Bible, there are few who care for the mystical Body of Christ for the carrying out of God's administration on earth. Suppose all Christians would care for this. How marvelous this situation would be! What an administration God could have on the earth! But the divisions among Christians not only paralyze the Body of Christ; they even cause the Body to be cut in pieces. This makes it extremely difficult for God to accomplish anything on earth for the carrying out of His administration. For centuries God has not been able to carry out His administration because the unique means for this--the mystical Body of Christ--has been cut into pieces through division.

Throughout the years we have been deeply impressed with the significance of the Lord's table. We know that Jesus' physical body was given for the accomplishment of our redemption so that we may enjoy Him in fellowship. Therefore, we often pray, "Lord, thank You for Your redeeming blood. Thank You for redeeming us by shedding Your blood. Lord, we also thank You that you have given Your body on the cross to bear our sins, to die for us, and to terminate the old creation. Lord, now we are here enjoying Your table. You gave Yourself through death and now, in resurrection, You are on the table for our enjoyment." Now we must also be impressed that to eat the Lord's supper is to satisfy Him. It is to give Him our remembrance. This implies that we are here for the carrying out of God's administration. In order that God's administration may be carried out, we must care for the oneness of the unique mystical Body of Christ. Having such a concern will preserve us in the Body and keep us from any division. If we have this understanding of the Lord's supper, we shall not be divided by anything. Rather, we shall remain in the unique mystical Body, the means

for Christ to carry out His heavenly ministry for the accomplishment of the divine administration.

PROVING AND DISCERNING

Regarding the Lord's supper, Paul uses two crucial words: prove and discern. Verse 28 says, "But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup." To prove ourselves is to check whether we are eating the bread and drinking the cup in a way that is worthy or in a way that is unworthy. When Paul wrote this Epistle, some of the believers at Corinth ate the Lord's supper in an unworthy way, not realizing that the cup and the bread were uncommon and different from ordinary food. We must realize that the cup signifies the blood the Lord shed on the cross for our sins. Thus, we should not drink it in a common, ordinary way, but drink it in a way which shows that we realize that it is different from ordinary drink. We should take the bread in the same manner.

However, we reject the superstitious Catholic teaching of transubstantiation. According to this heretical teaching, the bread and the wine in the cup actually become the body and blood of Christ.

Although we reject transubstantiation, we must realize as we drink the cup and eat the bread that these are solemn, holy, and divine signs. The cup signifies the precious blood our dear Lord shed on the cross for our sins, and the bread signifies the body He gave for us on the cross. Therefore, we should not treat these signs in a careless manner. If we eat and drink carelessly, then we partake of the Lord's supper in an unworthy way. We need to prove ourselves to be sure that we are not unworthy to partake of the Lord's supper. This proving ourselves is that we may be worthy to remember the Lord.

The second crucial word used by Paul is discern. Verse 29 says, "For he who is eating and drinking, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body." We have pointed out that this is the discerning both of the Lord's physical body and also of the mystical Body for the

carrying out of God's administration. Proving ourselves is for the remembrance of the Lord; discerning the Body is mainly for the carrying out of God's administration. Whenever we come to the Lord's table, we should not just enjoy the Lord; we should also remember Him by proving ourselves. We must ask if we are living in a way that is worthy for us to eat the Lord's supper. We should never take the Lord's blood and body in a careless manner. Instead, we should realize that the signs on the table signify the precious blood and body of the Lord. Then we must ask ourselves if we live and behave in a way that is worthy of our eating this supper. This is to remember the Lord. At the same time we must discern whether the bread on the table signifies the unique mystical Body of Christ or if it signifies a division. If the bread signifies a certain divisive group or denomination, we should not take it, for we discern the Body. To discern the Body in this way is to recognize that it is utterly distinct from anything divisive. We discern the Body in such a way for the carrying out of God's administration.

Although we are still small in number, the angels and demons know that our standing is different from that of divisive Christianity. Furthermore, deep within we have the assurance that we are discerning the Body for the carrying out of God's administration on earth. We are also the heavenly television reflecting on earth what Christ is doing in the heavens for the divine administration. Others may oppose us, argue with us, and vindicate themselves. But deep within their conscience they do not have the assurance that they are discerning the unique mystical Body. Praise the Lord, we have this assurance!

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FIVE

DEALING WITH THE LORD'S SUPPER

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 11:17-34

In 11:17-34 Paul deals with the matter of the Lord's supper. Let us consider the different points covered by Paul in these verses.

I. REBUKING BECAUSE OF THE DISORDER

A. No Praise in Giving This Charge

In 11:17-22 Paul rebukes the Corinthians because of the disorder among them with regard to the Lord's supper. In verse 17 he says, "But in giving this charge, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse." The word "but" here indicates a contrast between "I do not praise you" and "I praise you" in verse 2. From this verse through the end of the chapter, the apostle deals with the eighth problem, the problem concerning the Lord's supper.

Paul is honest and frank. When the believers should be praised, he praises them. But when they should not be praised, he does not praise them. Although Paul does not say in verse 17, "I rebuke you," he nonetheless speaks to them in a rebuking tone.

B. The Corinthian Believers Coming Together Not for the Better But for the Worse

The reason Paul did not praise them was that their coming together was not for the better, but for the worse (v. 17). This indicates that the meeting together of the believers may be a loss instead of a profit. The expression "not for the better but for the worse" means that the result

of the Corinthians coming together was not profit but loss, that the result of their meeting was not gain but loss. Some Corinthians became weak, others became sick, and some even died. This proves that they lost a great deal.

C. Divisions Existing among Them in Their Church Meeting

In verse 18 Paul goes on to say, "For first of all, when you come together in the church, I hear that divisions exist among you, and some part I believe." Paul spoke in a rather soft way. He does not say that he fully believed all he heard; on the contrary he says that he believed a certain part. This reveals his soft tone in rebuking the Corinthians. The expression "in the church" means in the assembly of the church (14:34-35).

Verse 19 continues, "For there must also be parties among you, that those who are approved may become manifest among you." The Greek word rendered parties means sects, schools of different opinions, as in Galatians 5:20. The word approved means tested that the specifications have been met. According to this verse, even the parties, the sects, are useful to manifest the approved ones, those who are not sectarian.

D. Their Coming Together in the Same Place Not Being to Eat the Lord's Supper

In verse 20 Paul says, "When therefore you come together in the same place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper." In 10:21 Paul speaks of the table of the Lord. As we have seen, the emphasis of the table of the Lord is the fellowship of His blood and of His body (10:16-17), the participation in the Lord, the enjoyment of the Lord in mutuality, in fellowship; whereas the emphasis of the Lord's supper is the remembrance of the Lord (11:24-25). At the Lord's table we receive His body and blood for our enjoyment; at the Lord's supper we give Him our remembrance for His enjoyment.

In verse 21 Paul declares, "For in eating, each one takes his own supper first, and one is hungry, and another is

drunk." In the apostle's time the believers used to come together for supper, the main meal of the day, with the rich bringing more and better food for the mutual enjoyment, and the poor, less food. This was called the feast of love (2 Pet. 2:13; Jude 12) and came from the background of the Passover feast (Luke 22:13-20). At the end of their love feast they ate the Lord's supper with the bread and the cup to remember the Lord (1 Cor. 11:23-25). The Corinthians did not do this properly. They did not wait for one another (see v. 33). Each took his own supper first. The rich became drunken and the poor were hungry (v. 21). This caused divisions and parties among them (v. 18). Hence, they spoiled the Lord's supper. Thus, their eating was not the eating of the Lord's supper (v. 20). In verse 22 Paul said to them, "What! Do you not have houses to eat and to drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and disgrace those who have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I do not praise you."

II. THE REVIEW OF THE DEFINITION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

A. The Apostle Receiving from the Lord

Concerning a review of the definition of the Lord's supper, Paul says in verse 23, "For I received from the Lord."

B. That Which He Delivered to the Corinthian Believers

What Paul received from the Lord he delivered to the Corinthian believers. In verse 23 he tells them "that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread." Then "having given thanks, He broke it and said, This is My body, which is for you; this do for the remembrance of Me." The breaking of the bread is that we may eat it (Matt. 26:26). To take the Lord's supper is for the remembrance of the Lord Himself.

Verse 25 says, "Similarly also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood; this do,

as often as you drink it, for the remembrance of Me." The bread is of life (John 6:35), and the cup is of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16). This cup is the new covenant, made up of all the rich blessings of the New Testament, including God Himself. It was enacted by the Lord's blood, which He shed on the cross for our redemption (Matt. 26:28).

The real remembrance of the Lord is to eat the bread and drink the cup (11:26), that is, to participate in, to enjoy, the Lord who has given Himself to us through His redeeming death. To eat the bread and drink the cup is to take in the redeeming Lord as our portion, as our life and blessing. This is to remember Him in a genuine way.

Verse 26 continues, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you declare the Lord's death until He comes." The word declare here means proclaim, announce, or display. To take the Lord's supper is to declare and display the Lord's death, rather than remember it. We remember the Lord Himself by declaring and displaying His death. Please notice that we remember the Person of the Lord, but we declare, proclaim, His death. We remember the Person by declaring His death to the entire universe: to the demons, to the angels, and to human beings.

According to verse 26, we are to declare the Lord's death until He comes. We should take the Lord's supper for the remembrance of Him by declaring His redeeming death without ceasing until He comes back.

III. THE NEED OF PROVING AND DISCERNING

A. The One Eating the Bread or Drinking the Cup of the Lord in an Unworthy Manner Being Guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord

In verse 27 Paul says, "So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord." To eat or drink in an unworthy manner is to fail to evaluate the significance of the bread and the cup of the Lord, which

signify His body broken for us and His blood shed for our sins through His death for our redemption. To be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord is for a believer to bring judgment to himself (vv. 29-30).

B. Proving One's Self

In verse 28 Paul continues, "But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup." For a man to prove himself means to examine himself, to put himself to the test and have himself approved, meeting the prescribed specifications.

C. Eating and Drinking Judgment to One's Self, Not Discerning the Body

Verse 29 says, "For he who is eating and drinking, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body." To eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner brings judgment to us. This judgment is not a condemnation, but the Lord's temporary discipline (v. 32).

Not to discern means not to distinguish, separate, discriminate, make a distinction. To fail to discern the Lord's body is to fail to make a distinction between the bread, which signifies the Lord's body, and common food. It is to fail to evaluate the significance of the bread we take at the Lord's supper. This brings judgment, the Lord's discipline, to us.

The thought of the apostle in using this expression, "the body," not "the body of the Lord," may include also the mystical Body of Christ (Eph. 4:4) in addition to the physical body of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:24). Therefore, when we participate in the Lord's table, we must discern whether the bread on the table signifies the one Body of Christ or any division of man, any denomination. In discerning the Body of Christ we should not partake of the bread in any division or with any divisive spirit. Our participation in the Lord's table must be the unique fellowship of His unique Body without any division either in practice or in spirit.

The apostle's dealing with head covering is related to the Head (v. 3); his dealing with the Lord's supper (the Lord's table) is related to the Body. Regarding the headship of Christ, representing God and represented by man, we must keep the divine governmental order ordained by God without any disorder. Regarding the Body of Christ, we must be properly regulated by the apostle's instruction without any confusion or division. The Head is Christ, and the Body is the church. Christ and the church--these two--are the controlling and directing factors of the apostle's dealings with the confused and disorderly church. He deals with the church's problems first by stressing Christ as God's center and our portion in chapters one through ten. Following this, he emphasizes the church as God's goal and our concern in chapters eleven through sixteen. In chapters one through ten he begins with Christ as the antibiotic to heal the diseases of the sick church. Then from chapter eleven he goes on to the church and uses the matter of the church, the Body, as an inoculation against the church's disorder. Both Christ and the church are crucial to the carrying out of God's administration in His New Testament economy.

IV. THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD

A. The Result of Not Proving and Discerning

In verses 30 and 31 Paul says, "Because of this many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we discerned ourselves, we should not be judged." By "this" in verse 30 Paul means not discerning the body. Being weak and sick in this verse is the discipline, the temporary judgment of the Lord, on the unworthy participants in the Lord's body. The Lord first disciplined them so that they were weak physically. Then, since they would not repent of their offense, they were further disciplined to be sick. Because they still would not repent, the Lord judged them by death. To die this way is equivalent to being strewn along in the wilderness in 10:5. The word sleep in verse 30 means die (1 Thes. 4:13-16).

B. Discerning Ourselves That We Are Not Judged

In verse 31 Paul says that if we discerned ourselves, we should not be judged. To discern ourselves is to distinguish matters that concern ourselves, to form an accurate estimate of ourselves. The purpose of being judged is that we may be brought back to God's administration. Those who are astray need judgment from God to bring them back under His administration.

C. Disciplined That We May Not Be Condemned with the World

In verse 32 Paul says, "But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined that we may not be condemned with the world." If we keep ourselves under God's administration, we shall not be judged, corrected, disciplined, to be brought back to His administration. The discipline in verse 32 is also a matter in God's administration. This discipline is temporary so that we may not be condemned with the world, that is, condemned forever.

D. Coming Together to Eat the Lord's Supper

In 33-34a, Paul says, "So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, that you may not come together for judgment." The charge to wait for one another is due to the condition described in verse 21. Waiting requires patience. Waiting for one another indicates that we are truly under God's administration.

E. The Remaining Matters to Be Set in Order When the Apostle Comes

In verse 34b Paul concludes, "And the remaining matters I will set in order when I come." This indicates that the apostle did not give instruction for everything concerning the practice of the church. For the "remaining matters" we need to seek the Lord's leading, based upon the principles which have been set forth in the New Testament and governed by these principles.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SIX

DEALING WITH THE LORD'S SUPPER

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 11:17-32

UNTO THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE LORD

First Corinthians 11:24 and 25 say, "And having given thanks, He broke it and said, This is My body, which is for you; this do for the remembrance of Me. Similarly also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood; this do, as often as you drink it, for the remembrance of Me." In the phrase "for the remembrance of Me," it is better to translate the Greek word rendered "for" as "unto." Thus, it should read "unto the remembrance of Me." The word "unto" implies a result, whereas the word "for" indicates a purpose. Having a purpose is not as good as having a result.

To have the Lord's supper for the remembrance of the Lord means that we have the supper for the purpose of remembering Him. But to have the Lord's supper unto the remembrance of the Lord means that we have the supper with the result that we remember the Lord. We may come to partake of the Lord's supper with the purpose of remembering Him and yet our eating of the supper may not result in the remembrance of the Lord. Instead of having the proper remembrance of the Lord, the result may be condemnation on us. Supposedly the believers at Corinth came together to remember the Lord. But the result was altogether different. Their eating and drinking was not unto the remembrance of the Lord, but unto their own condemnation.

In chapter eleven Paul was admonishing the Corinthians to have the Lord's supper in a way that would result not in their condemnation but in the remembrance of the Lord. It is possible that the result of our eating of the Lord's supper may also be condemnation instead of the remembrance of the Lord.

The thought embodied in the word "unto" in these verses is deep and profound. It is, of course, not incorrect to translate the Greek preposition as "for." However, this does not express the meaning or significance here. Here the word is used with the significance of result, not purpose. What will be the result of your eating of the Lord's supper? Will it result in the remembrance of the Lord, or in condemnation for wrongdoing? This was Paul's sober word to the Corinthians.

The eating of the Lord's supper is to satisfy the Lord. But instead of coming together to satisfy the Lord, the Corinthians were seeking to satisfy themselves. The fact that some even became drunk proves that they cared for their own satisfaction (v. 21). To come to the Lord's supper with the intention of receiving satisfaction for ourselves is against the principle of His supper. We should not come to the Lord's supper with such an intention. Rather, we should come with the intention to satisfy the Lord.

Merely to render the Lord some kind of shallow remembrance does not satisfy Him. He is satisfied when we have the supper in such a way that it results in the remembrance of Him. Simply to remember the Lord is shallow. But to partake of the Lord's supper with the result that we have the remembrance of Him is deep. Remembering the Lord is something temporary. It may last only while we are eating of His supper. As we are eating of the supper, we remember Him. But to eat the Lord's supper resulting in the remembrance of the Lord implies that the remembrance is coming and also that it will continue after we have finished eating. Thus, the remembrance is a continuation of our eating. Our eating results in the remembrance, and the remembrance is the continuation of the eating.

A REMEMBRANCE RELATED TO GOD'S ADMINISTRATION

Paul's word in chapter eleven is related to what the Lord says in Matthew 26:29: "And I say to you, I will by no means drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of My Father." This word is found in Matthew, the gospel concerned with the kingdom. The kingdom is a matter of God's administration. Our eating of the Lord's supper must result in a remembrance that is closely related to God's administration.

Does your eating of the Lord's supper result in God's administration? If not, your partaking of the Lord's supper is too superficial. While a believer is at the Lord's supper, he may say to himself, "Oh, I realize that the Lord died for me. Now His love constrains me in the evening of the Lord's Day to remember Him by eating His supper. As I partake of the supper, I remember Him. I remember His incarnation and how he was born of a virgin in Bethlehem. I remember how He grew up in the city of Nazareth, how He suffered and was persecuted, how He was betrayed, judged, condemned, and sentenced to die on the cross. I especially remember that on the cross He died for my sins." To remember the Lord in this way is good, but it does not have anything to do with the kingdom, with God's administration. After the Lord's supper, there is no lasting result with respect to the remembrance of the Lord. If our eating of the Lord's supper stops with this kind of remembrance, our partaking of the Lord's supper is too superficial. The genuine eating of the Lord's supper must result in the administration of God; it must result in the kingdom.

Our eating of the Lord's supper must be related to the kingdom. It should not be without a continuing result after each partaking of the Lord's supper is over. On the contrary, it must result in the kingdom, the administration of God. In other words, our eating of the Lord's supper must result in satisfying Him by bringing in the kingdom,

by having ourselves and everything related to us brought into a proper relationship with God's administration. This is not a matter that can take place in an hour's time. It can be accomplished only by a process which is yet to come. This coming process is actually the kingdom of God, God's administration, being worked out on earth.

PROVING AND DISCERNING

Because the relation between the Lord's supper and God's administration is a very serious matter, Paul charges the Corinthians to prove themselves and discern the body (vv. 28-29). If we do not prove ourselves and if we do not discern the body, we may eat the Lord's supper without having the result of the remembrance of the Lord. We need to prove ourselves that our standing is proper, and we must also discern the body. Then our eating of the Lord's supper will result in a full satisfaction to the Lord and also in the carrying out of the administration of God. This is the proper eating of the Lord's supper.

Perhaps you are wondering how the eating of the Lord's supper can result in the carrying out of God's administration. As Christians, we have been saved, we have been born of God to be the children of God, and we have been brought into the kingdom of God. According to John 3:3 and 5, regeneration brings us into the kingdom of God. If we had not been born of the Spirit, we could not enter into the kingdom of God. But through regeneration we have been brought into God's kingdom and have also become members of the Body of Christ. We need to realize that we have been regenerated to become the children of God, to be brought into the kingdom, and to become the members of the Body of Christ. Once we have this realization, we need to consider the purpose of all this. Why have we been regenerated to be brought into the kingdom and to become the members of the Body? The answer is that we have been regenerated so that we may live a life for the kingdom of God and the Body of Christ. The kingdom and the Body should be the goal of our living.

As Christians, we are not here simply to have a good

life. Many Christians love the Lord, but they do not realize that their life on earth is for God's kingdom and Christ's Body. To be for the kingdom of God and the Body of Christ is to be for God's administration. Today God's administration is carried out by the kingdom and the Body. This should be our daily living. Then on the first day of the week we come together purposely to eat the Lord's supper with the expectation that our life will be a life for the kingdom of God and the Body of Christ. If you understand this, you will know how eating of the Lord's supper may result in such a satisfaction to the Lord.

Concerning the Lord's table and the Lord's supper, our understanding may still be under the influence of our religious background. Our mind may be so saturated with traditional thoughts and concepts that we have no capacity to take in anything new. This is to be like a glass that has been filled to the brim: there is no room in the glass for anything more or anything else. To use a different illustration, our mind may be like an apartment building with a "No vacancy" sign posted in front of it. Unconsciously we may have put up a sign saying, "No vacancy: I am not able to understand anything more concerning the Lord's supper." I am concerned that this may be the situation of nearly all the saints.

DECLARING THE LORD'S DEATH

In 11:26 Paul says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you declare the Lord's death until He comes." At the Lord's table, while we are eating and drinking, we are making a declaration. We declare the Lord's death until He comes. To declare means to proclaim, announce, or display. In organized religion, whether in Catholicism or Protestantism, I doubt that anyone realizes that the purpose of so-called mass or holy communion is to declare the death of Christ, to display His death to the universe. Those who attend mass or communion automatically have the thought of remembering the death of Christ. This is a natural concept. Furthermore, certain pastors may strengthen this concept with their teaching. People spontaneously think

that to participate in holy communion is simply to remember Christ's death.

However, it was the thought neither of the Apostle Paul nor of the Lord Jesus that we should remember Christ's death. The Lord Jesus said, "This do unto the remembrance of *Me*." We are to partake unto the remembrance not of something, but unto the remembrance of a living Person. We are to partake of both the bread and the cup unto the remembrance of the Lord. As we have seen, this means that our partaking should result in the remembrance of Him. To remember the Lord Himself is an important matter. Nevertheless, for the most part, Christians do not realize that at holy communion they should remember the Lord and not merely what He has done for us. Notice that verses 24 and 25 do not simply say "remembrance of Me," but speak of "*the* remembrance of Me." The use of the definite article adds emphasis and strength to this expression. We should not remember anything else; we are simply to have the remembrance of Christ Himself.

Although we are to remember the Lord, we are not told to remember His death. Rather, in verse 26 we see that we should *declare* the Lord's death. Christ's death is not for us to remember--it is for us to declare, announce, display. We must display it to all the angels, demons, human beings, and creatures. We must declare, announce, the Lord's death until He comes. In this verse the word "until" is significant, for it points to the kingdom.

THE TWO COMINGS OF CHRIST

In verse 26 we have the Lord's death and the Lord's coming. In between Christ's death and His coming there is a gap, a gap which is filled in by the church. We may say that the church is a bridge connecting the Lord's death to His coming. Thus, the church bridges a deep gap from one side to the other. This means that the church continues the Lord's death and brings in His coming back. Without the church, this gap would not be bridged. There would be no way to connect the Lord's death with His coming.

The goal of Christ's first coming was His death, but what will be the goal of His second coming? The answer to this question is in Matthew 26:29. Here, while the Lord was establishing His supper, He tells us that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He drinks it with us in the kingdom of His Father. This indicates that His second coming has a goal, and this goal is the kingdom.

Each of the Lord's two comings has a goal. The goal of His first coming was to die to accomplish the all-inclusive redemption. The goal of His second coming is to set up God's kingdom.

We should not take for granted Paul's words, "Declare the Lord's death until He comes," and we should not understand them in a superficial way. It is a matter of great significance that Paul wrote these words. He did not put them down according to His opinion. In verse 23 he says, "For I received from the Lord that which also I delivered to you." What Paul spoke to the Corinthians was what he received from the Lord. This is the reason I refer you to Matthew 26. In establishing His supper the Lord did speak of His coming back in relation to the Father's kingdom.

It is crucial to see that there are two comings of Christ. With His first coming a great thing was accomplished--His death to carry out an all-inclusive redemption. After His death, Christ went away to receive the kingdom. This is revealed in the New Testament and also in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 7:13 and 14, the prophet beheld that "one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." In Luke 19:12 the Lord, in a parable, refers to Himself as "a certain nobleman" who "went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return" (Luke 19:12). Furthermore, according to both the book of Daniel and the Gospels, the Lord will come

back after receiving the kingdom. He will come back with the kingdom and will establish this kingdom for God's universal administration.

THE UNIQUE PRODUCT OF CHRIST'S DEATH

Between the Lord's two comings with their two goals, there is a long span of time. This span of time is the church age. The Lord's all-inclusive redemption has produced something unique--the church. In John 12:24 the Lord Jesus says, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." Here the Lord Jesus seems to be saying, "I am the unique grain of wheat. If I do not fall into the earth and die, I shall remain alone. But My intention is to be sown into the earth and die. Then I shall rise up in resurrection to produce many grains." This is exactly what took place through the Lord's death and resurrection. He has produced many grains, and these grains are to be formed into one loaf, which is the church. Therefore, the church is the unique product of the Lord's all-inclusive death. The death of Christ has produced the church, and the church will bring in the kingdom.

In his early ministry Brother Nee emphasized that the New Testament teaches three important matters: the cross, the church, and the kingdom. He told us clearly that the cross produces the church, and that the church brings in the kingdom. Through the church the kingdom as God's administration will be brought to earth. The cross was the issue of the Lord's first coming, and the kingdom will be related to His second coming. But between these two comings there is the church produced by His first coming. The church will bring in the kingdom with Christ's second coming. Now we must see that in verse 26 to declare the Lord's death until He comes is equal to declaring the existence of the church for the bringing in of the kingdom.

In 11:29 Paul goes on to the matter of discerning the body. Those who do not discern the body eat and drink judgment to themselves. To fail to discern the body indicates a failure to take care of the matter of the church.

It is utterly wrong to come to the Lord's supper without taking adequate care of the church. The church today is Christ's mystical Body, and Christ Himself is the Head. In His ascension Christ was made the Head over the entire universe. The church produced by His death is now the mystical Body of this Head.

THE HEAD OPERATING THROUGH THE BODY

Because as human beings we have a physical body, we are able to do many things. If we did not have a body, we could not carry on certain activities. In the same principles, the mystical Body of Christ, the church, is for Christ's move on earth. Yes, the Head has gone away, but the Body remains on earth. The Head is now operating God's administration through the Body.

It is a fact of history that the Body has been divided and paralyzed. Even at the time Paul wrote this Epistle, the expression of the Body in Corinth had been divided. This is the reason in chapter eleven he speaks of divisions and parties (vv. 18-19). This indicates that the Body had become ill. Some among the Corinthian believers had become sick and others had died, simply because the Body had been divided (v. 30). They had failed to discern the Body. They did not take care of the Body adequately. From this we must learn the need to take care of the Body, the church. Furthermore, the church bridges the gap between the Lord's first coming and His second coming. This bridge is also a highway from Christ's death to God's kingdom. Without this bridge with the highway, there would be no way to go from one side of the gap, Christ's death, to the other side, God's kingdom. The unique connection is the church as the bridge. Therefore, we must discern the body. This means that we should never damage the bridge. However, many of today's Christians neglect the bridge, and others have damaged it.

THE REASON FOR EATING THE LORD'S SUPPER

Now we must go on further to see why we need to eat the Lord's supper. In this message we have emphasized

that we should partake of the Lord's supper unto the remembrance of Him; that is, with the result of having the remembrance of the Lord. We should come to the Lord's supper with the expectation that a certain result will issue forth. Our eating of the Lord's supper must result in the remembrance of the Lord in His two comings. We should remember Him in His first coming to accomplish the all-inclusive redemption to produce the church, and also in His second coming to bring in the kingdom so that both God and we may have a way to carry on the recovery. Apart from the kingdom, there is no way for the Lord's recovery to be carried onward. Therefore, we eat the Lord's supper with a view to remembering Him in both His first coming and in His second coming.

To remember the Lord in this way actually is to satisfy Him. The Lord has come and has died on the cross to produce the church. He is very happy with what He has accomplished and what He has produced. Now He is in the heavens carrying on His heavenly ministry so that he may come back to earth with the kingdom of His Father. But who are the people on earth who can cooperate with Him? Who can respond to Christ's operation in the heavens? Only the church can cooperate with Him and respond to Him. If the Lord did not have the church, He would probably be sorrowful there in the heavens, for there would be no one on earth to cooperate with Him and to carry out what He is ministering.

Truly the church is Christ's satisfaction. Whenever we come to eat the Lord's supper, we declare His death. We announce to the whole universe that the Lord Jesus has come, that He has died on the cross to accomplish an all-inclusive redemption, and that His death has produced the church. Now we are the church, His Body, responding to His ministry in the heavens and cooperating with Him. To eat His supper on the first day of every week is to make such a declaration. As long as there is a people on earth responding to Christ in His heavenly ministry, there is a way for Him to bring God's kingdom to earth. This is what satisfies the Lord and makes Him happy.

The Lord's supper should serve as a reminder that we are living on the earth for the Lord's satisfaction. Yes, the supper is for us to eat, but it is not for our satisfaction. We eat the supper not for our satisfaction, but for the Lord's satisfaction. Eating the supper reminds us to have a life in the church to bring in the kingdom for the satisfaction of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, this supper is a satisfaction to the Lord in relation to the kingdom, the administration of God.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SEVEN

DEALING WITH THE GIFTS

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:1-11

Why does Paul deal with the gifts immediately after speaking about the Lord's supper? Apparently there is no connection between the Lord's supper and the gifts. Many readers of the Bible have found it difficult to understand why Paul deals first with the Lord's supper and then with the gifts. If we would understand the connection between these two matters, we must see that they are related to God's administration. The divine administration is the secret to the five problems covered in the last six chapters of 1 Corinthians. Therefore, if we see that this section of the book is concerned with things in the realm of the divine administration, we shall have the key to understanding these chapters.

The first matter covered in this section is head covering, which is related to headship. Headship is the first item in God's administration. Just as head covering is related to the headship, so the Lord's supper is related to the Body. The Body is the means by which God carries out His administration. Without the Body, the Head cannot accomplish anything on earth for the carrying out of God's administration.

Now we must go on to see that with the Body there is the need of the different functions. If my physical body did not have any functions, the body would not be able to do anything. However, in every member of my body there is a function. The function comes out of the gift of each member. The finger, the hand, the arm, and the shoulder all have their gifts. Every member of our body, no matter how small or unimportant it may seem, has a gift. As long

as it is a member of the body, it has a gift, and with the gift, there is the function. By means of the functions of all the members of the body, the body is able to work. The totality of the functions of the gifts of all the members in the body is the work of the body. When I speak, every member of my body is involved. Every part of my body, every muscle, even the nose and the ears, are functioning.

God is administrating the entire universe for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose Christ the Head needs the Body, the church. This is the reason Satan hates the church. We are opposed today simply because we are standing for the church. There are Christian bookstores that carry all the books by Brother Nee except his books on the church. Certain missionaries in Taiwan admitted that our work there was excellent, but they regarded the matter of the church practice as a "dead fly in the ointment."

Satan hates the Body and opposes it. If the church were only an assembly of believers coming together for fellowship, Satan would not hate the church so much. However, for us, the church is not merely an assembly; it is the Body for the carrying out of God's administration. In order to be such a church, we all need to function. Suppose, however, we have a church in which only a few members function and the rest sit in the meetings without functioning. A church in that situation may be opposed by the enemy, but not nearly as much as those who stand for the Body, the instrument of the Head for carrying out the divine administration.

The Body has many members, and every member has a gift. This is the reason that after the headship and the Body, Paul comes to the matter of the spiritual gifts. The spiritual gifts are for the functions of the members of the Body. Hence, chapter twelve is the direct continuation of chapter eleven. After discerning the Body, we need to see the importance of all the gifts of the members of the Body. In 12:4-11 Paul mentions nine gifts. This does not mean that there are only nine spiritual gifts. Paul lists nine gifts as an illustration.

I. THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE

In 12:1-3 we have the governing principle of the spiritual gifts. In verse 1 Paul says, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant." In chapters twelve through fourteen Paul deals with the ninth problem among the Corinthians, the problem of spiritual gifts in relation to God's administration and operation.

In verses 2 and 3 Paul continues, "You know that when you were of the nations, you were led away to dumb idols, however you were led. Wherefore I make known to you that no one speaking in the Spirit of God says, Jesus is accursed; and no one can say, Lord Jesus, except in the Holy Spirit." The apostle's thought here is that the dumb, voiceless idols in verse 2 make their worshippers dumb and voiceless. But the living God causes His worshippers to speak in His Spirit. This kind of speaking is related to the spiritual gifts. No one who speaks in the Spirit of God would say, "Jesus is accursed"; he would like to say and he is able to say, "Lord Jesus." No worshippers of God should be silent, but all should use their voices to speak forth the Lord Jesus in the Spirit of God. This--to speak the Lord Jesus--is the main function of all the spiritual gifts.

The governing principle of the gifts is to speak by our spirit with the Spirit, that is, to utter something with the Spirit in our spirit. This kind of speaking is centered on the Lord Jesus. Therefore, what we speak should be focused on Christ. Christ should be the substance, the element, the essence, the center, and the circumference of our speaking.

When Paul writes about the gifts of the members of the Body, he begins by speaking of "dumb idols." The gifts, of course, have nothing to do with idols. But what Paul says concerning the spiritual gifts is spoken against the Corinthians' background in idol worship. In verse 2 Paul reminds them that when they were of the nations, of the Gentiles, they were "led away to dumb idols." Here Paul does not say they were led away to sins, lusts, or the world; he says that they were led away to dumb idols, in whatever

way they were led. No matter by what way they were led, they were led to dumb idols. Paul's use of the adjective "dumb" implies that both the idols and those who worship them are dumb, unable to speak. When the Corinthians were unbelievers, they also were dumb; they were silent worshippers of dumb idols. This means that when they worshipped the idols, they did not speak. Rather, because the idols were dumb, they also were dumb, silent. But after coming to believe in Christ, they are now worshippers of the living God.

It is by speaking that we prove that we are living. Our God is living. The Bible reveals that our living God is the speaking God. Throughout the centuries, especially in this New Testament age, God has been speaking. To prove that we are a living member of Christ, we also must speak. We do not mean, of course, that we should speak in a light way or that we should gossip. Instead, we should speak something for the Lord and even speak forth the Lord. We need to speak things which are centered on Christ. Furthermore, Christ must be our speaking, our utterance. He must be the center and circumference of our speech. To speak Christ in this way is a strong proof that we are living. Because the God whom we worship is the living and speaking God, we also speak and thereby prove that we are the living members of the Body of Christ.

I can testify from experience that the more I speak, the more living I am. To speak is actually to breathe. When I speak by exercising my spirit, I breathe Christ in. Day by day, we need to speak Christ to our husband or wife, to our children, and to our neighbors. We need to speak Christ, taking Him as our center. This speaking is the governing principle of the spiritual gifts.

According to verse 3, our speaking must be governed by the Lord Jesus. In this verse Paul says, "Wherefore I make known to you that no one speaking in the Spirit of God says, Jesus is accursed." The Greek words rendered, "Jesus is accursed," literally are "Anathema Jesus." Anathema denotes a thing or person accursed; set apart, devoted, to woe. To say "Jesus is accursed" means to speak

negatively concerning Christ. Whenever someone speaks in a negative way about Christ, that is a curse.

In verse 3 Paul also says, "No one can say, Lord Jesus, except in the Holy Spirit." This is a literal translation of the Greek. This verse indicates that when we say with a proper spirit, "Lord Jesus," we are in the Holy Spirit. Hence, to call on the Lord Jesus is the way to participate in, to enjoy, and to experience the Holy Spirit.

We have just pointed out that the literal translation of the Greek in verse 3 is "Lord Jesus." When we say, "Jesus is Lord," we admit that the Lord Jesus is the Lord. But when we say, "Lord Jesus," we not only make such an admission, but we also call on Him. To say "Lord Jesus" is sweeter than saying "Jesus is Lord." This difference can be illustrated in the way we may speak of our father. For example, to say, "This is my father," is not as sweet and intimate as to say, "My father!" In your daily living do you say, "Jesus is Lord," or do you more often call, "Lord Jesus"? Most of us would testify that we call, "Lord Jesus," much more frequently than we declare, "Jesus is Lord."

No doubt, the expression "Lord Jesus" in verse 3 indicates calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. Today some oppose the practice of calling on the name of the Lord. But in 12:3 Paul definitely refers to calling on the Lord audibly. The translation "Jesus is Lord" does not indicate calling. But the literal rendering "Lord Jesus" indicates not only an admission, but also an address, a calling on the Lord.

Many of us can testify that calling on the name of the Lord Jesus causes us to be living. When we feel somewhat depressed, we simply need to call, "O Lord Jesus," and we are strengthened and uplifted. Reports have come to us that a number of saints in a certain place have been helped by calling on the name of the Lord and by pray-reading. One brother testified that the Lord has given us His Word, His Spirit, and His name. We may enjoy His Word by pray-reading; we may enjoy His Spirit by following the anointing; and we may enjoy His name by calling on the name of the Lord.

As those who worship the living God, we must speak. However, many Christians are dumb. The Pentecostal movement came in as a reaction to this dumbness. At different times in the past, there have also been reactions against the dumbness of formal religion. For example, at the time of John Wesley, the preaching of the Word was limited to the sanctuary. No one was allowed to preach in a secular place. But John Wesley reacted against that restriction and preached outdoors, on the streets and even to miners as they came from the coal mines after work. Inspired by Wesley's preaching, some repented and wept. Others, beside themselves for joy, shouted to the Lord.

Christ is God's Word, God's speaking. Thus, when we enjoy Christ, we also shall speak. We shall speak forth Christ and, at times, even shout Christ forth. On our way to the meetings of the church, we should not be dumb. Even as we are on the way, we should speak Christ and then bring Christ to the meeting by our speaking.

To say that Jesus is accursed is to utter negative things concerning Him. But to say, "Lord Jesus," means to speak of Him in a positive way. Furthermore, in 12:3 Paul tells us that no one can say, "Lord Jesus," except in the Holy Spirit. What an encouraging word! As long as we say, "Lord Jesus," with a proper spirit, we are in the Holy Spirit. Do you feel that you are not in the spirit? Then call on the name of the Lord Jesus. By calling on His name, you will breathe in the heavenly air, the Holy Spirit, and you will be in the Spirit. However, if you are silent, not calling on the Lord, you will not breathe in the spiritual air. This will make you spiritually unhealthy and unhappy. But the more you speak for Christ and even speak Christ, the happier you will be. We in the Lord's recovery have many positive things to talk about. We have Christ, we have the church life, and we have God's eternal purpose. Let us all learn to speak Christ. This speaking is the governing principle of the spiritual gifts.

When we were in Elden Hall in Los Angeles in 1970, the meetings always started well ahead of the scheduled time. The saints gathered to speak, sing, shout, and praise

long before the scheduled meeting time. But in certain places today there is a tendency for the saints to be silent. It seems many have lost their function and their gift. This opens the way for a return to the fallen situation, where there are meetings with forms and a system of clergy-laity. In the church all the members should be living and speaking. Then all the time will be filled with the speaking of Christ and for Christ.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT BY DIFFERENT GIFTS

A. Distribution of Gifts but the Same Spirit

In verse 4 Paul goes on to say, "But there are distributions of gifts, but the same Spirit." "But" here indicates a contrast between verses 3 and 4. Verse 3 says that when we minister by speaking in the Spirit of God, we all say, "Lord Jesus," exalting Jesus as the Lord. "But" there are differences in the gifts for the manifestation of the Spirit; there are diversities in these gifts.

The Greek word rendered distributions can also be translated diversities, varieties, distinctions. The same word is also used in verses 5 and 6.

The gifts in 12:4 refer to the outward gifts, the abilities or enablings for service. Some of them are miraculous, and some are developed out of the initial gifts mentioned in 1:7. All of these are different from the initial gifts.

B. Distributions of Ministries and the Same Lord

In verse 5 Paul continues, "And there are distributions of ministries, and the same Lord." The ministries here are services. The gifts in verse 4 are for these services, and they are for the operations in verse 6.

C. Distributions of Operations, but the Same God Who Is Operating All Things in All

Verse 6 says, "And there are distributions of operations, but the same God, Who is operating all things in all." The operations here are works. The ministries or services in verse 5 are for these works.

The gifts are by the Spirit; the ministries, the services, are for the Lord; and the operations are of God. Here the Triune God is involved in these three things: gifts, ministries, and operations. The gifts by the Spirit are to carry out the ministries, the services, for the Lord, and the ministries for the Lord are to accomplish the operations, the works, of God. This is the Triune God moving in the believers for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose to build up the church, the Body of Christ, for the expression of God.

In these verses Paul speaks of the Trinity. He speaks of the Spirit in verse 4, the Lord in verse 5, and the Father in verse 6. The gifts are by the Spirit, the ministries are for the Lord, and the operations are of God. The gifts are the enabling. When we exercise our gifts, the ministries come forth. Thus, the gifts are for the ministries.

In Greek the word rendered ministries simply means services. Ministries is from the same root as the word which means deacons, serving ones. Deacons are serving ones, and ministries are their services. When we use our gifts to function, spontaneously that function becomes a service.

The services are of the Lord, but the Spirit distributes the gifts. When the gifts function, we have the services, which are of the Lord and for the Lord. Then the services accomplish certain operations for God. Therefore, the gifts are for the ministries, and the ministries are for the operations.

God is the Administrator, the One who is administrating by means of the operations. These operations are the works to carry out the divine administration. These operations, these works, are accomplished by the services, the ministries. Jesus Christ the Lord, the anointed One, takes care of all these ministries. Hence, they belong to Him and are of Him. But how does the Lord obtain these services? It is by the Spirit's gifts. Furthermore, the use of these gifts depends on our cooperation. If we do not speak, if we do not utter anything of the Lord and for the Lord, the Spirit has no way. The exercise of the gifts carries out the ministries

and the ministries accomplish the operations. These operations are for the carrying out of God's administration, which is for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose.

In the past we have pointed out that in the New Testament there is just one ministry, and now we are speaking of ministries. When we say that there is only one ministry in the New Testament, we mean that all the gifted persons should minister the same thing--Christ and the church. This is the unique ministry. However, the ministries in 12:5 refer to the services of the different members of the Body. The various members of the Body have their different ministries, their different services.

D. The Manifestation of the Spirit Given to Each One for Profit

In verse 7 Paul says, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for profit." All the different gifts are the manifestation of the Spirit; that is, the Spirit is manifested in the believers who have received the gifts. Such manifestation of the Spirit is for the profit of the church, the Body of Christ. For profit means for the growth in life of the members of the Body of Christ and for the building up of Christ's Body.

In verse 8 Paul goes on to say, "For to one through the Spirit is given a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit." According to the context of this book, the word of wisdom is the word concerning Christ as the deeper things of God predestined by God for our portion (1:24, 30; 2:6-10). The word of knowledge is the word that imparts a general knowledge of things concerning God and the Lord (8:1-7). The word of wisdom is mainly of our spirit through revelation; the word of knowledge is mainly of our understanding through teaching. The former is deeper than the latter. However, these two, not the speaking in tongues nor any other miraculous gift, are listed as the first gifts and topmost manifestation of the Spirit because these two are the most profitable ministries or services for the edification of the saints and the building up of the church to carry out God's operation.

It is not easy to differentiate the word of wisdom from the word of knowledge. According to 1 Corinthians, the word of wisdom is a word concerning Christ. If we would speak Christ, we need the word of wisdom. In chapters one and two Paul's emphasis is that Christ is God's wisdom and that this is the wisdom we speak. For this word of wisdom, we need revelation, not merely teaching. This means we need something shown to us by the Spirit in our spirit--we need a vision of Christ as the deep things of God.

The word concerning Christ as the deep things of God is the word of wisdom. Primarily, this word is given by the apostles and prophets. They have seen a vision, a revelation, of Christ, and whatever they speak concerning Him is the word of wisdom.

The word of knowledge is a word concerning spiritual things, in particular a word regarding what God is and does. This word is mainly given by the teachers.

In verse 9 Paul says, "To a different one faith in the same Spirit." The faith here is like the faith that can remove mountains, as mentioned in 13:2 and Mark 11:22-24.

In verse 9 Paul also speaks of "gifts of healing in the one Spirit." These gifts are the miraculous power for healing different diseases.

In verse 10 Paul says, "And to another operations of works of power." These works of power are miracles, works of miraculous power other than healing, such as Peter raising Dorcas from death (Acts 9:36-42).

In verse 10 Paul also mentions prophecy. This is to speak for God and to speak forth God, including foretelling, predicting. We should not understand the word prophecy here as primarily meaning to predict. It mainly means to speak for the Lord and to speak forth the Lord. Of course, it sometimes includes an element of prediction, of speaking for, speaking forth, and speaking beforehand.

Paul also tells us in verse 10 that to another is given the discerning of spirits. This is to distinguish the Spirit that is of God from those that are not of God (1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:1-3). This requires maturity in life.

Paul concludes verse 10 by saying, "To a different one various kinds of tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues." Tongues here are a proper language or dialect (Acts 2:4, 6, 8, 11) either of men or of angels (13:1), not meaningless voices or sounds. The genuine and proper speaking in tongues is one of the many gifts of the Spirit (v. 4), one of the many aspects of the manifestation of the Spirit (v. 7). Some say speaking in tongues is firstly the initial evidence of the baptism in the Spirit, but it afterward becomes a gift of the Spirit: as the initial evidence, they say that every believer must have it; as a gift, every believer does not necessarily have it. But this kind of teaching is groundless in the New Testament. The New Testament makes it more than clear that speaking in tongues is only one of the many gifts of the Spirit, and not all the believers have it.

The interpretation of tongues is to make the unknown tongues known, understandable (14:13). This is the ninth item of the manifestation of the Spirit listed here. However, the manifestation of the Spirit by the believers is of more than nine items. The apostleship, helps, and administrations by the Spirit listed in verse 28, seeing visions and dreaming dreams by the Spirit as mentioned in Acts 2:17, the signs and wonders referred to in Hebrews 2:4, and three of the five miraculous acts prophesied in Mark 16:17-18 are all omitted here. The apostle here listed only nine items of the Spirit's manifestation as an illustration. Of these nine, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues are listed as the last two because they are not as profitable as the other items for the building up of the church (14:2-6, 18-19). Of these nine gifts and those listed in verses 28 through 30, prophecy as prediction, faith, gifts of healing, works of power, speaking in tongues, and interpretation of tongues are miraculous. All the rest, a word of wisdom (like the word of the apostles), a word of knowledge (like the word of the teachers), and speaking for God and speaking forth God in prophecy by the prophets, discerning of spirits, helps, and administrations are gifts developed by the growth in life

(3:6-7), as are those listed in Romans 12:6-8, out of the inward, initial gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1:7. The miraculous gifts, especially speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues, do not require any growth in life. The Corinthians did much speaking in tongues, yet they still remained in infancy (3:1-3). However, the gifts developed in life require growth in life, even maturity, for the building up of the church. It was for this purpose that this Epistle was written to them.

Sometimes those in Pentecostalism ask if we have the gifts of the Spirit in our meetings. Some saints, thinking that we do not have these gifts, may not know how to answer this question. But we have the best gifts, the topmost gifts, the "head" gifts rather than those at the "tail." We have the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. These gifts are the "head," whereas tongue-speaking and interpretation of tongues are the "tail." As we shall see, at least three times Paul mentions these gifts at the bottom of the list.

We have pointed out that in these verses Paul gives nine illustrations of the manifestation of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are unlimited. When we have the gifts, we have the manifestations; when we exercise the gifts, we have the ministries of the Lord; and then these ministries will accomplish the work of God to carry out His administration.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-EIGHT

DEALING WITH THE GIFTS

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:12-22

In 12:1-11 Paul stresses two matters: speaking and the Spirit. A Christian must be a speaking person. If we are silent in our worship, then we become dumb worshippers. We do not worship a silent God; we worship a living, speaking God. Thus, our speaking is a sign that we are proper worshippers of God. Furthermore, whenever we speak, Christ should be the center. We should even speak forth the Lord Jesus. According to 12:3, when we say, "Lord Jesus," we are in the Spirit. Therefore, speaking is Paul's first emphasis in 12:1-11, and the Spirit is the second.

As Christians, we all should speak. When we speak forth the Lord, we are in the Spirit. For example, as I speak, I breathe in air. I am not only surrounded by the air, but air is also in me. The more I open my mouth to speak, the more the air enters into me and saturates me. If I would neither speak nor breathe, there would be no way for air to come into my being. Then my inner being could not receive the necessary supply of oxygen. In order for oxygen to work in my inward parts, it is necessary for me to breathe and speak. By speaking I enjoy the air. In the same principle, when we speak with Christ as the center of our speaking, we are in the Spirit.

III. ONE BODY WITH MANY MEMBERS

In dealing with the gifts, Paul's third emphasis is the Body. In 12:12-22 he speaks of the Body again and again. Today there is a neglect of the Body among many

Pentecostal people. They may seek the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit without realizing that the gifts of the Spirit are altogether for the Body. The gifts are of the members, but they are not for the members. Rather, the gifts are of the members and for the Body.

We may use the members of our physical body as an illustration of how the gifts are for the Body. My hand has a particular gift and is able to do certain things. But the gift and the functions of the hand are not for the hand itself, but for the body. Likewise the feet have the ability to walk. We may say that they have the gift of walking. But this ability, this gift, is for the body; it is not only for the feet. In the same principle, our mouth eats for the body, and our eyes see for the body. Would it not be a terrible thing if the mouth ate only for itself and not for the body? If such were the case, the food would remain in the mouth and not be supplied to the body. It would also be dreadful if the eyes functioned only for themselves and did not see for the body. The eyes have a function, the ability to see. This seeing gift, however, though it belongs to the eyes, is not for the eyes; it is for the body. The nose also functions for the body. If the nose could be selfish and keep all the air for itself, the body would not receive air. The nose breathes air for the body. All these illustrations show that the gift that belongs to each member is for the whole body.

We need to be impressed with the fact that immediately after emphasizing the Spirit, Paul turns to the Body and places a great emphasis on it. In 12:1-3 Paul stresses speaking, and in verses 4 through 11 his emphasis is on the Spirit. In these verses the word Spirit is used seven times. But in verses 12 through 22 the crucial word is the Body.

A. The Constitution of the Body

Verse 12 says, "For even as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of the body being many are one body, so also is Christ." "For" indicates that verse 12 is an explanation of verse 11. Verse 11 says that one Spirit operates all the various aspects of His

manifestation, distributing them to many believers individually. This is just like our physical body being one and having many members.

In Greek Christ in verse 12 is "the Christ," referring to the corporate Christ, composed of Christ Himself as the Head and the church as His Body with all the believers as its members. All the believers of Christ are organically united with Him and constituted of His life and element to become His Body, an organism, to express Him. Hence, He is not only the Head, but also the Body. As our physical body has many members yet is one, so is this Christ.

In verse 13 Paul continues, "For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." As the Spirit is the sphere and element of our spiritual baptism and in such a Spirit we were all baptized into one organic entity, the Body of Christ, so we should all, regardless of our races, nationalities, and social ranks, be this one Body. Christ is the life and constituent of this Body, and the Spirit is the reality of Christ. It is in this one Spirit that we were all baptized into this one living Body to express Christ.

The believers of Christ are baptized through water and in the Spirit into Christ, the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3), the name--the Person--of the Triune God (Matt. 28:19), and the Body of Christ. Baptism ushers the believers into an organic union with Christ and the Triune God, making them living members of the Body of Christ. All the gifts, as the manifestation of the Spirit distributed to the individual believers by the Spirit, are for the profit, the building up, of this Body. The apostle is very conscious of this. He is very Body-conscious, Body-centered, unlike the Corinthians and so many other believers through the centuries who have been very much self-centered concerning spiritual gifts. Hence, following this verse, Paul gives us a long discourse concerning the Body. His intention is to rescue the Corinthian believers from self-seeking back to a concern for the Body so that they may be no longer for their individual profit, but for the building up of the Body.

In verse 13 Paul speaks of Jews and Greeks and of slaves and free. Jews and Greeks refer to races and nationalities, and slaves and free refer to social ranks.

To be baptized in the Spirit is to get into the Spirit and be lost in Him. To drink the Spirit is to take the Spirit in and have our being saturated with Him. By these two procedures we are mingled with the Spirit. To be baptized in the Spirit is the initiation of the mingling and is once for all. To drink the Spirit is the continuation and accomplishment of the mingling and is perpetual, forever.

Pentecostal people talk a great deal about the baptism in the Spirit, but not nearly as much about being baptized into the Body. The baptism of the Spirit is not for individuals; it is for the Body. In verse 13 Paul clearly says, "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." This Body is an organic entity. We know from Matthew 28:19 and Galatians 3:27 that we have been baptized into the Triune God and into Christ. The Triune God and Christ are organic and living. From Romans 6:3 we know that we have been baptized not only into Christ but also into His death. Positively, we have been baptized into the Triune God and into Christ; negatively, we have been baptized into the death of Christ. This negative aspect of baptism clears away such negative things as sin, the flesh, the self, and the old creation. The ultimate issue of baptism is that we are put into the Body. Hallelujah, we are in the Body!

If we would have a proper appreciation of the spiritual gifts, we need to see the three important matters of speaking, the Spirit, and the Body. Spiritual gifts are a matter of speaking, by the Spirit, and for the Body. Whenever you use a spiritual gift for yourself and not for the Body, you annul your gift. To repeat, the gift is not for the member itself; it is for the body. If the feet used their gift of walking for themselves and not for the body, they would nullify their gift. Many are seeking the spiritual gifts and some seemingly have received the gifts. But in many cases they have received these gifts in vain because they use them for themselves and not for the Body. Many of today's Christians have no thought of the Body.

Actually, we do not need to seek the gifts so much. Instead, we should simply learn to be for the Body. If we are for the Body, we shall have an abundance of gifts. Furthermore, being for the Body will enrich, uplift, strengthen, and even multiply our gifts.

In dealing with the gifts, Paul was very Body-conscious, very church conscious. His concern was the building up of the church. The gifts are not for self-edification; they are for the building up of the Body.

I wish to testify by the Lord's mercy that throughout the years I have always been concerned for the Body. The reason I have a strong gift of speaking is that I have never had the thought to use this gift for myself. My burden, concern, and intention have been and still are for the churches. I have no desire to be a popular speaker. My burden is for the Body and for all the churches. The more I speak for the churches and to the churches, the more I have to minister.

I appreciate Paul's word in 12:13: "In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and were all given to drink one Spirit." Where can we drink one Spirit? We drink the Spirit in the Body. If we were not in the Body, there would not be any flow. There would be nothing to drink. The flow is in the Body. According to the book of Revelation, in eternity the flow will be in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1-2). Today, the flow, the river, is in the Body. In one Spirit we have all been baptized into one Body to drink one Spirit.

Many of us can testify that before we came into the church life in the Lord's recovery, we were either in a dry, parched land or in a marshy land. There may have been some water in this marshy land, but it was not good for drinking. But in the church life in the Lord's recovery, we are drinking the Spirit every day, even all the time. We are not only at a fountain--we are in the flow. How I appreciate this verse telling us that we have been baptized into one Body to drink! In one Spirit we have been baptized into one Body to drink the one Spirit. When we are full of the water of the Spirit, we have no choice but to let this water bubble out from within us. During the years

I have been ministering in this country, I have been bubbling over with the Spirit. I am bubbling over with the word of wisdom, with the word concerning Christ as the depths of God. I am also bubbling over with the word of knowledge. Furthermore, I can testify that I am not for my own interests. My only concern is the Body of Christ.

We all need to forget ourselves, our localities, our work, and our personal spirituality and be burdened by the Lord concerning His Body. This will cause us to be enriched, uplifted, and strengthened in our spiritual gifts. Imagine what would happen if all those receiving this word would be for the Body and would be willing to forget themselves, their individual spirituality, and their spiritual future. What a marvelous situation this would be! In the next period of time the Lord would be able to accomplish a great deal for the carrying out of God's administration on earth. The churches throughout the earth would truly be heavenly televisions expressing what Christ is doing in His heavenly ministry. For this to come about, we must see the Body and be for the Body.

B. The Indispensability of Each Member

In verses 14 through 22 we see the indispensability of each member of the Body. The body is not one member but many. The foot should not say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body." The ear should not say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body." If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the smelling be? But God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, even as He willed. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." Much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.

In 12:14-22 Paul mentions the Body ten times. However, in these verses he does not mention the Spirit even once. Here Paul stresses the Body. This is the reason I cannot agree with the Pentecostalists who talk about the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, but do not place the proper emphasis on the Body. Those who pay

attention to the Spirit and neglect the Body are divisive. No other Christians are as divisive as those in Pentecostalism.

We have pointed out again and again that in chapter twelve Paul first emphasizes speaking, then the Spirit, and then the Body. The proper speaking brings in the Spirit. When we say, "Lord Jesus," we are in the Spirit. Then, according to verse 13, the Spirit ushers us into the Body. Now we need to become Body-centered and Body-conscious. This is Paul's emphasis in 1 Corinthians 12.

Hallelujah for the speaking, for the Spirit, and for the Body! By speaking we are in the Spirit. When we take care of the Body, we are preserved in the Spirit. How can we get ourselves into the Spirit? By speaking, "Lord Jesus." How can we remain in the Spirit and be preserved in the Spirit? By being in the Body and caring for the Body. We need to do two things: speak and stay in the Body. When we speak, we are ushered into the Spirit, and when we stay in the Body, we are kept in the Spirit.

I can testify that daily I enjoy the Spirit very much. The reason I enjoy the Spirit is that I speak, "Lord Jesus," and I stay in the Body. It is not possible for me to get away from the Body. Wherever I go, the Body is there. Praise the Lord for the Body that preserves us in the Spirit!

When we are in the Spirit, we have the gifts of the Spirit. The Spirit never works in vain. As He is with us, He distributes certain gifts to us.

If we all get into the Spirit by speaking and stay in the Spirit by caring for the Body, the Lord will have a way to carry out God's administration. He will have the mystical Body as an instrument to express on earth what He is doing in the heavens. We all can be those who are in the Spirit and in the Body.

Since I left mainland China in 1949, about three hundred eighty churches have been raised up on five continents through this ministry. All this has been accomplished without mission boards, fund raising, or people trained in seminaries. On the contrary, it is our reflection of Christ's heavenly ministry for the carrying out of God's administration. What the Lord has done since

1949 is a strong evidence that what God needs on earth today is the practical expression of the mystical Body of Christ. For example, because the Body is universal, there is now a church in Pretoria, South Africa, although we never sent anyone to that locality for the church life. This causes me to have high expectations for the future. The future of the Lord's recovery is glorious. I surely believe that whatever the Lord has spoken in the New Testament will be fulfilled. There is no doubt that the Lord is working to recover, to gain, His mystical Body. We need to discern His Body and remain in the Body so that we may enjoy the Spirit for God's administration.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-NINE

DEALING WITH THE GIFTS

(3)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:23-31

C. The Tempering of the Members

In verses 23 through 27 Paul speaks regarding the tempering of the members. Verses 23 and 24 say, "And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, these we clothe with more abundant honor, and our uncomely members have more abundant comeliness; but our comely members have no need. But God has tempered the body together, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacked." The Greek word translated tempered literally means blended; hence, mixed, compounded, adjusted. God has blended all the different members of Christ together into one Body. For this we need much transformation (Rom. 12:2), from the natural life to the spiritual, by the same Spirit, for the practical Body life.

It is not easy to be blended together in the Body. It is even difficult for a husband and wife to be tempered together. In the Body we are blended, tempered, with many others. Furthermore, the Body is both local and universal. If you think you have been blended quite well with the saints in your locality, the Lord may bring someone from another part of the world to test how much you have been tempered. This is the situation of the church in Anaheim. Anaheim is a good example of a church where people of many races and nationalities meet together and experience the blending, the mixing, the compounding. To be compounded is to be adjusted. God has blended, tempered,

all the different members of Christ together into one Body. Such tempering requires a great deal of transformation. For the practical Body life we need to be transformed by the Spirit from the natural life to the spiritual life.

God has tempered the Body together, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacks so "that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another" (v. 25). In the Body life the same care should be given to all the different members. Difference in care causes divisions.

God cannot carry out His administration if the Body is divided. God has one way to carry out His administration in the universe. According to Ephesians 1:10, God will head up all things in Christ through the Body of Christ. First Christ must head up the church. Then God will use the Body of Christ headed up by Christ and in Christ to head up all things. The time is coming when all things will be headed up in Christ. This will be the dispensation of the fullness of times. In order for this to take place, God must head us up in Christ. This is the reason the Lord definitely needs His recovery.

In today's Christianity, the Body has been divided. Some claim that we are narrow and exclusive. Actually, the situation is the opposite. We are not exclusive, and we are not narrow. We recognize and accept all genuine believers, no matter what their background may be. As long as they are blood-washed, Spirit-regenerated believers in Christ, we receive them. We do not have any creed, any particular belief, or any special terms or conditions. We simply believe the Bible in a general way. This gives God an opportunity to gather a remnant of those who love Him and seek Him and use them to recover the proper church life. God is using the church life in the Lord's recovery as a testimony of the oneness in the midst of the divisions.

We strongly testify that we reject all divisive factors. An example of such a factor would be insisting on a certain form of baptism. Although we practice pray-reading, we do not allow pray-reading to become a factor of division. If those attending the meetings do not want to pray-read, we

do not insist that they do so. The matter of tongues is not a factor of division among us. Because we reject all factors of division, the Lord has a way to gain a remnant to replace the divisions so that God can carry out His administration.

In verses 3 through 11 Paul mentions the Spirit again and again. But in verses 12 through 27 he makes no mention of the Spirit, but uses the word body eighteen times. In verse 13 we have the transition from the Spirit to the Body: "For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit." In one Spirit we have all been baptized into one Body. Many Pentecostal people, however, talk only of being baptized in the Spirit. But verse 13 says that in one Spirit we have been baptized into one Body to drink one Spirit. It is crucial to realize that we have been baptized into one Body to drink. Not only have we been baptized in one Spirit; we have also been baptized into one Body and with a particular purpose--to drink one Spirit. In the recovery we emphasize very strongly the matter of being in the one Body drinking one Spirit. Are you now in the Body drinking? I can declare boldly that I am in the one Body drinking the one Spirit.

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

wonderful to be drinking the Spirit in the Body! Sometimes I enjoy this drinking so much that I am excited and beside myself with joy.

After making the transfer from the Spirit to the Body in verse 13, in verses 14 through 27 Paul talks about the body with the members. Here we see that Paul is centered on the Body and burdened regarding the Body. The spiritual gifts are a matter not only of the Spirit, but also a matter for the Body. These gifts are of the Spirit and by the Spirit, but they are not for us as individuals. The gifts are for the Body.

Throughout the years I have known a number of brothers and sisters who, humanly speaking, do not seem to have any gifts. But they have a strong spirit with a heart for the Body. As a result, eventually they have been much used by the Lord. I know of a certain couple who have been visited by the Lord's mercy. They received His grace, and they began to love Him. Gradually, over the years, they have been growing in the Body and have received a burden for the Body. The only gift they seem to have is that of loving the Body, of loving the saints. Now in their locality there is a beautiful expression of the church life.

However, those who are talented by birth, gifted by rebirth, and well educated may not be useful at all in the raising up of the proper church life. Instead, they may not use their gifts for the Body, but for themselves. But the couple I have just referred to is in the Body and cares for the Body. For this reason, the Lord has used them in the raising up of a local church. If this brother and sister continue to receive grace and be preserved in grace, their function, their gift, will be enriched, uplifted, and multiplied. However, those who are talented, gifted, educated, and eloquent may cause problems and eventually even cause divisions.

Today's charismatic movement seems to be quite prevailing. However, it is also very divided. Furthermore, it does not help believers to grow in life. The charismatic movement is of an altogether different category from the Lord's recovery.

It is important for us to see that concerning the gifts Paul places great emphasis on the Body. We must be in the Body, we must be for the Body, and we must be thoroughly Body-conscious and Body-centered. If we are Body-conscious and Body-centered, we shall be used by the Lord.

If we examine the history of the Lord's recovery, we shall see that those who care for the Body have been used by the Lord. But those who neglect the Body have experienced failure. Whoever depends on the Body and whoever is in the Body and for the Body, not putting their trust in the gifts, will be useful. This is a law which operates in the spiritual realm. The reason this law functions is that God does not care for our gifts--He cares for the Body. Your gift is not the means for God to carry out His administration. The means is the mystical Body of Christ. The Body is the instrument God will use to carry out His administration.

Some may point out that the Body has been divided. Yes, this is true. But in the Bible there is a principle--the principle of recovery. Even though the Body has been divided, God still has the principle of recovery. According to this principle, God does not need a large number or a mass movement. It is sufficient that a small remnant take the standing of God's intention and be one with Him in His intention. Then this remnant, this small number, will be used by God to recover what has been lost. Therefore, in the eyes of God we are the Body. We are not the Body in the original sense, but we are the Body in the recovered sense, in the sense of recovery.

We know from experience that often what is recovered is more dear, excellent, and precious than what was lost. The Lord has lost His treasure, but now He has a recovery. This recovery is dear and precious to Him. Furthermore, throughout the world the Lord's recovery has been very much blessed by the Lord. For example, although we sent no missionaries to Japan, many churches have been raised up there through the work of the heavenly Administrator operating through His Body.

It is vital for us to see the heavenly administration and

the heavenly principles. I certainly do not despise today's Christians; however, I do not agree with their mistakes and their blindness. What they thought was the best way to work for God is actually not so. There is no need for us to do so many things or spend money in the way they do. What we need is to give the Lord a way to carry out His administration through His Body. If we take His way and let Him be the Administrator, He will be able to gain the earth for Himself. By His mercy, this is exactly what we are doing in the church life today. We are simply allowing Him to be the Administrator, and we follow the principle that the gifts must be for the Body. Whatever is for the Body is the most useful gift. Hence, I urge you to forget what you can do and what your gifts are and instead care for the Body.

IV. THE GIFTS GOD PLACED IN THE CHURCH

In 12:28-31 Paul speaks concerning the gifts God has placed in the church. Verses 3 through 11 emphasize the Spirit, verses 12 through 27 emphasize the Body, and verses 28 through 31 emphasize administration. Verse 28 says, "And God has placed some in the church: firstly apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers; then works of power, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues." The church here refers both to its universal and local aspects. From verse 12 through 27 the church is considered the Body of Christ. The Body is an organism for Christ as the believers' life to grow and express Himself. The church is an assembly for God to operate His administration. Therefore, in chapter twelve in dealing with the gifts, four matters are emphasized: speaking, the Spirit, the Body, and administration. Speaking ushers us into the Spirit, the Spirit brings us into the Body, and the Body keeps us in the Spirit. Thus, Ephesians 4:4 speaks of one Body and one Spirit. If we are in the Body, we have the Spirit, for the Body preserves us in the Spirit. If this is our situation, the Body is not divided; rather, it remains one in the Spirit. Then the Body is qualified for the carrying out of God's

administration. The Body in the sense of being the church is the means for God to administrate on earth.

The Body as the church is the assembly of God. The Body of Christ is an organism to grow Christ and express Him. The assembly of God, the church, is the means for God to carry out His administration. Thus, we go from speaking, to the Spirit, to the Body, and, ultimately, to God's administration. The Lord's coming back will be the ultimate consummation, the peak, of His administration. What we are doing in the Lord's recovery is preparing the way to bring Him back. Hallelujah for speaking, the Spirit, the Body, and administration! All this is to bring the Lord Jesus back.

In verse 28 Paul mentions apostles, prophets, and teachers. The apostles are those who are called and sent by God (1:1; Rom. 1:1) to preach the gospel that sinners may be saved to be the materials for the building of the church, to establish the churches (Acts 14:21-23), and to teach the divine truth. Their ministry is universal for all the churches. The prophets are those who speak for God and speak forth God by God's revelation, and who speak sometimes with inspired prediction (Acts 11:27-28). Teachers are those who teach the truths according to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42) and the prophets' revelation. Both prophets and teachers are universal as well as local (Eph. 4:11; Acts 13:1).

In verse 28 Paul also refers to helps and administrations. The helps or helpers, helpings, must refer to the services of the deacons and deaconesses (1 Tim. 3:8-13). The administrations or administrators, governings, refers to the eldership in the church.

In verse 28 Paul lastly mentions various kinds of tongues. This is the second time the speaking in tongues is listed as the last of the aspects of God's operation in the church.

In verses 29 and 30 Paul asks a number of questions: "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of powers? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" Of course, the answer

to all these seven questions is no. Speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues are again, the third time, listed last in Paul's writing because they render the least profit to the church (14:4-6, 19).

In verse 31 Paul says, "But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And yet I show to you a way of excellence." To earnestly desire the greater gifts is to be zealous for them, to delight in them. The expression greater gifts indicates that some gifts, like speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues, are smaller because they are less profitable to the church. It also indicates that we should desire earnestly the greater gifts, like prophesying and teaching, which are more profitable for the building of the church (14:1-6). To have these greater gifts we need to grow in life unto maturity. They are developed, by growth in life, out of the initial gifts (1:7) we received when we were regenerated.

Paul concludes verse 31 by saying that he would show the Corinthians a way of excellence. The way to have the greater gifts is love. This way is fully defined in the following chapter.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY

DEALING WITH THE GIFTS

(4)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 13:1-13

First Corinthians 13 is the direct continuation of chapter twelve. In the last verse of chapter twelve, verse 31, Paul says, "But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And yet I show to you a way of excellence." The way of excellence is love. Thus, chapter thirteen presents this excellent way.

In chapter twelve Paul emphasizes speaking, the Spirit, the Body, and God's administration. Now in chapter thirteen we have love as the fifth emphasis. Speaking ushers us into the Spirit, the Spirit brings us into the Body, and the Body preserves us in the Spirit. Furthermore, the Body is for God's administration. Paul's fifth emphasis, the matter of love, is the way to use the gifts, the way to be in the Body, and the way to be for the Body.

Chapter thirteen is not an isolated section of 1 Corinthians. Rather, it comes between chapters twelve and fourteen and with them forms a portion in this Epistle dealing with the gifts. Therefore, we should never consider chapter thirteen as if it stood by itself. No, it is a continuation of chapter twelve and leads into chapter fourteen. The first verse of chapter fourteen indicates this: "Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy." The last verse of chapter twelve brings us into chapter thirteen, and the first verse of chapter fourteen concludes chapter thirteen and brings us into chapter fourteen. In 12:31 Paul speaks of the excellent way to exercise the gifts, in chapter thirteen he presents love as this excellent way, and in 14:1 he advises

us to pursue love and desire earnestly the spiritual gifts, especially that we may prophesy. Thus, these chapters make up one unit, with chapter thirteen continuing chapter twelve and chapter fourteen continuing chapter thirteen.

Is love only a way, or is it also a gift? According to Romans 12, there is ground to say that love is a gift. In Romans 12:6-8 Paul says that we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us and that we should exercise them accordingly. According to verse 8, even the showing of mercy is a gift. Then in verses 9 and 10 Paul goes on to say, "Let love be without hypocrisy....Love one another warmly in brotherly love, vying with one another in showing honor." Then in verses 12 and 13 he says, "Rejoicing in hope, enduring in tribulation, persevering in prayer, communicating to the needs of the saints, pursuing hospitality." All these, along with love, are spoken of in a chapter concerned with gifts. Therefore, we may say that love is at least on the border of the gifts.

Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 13:8 may also indicate that love is a gift and not merely a way: "Love never falls away; but whether prophecies, they shall be done away; or tongues, they shall cease; or knowledge, it shall be done away." Here Paul lists love along with the gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge. There is no doubt that to prophesy, speak in tongues, and teach with the word of knowledge are gifts. Although prophecies will be done away, tongues will cease, and knowledge will be done away, love will never fall away.

I have pointed out that there are certain brothers and sisters who apparently do not have any gifts. However, they are absolutely for the Body. To be for the Body is a matter of love, and to care for the members of the Body requires love. If we do not have love, how can we care for others? Love is necessary to care for the members so that the Body may be built up. Thus, love is the greatest gift. Nothing edifies people as much as love does. Love is a spiritual antibiotic. If there is love in a local church, there will be no need to worry about spiritual diseases. Love is

the best medicine to cure such diseases. Love is a gift, even the greatest gift.

It is not difficult to have the gift of love. There is no need to fast for love or pray to receive it. Furthermore, there is no need to imitate, pretend, or perform. Love is within us. As long as you have the divine life through regeneration, you also have love, for love is the expression of life, another form of life.

V. THE EXCELLENT WAY FOR EXERCISING THE GIFTS

A. The Need of Love

Paul takes a whole chapter to emphasize the crucial matter of love. His first emphasis, on speaking, occupies just three verses; his second emphasis, on the Spirit, occupies nine or ten verses; and the third and fourth matter he emphasizes, the Body and administration, occupy sixteen verses and three verses respectively. But when Paul comes to the crucial matter of love, he devotes an entire chapter to it. This shows how important love is.

Love is a matter of life. Certain gifts are also related to life, for they are developed from the initial gifts: the Holy Spirit and the divine life. However, other gifts, especially miraculous gifts such as speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, works of power or miracles, and healings, are not developed out of life. For this reason, Paul opens chapter thirteen by saying, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." Sounding brass and clanging cymbals give sounds without life. This is a genuine illustration of tongue-speaking. In chapters twelve and fourteen Paul places tongues and interpretation of tongues last. But here he mentions tongue-speaking first, but in a negative way that indicates that it is not a matter of life.

In the same principle, divine healing may not be a matter of life. There is a healing which comes by gift and a healing which comes by grace. This latter kind is of life, even of resurrection life. During my Christian life I have experienced the gift of healing. But I wish to testify that

many times I have enjoyed healing by grace. For two and a half years, from September, 1943, until the spring of 1946, I was seriously ill with tuberculosis. For many months I was confined to bed. Every day I prayed to the Lord and was dealt with by Him. I did not pray for the church or for the work, but for my own situation. Eventually what mattered most was not that I would be healed, but that I would be thoroughly cleansed and purified. I can testify that during that period of time, my motives, intentions, and every part of my inner being were dealt with. Then the Lord healed me not by a gift in power, but by grace in life. That healing was thorough and absolute. I draw on my experience to print out that to receive healing by means of a gift has nothing to do with life. However, there is a healing by grace in life.

I appreciate the gifts in life much more than the miraculous gifts. I have seen some believers who genuinely received certain miraculous gifts only to later turn from the Lord in unbelief. What we need is life and love, the best gift, which ministers life to others.

As those who love the Lord, who are absolute with Him, and who are seeking the building of His Body so that He may have the instrument to carry out God's administration on earth for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose, we must pursue love. Elders and co-workers, you need love. Brothers and sisters, you all need love. Only love builds up the Body. Moreover, according to chapter thirteen, the gift of love is everlasting, for it is constituted of the divine life and is the expression of God, the expression of eternal life. Therefore, we all should pursue love.

In 13:2 and 3 Paul says, "And if I have prophecy and know all the mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I dole out all my goods, and if I deliver up my body that I may boast, but have not love, it profits me nothing." To deliver up the body in verse 3 is to die as a martyr. Instead of "that I may boast," some manuscripts read "that I may be burned."

B. The Definition of Love

In 13:4-7 Paul gives us the definition of love. This definition includes fifteen virtues of love: suffering long, being kind, not being jealous, not bragging, not puffed up, not behaving unbecomingly, not seeking its own things, not provoked, not taking account of evil, not rejoicing over unrighteousness, rejoicing with the truth, covering all things, believing all things, hoping all things, and enduring all things.

In verse 4 Paul says, "Love suffers long, and is kind." Love is the expression of life, which is the element of God. Hence, God is love (1 John 4:16). God as life is expressed in love. All the fifteen virtues of love listed in verses 4 through 7 are the divine virtues of God's life. Such a life differs from the outward gifts listed in chapter twelve. The Corinthians were after the outward gifts, but they neglected love, the expression of life. Thus, they were still fleshy, fleshly, or soulish (3:1, 3; 2:14). They needed to grow in life, expressed by love, by pursuing love, not the outward gifts, so that they might be spiritual (2:14).

In verse 4 Paul says that love does not brag. Bragging is somewhat different from boasting. To brag is to boast of one's self in a way to damage others. It is a kind of boasting which depreciates others and puts them down. Love certainly does not brag.

In verse 5 Paul points out that love "does not take account of evil." The Greek word here indicates that love does not keep a record like a bookkeeper. This means that if you love others, you will not keep a record of their mistakes.

Verse 6 says, "Does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth." The totality of unrighteousness is Satan, and the totality of truth is God. Love as the expression of the divine life does not rejoice over Satan's unrighteousness, but rejoices with God's truth. Love does not rejoice over anyone's unrighteousness; instead, it rejoices with the truth.

According to verse 7, love covers all things. The Greek word, also used in 9:12, can be rendered "bears." Literally,

it means to contain (as a vessel), to conceal; hence, to cover (as a roof). This word is used in the Gospels regarding the incident where some people broke up a roof in order to bring a certain sick man to the Lord Jesus. They made a hole in the roof and then lowered the man to the place where the Lord was (Mark 2:4). This Greek word means to make a hole in someone's roof. We may do this by gossiping about others. As we talk about them, we make a hole in the roof over them; that is, we uncover them. However, love covers all things; it does not make a hole in anyone's roof.

If we consider the fifteen virtues of love listed in these verses, we shall realize that love is nothing other than God Himself. Who other than God could have all these virtues? We cannot endure all things or believe all things. Neither can we truly have longsuffering. Only God has all these virtues. Hence, the love described here is God Himself. Furthermore, the Bible elsewhere says clearly that God is love (1 John 4:16). God is also life. Life is God's essence, and love is God's expression. In Himself God is life, but God expressed is love. The love which is God Himself with His divine essence as life has these fifteen virtues. This is the reason that in 1 Corinthians Paul charges the believers to grow in life. They were short of life, short of love. In other words, they were short of God and needed to grow in life.

C. The Excelling of Love

In 13:8-13 Paul speaks concerning the excelling of love. In verse 8 he declares, "Love never falls away; but whether prophecies, they shall be done away; or tongues, they shall cease; or knowledge, it shall be done away." For love never to fall away means that it survives everything, holds its place forever. Love never fails, never fades out or comes to an end. It is like the eternal life of God. All the gifts, whether prophecies, or tongues, or knowledge, are means for God's operation; they are not life to express God. Hence, they shall cease and be done away. They are all dispensational. Only life, which love expresses, is eternal. According to the following verses, all gifts are for the

immature child in this age. They will all be done away in

the next age. Only love is of a mature man and will last for eternity. When we live and act by love, we have a foretaste of the next age and of eternity.

Nothing can shake love or remove it. All the other gifts, including prophecy, will eventually be done away with, but love remains. It never falls away. In the coming age there will be love, but there will be no tongues, interpretation, or prophecy. Both tongues, the most childish of the gifts, and prophecy, a more mature gift, will be done away.

In verses 9 and 10 Paul continues, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is complete comes, that which is in part shall be done away." In this age we know and prophesy only in part, not in full. The word "when" in verse 10 refers to the next age, the kingdom age. The word "complete" also means mature, in contrast with childish in the following verse. Furthermore, "that which is in part" refers to such things as prophecies and knowledge, as mentioned in verse 8.

Verse 11 says, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child, I reasoned as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things." In this age the believers are children, having the childish gifts. The word "child" here means an immature one. To reason as a child is to take account of things as a child. In the next age the mature believers will become men, and all the childish gifts, especially the least ones, tongue-speaking and its interpretation, will be done away. However, we can have a foretaste of the next age by living a life of love in this age. Love matures us in life; gifts keep us in childhood.

In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, "For now we see by means of a mirror obscurely, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall fully know as also I was fully known." The word "now" refers to this age. Concerning the expression "by means of a mirror obscurely," J. N. Darby says in his New Translation, "That is, through some medium which, in degree, hinders vision. The word means also 'a mirror,' but it is used for window, made, not of clear transparent glass, as now, but of semi-transparent materials."

The word "then" in verse 12 refers to the next age. In verse 13 Paul concludes, "But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love." The word "but" here indicates a contrast between verse 13 and the preceding verses.

Faith receives the divine things (John 1:12) and realizes the spiritual and unseen things (Heb. 11:1). Hope reaps and partakes of the things realized by faith (Rom. 8:24-25). Love enjoys the things received and realized by faith and partaken of by hope for nourishing ourselves, building up others (1 Cor. 8:1), and expressing God, thus fulfilling the entire law (Rom. 13:8-10). Such a love causes us to grow in life for the development and use of the spiritual gifts, and is the excellent way to have the greater gifts. Hence, it is the greatest of the three abiding virtues. So we must pursue it (1 Cor. 14:1).

Love cares for the Body and builds up the Body. First love unites the Body and then builds it up. Therefore, we focus our attention on the love which builds up the Body. We should pursue love and remain in the Body to enjoy the Spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-ONE

DEALING WITH THE GIFTS

(5)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 14:1-25

As Paul was writing chapters twelve, thirteen, and fourteen of 1 Corinthians, there was a burden in his spirit and on his heart concerning certain crucial matters: speaking, the Spirit, the Body, God's administration, and love. These five matters are emphasized in chapters twelve and thirteen. In chapter fourteen Paul comes to another main point: the superiority of a particular gift for the building up of the church. Among the many spiritual gifts, one is superior not for our work, maturity, or spiritual interests, but for the building up of the church. As we shall see, this superior gift is that of prophesying. Therefore, in dealing with the gifts, Paul emphasizes six matters: speaking, the Spirit, the Body, the administration of God, love, and the gift which is superior for the building up of the church.

Paul's ultimate concern is not speaking, the Spirit, the Body, God's administration, or love as the excellent way to exercise the gifts. Rather, Paul's ultimate concern is the building up of the church. Paul was very church-conscious and church-centered. His concern was focused on the church.

In Colossians 1:24 Paul says, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His Body, which is the church." Christ died not only for redemption, but also for the church. According to Ephesians 5:25, Christ gave Himself up for the church. Yes, Christ died to accomplish redemption. Redemption, however, is a procedure; it is not God's goal, God's destination.

Redemption is a way to reach the goal, but the goal is the church.

Because the church is God's goal, we cannot agree with those Christians who neglect the church and who have only a superficial grasp of Christ's redemption. Many do not even like to hear the church mentioned. But the death of Christ mainly and ultimately is for the church.

In eternity we were chosen and predestinated by God. Because we fell away from God, there was the need for Christ to accomplish redemption in order to bring us back to God. But His redemption is not God's goal; it is not His ultimate intention. God's goal, His intention, is to have His chosen people organically united to be the Body, the church. Even if we had not fallen, it nevertheless would have been necessary for God to carry out a certain procedure to obtain the church.

When I was young, I was told simply that Christ came because we had fallen into sin. I was taught that God loved us and gave His only begotten Son to save us. According to this understanding, if we had not fallen, it would not have been necessary for Christ to come. But it is a mistake to think that God's intention is merely to redeem us from hell to heaven. God's intention is to have the church, and the death of Christ redeems us so that we may become His Body. This was the reason Paul was church-conscious and church-centered. In his consciousness the church was an extremely crucial matter.

As we consider the spiritual gifts, we need to ask what the gifts are for. Many Christians care only for the gifts, but they do not care for the purpose of the gifts. Some desire to have a gift of preaching, and others desire the miraculous gifts such as the gift of tongue-speaking or the gift of healing. But they may not care at all what these gifts are for. Paul was different. The concern deep within him was for the building up of the church. He knew what gifts were useful for the building up of the church. We need to learn of Paul to be concerned for the building up of the church. Whether we are spiritual, mature, or gifted is secondary. The primary thing in God's economy is the

building up of the church. Paul's emphasis, his main point, in chapter fourteen concerns what gift is best, not for us, but for the building up of the church. Yes, God has given many gifts, but not all gifts are important with respect to the building up of the church. Therefore, in this chapter Paul shows us which gift is superior for the building up of the church.

VI. THE SUPERIORITY OF PROPHESYING OVER SPEAKING IN TONGUES

A. Prophesying Building Up the Church More

1. Pursuing Love and Desiring Earnestly Spiritual Gifts, but Rather to Prophesy

In 14:1 Paul says, "Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but rather that you may prophesy." This charge is based upon the revelation in 12:31 through 13:13. To pursue love is to seek after the growth in life for the development of the gifts in life. Hence, it must be matched with an earnest desire for the most profitable gift, the gift of prophecy.

Paul was very wise, and he composed verse 1 in a wise manner. In this verse he was not actually encouraging the Corinthians to seek such gifts as healing, miracles, and tongue-speaking. Instead, Paul's intention was that they would seek the gift of prophecy. However, Paul did not tell the Corinthians to forget all the spiritual gifts except the gift of prophecy. He told them to desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but rather, or especially, that they would prophesy. He wanted them to pursue what was best, what was most valuable. He knew that there was turmoil among the Corinthians and that they needed to be calmed down. For this reason, he exercised wisdom, telling them that love is the best way to exercise the gifts and then charging them to pursue love and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that they may prophesy.

Since to prophesy is to speak for the Lord and speak forth the Lord, that is, to minister Christ to others, which

is the main thing in the church meeting, prophesying requires the divine life to fill it as its content. Love is the excellent way to experience the divine life and make it the content of the gift of prophecy for the building up of the church. Hence, we must pursue love and desire earnestly these greater gifts.

2. The Comparison between Speaking in Tongues and Prophesying

In verses 2 and 3 Paul says, "For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one hears, but in spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks to men for building up and encouragement and consolation." The apostle's word in verses 2 through 6 gives a clear and definite view that speaking in tongues is much less important than prophesying. He strongly belittles the gift of tongues and exalts the gift of prophecy because his main concern is the church, not the individual believers. Speaking in tongues, even if it is genuine and proper, only edifies the speaker himself, but prophesying builds up the church. To prophesy in revelation or to teach in knowledge with clear, understandable words is more profitable to the church than to speak in tongues with unknown words. Since to prophesy, to speak forth the Lord, ministers Christ to others, it builds them up and gives them encouragement and consolation.

I would like to emphasize the fact that in the New Testament to prophesy is not mainly to predict, but mainly to speak for the Lord and to speak forth the Lord. Even in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesying is not mainly a matter of prediction, but of speaking for God and of speaking God forth. Of course, the element of prediction is included. Throughout the Bible, to prophesy means to speak for God and to speak forth God and, in a secondary way, to predict. To prophesy is to tell for, to tell forth, and also to foretell. This is a proper understanding of prophecy in the Bible.

To prophesy in the sense of telling for and telling forth requires much growth in life. For this, we need to know God and we need to experience Christ. If we do not have

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

To repeat, in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 the noun prophecy and the verb prophesy do not mainly refer to prediction; they mainly denote speaking for God and speaking forth God. Nevertheless, many of those in today's Pentecostalism or charismatic movement place great emphasis on the element of prediction and neglect the more important matters of speaking for God and speaking God forth.

In verse 4 Paul continues, "He who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but he who prophesies builds up the church." To prophesy, to speak for the Lord and speak forth the Lord, not only builds up the individual saints, but also builds up the church. Tongue-speaking, on the contrary, does not build up the church.

In verse 5 Paul goes on to say, "Now I desire that you all speak in tongues, but rather that you may prophesy; now greater is he who prophesies than he who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, that the church may receive building up." What was on Paul's heart was not that the Corinthians would seek the gift of tongue-speaking; it was to encourage them to prophesy so that the church might be built. Paul's burden was the building up of the church. This was the concern deep in his heart.

In verse 6 Paul asks a question: "But now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either in revelation or in knowledge or in prophecy or in teaching?" This implies that speaking in tongues does not profit anyone except the tongue-speaker. Here we again see Paul's wisdom in writing to the Corinthians. He knew they were in turmoil, and he spoke to them with a certain amount of carefulness in order to calm them down. He pointed out to them that he would not profit them unless he spoke to them either in revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching.

In verse 7 Paul continues, "Even lifeless things, whether flute or harp, in giving a sound, if they give no distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp?" The apostle's illustrations in verses 7 through 11 indicate that the Corinthian believers abused speaking in tongues by doing it in a nonsensical way, uttering an "uncertain sound" (v. 8) of "no distinction" (v. 7), "without significance" (v. 10). They also overused it by practicing it in any place, in any way, and in any situation. Hence Paul corrects and restricts them from their abuse and excessive use of such a small gift of the least profit, that they may seek the greater gifts and abound in the building up of the church.

In verse 7 Paul is definitely indicating that the Corinthians should cease uttering meaningless sounds. Today many practice tongue-speaking in a meaningless way. In many cases those who speak have no idea what they are saying.

In verse 8 Paul asks, "For if indeed the trumpet gives an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?" Among many Pentecostal people today, no one can prepare for battle, because there is no definite direction.

In verse 9 Paul says, "So also you, unless you give by the tongue an intelligible word, how will it be known what is being said? For you will be speaking into the air." The tongue here refers to the physical tongue, not to a language or dialect. Certainly in this verse Paul is not encouraging the practice of tongue-speaking.

Verse 10 says, "There are, perhaps, so many kinds of voices in the world and not one without significance." In Greek the word rendered voice is the same as sound in verse 7 (the singular one) and verse 8. Here it denotes voices, that is, languages.

Verse 11 continues, "If then I do not know the meaning of the voice, I shall be to him who speaks a barbarian, and he who speaks a barbarian to me." Literally, the Greek word rendered "meaning" means power, force. The Greek word translated barbarian, *barbaros*, means foreigner, that is, a non-Greek, one who does not speak Greek. "Supposed

to be originally a descriptive word of those who uttered harsh, rude accents.... Later, the word took the sense of outlandish or rude" (Vincent).

In verse 12 Paul declares, "So also you, since you are zealots of spiritual gifts, seek that you may abound to the building up of the church." From this verse we see that the Corinthian believers were not only zealous; they were zealots. They had become such persons.

In this verse we see once again by the words "abound to the building up of the church" that the apostle is fully occupied with the consideration of building up the church. He is fully church-conscious and church-centered, altogether different from the self-centered Corinthians. Their problem with spiritual gifts was due to their self-seeking, not caring for the building up of the church. In dealing with the first six problems, in the realm of human life, the apostle stresses Christ as God's unique portion to us. In dealing with the last five problems, in the realm of the divine administration, he emphasizes the church as God's unique goal for us. The Corinthians were not only devoid of Christ, but also ignorant of the church. The apostle's completing ministry (Col. 1:25) is comprised of Christ as the mystery of God (Col. 2:2) and the church as the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). However, the Corinthians missed both, even though they were under the apostle's ministry. They were pitifully in themselves, blind and ignorant.

In verses 13 and 14 Paul continues, "Wherefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful." For our spirit to be used and exercised in prayer is surely healthy to our spiritual life. But for our mind to be unfruitful and unused is absolutely unhealthy. We must exercise our regenerated spirit with our renewed mind in praying to the Lord. Our mind should be set on our spirit (Rom. 8:6), never detached from it, even in our daily walk, needless to say in our prayer. Our prayer must be from our God-contacted and God-contacting spirit and through our sober and understanding mind, with clear and

understandable words, that our prayer may touch God, nourish and strengthen ourselves, and build up others.

Verse 15 says, "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray also with the mind; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing also with the mind." Paul's word about praying "also with the mind" implies that he encourages the receivers of his letter to pray not merely in an unknown tongue, but also with clear and understandable words.

The phrase "with the mind" does not mean with the mind only and not with the spirit at all. In Ephesians 6:18 the apostle charges us to pray at every time in spirit. Prayer is worship, which should be in spirit (John 4:24). When we pray with the spirit, not in an unknown tongue, but in understandable words, our mind is automatically used to interpret and express the thought of the spirit. What the apostle means here is that in the church meeting, for the profit of all the attendants, we should pray with our mind in intelligible words (1 Cor. 14:19) to express the burden in our spirit. In a church meeting our prayer should not only be heard by the Lord for His answer, but should also be intelligible to all the attendants for their profit. For this purpose we should also learn to use our mind in public prayer as we do our spirit, training our mind to cooperate with our spirit, even to be one with our spirit, that the spirit may become the spirit of our mind (Eph. 4:23).

Verse 16 continues, "Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how shall he who fills the place of the unlearned say the Amen at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?" This reveals that in the church meetings during the apostle's time, when one prayed all the others said Amen, even "the Amen," at his prayer.

In verse 17 Paul again indicates how much he is concerned for the building up of the church: "For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not builded up." This indicates that not only our prophesying and teaching in the church meetings should build up others, but also our prayers and thanks to the Lord. This shows how much the apostle is concerned with the building up of the church and

the saints. His word in this verse is not only a correction but a charge.

Those who advocate the practice of tongue-speaking appreciate Paul's word in verse 18: "I thank God I speak in tongues more than all of you." However, they often seem to forget that Paul's thought is not completed in verse 18, but continues into verse 19, where he says, "But in the church I would rather speak five words with my mind that I might instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." This shows how much speaking in intelligible words is needed in the church meeting for the building up of the church, and how speaking in tongues actually is not needed at all. To be sure, in these verses Paul is not encouraging us to speak in tongues.

B. Prophesying Convicting People More

In verse 20 Paul goes on to say, "Brothers, do not be children in your understanding, but in malice be babes, and in your understanding become full-grown." The Corinthian believers were not only infants in life (3:1), but also children in understanding. They needed to grow both in life and in the understanding of their mind. All the apostle's dealings with their problems were for this purpose, that they might mature in every way.

The Greek word translated understanding also means thinking, reasoning, mind. In Greek it is different from the word for mind in verses 15 and 19. It "emphasizes the distinction from ecstasy" (Vincent). This is in regard to the Corinthian believers' understanding and thinking concerning speaking in tongues. They were ecstatic in this practice, thus childish in their understanding concerning it, not using their mind properly as a matured believer should. The apostle advises them to grow and become full-grown in their understanding, that is, in the proper use of their mind, as he uses his (v. 19), in the matter of tongue-speaking. The childish Corinthian believers needed to become full-grown in their understanding so that they might be able to know the things which are to be mentioned in verses 21 through 25.

Verse 21 says, "In the law it is written, In other tongues and with other lips I will speak to this people, even so they will not listen to Me, says the Lord." The law in this verse refers to the Old Testament. This word in Isaiah 28:9-13 indicates that the speech in strange tongues was a chastisement for the children of Israel's unbelief toward the intelligible word of God. Hence, the apostle's quotation of this word implies that the Corinthians have not properly received the intelligible revelation of God through the apostles.

Verse 22 continues, "So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to the unbelievers; but prophecy is not to the unbelievers, but to those who believe." "So then" at the beginning of this verse indicates that according to the word in verse 21 quoted from Isaiah 28, tongues are for a negative sign to the unbelievers, signifying their poor condition of unbelieving. It implies that whenever or wherever a strange tongue is spoken, peoples' unbelief is there. The apostle's intention here is to hold the Corinthians back from their excessive practice of speaking in tongues. But prophecy is for a positive sign to those who believe, signifying their proper condition of believing. This is an encouragement to the practice of prophesying. The fact that tongues are a sign to unbelievers may indicate that those who want to receive the gift of tongues may have an evil heart of unbelief.

Verse 23 says, "If therefore the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak in tongues, and the unlearned or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are insane?" Paul's word about all speaking in tongues refers to all the functioning ones, not to all the attendants in the meeting. If in a meeting all the functioning ones speak in tongues, others may consider they are mad. Hence, to encourage all to speak in tongues, others may consider they are mad. Hence, to encourage all to speak in tongues in the church meeting is not right; it is against Paul's word.

The Greek word rendered insane also means mad, raving mad. This word is a strong discouragement to the excessive practice of speaking in tongues.

In verse 24 Paul says, "But if all prophesy and some unbeliever or unlearned person enters, he is convicted by all, he is judged by all." The phrase "all prophesy" refers to all the functioning ones, not to all the members of the church in the meeting. If all the functioning ones prophesy in the church meeting, this will convict others. This kind of prophesying must not be mainly to predict, but to speak for the Lord and speak forth the Lord.

The matter of being convicted by all, judged by all, must not be by the prophecy of prediction, but by the prophecy of speaking for the Lord and speaking forth the Lord. This kind of prophecy requires some amount of growth in life. This word is also an encouragement to the practice of prophesying.

In verse 25 Paul concludes, "The secrets of his heart become manifest; and so falling on his face, he will worship God, reporting that God is really among you." This implies that prophecy, speaking for God and speaking forth God with God as its content, ministers God to the hearers and brings them to God. This also indicates that the church meeting should be filled with God, and all its activities should convey and transmit God to others so that they may be infused with God.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-TWO

DEALING WITH THE GIFTS

(6)

THE PROBLEM CONCERNING TODAY'S TONGUE-SPEAKING

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:4-31; 14:1-25

In dealing with the gifts, Paul emphasizes six matters: speaking, the Spirit, the Body, God's administration, love, and the superiority of prophecy for the building up of the church. In chapter twelve Paul speaks of the Body again and again, at least eighteen times. But in chapter fourteen he speaks of the building up of the church. Thus, in chapter twelve we have the Body and in chapter fourteen, the church.

THE BODY AND THE CHURCH

The Body and the church are synonymous; both refer to the same thing. The Body is the church, and the church is the Body. Nevertheless, in chapter twelve Paul emphasizes the Body, and in chapter fourteen he emphasizes the church. There is a distinction between the Body and the church. The Body is an organism for Christ as the believers' life to grow and express Himself. The church is an assembly for God to operate His administration. Christ as life is the essence of the Body as an organic entity. This organism is not for organization; it is for living to express Christ. Christ is the essence of His Body, and His Body is an organic entity which lives, grows, and matures with Himself until it eventually expresses Him.

In 12:12-27 the main thought is not activity or enterprise. It is that the Body is an organism to live, grow,

mature, and express Christ as the inward essence. For this reason, verse 3 tells us that when we say, "Lord Jesus," we are in the Spirit. It is the Spirit who brings us into the Body, for the Spirit is the life-giving Spirit, the Spirit of life, not merely the Spirit of God as found in Genesis 1:3. We have received the Spirit who brings us into the Body organically.

In Romans 10:13 Paul says, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." We need to put this verse together with Acts 2:21, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Here in Acts 2 to be saved is to receive the initial gifts of the Spirit. To receive the Spirit as the initial gift is equal to being saved. This takes place not only by believing, but also by calling on the Lord. Everyone who truly believes in the Lord Jesus will also call on Him and say, "Lord Jesus." If we say, "Lord Jesus," the Spirit will come into us, and we shall be in the Spirit. The Spirit is the *pneuma*, the breath, the air, for us to breathe. It is impossible for us to breathe without taking air into us. When we breathe, the air is in us, and we are in the air. Likewise, when we call on the Lord Jesus, we are in the Spirit who gives life and brings us into the Body.

According to 12:13, in the Spirit we have been baptized into the Body. The water of baptism is a symbol of the fact that we have been baptized into the Triune God (Matt. 28:19) and baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3). When we were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into His Body and became part of this organic Body. First Corinthians 12 clearly reveals that we have become members of the organic Body of Christ. Hallelujah, we are now in the Body! We have called, "Lord Jesus," and have been brought into the Spirit, the Spirit has ushered us into the Body, and now we are organically in the Body.

After speaking so much concerning the Body in 12:12-27, Paul begins to speak of the church in verse 28: "And God has placed some in the church: firstly apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers; then works of power, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, various kinds

of tongues." The church is for God's administration. When Paul mentions the church, his emphasis is not on an organic entity, but on God's administration. The Body is for the expression of Christ; the church is for the administration of God. In chapter fourteen Paul's concept is not mainly related to organic growth, but to governmental administration. In chapter twelve the emphasis is on life; in chapter fourteen it is on government. Therefore, we may use the term "organic expression" to describe chapter twelve and the term "governmental administration" to describe chapter fourteen. Furthermore, the building up of the church is for administration, but the building up of the Body is for the expression of Christ organically. To express Christ we need the Body; to carry out the divine administration we need the church. For this reason, chapter twelve emphasizes the Body organically for growth and the expression of Christ, but chapter fourteen emphasizes the church governmentally for the carrying out of God's eternal purpose.

At this point I would ask a question related to speaking in tongues: For the Body to grow organically and express Christ, can tongue-speaking ever be helpful? We need to answer this question carefully. It would be wrong to say that tongue-speaking could not be of any help to the growth of the Body. Speaking in tongues is somewhat related to the Spirit, and the Spirit is for the Body. For this reason, we should not say that tongue-speaking could never be helpful to the Body. The decisive factor concerns our realization regarding tongue-speaking and our application of it. If you apply tongue-speaking only for your self-seeking, this will damage the Body. But if you seek tongue-speaking for the Body and if you take care of the Body, then your tongue-speaking will be helpful to the Body. Some among us have testified that tongue-speaking stirred them inwardly to seek Christ. This is a fact which cannot be denied. Certainly to seek Christ is by the Spirit and for the Body. However, those who are stirred up by the Spirit through tongue-speaking to seek Christ may not realize that their seeking of Christ should be for the Body.

In such

a case, their realization regarding tongue-speaking is somewhat short. For tongue-speaking to be helpful to the Body depends on the proper realization and application.

Now let me ask another question: Is tongue-speaking helpful in the building up of the church for God's administration? The answer to this question is a clear and definite no. Especially as practiced today, tongue-speaking is of no help to God's administration. On the contrary, in case after case it damages the church, tears down God's administration, and overthrows the divine government.

THE WRITINGS OF PAUL AND JOHN

First Corinthians was written in Ephesus. In writing this Epistle Paul's intention was to correct and adjust the church in Corinth. That church was in confusion, both in the Christian life and in relation to God's administration. Paul's intention was to regulate the Corinthians, rescue them from their distractions, and bring them back to the central lane of God's economy. When Paul wrote this Epistle, he was enjoying the excellent church life in Ephesus.

The book of Romans was written in Corinth. After writing 1 Corinthians, Paul eventually left Ephesus and visited Corinth. As he says in 2 Corinthians, he delayed coming to them because he wanted to spare them and did not want to come in sorrow. But because they repented and were adjusted after receiving his first Epistle, Paul was happy and went to Corinth to see them. While he was in Corinth, he wrote the Epistle to the Romans.

Romans is a basic sketch, a governing sketch, of the Christian life and the church life. In this book Paul does not say a word about tongue-speaking or divine healing. He knew from his experience in Corinth how much the church had been damaged by tongue-speaking and by the so-called miraculous healing. At the time, Corinth was a hotbed for such things. Many were extremely enthusiastic about tongue-speaking and ecstatic over the miraculous things. Nevertheless, by these very things the church was ruined, destroyed. Realizing the damage this had caused

to the church in Corinth, Paul was very sober when he wrote the book of Romans.

In Romans 12 Paul speaks of the function of the proper gifts in the Lord's Body. I repeat, here Paul does not say a word concerning tongue-speaking or divine healing. Rather, he stresses having mercy, loving one another, and pursuing hospitality. This indicates that Paul took the lead to belittle tongue-speaking. Paul's attitude in his completing ministry toward speaking in tongues is to belittle it.

If this is Paul's attitude in his completing ministry, then what is John's attitude in his mending ministry? Does John say anything about tongue-speaking, divine healing, or miracles in his first Epistle? No, what he says in this book is based upon his Gospel. In John 7:37-39 John points out that all those who believe in Christ will receive the Spirit and out of their being will flow rivers of living water. This refers not to the Spirit in tongue-speaking or healing, but to the Spirit of life. The believers in Christ will drink the Spirit of life. Then out of their innermost being will flow rivers of living water. This is what John says in his Gospel. In his first Epistle he goes on to speak of the anointing which we have within us. He does not speak of an ointment upon us, but of the anointing within us. Within us we have the Spirit of life, and this Spirit is the ointment with which we are anointed. This ointment is typified in Exodus 30 by the oil compounded with the spices. This anointing is experienced not in a miraculous way, but in a spontaneous way in our daily life. Therefore, from this we see that John is one with Paul in placing no emphasis on tongue-speaking, healing, or miracles.

What does John say concerning the Spirit in Revelation? He does not say anything about tongue-speaking or divine healing, but he does speak of the seven Spirits. According to Revelation 4:5, these seven Spirits are seven lamps shining with something within them. These seven lamps do not shine in a miraculous way. Instead, they shine in a normal way.

In Revelation 4 we have the seven Spirits of God as the seven lamps, but in chapter twenty-two we have the Spirit signified by the river flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb to water the New Jerusalem. Once again, nothing is said about tongue-speaking. If tongue-speaking were so important, so crucial, certainly Paul and John would have emphasized it.

REASONS FOR NOT ENCOURAGING TONGUE-SPEAKING

My desire is to speak for Christ and to speak forth Christ. Nevertheless, especially as a help to the young people, I am burdened to make it clear why I do not encourage tongue-speaking. Although I do not oppose speaking in tongues, I do not encourage it. My reasons are based on my experience and observation.

I do not encourage today's tongue-speaking because it can be compared to opium or morphine. Medical doctors know that opium and morphine can be useful in dealing with certain kinds of pain or illnesses, but the dosage has to be limited and the use restricted. Used under proper direction with adequate limitation, opium and morphine can be helpful. The danger is in becoming addicted to these drugs. Once a person is addicted to either opium or morphine, the result is dreadful. Many may practice tongue-speaking for a period of time and then give it up. Others, however, become addicted to speaking in tongues. They may become addicted to such an extent that when they meet together they do not care for anything else. They are so much for tongue-speaking that they are not concerned even if the so-called tongue is not genuine.

Second, for the long run, tongue-speaking does not help believers to grow in life. On the contrary, addiction to tongue-speaking may lead to the indulgence of lust. Yes, some have testified that speaking in tongues stirred something within them to seek after Christ. This is a proper result of tongue-speaking. But those who become addicted to tongue-speaking care only for their ecstasy. They do not care for sobriety. As a result, there are many cases of fornication among them.

Third, those who have become addicted to tongue-

speaking have no ear to hear the word of the cross and the deeper things concerning Christ. They are not interested in how the cross of Christ deals with the flesh and the self. They do not care for such a sober word of righteousness. They are like a piece of wood that has been ruined by poor carpentry and cannot be used in making better furniture. They have no heart for the deep things of Christ or the life in resurrection. For example, they would have no ear for all the messages we have given on 1 Corinthians and on the four books that make up the heart of the divine revelation--Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. Instead, they like to pay their attention to Acts 2, and 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. However, they misuse these portions of the Word. They have no heart to hear a sober word.

Due to the burden I have received from the Lord and to His commission, I am concerned that Pentecostalism may creep into the Lord's recovery. If this happens, the recovery will be damaged. This does not mean, however, that I oppose genuine tongue-speaking. Genuine tongue-speaking is of God, and I do not oppose it. Nevertheless, I do not encourage today's tongue-speaking. Furthermore, even the leaders in the Pentecostal movement have made adjustments throughout the years. They realized that without certain adjustments they would not be able to carry on their work. I have learned that at the Assembly of God school in Springfield, Missouri, the students are taught to emphasize teaching, not tongue-speaking, in congregational meetings, and to encourage the people to speak in tongues privately. Nevertheless, the practice of tongue-speaking has still frustrated many of those dear saints in the matter of the growth in life.

Fourth, no other Christians are as independent and divisive as those who promote tongue-speaking. Every tongue-speaker is independent, individualistic, and divisive. Each one cares only for himself. By this we see that the enemy creeps in to use something which may be of God to damage God's administration. In Pentecostalism and in the charismatic movement there is no building, no

Body life, no care for oneness, and nothing of the divine administration.

Now we can understand Paul's concept in 1 Corinthians and know the burden in his spirit and on his heart when he was writing this book. Paul was deeply concerned for the Body of Christ and for God's administration. He knew God's heart and God's plan. He knew that God's purpose is to have a Body to grow Christ and express Christ and also to have the church to carry out the divine administration. Today's tongue-speaking has been used by the enemy to frustrate the growth of the Body and to damage the building up of the church for God's administration. Therefore, I cannot encourage this practice. But I want to say again that I do not oppose genuine tongue-speaking. I do not follow J. N. Darby in saying that speaking in tongues is dispensationally over. No, it is still possible for there to be genuine tongue-speaking, but this must be practiced in a proper way.

Tongue-speaking causes much more loss than profit. Each of the three times we tried to adopt this practice in the church life, we suffered loss. Our hope is that the Lord's recovery will be preserved from the damage that can be caused by today's tongue-speaking and go on in a pure way of life, not damaged by any mixture.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-THREE

DEALING WITH THE GIFTS

(7)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 14:26-40

Throughout the years much has been spoken and written concerning 14:26-40. The reason for this is that in the New Testament there is not a clear word telling us how Christians should meet or how we should function in the meetings of the church. This portion of 1 Corinthians is considered by some to be unique in the New Testament in that it seems to tell us how to function in the meetings. However, the more we study these verses, the more puzzled we become. But because Paul has included this section in 1 Corinthians, we need to study it carefully.

In the Recovery Version of 1 Corinthians, the subtitle for 14:26-40 is, "How to Function in the Church Meeting." Actually, I do not like the term "how to." The New Testament is the word of the Spirit, not a word of "how to" do things. The human mind always desires to know how to do a particular thing. This desire is somewhat natural. Nevertheless, it is sometimes impossible to keep from using the term "how to." Therefore, I have used it as a subtitle for this portion of 1 Corinthians.

VII. HOW TO FUNCTION IN THE CHURCH MEETING

A. For Each One

In verse 26 Paul says, "What is it then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up."

"Has," used five times in this verse, is the translation of the Greek word *echo*, a word widely used, with many meanings, three of which are the main ones: (1) to hold, to possess, to keep a certain thing; (2) to have a certain thing for enjoyment; (3) to have the means or power to do a thing. The first two meanings should be applied to the first three of the five things listed in this verse--a psalm, a teaching, a revelation--and the third meaning to the last two--a tongue and an interpretation of a tongue. This indicates that when we come to the church meeting, we should have something of the Lord to share with others, whether a psalm to praise the Lord, a teaching (of the teacher) to minister the riches of Christ to edify and nourish others, a revelation (of the prophet, v. 30) to give visions of God's eternal purpose concerning Christ as God's mystery and the church as Christ's mystery, a tongue as a sign to the unbelievers (v. 22) that they may know and accept Christ, or an interpretation to make a tongue concerning Christ and His Body understandable. Before coming to the meeting, we should prepare ourselves for the meeting with things like these from the Lord and of the Lord, either through our experience of Him or through our enjoyment of His Word and fellowship with Him in prayer. After coming into the meeting, we should not wait for an inspiration; there is no need to wait. We should exercise our spirit and use our trained mind to function in presenting what we have been prepared with to the Lord for His glory and satisfaction and to the attendants for their benefit--enlightening, nourishing, and building up.

This is like the feast of tabernacles in ancient times: the children of Israel brought the produce of the good land, which they reaped from their labor on the land, to the feast and offered it to the Lord for His enjoyment and for mutual participation in fellowship with the Lord and with one another. We must labor on Christ, our good land, that we may reap some produce of His riches to bring to the church meeting to offer. Thus, the church meeting will be an exhibition of Christ in His riches and a mutual enjoyment of Christ shared by all the attendants with one

another before God and with God for the building up of the saints and the church.

According to the stress and emphasis of this Epistle, all five things listed in this verse should be focused on Christ as God's center for our portion and the church as God's goal for our aim. The psalm should be the praise of God for giving Christ as wisdom and power to us for our daily life and church life. The teaching from a teacher and the revelation from a prophet should teach and minister Christ with the church as His Body to others. A tongue and its interpretation should also have Christ with the church as its center and content. Any emphasis on things other than Christ and the church will confuse and distract the church from the central lane of God's New Testament economy and make the church like that in Corinth.

In verse 26 Paul tells us that everything should be done for building up. Whatever we do in the church meeting must be for the building up of the saints and the church. To exhibit Christ and to enjoy Him in our meetings for the building up of His body must be our unique purpose and goal.

In verse 26 the word "has" is very important. According to Paul, whenever we all come together to meet, we should have something. Paul does not say "shall have" or "should have"; he speaks in the present tense to denote the fact and says that we have something, that each one of us has something. Furthermore, he does not say that just a few have, that many have, or that most have; he says that "each one has" something. He then mentions five things in the following sequence: a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation. This list is not all-inclusive; it is illustrative. He mentions a psalm first, and tongues and interpretation last. He lists tongues and interpretation last because in this chapter he is mindful of the building up of the church for God's administration.

The fact that Paul mentions a psalm first indicates that in the meeting of the church praising the Lord must be primary. A psalm is somewhat equivalent to a hymn. In today's Pentecostal movement there is the singing of Bible

verses. However, most of the verses are from the Old Testament. I doubt if there has ever been singing concerning Christ as the mystery of God or the church as the mystery of Christ. Have you ever heard that those in a Pentecostal meeting sang Ephesians 1, 3, or 4? We need to write music that we may sing these chapters and other portions of the books which make up the heart of the divine revelation: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. We need to sing about how it pleased God to reveal His Son in us; about Christ living in us and about the fact that we have been crucified with Him; about walking in the Spirit and according to the regulation of the Spirit; about the need for a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we may know the hope of God's calling, the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the greatness of His power exercised to raise Christ and set Him in the heavens; about the church being the fullness of Christ, the One who fills all in all; about the need to be strengthened into our inner man by the Spirit of God with might so that Christ may make His home in our hearts and that we may comprehend with all the saints the universal dimensions of Christ unto the fullness of God; about one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all; about walking in the truth of Jesus so that we may put off the old man, put on the new man, and be renewed in the spirit of our mind to have the reality of the new man; about the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ; about magnifying Christ, living Him, being found in Him, pursuing Him, and having the excellent knowledge of Him; about Christ, the Beloved, as the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of creation. Let us learn to sing verses from these four books as well as from Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Hebrews. In our singing we need to be brought up to the standard of the New Testament economy.

Our hymnal contains more than thirteen hundred hymns. When we compiled the hymnal, we selected hymns which God had given to His people throughout the centuries. This proves that we are far from being sectarian;

on the contrary, we are all-inclusive. But now we must go on to write more hymns and songs on the completing ministry of Paul and the mending ministry of John. We need a collection of songs on Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews. We also need songs and hymns on the Gospel of John, 1 John, and Revelation. Let us sing hymns written on John 15 about abiding in Christ and Christ abiding in us. Let us also sing about the seven lampstands, the seven lamps of fire, and the flowing river in the book of Revelation.

In our singing and in the use of our hymnal, we should not be traditional. Our singing and praising should not mainly be of God as the Creator or of His dispensations in dealing with mankind, but mainly of His New Testament economy. For example, we need to sing concerning the processed Triune God.

I hope that in the years to come there will be a great change in our singing and in our hymnal as well. In our singing and praising we are still somewhat under the influence of tradition. Regarding this, we need to leave the traditional way and absolutely return to God's New Testament economy.

The believers at the time of Paul may have sung the Old Testament Psalms. The writers of the Old Testament did not have a clear revelation concerning the church as the mystery of Christ. Since this matter is no longer hidden, we need to write hymns concerning it based on the revelation in the New Testament. Paul has written fourteen Epistles, and we need to sing them. However, we may be held back by the atmosphere and influence of traditional Christianity. Once again, I encourage you to write hymns on the New Testament economy. Let us sing hymns about Paul's completing ministry and John's mending ministry.

After saying, "Each one has a psalm," Paul goes on to mention a teaching, a revelation, a tongue, and an interpretation. The teachings must be according to the teachings of the apostles, and a revelation must show

something which has been hidden but is now revealed. In the meetings we need a word of teaching and also a word of revelation. We have pointed out that the teaching from a teacher and the revelation from a prophet should teach and minister Christ with the church as His Body. In principle, the same must be true of tongues and the interpretation of tongues: they should have Christ with the church as the center and content. This means that they should be centered on Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ, not on other things. The proper tongue-speaking should be concerning Christ and the church. This is based upon the context of the entire book of 1 Corinthians, a book which speaks of Christ as the wisdom and power of God and the deep things of God and of the church as the Body to express Christ and as the means to carry out God's administration.

The singing and speaking among Pentecostal people today falls far short of the vision of God's economy in the New Testament. They are lacking in the heavenly revelation; therefore, their singing and speaking are in a natural realm. We thank the Lord that His recovery is in another realm, a spiritual realm, a heavenly realm, the realm of Christ and the church. Nevertheless, we still need our understanding and comprehension to be uplifted. We need to pray that the Lord will turn us fully from the natural realm to the heavenly, spiritual realm so that everything we say and do in the meetings will be for the carrying out of God's New Testament economy. I hope that in all the meetings of all the churches this will be the situation and that the meetings will be filled with speaking concerning Christ and the church.

B. For Speaking in Tongues

In verses 27 and 28 Paul goes on to say concerning tongue-speaking, "If anyone speaks in a tongue, let it be by two, or at the most three, and in turn, and let one interpret; but if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in the church, and let him speak to himself and to God." Paul's use of the word church in verse 28 indicates that the

church meeting is the church. In these verses we see that Paul did not altogether neglect speaking in tongues, but instead gave some regulations concerning it. Two or at the most three may in turn speak in tongues, and one should interpret. However, in some Christian meetings today, everyone is encouraged to speak in tongues. Those with such a practice surely need to pay attention to these verses and learn to speak in turn. The waiting this requires will regulate them and test them. But if there is no interpreter present, they should be silent in the meeting and speak to themselves and to God. As we consider these verses, we see that according to the regulations given by Paul, a Christian meeting should not be conducted like certain of today's Pentecostal meetings.

C. For Prophesying

Verse 29 says, "And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others discern." According to this verse, in a meeting two or three prophets may speak, and the other prophets should discern. The word "others" here refers to other prophets. Verses 29 through 32 speak about the prophets only, not all the members of the church. The other prophets should discern, judge, (lit., discriminate), what is spoken by the prophets. This is to judge or discern whether what is prophesied is of God or not, discriminating the true from the false. This indicates that some prophesying may not be of God.

In verse 30 Paul continues, "But if something is revealed to another sitting by, let the first be silent." "Another" refers to another prophet, and "the first" refers to the first prophet. Thus, verse 30 refers to the prophets, not to all the attendants of the church meeting.

Verse 31 says, "For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged." According to the context of verses 29 through 32, "you" and "all" (twice) refer to the prophets, not all the members of the church. The Greek word rendered encouraged here also means comforted. Even the prophets need to learn and to be encouraged.

In verse 32 Paul says, "And the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets." "And" proves that what is mentioned in the preceding verse is concerning the prophets, not all the members of the church. To say that the spirits of prophets are subject to the prophets means that the prophets are not under the control of their spirits, but that their spirits are under their direction. Thus, they can determine when to prophesy and when to cease to maintain good order in the church meeting. Their spirits are not their master, but their means to function. They should learn how to exercise and use their spirits at their discretion.

Verse 32 clearly indicates that our spirit should be subject to us, not that we should be subject to our spirit. However, some in today's Pentecostalism excuse themselves by saying that whatever they do in the meetings is according to the spirit. They claim that they are carried away by their spirit. For example, someone may shout aloud and not care for anyone or anything else. Should someone ask him why he shouts so loudly, he may reply, "This is not up to me; I am carried away by the spirit." This is contrary to Paul's word. He says strongly that we should not be subject to the spirit; rather, the spirit should be subject to us.

For years I have pointed out our need to exercise the spirit. This implies that our spirit is subject to us. We exercise the spirit; it is not the spirit which exercises us. Do you exercise the spirit, or does the spirit exercise you? The expression "exercise the spirit" is meant for those who are sober-minded, especially for those who tend to sit quietly in the meetings. All such ones need to exercise the spirit. But to those like the Corinthians who are carried away with their ecstasy, Paul would say, "Don't subject yourself to the spirit, but let your spirit be subject to you. Turn away from your ecstasy and cause your spirit to be subject to you." Do not excuse yourself by saying that everything you do is according to the spirit. The exercise of the gifts must be done in a regulated way, not in an uncontrolled manner. Our spirit must be subject to us.

This means that we must have a sober mind to use our spirit in a proper way.

Verse 33 says, "For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace." The principle of Paul's charge to the Corinthians in verses 26 through 32, mainly concerning speaking in tongues and prophesying, is to keep a peaceful and becoming order according to what God Himself is.

D. For Women

The last part of verse 33 actually introduces verse 34 and reads: "As in all the churches of the saints." The word "as" indicates that all the local churches should be in the same practice. First Corinthians 1:2 and 10:32 mention the church of God. But here we read of the churches of the saints. The "church of God" denotes the constituent of the church; the church is constituted of the element of God. The "churches of the saints" denotes the components of the churches; the churches are composed of the saints.

Verse 34 says, "Let the women be silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but let them be subject, as the law also says." The phrase "in the churches" means in the meetings of the church. According to 11:5, women can prophesy (of course, in public) with their head covered, and Acts 2:17 and 18 and 21:9 confirm that there were women prophesying. But in 1 Timothy 2:12 women are not permitted to teach, that is, to teach as an authority (there teaching is related to the exercising of authority), defining doctrine. Hence, according to the New Testament principle, for women not to be permitted to speak in the church meetings means that women are not permitted to teach with authority concerning the defining of doctrine. In this sense they should be silent in the church meetings. They are not permitted to speak because they should be subject to man. This is related to the matter of authority ordained by God in His government. In God's governmental ordination, women are not permitted to speak with authority over man. They may pray and prophesy, that is, mainly to speak for the Lord and speak forth the Lord. However, they must do this under the

covering of the brothers because they are charged here to be subject.

The "law" in verse 34 refers to the books written by Moses (Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13). In Moses' writings, Genesis 3:16 charges the woman to be subject to man's rule. This is God's ordination.

First Corinthians 14:34 should not be understood in isolation from the rest of the Bible. On the contrary, we need to interpret the Bible by the Bible and with the Bible. According to the teaching of the entire New Testament, sisters may prophesy, but they do not have the authority to define doctrines. This must be left to the brothers. Furthermore, it is a fact of history that some of the most serious heresies have come in through women.

In 1933, after giving up my job to serve the Lord full time, I visited Brother Nee in Shanghai. While I was there, he told me that, under the influence of the Brethren practice, they did not allow the sisters to pray in the meetings, much less to speak. He told me they had followed that practice for eleven years. However, Brother Nee realized that if the sisters did not pray in the meetings, half of the church would be paralyzed and out of function. That would be a damage and loss to the meetings. Hence, Brother Nee was considering how to adjust the situation. Then he referred the matter to me and asked what I thought about it. I said that I thought we needed to have the sisters pray in the meetings. This is an example of making a decision related to doctrine. Such a decision involves authority.

Such a decision with authority is the kind of speaking Paul is referring to in verse 33. He does not agree that sisters should speak in the church meetings in a way to exercise authority over the brothers. If we do not understand the verse in this way, we have no way to reconcile it with chapter eleven, where Paul speaks of the sisters praying or prophesying with their heads covered. This is a strong indication that the sisters can speak in the meetings, as long as they have a covering on their head.

In verse 35 Paul says, "But if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it

is a shame for a woman to speak in the church." Once again "in the church" means in the church meetings.

In verse 36 Paul asks, "Or was it from you that the word of God went forth, or did it reach only to you?" This strong, frank word indicates that a local church should follow the other churches in its practice. All the local churches should submit to the universal order of the Spirit according to the word of the apostles, from whom the word of God goes forth.

In verse 37 Paul goes on to say, "If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him know clearly that the things which I write to you are a commandment of the Lord." Paul here was speaking with authority, uttering a commandment of the Lord.

Paul's word in verse 37 indicates that to be a prophet or to be spiritual is highly esteemed in the church for the carrying out of God's New Testament economy. A prophet is one who is second to the apostle in God's administration in the church (12:28), who speaks for God and speaks forth God, and who has received revelation of the mysteries of God concerning Christ and the church (Eph. 3:5) as the foundation for building the church (Eph. 2:20). A spiritual person is one who lives according to his spirit, which is mingled with God's Spirit, and who is able to discern all the spiritual things (1 Cor. 3:1; 2:15). Such spiritually knowledgeable persons should know clearly that the Apostle Paul's teachings are the commandment of the Lord, and their speaking should correspond to his teachings. Paul's spirit is strong and his word is frank in dealing with the disorderly Corinthians. He charges them to know definitely that his teachings are a commandment of the Lord, and they are authentically authoritative of the Lord. Since the apostle's teachings are according to God's ordination, they are the commandment of the Lord.

Verse 38 says, "But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant." Sometimes Paul is polite, but here he is strict and frank.

Verse 39 says, "Therefore, my brothers, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues." Here Paul softens his tone a little in order to

calm down the turmoil among the disorderly Corinthians. Actually, this entire chapter deals with prophesying and speaking in tongues. Since prophesying is the most profitable gift in building up both the saints and the church with the rich ministry of Christ, it is highly evaluated and promoted by the apostle. Because speaking in tongues does not afford any profit for such building, the apostle is faithful to expose its lesser value. Both the apostle's evaluation and exposure are according to his concern for the fulfilling of God's purpose in building up the church with the riches of Christ. At the conclusion of this chapter, he still charges us to desire earnestly to prophesy for God's building. However, he also charges us not to forbid to speak in tongues in order to keep the all-inclusiveness and oneness of the church.

In verse 40 Paul concludes, "But let all things be done becomingly and in order." The apostle's concern for the church is that Christ as God's center and the church as God's goal may be carried on and carried out with all things done becomingly and in good order before men and angels (4:9; 11:10). Our natural life is useless in fulfilling such a high purpose. The experience of Christ crucified (1:23; 2:2) for the termination of our self and the experience of Christ in resurrection as our daily sanctification and redemption (1:30) are needed for a proper church life.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-FOUR

A PROPER CHRISTIAN MEETING

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:17; 14:32; Eph. 5:18-19; 2 Cor. 2:10; Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4

At the beginning of the church age, the saints were very simple. They did not yet have the New Testament, and very few had copies of the Old Testament. Furthermore, they did not have hymnbooks. However, one thing is certain: they all had the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. In the early days of the church life, there were not so many doctrines, practices, or ways to work for the Lord. Instead, the saints simply enjoyed the Spirit who lived and dwelt in their spirit. This made them a different kind of people. Before they were saved, they were in the condition described by Paul in Ephesians 2:1-3. But after they were saved, converted, and regenerated, they became another kind of people, a people indwelt by the all-inclusive Spirit.

CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

Those in the early church were known by the fact that they called on the name of the Lord Jesus. Acts 9:14 says that Saul had authority from the chief priests to bind all who called on the name of the Lord. This practice of calling on the name of the Lord Jesus was the sign of a believer in Christ. The unbelievers could easily recognize a Christian by the fact that he called on the Lord's name. I have no doubt that the early Christians daily called upon the name of the Lord.

In 1:2 Paul refers to this matter: "To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and

ours." This verse indicates that, on the one hand, the believers are a called people, for they have been called by God. On the other hand, they are a calling people, for they call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been called by God to call on the Lord's name. According to this verse, the believers called on the Lord's name "in every place."

SPEAKING

In addition to calling on the name of the Lord, those in the early church did a great deal of speaking about the Lord Jesus. They spoke about Him to one another and to the unbelievers. Their speaking was a way of prophesying, the kind of prophesying emphasized in the New Testament. Unlike the prophets in the Old Testament, those who believe in Christ do not need to wait for the Spirit of the Lord to come upon them in order to prophesy. From the time we first called on the name of the Lord, Christ as the living Spirit has been in our spirit. For this reason, Paul could say, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (6:17). How marvelous that the Spirit is mingled with our spirit! Furthermore, this spirit is subject to us (14:32). Because our spirit is subject to us, there is no longer the need to wait for the Spirit to come upon us. Instead, we simply need to exercise our spirit. Surely the Christians in the beginning of the church life exercised their spirit to speak to one another and to unbelievers on behalf of the Lord.

How simple were the saints in the early days of the church life! In their meetings there must have been a great deal of calling, speaking, singing, and praising. According to Ephesians 5:19, they spoke to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with their heart to the Lord.

Whenever we gather together in the meetings of the church, we should exhibit what we daily enjoy of the Lord. In an exhibition people manifest or display something they have or have produced. It is possible to exhibit only what we have, not what we do not have. The proper Christian

meeting should be an exhibition of our Christian life. It should be a display of the riches of Christ we experience in our daily walk. If we exercise our spirit to contact the Lord daily, then in the church meetings we shall have something of Christ to share with the saints.

LIVING IN THE INDEX OF THE EYES OF CHRIST

The Lord Jesus is not a religion or a set of forms, regulations, or teachings. He is a living Person whom we may contact day by day. As the all-inclusive Spirit indwelling our spirit, He is real and available. Hour by hour and even moment by moment, we should exercise our spirit to contact Him in an intimate way. We need to develop the habit of calling on the Lord's name at all times and in all places. If we build up this practice, we shall be able to say, "O Lord Jesus, Your name is the sweetest name on earth."

As we contact the Lord and call on His name, we must walk with Him, live by Him, and do everything according to the index of His eyes. The index denotes the area of the face around the eyes, the look as being the index of the inward thoughts and feelings to signify the presentation of the whole person. According to 2 Corinthians 2:10, Paul lived in the person, the index, of Christ. He did everything according to the expression conveyed through the index of the Lord's eyes. We also should live according to this index of Christ. However, this is possible only when we are in His presence. If we are away from Him or if there is something between us and Him, we cannot live according to the index of His eyes. For example, a good wife will carefully watch the index of her husband's eyes and live according to it. This is the way we should live in relation to the Lord. Everything we say or do should be in the index of the eyes of the Lord Jesus. As I am speaking to a brother, I should speak according to the indicators of the Lord's index.

It is possible for us all to experience this. We can live in such intimate contact with the Lord Jesus that in every detail of our daily life we can behave according to the index of the Lord's eyes. As I am about to put on a

particular tie,

I spontaneously know whether or not the Lord likes that tie. If He approves of it, I shall put it on. But if it displeases Him, I will gladly get rid of it. Oh, how sweet it is to live in the index of the eyes of Christ!

We have been emphasizing the need to have intimate contact with the Lord, even to live according to the index of His eyes. When we live in this way, we find out how real, living, and present the Lord is. However, the tragedy is that in the meetings we proclaim, "It is no longer I--Christ lives in me," but in our daily living we may not allow the Lord to live in us. For example, we may insist on going to the department store, even though we sense deep within that the Lord does not approve. We may bargain with the Lord, asking Him to let us go just this one time and promising Him that we shall not go again. When we speak this way to the Lord, we are not honest or truthful with Him. Whenever we say, "Lord, let me do it just this once," there will always be a second time. If we do not contact the Lord daily and live by Him, what shall we have of Christ to exhibit in the church meetings? Surely we cannot show forth our disobedience to the Lord, or testify concerning how we went shopping in spite of the Lord's inward protest. Because they have nothing of Christ to exhibit, many saints are silent in the meetings. But if we enjoy the Lord in our daily life and testify in the meetings of this enjoyment, we shall have even more enjoyment of the Lord. The more we speak of Christ, the more we enjoy Him and the more we are filled unto all the fullness of God.

BACK TO SIMPLICITY

My burden in this message is to impress you with the simplicity of the early Christians. May the Lord restore such a simplicity among us in His recovery today! If we are brought back to this simplicity in our meetings, we shall not use the hymnal or even the Bible to replace the all-inclusive Spirit. Sometime we may have a meeting in which we use neither the hymnal nor the Bible. Instead, we may simply show forth Christ through the exercise of our spirit. I can be deprived of my hymnal and of my Bible,

but I cannot be deprived of the all-inclusive Christ in my spirit. However, if some Christians did not have a hymnal or Bible, they would have nothing. They know how to sing from the hymnal and how to use the Bible, but they do not know how to exercise the spirit to experience Christ as the life-giving Spirit. Oh, may the Lord cause us to put our trust in nothing other than the living Christ Himself!

We have seen that although the Christians in the early church did not have the Bible or a hymnal, they did have the living Christ. They called on His name and spoke a great deal of Him and regarding Him. They also sang and praised the Lord. Therefore, whenever they gathered together, they could exhibit what they had experienced and enjoyed of Christ in their daily living. By this we see that a proper Christian meeting should be an expression of the Christian life. We should not make the meetings something different from or apart from our daily walk. If we do this, our meetings will become a performance, the meeting hall will become a theater, and the saints will become performers. Our meetings should not be performances--they should be exhibitions of the way we live at home, at school, and at work. They should be an expression of the Christ by whom and in whom we live day by day. In order to have proper meetings, we must first have a proper daily life.

WALKING ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

If we would have a proper Christian daily life, we need to walk according to the spirit. It is significant that the New Testament does not charge us to walk according to the Scriptures, but to walk according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4). In Galatians 5:16 Paul says, "Walk by the Spirit." In verse 25 he goes on to say, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." We are to conduct ourselves not according to teaching or doctrine, but according to the Spirit. Today the Spirit is the very Christ who has come into our spirit and who is now mingled with our spirit. Our need is to live according to this mingled spirit. The more we live by walking according to the mingled spirit, the more we shall be filled in spirit unto all the fullness of

God. Then we shall know how to call on the name of the Lord, how to speak to others, and how to sing and testify. If we develop these habits, our meetings will spontaneously be an exhibition of our daily walk. How different are such meetings from the formal religious services of today's Christianity!

THE PRODUCT OF OUR DAILY LIVING

We must admit that we are still under the influence of traditional Christianity. We were born into this environment and raised under this influence. But in the Lord's recovery we must cast off traditional Christianity, especially the traditions related to formal meetings. Our meetings should not have a formal beginning. Instead, they should begin spontaneously through our exercise of the spirit. However, I say again that this kind of meeting is the product of the exercise of our spirit to experience Christ in our daily life. If we do not exercise our spirit in our daily living, whatever we do in the meetings will be a performance, not the spontaneous exhibition of our daily Christian life. If we walk in spirit day by day, no one will be able to predict how the meetings will begin. We shall simply gather together to have a spontaneous exhibition of the riches of Christ for the building up of the church. Because of the influence of tradition and the natural concept, it is very easy for us to meet in a systematized way. The meetings may be formal and altogether devoid of the spontaneity of the Spirit. Oh, we need release! We need liberation! But this release and liberation cannot begin with a performance in the meetings; it must begin with the exercise of the spirit in our daily walk. In our daily living we should be a certain kind of person, one who contacts the Lord, calls on His name, speaks to others about Him, and who sings praises to the Lord. Then when we come to the church meetings, we should continue to be this kind of person. In this way our activity in the meetings will exhibit our exercise in our daily walk.

We do not realize how much we are still under the killing influence of religious tradition. Be assured, we are still too much under the tradition of Christianity. You may

ask what we can do about it. The only thing for us to do is to exercise our spirit to have intimate contact with the Lord as a living Person day by day. We should not try to adjust ourselves or improve our behavior. Furthermore, we should not endeavor to be spiritual or holy. Forget about all these things and simply pay attention to the index of the Lord's eyes. Instead of trying to be spiritual, we should simply live in the Lord's presence. We need to make a declaration to Satan and to the whole universe: "I don't know the meaning of holiness or spirituality. I only know that Christ is my life and my person. Today He is living within me, and I am living according to the index of His eyes. My only desire is to be one with Him. I do not care whether I love or hate, whether I am angry or calm. I care only to take Christ as my person and to be one with Him in everything."

EXHIBITING CHRIST FOR UPLIFTED MEETINGS

In our Christian dictionary there should be just one word--Christ. Christ is our humility, our patience, our everything. What sweetness there is in our daily life when we take Christ as everything! How marvelous to live according to the index of His eyes! Such a living is filled with calling, speaking, singing, and praising. If this is our daily experience, then in the meetings there will be no performing. On the contrary, we shall release our spirit spontaneously to exhibit Christ. If all the saints have such a daily living, the meetings will be genuine, rich, and uplifted, altogether different from anything we have experienced before.

Let us set aside our natural concept of what a meeting should be. The Lord has shown us clearly that a proper meeting is the exhibition of our daily living as Christians. In the meetings we should not focus our attention on singing, preaching, or teaching. Our focus must be the exhibition of our daily walk.

If we are clear about this, we shall realize that no one can teach us how to have a meeting. Teaching will lead only to a performance, never to an exhibition. Let us all

look to the Lord for mercy and say, "Lord, we have been veiled by religion and distracted from Yourself. Lord, bring us back to Yourself, back from so many good, spiritual, and even scriptural things. Cause us to know Christ and Christ alone."

I have the full assurance that the Lord intends to recover our intimate daily contact with Himself and our living by Him. In particular, I expect the Lord to gain the young people in this regard because they are less under the influence of tradition. Let us all rise up to repudiate traditional Christianity. If we repudiate the religious traditions and care only for the living Christ, we shall have a proper spirit, a spirit of power, love, and a sober mind. Then in the meetings we shall bubble over with the Spirit. The more we speak of the Lord, the more we shall have to say.

Oh, may we all be simple and return to Christ Himself! Let us forget the religious traditions and all formal practices. The Lord is calling us back to the Spirit. Our urgent need is to live and walk in the spirit and then to exhibit corporately our daily living in Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-FIVE

DEALING WITH THE MATTER OF RESURRECTION

(1)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 15:1-11

In 15:1-58 Paul deals with the matter of resurrection. In this message we shall consider 15:1-11.

I. CHRIST'S RESURRECTION, THE VITALITY OF THE GOSPEL

The resurrection of Christ is the vitality of the gospel. There are many philosophies and religions on earth. But none of these philosophies or religions is vital. On the contrary, every one of them is devoid of life. In a philosophy or religion there may be many teachings and doctrines, but there is no life. Religions are altogether devoid of life. None of them has any vitality. But the Lord's gospel contains life, even resurrection life.

Resurrection life is a life that has conquered death, a life that entered into death, remained in death for a period of time, and then came out of death. Hence, this life is a death-conquering and death-subduing life. Therefore, it is called resurrection life.

The gospel of Christ not only has life; it also has the life power to subdue death, to conquer death, and to annul death. This life, the life that has subdued, conquered, and nullified death, is resurrection. Do you know what resurrection life is? Resurrection is a life that is victorious over death.

We have pointed out that the book of 1 Corinthians may be divided into two large sections, with chapters one through ten forming the first section and chapters eleven through sixteen, the second section. In the first section

Paul deals with the daily life of a Christian. For this, Christ is needed. Christ is the unique factor to solve all the problems in a Christian's daily life. This Christ, the solution to all the problems in the daily life of a Christian, is God's wisdom and power. He is the One who was incarnated, who lived on earth as a man, who died on the cross, and who was raised from the dead.

Some religions have teachings about Jesus, but they are not according to the Bible. The religion of Islam, for example, claims that although Jesus was put on the cross, He did not die there, but was taken away by angels. According to the Moslems and the Koran, this Jesus, the greatest prophet, is in the heavens. The Moslems certainly do not believe in the crucified and resurrected Christ. But according to the Bible, we believe that Christ was crucified, buried, and resurrected. Therefore, our Christ is the Christ of resurrection. Furthermore, He Himself actually is resurrection (John 11:25). He is the life that conquers death and subdues it. Hallelujah, our Christ is a death-conquering life! He is resurrection!

In order to be God's wisdom and power to us for the solving of our problems in our daily living, Christ must be the resurrected Christ. Today we have Him in resurrection. The very Christ who is living in us as our life is the resurrected Christ.

As we have pointed out, in the second section of this book, chapters eleven through sixteen, Paul deals with five problems in the realm of God's administration. If we would know the divine administration, we need to realize that a rebellion has taken place in the universe. Under the leadership of Satan, the archangel, many angels rebelled against God. This was a matter in the realm of God's creation. In God's original creation there was a rebellion. Therefore, later God had a second creation, which mainly involved the creation of man. In Genesis 1 the creation is primarily the creation of man, not of the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (lit.). The rest of this chapter speaks of the restoration of the heavens and the earth with

the creation of the human race. After the creation of man, Satan, the rebellious one, seduced man to follow him. As a result, man also rebelled against God. Therefore, there has been a rebellion among the angelic race and another rebellion among the human race. In creation God was not able to carry out His administration, due to the rebellions of the angels and of man.

One day, God Himself came in the Son as a man. According to Isaiah 9:6, His name was called wonderful. He is so wonderful that no one can understand Him thoroughly. He is both God and man at the same time. Isaiah 9:6 also tells us that though He was a child, He was called the mighty God, and that though He was a Son, yet His name was called the everlasting Father. This wonderful God-man lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years. Most of His life was spent in a carpenter's home in the small town of Nazareth. Imagine, the very One who was called the mighty God and the everlasting Father lived in such a situation for more than thirty years! Eventually, He came forth to minister. He carried on His ministry for three and a half years. At the end of this time, He was brought to the cross. Actually, it is not altogether accurate to say that Christ was brought to the cross, for in John 10 He tells us that He was willing to give up His life. This means that He willingly walked to Golgotha, to Calvary. He was willing to be put on the cross.

The Lord was crucified definitely and physically. With nails in His hands and His feet, He hung on a wooden cross probably for six hours, from nine o'clock in the morning until three o'clock in the afternoon. During the first three hours, man did everything possible to mock Him. Then in the last three hours God came in to judge Him as our substitute. As God was judging Him, Christ shed His blood to redeem us. Out of His side came blood and water: blood for redemption and water for the release of life. Therefore, by His crucifixion, Christ accomplished redemption and released the divine life.

Immediately after He died, Christ was given a proper burial in a tomb belonging to a rich man. Then on the third

day He was resurrected. The Bible clearly says that Christ was resurrected. On the other hand, the Bible also says that Christ rose up, that He did not need anyone to resurrect Him. How was it possible for Christ to rise from the dead? It was possible because He Himself is resurrection.

Christ was willing to be buried, to enter into death, the tomb, and Hades. While He was in Hades, He tested death, put death to shame, and conquered and subdued death. He went into the realm of death to tour this region and see what it was able to do. Eventually He discovered that death could do nothing to Him. It did not have the power to hold Him, to retain Him (Acts 2:24). When it was time for Him to rise up, He said farewell to death and walked away. Thus, Christ conquered death, subdued death, and came out of death. This is resurrection.

We are not able to comprehend fully the Trinity, the incarnation, the crucifixion, or the resurrection. In fact, we cannot even fully understand our own physical life. Can you explain what your life is? Furthermore, do you completely understand your spirit and your psychological heart? It is a fact that we have a spirit and a psychological heart, but we cannot fully understand these things. It certainly would be foolish to refuse to believe in them because we cannot adequately understand them. The same is true with respect to the Trinity, the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection.

The Word of God is trustworthy. In the Word we are told that God is triune, that God is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. One day this God became a man. That was the incarnation. Then this incarnate One, the embodiment of the Triune God, lived on earth and was crucified. This is a mystery. The One who died on the cross was not only a man, but also God. But how could God die? This is a mystery. In one of his hymns Charles Wesley says, "How can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?" Another line of this hymn (*Hymns*, #296) reads, "'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies!" This is indeed a mystery, and we cannot understand it thoroughly. After Christ died, He was

buried and resurrected. We may also say that He rose up. Not only was He raised up--He rose up. All these--the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection--are facts.

My burden in this message, however, is not simply to speak these facts; it is to consider the spiritual significance and reality of these facts. What is the significance of incarnation? The significance of Christ's incarnation is that the very God entered into humanity and became one with humanity. But according to the superficial understanding of many Christians today, the significance of the incarnation is simply the bringing forth of a Savior. Of course, the Gospel of Luke says that a Savior was born to us in Bethlehem (2:11). But, revealing something much deeper, the Gospel of John speaks of the incarnation in this way: the Word, which was with God and was God from the beginning, became flesh (1:1, 14). This is not merely to bring forth the Savior; it is to bring God into man and make God one with man. It is even to make God one with the flesh, for John 1:14 declares, "The Word became flesh." Here the Word denotes God, and the flesh denotes man. With the Word who became flesh there were grace and truth. As John 1:17 says, "Grace and reality came through Jesus Christ." Therefore, incarnation is to bring God into man and to make God and man one. What a great wonder this is! It is a greater wonder than God's creation of the universe, man, and millions of items. How wonderful, how mysterious, that through incarnation God came to be one with man!

When Christ, the God-man, died on the cross, He was the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Through His death on the cross, He accomplished redemption. The significance of the crucifixion, however, includes more than redemption. Redemption certainly is a crucial part of the crucifixion. But Christ died not only to accomplish redemption for us; He died to terminate the entire old creation. Do you know what is the all-inclusive significance of Christ's crucifixion? It is that the cross of Christ brings the entire old creation, including the angelic race, the restored and fallen heaven and earth, and the human race, to an end. When Christ

was on the cross, He did not hang there alone. The old creation was on Him and was crucified with Him. On the cross, therefore, Christ terminated the angelic race, the heavens and the earth, the human race, and every item of the old creation. Although this is revealed in the Bible, no such word of righteousness is preached among Christians today. Nevertheless, this is the significance of the death of Christ. This is the reason we speak of Christ's death as the all-inclusive death.

In Hebrews 10 the veil in the temple is a type of the all-inclusive death of Christ. Hebrews 10:19 and 20 say that the veil typifies Christ's flesh: "Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entering the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He dedicated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh." On the veil in the temple, cherubim were embroidered. These cherubim signify God's creatures. Thus, when the veil in the temple was rent, the creatures embroidered on the veil were also torn. This indicates that when Christ was crucified, we, along with the whole creation, were crucified also. Hallelujah for this all-inclusive death!

To repeat, when Christ died, He brought every item of the old creation to the cross. Everything has been crossed out! Do you believe this? I believe it because the Bible tells me so. Furthermore, not only have we been crossed out--we have also been buried in Jesus' tomb. Although this tomb was small, the whole universe was buried in it.

Resurrection means that Christ died, was buried, and rose up again. This resurrection is the vitality of the gospel. In this vital resurrection it is possible for God to have an administration.

Now we can understand why chapter fifteen covers the matter of resurrection. In chapters eleven through fourteen we have the Head, the Body, and all the gifts with the functions for the operations to carry out God's administration. All this, however, must be in resurrection. In creation God does not have a way to carry out His administration, for both the angels and mankind rebelled against Him. But in resurrection God has a way to carry

out His administration. As Christians we must be a resurrected people, and the church must be in resurrection. Only in resurrection can we realize God's headship, discern the Body, and be members of the Body. Christ cannot have the Body except in resurrection. If there is no resurrection, there can be no church. The church is in resurrection, and we also are in resurrection.

In this resurrection God's administration is carried out. First Corinthians 15:27 and 28 indicate this: "For He has subjected all things under His feet. But when He says that all things have been subjected, it is evident that He is excepted Who has subjected all things to Him. And when all things are subjected to Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him Who has subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all." According to verse 27, God has subjected all things under Christ's feet. Eventually, when all things are subjected to Christ, God will be all in all. This is the carrying out of God's administration. We need to be impressed with the fact that these verses are found in a chapter dealing with resurrection. It is certainly nonsense to claim that there is no resurrection.

A. Preached

1. The Apostle Making the Gospel Known to the Corinthian Believers

In 15:1 and 2 Paul says, "Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you as the gospel, unless you believed in vain." The gospel here is the full gospel, including the teachings concerning Christ and the church, as fully disclosed in the book of Romans (1:1; 16:25). We should stand in the full gospel, that is, in the entire New Testament, not just in certain teachings or doctrines.

In verse 2 "being saved" literally means in the way of salvation (Conybeare). After being justified in Christ and regenerated by the Spirit, we are in the process of being saved in the life of Christ (Rom. 5:10) until we are mature

and conformed to Him in full (Rom. 8:29). On the one hand, we have been saved; on the other hand, we are being saved. We have been saved by Christ's death, but we are still being saved in His resurrection.

2. The Gospel Delivered to Them

In verses 3 and 4 Paul goes on to say, "For I delivered to you, among the first things, that which also I received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." Christ's death for our sin, His burial for our termination, and His resurrection for our germination with life, according to the prophecies of the Old Testament (Isa. 53:5-8, 10-12; Psa. 22:14-18; Dan. 9:26; Isa. 53:9; Psa. 16:9-10; Hosea 6:2), are the basic items among the first things of the gospel. The last of these items is the most vital in the gospel, for it imparts life to us that we may live Christ. Other items of the full gospel include Christ as the mystery of God, the church as the mystery of Christ, and the New Jerusalem. Actually, the full gospel includes the whole New Testament.

B. Witnessed

In verses 5 through 11 Paul speaks concerning the witnesses of Christ's resurrection. Verse 5 says, "And that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve." The Greek word rendered seen also means appeared to. The earlier apostles and disciples were eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection (Acts 1:22), and their preaching stressed their testimony to this (Acts 2:32; 4:33). They bore witness to the resurrected Christ not only by their teaching, but also by their living. They lived with Him by His living in resurrection (John 14:19).

In verses 8 and 9 Paul refers to himself: "And last of all He was seen by me also, even as to one untimely born. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." One who persecuted Christ and the church became an apostle.

In verse 10 Paul continues, "But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." Grace, three times in this verse, is the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit (v. 45) to bring the processed God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply that we may live in resurrection. Thus, grace is the Triune God becoming life and everything to us. It is by this grace that Saul of Tarsus, the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15-16), became the foremost apostle, laboring more abundantly than all the other apostles. His ministry and living by this grace are an undeniable testimony to Christ's resurrection.

"Not I, but the grace of God" equals "not I, but Christ" in Galatians 2:20. The grace that motivates the apostle and operates in him is not some matter or some thing, but a living Person, the resurrected Christ, the embodiment of God the Father becoming the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, who dwells in him as his everything.

In verse 10 grace is the Christ who is in resurrection and who is resurrection. By this grace Paul could be what he was and labor more than all the other apostles. When we compare 1 Corinthians 15:10 with Galatians 2:20, we see that grace is not a thing, but a Person. All the disciples and apostles who saw the resurrected Christ not only saw Him objectively, but experienced Him subjectively. Through their seeing of Christ, He entered into them and became the subjective One in them. When the day of Pentecost came, this was the reason they were living, energetic, and operative. The resurrected Christ was in them. Not only was Christ Himself resurrected objectively, but in resurrection He lived in Peter, John, and all the other apostles and disciples.

Throughout the centuries, all the living servants of God have had this resurrected Christ living in them. I can also testify that He lives in me, enabling me to do what I never could do in myself. Hallelujah, the Lord Jesus lives! How do we know He lives? As the hymn says, we know He lives because He lives in us (*Hymns*, #503). We may be

persecuted and opposed, and we may suffer very much. But we have the resurrected Christ in us. The more we are opposed, the more alive and active we become. Nevertheless, our testimony is this: Not I, but the grace of God with us.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-SIX

DEALING WITH THE MATTER OF RESURRECTION

(2)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 15:12-28

In this message we shall consider two matters in 15:12-28: Paul's rebutted to those who claimed there was no resurrection, and the history of resurrection.

II. REBUTTAL TO "NO RESURRECTION"

Verse 12 says, "But if Christ is preached that He has been raised from among the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" In this chapter the apostle deals with the Corinthians' heretical saying that there is no resurrection of the dead. They were like the Sadducees (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8). This is the tenth problem among them. It is the most damaging and destructive to God's New Testament economy, worse than the heresy of Hymenaeus and Philetus concerning resurrection in 2 Timothy 2:17 and 18. Resurrection is the life pulse and lifeline of the divine economy. If there were no resurrection, God would be the God of the dead, not the God of the living (Matt. 22:32). If there were no resurrection, Christ would not have been raised from the dead. He would be a dead Savior, not the One who lives forever (Rev. 1:18) and is able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). If there is no resurrection, there would be no living proof of justification by His death (Rom. 4:25), no imparting of life (John 12:24), no regeneration (John 3:5), no renewing (Titus 3:5), no transformation (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18), and no conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). If there were no resurrection, there would be no members of Christ (Rom. 12:5), no Body of Christ as His

fullness (Eph. 1:20-23), and no church as Christ's bride (John 3:29) and the new man (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10-11). If there were no resurrection, God's New Testament economy would altogether collapse and God's eternal purpose would be nullified.

In verse 12 Paul refers to the preaching that Christ has been raised from among the dead. This indicates clearly that the apostles preached the resurrection of Christ. According to the book of Acts, the preaching of the gospel was mainly the preaching of Christ's resurrection. Although the apostles emphasized the resurrection of Christ, today's Christian preaching stresses the crucifixion much more than the resurrection. We, however, must follow the apostles to emphasize resurrection as well as crucifixion.

Verse 13 continues, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, neither has Christ been raised." This is the first point of Paul's rebuttal. It is a fact that Christ has been raised from among the dead. How, then, could some say that there is no resurrection? If there were no resurrection, then Christ could not have been raised from among the dead.

In verse 14 Paul says, "And if Christ has not been raised, then is our preaching vain; your faith also is vain." The Greek word rendered vain means empty, void. Without the living Christ in resurrection, both the preaching of the gospel and our faith in it would be empty and void, having no reality. Preaching the death of Christ without preaching His resurrection would be vain. The resurrection of Christ is what causes our preaching to become vital and prevailing. Such a preaching would never be in vain. Furthermore, apart from Christ's resurrection, our faith would also be vain. Without the resurrection of Christ, both our preaching and our believing become vain. This is a very serious matter.

In verse 15 Paul goes on to say, "And we are found also false witnesses of God, because we witnessed concerning God that He raised Christ, Whom He did not raise if indeed the dead are not raised." This is another strong point in Paul's rebuttal.

In verse 16 Paul says, "For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised." Then verse 17 says, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." The Greek word rendered futile means fruitless, worthless. Without Christ resurrected to live in us as our life and as everything to us, our faith in Him is fruitless, worthless, and without any issue like the impartation of life, freedom from sin, victory over Satan, and growth in life. The word futile used here is even stronger than the word vain found in verse 14. Something that is vain is empty. But the word futile indicates labor without result, work without any gain. If there is no resurrection we may still believe, but eventually nothing results from our believing. Hence, our faith becomes futile.

Furthermore, according to verse 17, if Christ has not been raised, we are still in our sins. Christ's death saves us from the condemnation of our sins, not from the power of sin. It is His resurrection life that delivers us from the power of sin (Rom. 8:2). If Christ were not resurrected, we would still remain in sins and under the power of sin.

Sins are one thing, and the power of sin is something else. Because sins brought in condemnation, we became sinners full of sins, and there was condemnation upon us. But through Christ's death, that condemnation has been removed. Thus, the death of Christ has saved us from the condemnation of sins. But His death cannot save us from the power of sin. The condemnation of sins is objective, whereas the power of sin is subjective. Being saved from the condemnation of sins can be accomplished once for all. But to be saved from the power of sin is a lifelong matter and a daily matter, even a moment-by-moment matter. The problem we all have with our temper illustrates our need to be saved daily from the power of sin. You have been saved from the condemnation of sins, but you still need to be saved from your temper.

When someone asks you if you have been saved, you need to answer in a proper way. You may answer with a question: "Do you mean saved from hell and from God's judgment, or saved from the power of sin?" Then go on to say, "You ask me if I have been saved. Now I want to ask

you if you have been saved from your temper." Who can say that he has been completely saved from his temper? We need to help others realize that we have been saved from sins, but still need to be saved from the power of sin. To be saved in this way we need resurrection power.

According to Romans 8:2, the law of the Spirit of life frees us from the law of sin. The law of sin actually denotes the power of sin, just as the law of gravity actually refers to the power of gravity. Only resurrection life can deliver us from the power of sin and from the law of sin. Resurrection life contains a law that is more powerful than the law of sin. An airplane can fly because of the operation of a power that overcomes gravity. In like manner, we can overcome the power of sin by the operation of Christ's powerful resurrection life.

In verse 17, Paul does not write in a philosophical way or in a theoretical manner. He appeals to the experience of those who argue against resurrection and then uses their experience to defeat them. In other words, Paul's rebuttal is very practical. Should anyone say that there is no resurrection, then Christ has not been resurrected. Then what shall we do concerning the power of sin? For this, we need resurrection.

In verse 18 Paul continues his rebuttal: "Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished." Those who have fallen asleep are dead (1 Thes. 4:13-16). Here the word perished means never to be resurrected, but to remain in death forever. If Christ has not been raised from among the dead, then those believers in Christ who have died have perished. They believed in Christ in order to be saved. But if Christ has not been raised, they will not be resurrected either. On the contrary, they will remain in death and perish. This is Paul's argument. By this we see once again that he argued concerning resurrection in a practical way.

I had an experience of dealing with a doctrinal argument in such a practical way more than forty-five years ago. One day I met a dear Christian friend on the street. At first he spoke to me in a polite manner, saying

that he praised the Lord that He was using me. But eventually he went on to say that he could not agree with teaching that genuine believers may be put in darkness when the Lord Jesus comes back. Instead of arguing with him doctrinally, I asked him a practical question: "Brother, let us take care of the present age. Do you believe that there are no genuine believers in Christ who are in darkness today?" He had to admit that many believers still live in darkness. Then I went on to ask, "Brother, then how about those believers when the Lord Jesus comes back?" This is an illustration of arguing with opposers in a practical way and not in a theoretical way.

Verse 19 says, "If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." If there is no resurrection, we shall have no future and no hope for the future, such as Christ as our hope of glory (Col. 1:27), the lot of our eternal blessing (Dan. 12:13), the reign with Christ in the millennium (Rev. 20:4, 6), and the reward of the resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14). Once again, Paul's argument is very practical.

Paul then inserts, in a parenthetical way, something concerning the history of resurrection in verses 20 through 28. He again argues concerning resurrection in a practical way in verses 29 through 32. In verse 32 he says, "If after the manner of men I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." Paul was willing to suffer by the resurrection life and for resurrection. He knew that there will be a day of resurrection, and that in resurrection there will be a reward.

III. THE HISTORY OF RESURRECTION

A. Christ, the Firstfruit of Those Who Have Fallen Asleep

In verse 20 Paul declares, "But now Christ has been raised from among the dead, the firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep." This verse begins a parenthetical section that goes through verse 28. This parenthetical word verifies the truth of resurrection by setting forth Christ as its firstfruit. Christ was the first One raised from

among the dead as the firstfruit of resurrection. This was typified by the firstfruits (a sheaf of the firstfruits, including Christ with some of the Old Testament saints who had died, was raised at the Lord's resurrection--Matt. 27:52-53) in Leviticus 23:10 and 11, offered to God on the day after the Sabbath, the day of resurrection (Matt. 28:1). Christ as the firstfruit of resurrection is the Firstborn from among the dead to be the Head of the Body (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:20-23). Since He, the Head of the Body, has been resurrected, we, the Body, shall also be resurrected.

Verse 21 says, "For since through man came death, through man also came resurrection of the dead." The man through whom death came was Adam, the first man (v. 45). The man through whom resurrection came is Christ, the second Man (v. 47). Adam brought in death through sin (Rom. 5:12); Christ brought in the life of resurrection through righteousness (Rom. 5:17-18). The death brought in by Adam works in us from our birth through our parents unto the death of our body. The life of resurrection brought in by Christ operates in us, as signified by baptism (Rom. 6:4), from our regeneration by the Spirit of God (John 3:5) unto the transfiguration of our body (Phil. 3:21).

God created man, but man fell and became subject to death. God, however, would not give up on man. But there was the need of a remedy. The remedy includes both redemption and resurrection. Redemption deals with sin, but it does not deal with death. Thus, there is a need of a further step in addition to redemption, and this step is resurrection. This gives God a way to solve the problem caused by man's fall. However, if there were no resurrection, God would have been defeated by the fall of man. But God can never be defeated. Man fell into sin, and sin brought in death. But God came in to accomplish redemption, solving the problem of sin. In addition, resurrection swallows death. Therefore, instead of being defeated, God is victorious. God has overcome man's fall. He defeated sin by redemption and death by resurrection.

Verse 22 says, "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." In Adam we were born in death and born to die; we are dead in him (Eph. 2:1, 5). As soon as a person is born, he begins to die. Do you realize that throughout the course of your life you have actually been dying? Each year you live is a year deducted from the span of your life. We were not born to grow and live; we were born to die, for in Adam we were born in death.

In verse 22 Paul does not just say that in Adam all die, but he goes on to declare that in Christ all shall be made alive. In Christ we have been reborn in life and resurrected to live; we have been enlivened, made alive, in Him (Eph. 2:5-6). On the one hand, we are dying; on the other hand, we are living. In Christ we all have been made alive; we have been resurrected to live.

B. Each One in His Own Order

In verse 23 Paul continues, "But each one in his own order: the firstfruit, Christ; after that those who are Christ's at His appearing." Here Paul again refers to Christ as the firstfruit, the first One raised from among the dead as the firstfruit of resurrection. Those who are Christ's are the believers in Christ, the just ones, who will be resurrected unto life at the Lord's coming back before the millennium (John 5:29; Luke 14:14; 1 Thes. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:52; Rev. 20:4-6). They will be the second group resurrected from among the dead.

In verse 24 Paul declares, "Then the end, whenever He delivers up the kingdom to God, even the Father; whenever He annuls all rule and all authority and power." The end denotes the end of all the ages and dispensations of the old creation. This is also the end of the millennium before the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1). In all the ages and dispensations, God, on one hand, has been dealing with His enemy, Satan, and all the negative things in the universe; on the other hand, He has accomplished all things for the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. The last of these ages and dispensations will be the millennium, the kingdom

age, after which all God's dealings and accomplishments will be fully completed. That completion will be the end, the conclusion, of all God's work. At this end all the dead unbelievers, the unjust, will be resurrected unto judgment for eternal perdition (John 5:29; Rev. 20:5, 11-15). They will be the third group to be resurrected.

Christ's resurrection marked the beginning of the church age. The believers in Christ who have died will be resurrected at His coming, which will be at the end of the church age. Here we see two resurrections: the first at the beginning of the church age, and the second at the consummation of the church age. The Greek word rendered "end" in verse 24 actually means completion. As we have pointed out, verse 24 refers to the end of all the ages and dispensations of the old creation. The end will not occur at the completion of the church age, but at the completion of the millennium. Then there will be eternity with the new heaven and the new earth. Paul's word is very brief, but it implies a great deal, for it includes the millennium. After the millennium, the end to which Paul refers in verse 24 will come.

In verse 24 the word "whenever" is significant. It points to the time when Christ annuls satanic authority, subdues all His enemies (v. 25), abolishes death (v. 26), and delivers up the kingdom to God the Father; that is, when all the negative things are done away and the entire purpose of God is fulfilled, the old creation will come to its end.

When will the Lord Jesus deliver up the kingdom to God? This will not be at His coming back, for then He will bring the kingdom of God to earth. Then for a thousand years He will execute the kingdom. Hence, the delivering up of the kingdom to God must be at the end of the thousand years. When will Christ have annulled all rule, authority, and power? This can only be at the end of the millennium. We know from Revelation 20 that Satan will not be absolutely annulled before the millennium. Instead, he will be imprisoned. Then at the end of the thousand years he will be released from prison. Only then will he be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7-10). Therefore, it will be

after the millennium that Christ will deliver up the kingdom to God. By that time Satan will have been annulled.

After accomplishing redemption, Christ went to receive the kingdom from the Father (Luke 19:13, 15). Before the millennium He as the Son of Man will have received the kingdom from God, the Ancient of days, to rule all the nations for one thousand years (Dan. 7:13-14; Rev. 20:4, 6). At the end of the millennium, after He has defeated Satan, the devil, and his evil angels (as all rule, authority, and power), and even death and Hades, putting all His enemies under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25-26) and casting all of them, including death and Hades, into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7-10, 14), He will deliver the kingdom back to God the Father.

In verse 24 Paul twice uses the word "whenever." However, most translations adopt the rendering "when." In the Recovery Version we follow the Greek to say "whenever." There is an important difference between when and whenever. When indicates a fixed time; whenever means that something could take place at any time. Today Christ could annul all rule, authority, and power if He chose to. Paul did not fix the time, because he was not the Lord. Thus, he said "whenever." Whenever Christ annuls all rule, authority, and power, that will be the end.

In verse 25 Paul says of Christ, "For He must reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet." In order for Christ to reign He must be in resurrection. If there were no resurrection, Christ would still be in the tomb, and it would not be possible for Him to reign. Christ began to reign from the time of His resurrection. In Matthew 28:18 the Lord Jesus said to the disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Then He charged them to go and disciple all nations. He has the authority to reign. Now under His reign we must disciple the nations, bringing the nations into His kingdom and making them His people. Today the real king, the real ruler, is the Lord Jesus. According to Revelation 1, He is the ruler of the kings of the earth. Every king, queen,

president, and head of state is under His reign. Actually, this statement also is a strong part of Paul's rebuttal to those who would say there is no resurrection.

In verse 25 Paul says that Christ must reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet. The longer Christ reigns, the more enemies are put under His feet. Eventually, at the end of the millennium, the last age of the old creation, every enemy will have been put under the feet of Christ. The word "until" indicates this and points to the end of the thousand years. That will be the time when every enemy has been put under Christ's feet.

In verse 26 Paul says, "The last enemy that is being abolished is death." Immediately after the fall of man, God began His work to abolish sin and death. This work has been progressing through the Old and New Testament ages and is still in process today. When sin is done away at the end of the old creation and when its source, Satan, is cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7-10), death will be abolished. It also will be cast into the lake of fire with Hades, its power, after the last and final judgment at the white throne (Rev. 20:11-15).

In verse 27 Paul explains, "For He has subjected all things under His feet. But when He says that all things have been subjected, it is evident that He is excepted Who has subjected all things to Him." The pronoun "He" in this verse refers to God, who has subjected all things under Christ's feet. This is a quotation of Psalm 8:6 concerning Christ as the Man whom God made to have dominion over all things. This will have been fulfilled when all the things mentioned in verses 24 through 26 have taken place. "For" at the beginning of the verse indicates this.

In verse 27 the phrase "His feet" and the pronoun "Him" refer to Christ as the Man prophesied in Psalm 8:4-8. To Him--the resurrected, glorified, and exalted Man--God has subjected all things (Heb. 2:7-9; Eph. 1:20-22). God has subjected all things under Christ's feet. However, it is evident that this does not include God Himself. God, the One who has subjected all things to Christ, is the only exception.

Verse 28 says, "And when all things are subjected to

Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him Who has subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all." This is the carrying out of God's administration by the way of resurrection.

The first time the pronoun Him is used in verse 28, it refers to Christ, to whom God has subjected all things. The second time it is used, it refers to God, the One who has subjected all things to Christ. According to verse 28, eventually the Son Himself will be subjected to Him who has subjected all things to Him so that God may be all in all. Christ, as the Son of God to be the head of man in His humanity, is under the headship of God the Father (11:3). This is for God's governmental administration. After God the Father has subjected all things under His feet as a resurrected Man in glory (Eph. 1:22; Heb. 2:7-8), and after He as such a resurrected Man has put all enemies under His feet to execute God the Father's subjection of all things to Him, He as the Son of God will also, along with His delivery of the kingdom back to God the Father (v. 24), subject Himself in His divinity to God the Father, who has subjected all things to Him the Son in His humanity. This indicates the Son's absolute subjection and subordination to the Father, exalting the Father that God the Father may be all in all.

At this point I would refer to Ephesians 1:10: "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." How will God subject all things under Christ? He will do this by heading up all things in Christ. Furthermore, it is through the church that all things will be headed up in Christ. First, Christ must have the Body, the church. In His Body He must first head us up. We have seen that in 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul says that the head of Christ is God, the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man. The heading up first takes place in the church. The church is the Body for Christ the Head to head up all things. Once the church has been headed up, the church will be used by Christ as His Body to head up all things. This will be in resurrection.

In 11:3 Paul begins with the headship and in 15:24-28 he consummates with resurrection. In resurrection Christ not only became the life-giving Spirit to impart His life into His Body; He also became the reigning King to execute God's administration. All this is in resurrection. On the one hand, to us as God's chosen people, Christ in resurrection is the life-giving Spirit imparting life to us. On the other hand, to the nations, Christ in His resurrection has become the reigning King executing God's administration. His Body must cooperate with Him in His resurrection life and resurrection authority so that the church may be headed up. Then all the nations will be headed up. Moreover, as He is heading up all things, He is subduing, subjecting, His enemies under His feet. Eventually, at the end of the millennium, after the end of all the ages and dispensations, God's administration will be fully accomplished, and Christ will deliver the kingdom back to God, the One who subjected all things under Him. Then there will be the new heaven and the new earth, and we shall be in the New Jerusalem enjoying Christ and reigning with Him over the nations. This is God's administration carried out in Christ's all-inclusive resurrection.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-SEVEN

DEALING WITH THE MATTER OF RESURRECTION

(3)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 15:29-44

Resurrection is a fact which has much to do with our daily life as Christians. The daily life of a Christian actually depends on resurrection. Furthermore, our Christian hope depends on resurrection. If there were no resurrection, there would be no hope, and we would be the most miserable people on earth.

Christ's resurrection is also related to God's administration. The carrying out of the divine administration depends on our experience of Christ's resurrection. If we do not have Christ as the resurrection life within us, we cannot be living members of His Body for the carrying out of God's administration so that Christ may reign until He subdues all His enemies. In this message we shall consider the moral influence of resurrection (vv. 29-34) and the definition of resurrection (vv. 35-49).

IV. THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF RESURRECTION

We have seen that verses 20 through 28 may be regarded as a parenthesis. This would then connect verse 29 to verse 18, and verses 30 through 32 to verse 19.

A. If There Is No Resurrection

In verse 29 Paul says, "Otherwise, what shall they do who are being baptized for the dead? If the dead are actually not raised, why indeed are they baptized for them?" The phrase "baptized for the dead" means to be baptized for others who are dead. This was not an official

matter generally practiced by the early churches, but a personal activity of some individual believers for dead persons for whom they were concerned who may have believed in the Lord but were not baptized before they died. They did this in hope of their resurrection from among the dead at the Lord's coming back (1 Thes. 4:16), since in baptism resurrection is strongly signified (Col. 2:12). The apostle uses what they did to strengthen the truth of resurrection. This does not mean, however, that he sanctions baptism by some believers for the dead.

In verse 29 the word "for" actually means on behalf of. Some believers had relatives, neighbors, or friends who also believed in the Lord, but who died without being baptized. Out of love for them, certain believers were baptized on behalf of the ones who had died. This was not taught by the apostles, but we know from church history it was practiced by the believers, although the practice was not common. The fact that one believer would be baptized on behalf of another believer who had died signifies a strong belief in resurrection. Baptism signifies death, burial, and resurrection. But if there is no resurrection and if Christians simply die and are buried, why would someone be baptized on behalf of the dead? The fact that someone would be baptized for the dead indicates a belief, an expectation, that the dead one would be resurrected. Paul refers to this practice as part of his rebuttal against the heresy which claimed that there was no resurrection. Here Paul seems to be saying, "If the dead are not raised, then why are others baptized for them to signify that they will be resurrected?" This is Paul's meaning here.

In verse 30 Paul goes on to say, "Why also are we in danger every hour?" If there is no resurrection, then why would Paul allow himself to be in danger every hour? Why would he daily risk his life? Instead, if there is no resurrection, he should enjoy this present life.

In verse 31 Paul continues, "Daily I die, I protest by the boasting in you, brothers, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord." Here the word die means to risk one's life, to be in danger of death, to face death, and to die to self (2 Cor. 11:23; 4:11; 1:8-9; Rom. 8:36).

The Corinthian believers were the fruit of the apostle's labor, a labor in which he risked his life and was in danger of death. In them the apostle can boast of this. By this boasting he protests that daily he dies. The apostle's boasting in the Corinthians as the fruit of the risk of his life is in Christ, not in himself, because his labor is not by himself but by Christ.

Paul was like a soldier risking his life on the battlefield. He fought for God's kingdom, and daily he died for the sake of the Corinthians. When he came to preach the gospel to them, he risked his life. While he was in Corinth, he died daily. It was not an easy thing for Paul to come to Corinth in the Gentile world. This world was opposed to anything Jewish and also opposed to anything Christian. Nevertheless, Paul daily risked his life in order to preach the gospel to them. But because of his willingness to die daily, a number of those at Corinth were saved.

In verse 32 Paul uses a figure of speech: "If after the manner of men I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." The phrase "wild beasts" used here is a figure of speech denoting evil persons or matters. The manner of men in fighting against any evil person or matter is to receive a temporal reward. But the apostle will be rewarded for his fighting with evil persons and matters for the gospel's sake at the resurrection in the future (Luke 14:14; 2 Tim. 4:8).

We know from Acts 19 that Paul was fighting against "wild beasts." Both the Jews and the Gentiles at Ephesus strongly opposed him. Thus, he had to fight against evil persons and evil things. But if there were no resurrection, what profit would it have been to Paul to fight in this way? As Paul says, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." This appears to be a quotation of a saying of that day, a maxim of the Epicureans. If there is no resurrection, we believers shall have no hope in the future and thus become the most miserable of all men (v. 19). If so, we should enjoy our life today, forgetting the future, like the Epicureans.

B. A Warning Not to Be Deceived

Verse 33 says, "Do not be deceived, evil companionships corrupt good morals." This appears to be a quotation of another saying of that day, a fragment of a Greek poem. By this word the apostle warns the Corinthian believers not to have any companionship with those heretics who say there is no resurrection. Such evil companionship will corrupt their faith and Christian virtues.

In verse 33 Paul charges the Corinthians not to pay attention to the deceitful and nonsensical heresy that there is no resurrection. Those who listen to this heresy will be deceived by it. Furthermore, if they become companions of heretics, that companionship will corrupt good morals. This principle applies to us in the church life today.

Certain of those who left the Lord's recovery and now speak evil concerning it may try to influence others who have remained in the church life. If you take in negative thoughts and become a companion to those who oppose the church life, that companionship will corrupt your church life. The good morals mentioned in verse 33 include loving the Lord, living for the future, risking our lives for the gospel, and practicing the proper church life. It actually includes all the good things covered in the entire book of 1 Corinthians.

In verse 34 Paul continues his charge: "Become sober righteously and do not sin, for some are ignorant of God. I speak to your shame." To become sober, righteously, is to awaken to soberness from a drunken stupor; it is to cease, righteously, to be drunken. The word "righteously" here means to be right with God and man. To say there is no resurrection offends God and man, and it is sin. Hence, the apostle advises the misled Corinthians to awake soberly from this sin to be right with God and man. They were drunken unrighteously in a stupor of the no-resurrection heresy. They needed to cease being in that stupor.

Literally, the words "are ignorant" are "have ignorance." To be heretical in saying there is no

resurrection is to be ignorant of God, not knowing God's power or His economy (Matt. 22:29-32). This is a shame to the believers.

As Christians, we must be awake to soberness. We should not be like the Epicureans, who wanted only to enjoy life and did not care for tomorrow. We need to cease, righteously, to be drugged. Anyone who says that there is no resurrection is not righteous with God or man. Likewise, those who oppose the church life are not right with either God or man.

Once I received a letter from a brother who acknowledged that I had helped him to know Christ and experience Christ. He was grateful for this help, and also for help in knowing the church. But then he went on to say that my teaching regarding the church life, especially the church ground, is fleshly. It is unrighteous to say that to teach the believers to practice the church life is fleshly. This saying is unrighteous both toward God and toward man. Anyone who makes such a statement or who agrees with it needs to awaken as from a drunken stupor.

Today there are many heretical teachings. Some of these teachings may contain only a small percentage of heresy, and others, a much larger percentage. Do you know why you are willing to accept a certain kind of heresy? It is because you have a tendency, an inner inclination, toward that heresy. It fits your taste. Then, because you take in a heretical teaching to match your taste, you become drugged.

Knowing the situation among the Corinthians, Paul warned them not to accept the heresy which denies the resurrection. He knew this would involve an evil companionship that would corrupt their morals in the church life. By this we see that resurrection certainly has a positive influence on our morals. But to deny the resurrection will corrupt our morals. It will cause us to be shipwrecked.

V. THE DEFINITION OF RESURRECTION

In the natural world we have many illustrations of resurrection. In 1936 I paid a visit to one of the leading

universities in China. One of the students spoke to me about his difficulty in believing in resurrection. He told me that due to his modern scientific knowledge, he could not believe. To him, resurrection was against scientific truth. Outside of the room where we were meeting there was a wheat field. Drawing his attention to the wheat growing in the field, I pointed out that the wheat was produced by some grains of seed that were buried in the earth. I told him that, in a sense, those seeds died, but that now they had come forth in resurrection as wheat. Through that illustration of death and resurrection, this young man was saved. Now he is one of the leading co-workers in Taiwan. In using wheat as an illustration of resurrection, I was not following my own wisdom. On the contrary, I was following the example set by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.

A. The Body of Resurrection

Verses 35 and 36 say, "But someone will say, How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come? Foolish man, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies." The philosophical Greeks thought they were clever, but Paul addressed them as foolish, indicating that the questions they asked proved their foolishness. In his answer Paul refers to the plant life. The reality of resurrection is contained and concealed in nature, especially in the plant life. A seed sown into the earth dies and is made alive. This is resurrection. This answers the foolish Corinthians' first question, "How are the dead raised?"

In verse 37 Paul continues, "And what you sow, you do not sow the body that shall be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat, or some of the rest." What is sown is not a sheaf of wheat, but a seed, bare grain. Then the seed grows and changes into "the body that shall be." It may be very difficult to distinguish between certain seeds. But once these seeds have been sown into the soil and have grown up, eventually the differences will be manifest. The plants will differ in shape and color.

Continuing this illustration in verse 38, Paul goes on to say, "But God gives it a body even as He willed, and to

each of the seeds its own body." Paul applies the word body here not to the body sown to die, as in verse 37, but to the resurrected body given by God, in a different shape and on a higher level. This answers the Corinthians' second foolish question, "With what kind of body do they come?"

Verse 39 says, "All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one of men and another flesh of cattle, and another of birds, and another of fishes." From verse 39 through 41, the apostle proves to the foolish Corinthians that God is able to give a body to all resurrected lives, just as He gave to all created things--to men and animals on the earth, to birds in the air, and to fish in the water--the earthly bodies with their different glories; and to the sun, the moon, and the stars, heavenly bodies with heavenly glory in varying degrees. In verse 42 Paul draws the conclusion, "So also is the resurrection of the dead." Then he points out that the body is sown in corruption, dishonor, and weakness, but raised in incorruption, glory, and power.

In verse 44 Paul declares, "It is sown a soulish body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a soulish body, there is also a spiritual body." A soulish body is a natural body animated by the soul, a body in which the soul predominates. A spiritual body is a resurrected body saturated by the spirit, a body in which the spirit predominates. If we die, our natural body, having been soulish, will be sown, buried, in corruption, dishonor, and weakness. When it is resurrected, it will become spiritual in incorruption, glory, and power. Hallelujah, one day we shall be in resurrection! Then there will be no more corruption, dishonor, or weakness. Instead, we shall be in incorruption, glory, and power.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-EIGHT

DEALING WITH THE MATTER OF RESURRECTION

(4)

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 15:45-58

In this message we shall continue to consider the definition of resurrection and then go on to see the victory of resurrection.

B. A Spiritual Body with Christ's Heavenly Image

Verse 45 says, "So also it is written, The first man, Adam, became a living soul; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit." Adam became a living soul through creation with a soulish body. Christ became a life-giving Spirit through resurrection with a spiritual body. Adam as a living soul is natural; Christ as a life-giving Spirit is resurrected. First, in incarnation, He became flesh for redemption (John 1:14, 29). Then in resurrection He became a life-giving Spirit for imparting life (John 10:10). He had a soulish body like Adam through incarnation. He has a spiritual body through resurrection. His soulish body has become a spiritual one through resurrection. Now He is a life-giving Spirit in resurrection, with a spiritual body, ready to be received by His believers. When we believe into Him, He enters our spirit, and we are joined to Him as the life-giving Spirit. Hence, we become one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). Our spirit is made alive and resurrected with Him. Eventually our present soulish body will also become a spiritual body in resurrection just as His body is (vv. 52-54; Phil. 3:21).

Verse 45 implies both creation and the new creation. Adam, the first man, was the head of the old creation.

When God created him, Adam became a living soul. This means that he became a person, a human being. In Hebrew the word for Adam means man. Because God created Adam a living soul, his main part was the soul, which is for the old creation. Today, in principle, if we live in our soul, by our soul, or for our soul, we are in the old creation. The soul is the center and lifeline of the old creation. A person may be moral, but if he lives in the soul, he still belongs to the old creation.

Christ being the last Adam implies a termination and conclusion of the old creation. The old creation ends with a man, the last Adam. This Man who terminated the old creation became in resurrection a life-giving Spirit. Now this Spirit is the center and lifeline of the new creation.

The old creation was created by God. The new creation, however, comes into being not by creation, but by resurrection. Therefore, verse 45 implies two creations: the old creation with man as a living soul to be the center and lifeline, and the new creation in resurrection with the life-giving Spirit as the center and lifeline.

Many Christians today are short of revelation, of the proper spiritual vision, and oppose us when we say that Christ as the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. But to deny that Christ is the life-giving Spirit is equal to denying the reality of resurrection. The life-giving Spirit is the life pulse of Christ's resurrection. If Christ had merely been resurrected with a body and did not become a life-giving Spirit, His resurrection would not mean nearly as much to us. It would simply be an objective fact unrelated to life. It could then be compared to the resurrection of Lazarus. The resurrection of Lazarus was merely an act of resurrection; it did not produce, bring forth, anything related to life. But Christ's resurrection is absolutely a matter related to life, for in resurrection He became a life-giving Spirit.

Most Christians believe in resurrection simply in an objective way. To them the resurrection of Christ is nothing more than an objective act, an act which is not related to the members of the Body of Christ. Those who have this understanding of Christ's resurrection also

regard His ascension strictly in an objective way. They do not realize that the ascension has something to do with us subjectively. From the point of view of some Christians, both the resurrection and ascension of Christ have nothing to do with us as far as life is concerned. On the contrary, both are objective facts accomplished by Christ. They hold to these facts as part of their fundamental beliefs.

Resurrection was not merely an objective act accomplished by Christ. It is very much related to us subjectively. Through incarnation Christ became a man; He became us. Therefore, incarnation was much more than an objective fact. It was a process that brought God into humanity. The principle is the same with the process of resurrection. Resurrection was not merely an act in itself; it was a process to bring forth the life-giving Spirit. Through the process of resurrection, the Man who ended the old creation became the life-giving Spirit, the germinating element of the new creation.

Very few Christians have seen that Christ in resurrection is a life-giving Spirit. Andrew Murray, however, understood something concerning this. He wrote about it in his masterpiece, *The Spirit of Christ*, in the chapter entitled, "The Spirit of the Glorified Jesus." The Spirit of the glorified Jesus is actually the Lord Jesus Himself in resurrection and in glory. When He entered into resurrection, He became the Spirit who gives life. This life-giving Spirit is the essence to germinate a new creation. The germinating element of the new creation is the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

Traditional Christian theology opposes the truth that Christ has become a life-giving Spirit. In the opinion of many, this is heretical. Actually, it is a truth found in the depths of the Word of God. Eventually, the truth will prevail.

First Corinthians 15:45 is a great verse. To repeat, this verse implies the old creation with the soul as the center and the new creation with the Spirit as the center. This Spirit is nothing less than Christ, the Triune God. Actually, the life-giving Spirit is the processed Triune God. God has passed through the process of incarnation,

crucifixion, and resurrection. Now in resurrection He is the life-essence to germinate the new creation. We have become the new creation germinated by the Triune God as the life-giving Spirit. In *The Economy of God* we emphasize the human spirit and Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit. The highest definition of resurrection is that it is the process by which Christ, the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit.

In 1964, when we were working on our hymnal, one brother advised us not to publish the hymns on Christ as the Spirit. He admitted that the Bible reveals that Christ is the Spirit. However, he said that because most Christians would not accept this teaching, we should not include hymns on this matter in our hymnal. I told him that I would never force anyone to follow my teaching, but that I did need the liberty to teach the truth from the Bible. I went on to point out that our goal is first to save sinners by preaching the gospel; second, to edify the saints and build them up through proper teaching so that they may grow in life; third, to take the unique ground of the church to establish local churches; and fourth, to have the fellowship of all the churches as one Body. I said that as long as our work has these four aspects, we have the same aim and the same goal. I also told him that I have a heavy burden concerning the matter of Christ being the Spirit and that I have no choice except to minister according to this burden. I told him that I must declare that Christ today is the life-giving Spirit. It is not up to me whether others will accept this teaching or reject it. At the time of Martin Luther, not everyone accepted the truth of justification by faith. If Luther had been hesitant on this point, how could there have been a Reformation? I told him strongly that I am not afraid of opposition.

I do not want anyone to follow me blindly. Paul says, "Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ" (11:1). If I follow Christ, if I follow the Bible, if I follow the truth, then you should follow me. Likewise, if you follow Christ, the Bible, and the truth, I should follow you. In this manner, we should follow one another. This is what we endeavor to do in the Lord's recovery.

Some who oppose the claim that Christ today is the life-giving Spirit try to make an issue of the fact that 15:45 does not use a definite article, that this verse speaks of a life-giving Spirit and not of the life-giving Spirit. However, the crucial matter here is not whether the article is definite or indefinite; it is the clear mentioning of the life-giving Spirit. Do our opposers believe that there are two Spirits who give life, the Holy Spirit and the life-giving Spirit? It is heretical to teach that there are two life-giving Spirits, two Spirits who give life. The more I speak on Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit, the more bold, assured, and encouraged I am. It truly is according to the divine revelation that Christ, the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit.

To say that the last Adam became the life-giving Spirit is similar to saying, according to John 1:14, that the Word became flesh. Notice that there is no article before the word flesh. Would it make any difference if this verse said, "The Word became *the* flesh"? In either case, flesh or the flesh, the meaning is the same. In the same principle, the lack of the definite article is not crucial in 15:45. To repeat, the vital matter is the life-giving Spirit.

Christians may admit that certain matters are found in the Word, but, being afraid of man, they may not have the boldness to stand for the truth. Because of the influence of tradition, they do not stand fully for the truth. Certain ones who oppose us have admitted that the Son is called the Father in Isaiah 9:6, but they would not say this because of tradition. Others may follow tradition, but we care only for the Bible, the pure Word of God.

In verse 46 Paul says, "But the spiritual is not first, but the soulish; after that the spiritual." The spiritual here denotes Christ, the second Man; the soulish denotes Adam, the first man (v. 47). According to human understanding, tradition, and practice, we should follow the one who is first, not the one who is second. This was the reason that Paul deliberately says in this verse that the soulish and not the spiritual is the first. The spiritual is the second. If we take the way of the Bible, we should follow the second and not the first. For example, should you follow Cain or

Abel? We certainly should not follow Cain, the first; we should follow Abel, the second. Furthermore, at the time of the Passover, it was the firstborn who were slain. This indicates that God's judgment is upon the firstborn. The same principle applies to the first creation and the new creation. God does not want what is first; He wants what is second.

In verse 47 Paul continues, "The first man is out of the earth, earthy; the second Man is out of heaven." Out of the earth denotes the first man Adam's origin, and earthy denotes his nature. Christ is not only the last Adam, but also the second Man. The first Adam is the beginning of mankind; the last Adam is the ending. As the first man, Adam is the head of the old creation, representing it in creation. As the second Man, Christ is the Head of the new creation, representing it in resurrection. In the entire universe there are these two men: the first man Adam, including all his descendants, and the second Man, Christ, comprising all His believers. We believers were included in the first man by birth and became part of the second Man by regeneration. Our believing has transferred us out of the first man into the second. As a part of the first man, our origin is the earth and our nature is earthy. As part of the second Man, our origin is God and our nature is heavenly. Out of heaven denotes both the second Man Christ's divine origin and His heavenly nature.

Verse 48 says, "As is the earthy, such also are they that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." The earthy refers to the first man Adam, who is earthy. "They that are earthy" denote all of Adam's descendants, who, like Adam, are earthy. "The heavenly" denotes the second Man Christ, who is heavenly. Likewise, "they also that are heavenly" denote all the believers in Christ, who, like Christ, are also heavenly. Once we were earthy, but now we are heavenly.

In verse 49 Paul declares, "And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." As a part of Adam, we have borne the earthy man's image through birth. As a part of Christ, we shall

bear the heavenly Man's image in resurrection. This indicates that just as we have been born in Adam as the earthy man, so we shall also be resurrected in Christ as the heavenly Man. Such a resurrection is our destiny. It is as sure as our birth and should never be questioned.

Today we are bearing two images, the image of the earthy and the image of the heavenly. We may take as an illustration of our situation a caterpillar that is in the process of becoming a beautiful butterfly. Sometimes the caterpillar in us can be seen; at other times the butterfly is somewhat evident. Eventually, by resurrection, we shall fully emerge from the cocoon as butterflies. No longer shall we be ugly caterpillars--we shall be beautiful butterflies bearing Christ's image. According to Philippians 3:21, the body of our humiliation will be transfigured into a body of glory and be like Christ's body. This will take place by resurrection and in resurrection.

VI. THE VICTORY OF RESURRECTION

A. Incorruption over Corruption

In the last section of chapter fifteen, verses 50 through 58, we have the victory of resurrection. In verse 50 Paul says, "Now this I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither does corruption inherit incorruption." Flesh and blood are the components of the soulish body, which is corruptible and not qualified to inherit the kingdom of God, which is incorruptible. Corruption is not able to inherit incorruption. Our corruptible body must be resurrected into an incorruptible one that we may be able to inherit the incorruptible kingdom of God in resurrection. Even today, if we live by flesh and blood and not by the spirit, we cannot practice the church life, which is today's kingdom of God. Then in the millennium, we shall not be able to inherit the kingdom of God. For this, we need to be spiritual.

In verse 50 Paul says that corruption does not inherit incorruption. The old creation is not only corrupt; it is

corruption. The kingdom of God, however, is incorruption. Corruption cannot inherit this incorruption.

Verse 51 says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." The mystery here refers to the transfiguration, including resurrection, of our corruptible body into an incorruptible one (Phil. 3:21). This is mysterious and beyond human understanding.

The word sleep in verse 51 means die (1 Cor. 11:30; John 11:11-13; 1 Thes. 4:13-16). The word changed means transfigured from corruption, dishonor, and weakness to incorruption, glory, and power (vv. 42-43); the body of our humiliation conformed to the body of Christ's glory.

Verse 52 says, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." The last trumpet is the seventh trumpet (Rev. 11:15), a trumpet of God (1 Thes. 4:16). This means that the last trumpet here is the same as the seventh trumpet in the book of Revelation. Certainly after the seven trumpets in Revelation there will not be any more trumpets. Therefore, it is correct to say that the seventh trumpet in Revelation is the last trumpet in verse 52.

At the last trumpet, the dead in Christ, the believers who have died, will be raised incorruptible (1 Thes. 4:16). We believers who are living at the time of the Lord's return will be changed. The dead saints will be resurrected first; then the living ones will be changed, transfigured, in rapture (1 Thes. 4:15-17). In verse 53 Paul continues, "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." The phrase "this corruptible" refers to our corruptible and mortal body, which must put on incorruption and immortality either through resurrection, in the case of the saints who have died, or through transfiguration, in the case of the living ones. Then this mortal body will put on immortality. No matter how healthy and strong we may be today, our body is corruptible and mortal. But in resurrection this body will put on something which the Bible speaks of as incorruption and immortality.

B. Life over Death

In verse 54 Paul goes on to say, "And when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality, then shall come to pass the word which is written, Death has been swallowed up in victory." The word "when" refers to the time that our corrupted and mortal body will be resurrected or transfigured from corruption and death into glory and life. Then death will be swallowed up in the victory of resurrection life. This is the consummation of the resurrection we share in God's economy through redemption and salvation in Christ. This resurrection begins with the making alive of our dead spirit and is completed with the transfiguration of our corruptible body. In between is the process of the metabolic transformation of our fallen soul by the life-giving Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18), who is the reality of resurrection.

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

In verse 55 Paul asks, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" This is the apostle's triumphant exclamation concerning the victory of resurrection life over death.

Verse 56 says, "Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law." Death is of the Devil (Heb. 2:14), and it stings us to death with sin (Rom. 5:12). In God's redemption, Christ was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) in order to condemn sin through His death (Rom. 8:3), thus abolishing the sting of death. Then, through His resurrection, death is swallowed up by the resurrection life.

Sin brings curse and condemnation to us by the law, both in our conscience and before God (Rom. 4:15; 5:13, 20; 7:7-8). Hence, the law becomes the power of sin to kill us (Rom. 7:10-11). Since Christ's death has fulfilled the

requirements of the law upon us (1 Pet. 3:18; 2:24), the power of sin is annulled. Thus the death of Christ has condemned sin and annulled the law, and His resurrection has swallowed up death. Therefore, we must give thanks to God, who gives us such victory over sin and death through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 57).

In verse 57 Paul exclaims, "But thanks be to God Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This victory over sin and death by Christ's death and resurrection should not be just an accomplished fact for our acceptance. It must become our daily experience in life by the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit, who is one with our spirit (6:17). Hence, we should live by and walk according to this mingled spirit. Thus, thanks will be continuously given to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is resurrection power that frees us from the law of sin, the power of sin. And in the future it will be resurrection that will swallow up death.

C. A Motive for the Work of the Lord

In verse 58 Paul concludes, "Wherefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." To question the truth of resurrection is to be shaken. To be assured and remain in the reality of resurrection is to stand fast, to be immovable.

Lack of belief in the truth of resurrection disappoints us concerning our future, thus discouraging us in the work of the Lord. Faith gives us a strong aspiration that we may abound in the work of the Lord with the expectation of pleasing the Lord in resurrection at His coming back.

Paul says that our labor is not in vain in the Lord. This is not by our natural life and natural ability, but by the Lord's resurrection life and power. Our labor for the Lord in His resurrection life with His resurrection power will never be in vain, but will result in fulfilling God's eternal purpose through preaching Christ to sinners, ministering life to the saints, and building up the church with the

experiences of the processed Triune God as gold, silver, and precious stones (3:12), and will be rewarded by the returning Lord in the day of resurrection (3:14; Matt. 25:21, 23).

Not long after I was saved, my sister, who was studying at a seminary, wrote me a letter in which she used 15:58 to encourage me to work for the Lord. At the time I did not realize that this verse speaks of something in resurrection and is closely related to resurrection. If we are in resurrection, this verse applies to us. But if we are not in resurrection, we may have the wrong idea that this verse encourages us to strive and be energetic. Throughout the years, Christians have quoted this verse. However, I do not believe that very many realize that this verse is related to resurrection. This is indicated by the word "wherefore" at the beginning of the verse, a word that refers to all that Paul has said in this chapter. Based upon what he has written here, Paul encourages the beloved brothers to be steadfast, immovable and always abounding in the work of the Lord. According to the natural life, they could be shaken even by a small thing. How, then, could they be steadfast? We can be steadfast only by the resurrection life within us. Resurrection makes us steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. Furthermore, it causes us to know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Without resurrection, whatever we do is vain. But in resurrection our labor in the Lord is not vain. Therefore, resurrection is not only an encouragement; it also motivates us to the work of the Lord.

LIFE-STUDY OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTY-NINE

DEALING WITH THE COLLECTION OF THE GIFT AND CONCLUSION

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 16:1-24

In this message we shall consider 16:1-24, the last chapter of 1 Corinthians. In verses 1 through 9 Paul deals with the collection of the gift. Verses 10 through 24 are the conclusion of this Epistle.

I. DEALING WITH THE COLLECTION OF THE GIFT

A. The Apostle's Direction

In verse 1 Paul says, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you do also." This is the eleventh matter dealt with by the apostle in this Epistle, a matter concerned with money, mammon, and material possessions. All of fallen mankind are under the domination of mammon and material possessions (Matt. 6:19-21, 24-25, 30; 19:21-22; Luke 12:13-19). At the day of Pentecost, under the power of the Holy Spirit, all the believers overthrew this domination and had all their possessions in common for distribution to the needy ones (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 34-37). That practice, due to the weakness of the believers' fallen nature (see Acts 5:1-11; 6:1), did not last long. It was already over by the Apostle Paul's time. Then the believers needed grace to overcome the power of mammon and material things and to release them from Satan's domination for an offering to the Lord to fulfill His purpose. Resurrection life is the supply for the believers to live such a life, a life trusting in God, not in treasures of material possessions, a life not for today but for the future, not for this age but for the coming age (Luke 12:16-21; 1 Tim. 6:17-19), a life that overthrows the

usurpation of temporal and uncertain riches. This may be the reason that this dealing follows the one concerning the reality of resurrection life. In any case this dealing is related to God's administration among the churches.

It is a crucial matter that this dealing follows a chapter concerning the reality of resurrection life. Resurrection is not only the power over sin and death; resurrection is a power over mammon and material possessions. Therefore, immediately following the chapter on resurrection, Paul turns to the matter of material possessions.

From verse 1 we see that Paul gave the same direction to the church in Corinth as he did to the churches of Galatia. This strongly indicates that all the local churches should be the same in their practice (7:17; 11:16; 14:33).

In verse 2 Paul continues, "On the first day of every week let each one of you lay aside by himself, storing up as he may be prospered, that no collections be made when I come." The seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, was a memorial of God's creation (Gen. 2:1-3; Exo. 20:8, 11). The first day of the week is a symbol of the Lord's resurrection; it is the day the Lord resurrected from among the dead (John 20:1). It is called the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). The New Testament saints meet and offer their possessions on this day (Acts 20:7), the day of the Lord's resurrection, signifying that they have been resurrected with the Lord (Eph. 2:6) through His resurrection (1 Pet. 1:3), and that they meet to remember Him and worship God with their offerings in resurrection by the resurrection life, not by their natural life.

Our giving must be in resurrection life, not in our natural life. However, much of the giving by Christians today is done according to the natural life. Money is raised by the natural life in a way that is absolutely in the old creation. Furthermore, those who give large amounts are often publicly recognized, whereas those who give small amounts are ignored. Our giving must be completely different from this. Our offerings must be presented in resurrection and by resurrection.

In verse 3 Paul says, "And when I arrive, whomever you

may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem." The Greek word rendered gift can also be translated grace. This was a kind of fellowship, under the apostle's direction, of the churches in the Gentile world with the church in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:1-2; Rom. 15:25-27).

We have pointed out again and again that in the second section of 1 Corinthians, chapters eleven through sixteen, Paul deals with matters in the realm of the divine administration. This section begins with the headship of God and consummates with a seemingly insignificant matter--the gift of material things for the saints. Whether or not we are truly in God's administration, or for God's administration, and are carrying out God's administration, can be tested by how we are related to material things and how we handle our money. If we use our money in a worldly way, then no matter what we may say about resurrection, we are not truly in God's administration. The extent to which we are in the divine administration and for the divine administration is determined by how we care for money and material possessions.

Throughout the years, we in the Lord's recovery have been hearing His Word and have been built up in the riches of Christ. We have surely been nourished by the divine Word. Now if we all would be faithful to live for God's administration in caring for money and material matters, there would be no financial needs in the recovery. For example, certainly we can exercise our spirit and our will to save a small amount of money each week, perhaps just two dollars and fifty cents, and give this to the Lord for His move on earth. One day, instead of having our lunch at a restaurant, we may eat a simple meal prepared at home. Then the money saved could be given to the Lord. Imagine what the situation would be if we all were faithful to do something like this week by week!

In such a spiritual book dealing with spiritual and heavenly matters, Paul eventually turns to the very practical matter of finances. It is quite easy to talk about the headship and say, "Praise the Lord, I am under the headship of Christ! Christ is my Head. Concerning His

headship, I do not have any problems." But can you say that you have no problem with the matter Paul brings up in chapter sixteen? We may talk about the victory of resurrection over sin and death, but what about the victory in resurrection over your use of your money and material possessions? It is easy for our talk to be abstract and impractical concerning the headship, discerning the Body, the gifts, and resurrection. For this reason, Paul, in God's wisdom deals with the matter of giving immediately after the matter of resurrection. If we truly live in resurrection, we shall not have a problem with money or material things.

In verse 2 Paul specifically mentions "the first day of every week." We have seen that this day, the Lord's Day, is a symbol of Christ's resurrection. We are not those who live and act in the seventh day of the week, for that day is a memorial of the old creation. We should be living in resurrection on the first day of the week. This means that we should not be seventh-day people; we should be first-day people. If we live in resurrection, in the first day of the week, then in the Lord's recovery there will be no problem regarding financial need.

B. The Apostle's Willingness

In 16:4-9 we see the apostle's willingness. Verse 4 says, "And if it is fitting for me also to go, they shall go with me." In verse 6 he goes on to say, "And perhaps I will stay with you, or even spend the winter, that you may send me forward wherever I may go." In verse 8 Paul tells us that he would remain in Ephesus until Pentecost. This Epistle was written in Ephesus, where the apostle stayed for three years on the third journey of his ministry (Acts 19:21-22; 20:1, 31).

II. CONCLUSION

A. Intimate Charges

Verse 10 says, "Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without fear; for he is working the work of the

Lord, even as I." In order for Timothy to be with the Corinthians without fear, they would have to be obedient and submissive to Paul's word. In this verse Paul seems to be saying, "You must be in the first day of the week, living in resurrection. You must also be under the headship of Christ and of God, you must discern the Body, desire the greater gifts, practice the gifts in love, and be in resurrection. If this is your situation, then my young co-worker will have no fear when he is with you. See that Timothy is with you without fear, for he is working the work of the Lord even as I am."

In verse 11 Paul continues, "Let no one therefore despise him. But send him forward in peace, that he may come to me; for I am awaiting him with the brothers." Here Paul urges the philosophical Greek believers not to despise his younger co-worker. How could the Corinthians have sent Timothy forward in peace unless they were living in resurrection? This would have been impossible. In this verse we actually have a very pleasant picture. Paul was awaiting Timothy with the brothers, hoping that the Corinthians would send him forward in peace.

In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, "Now concerning our brother Apollos, I urged him much that he would come to you with the brothers; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come whenever he has opportunity." By this, the Corinthians should realize that Paul's attitude toward Apollos and his relationship with him were in sharp contrast to their preferences (1:11-12). His attitude and relationship kept the oneness; their preferences caused division.

Both Paul and Apollos were persons living in the Spirit. Yet one urged the other to visit the church, but that one did not have the desire to do it. This shows that both had freedom in the Spirit, and the Spirit had freedom in them. This also shows that no one exercised any control over the work for the Lord.

In verse 10 Paul simply refers to Timothy. But when speaking of Apollos in verse 12, he uses the expression "our brother." This is a dear, intimate expression. We know

from the early chapters of this Epistle that certain of the Corinthians preferred Apollos over Paul. Their preferences were a cause of division. Now Paul's reference to "our brother Apollos" indicates that there was nothing between him and Apollos. It seems as if Paul was saying, "You Corinthians make a difference between Apollos and me. But I would like you to know that there is nothing between us. Apollos is my brother; he is our brother. I urged him much that he would come to you." Even though Paul realized that certain of the Corinthians preferred Apollos, he still encouraged him to go to Corinth. In fact, he urged him much to go. However, it is not likely that very many Christian workers today would encourage another worker to go to a certain place if they realized that those in that place had a preference for that other worker.

We have pointed out that although Paul urged Apollos to go to Corinth, it was not Apollos' desire to go at that time. Who, then, was living in the Spirit, Paul or Apollos? The answer is that both were living in the Spirit. But although both Paul and Apollos lived in the Spirit, they had different feelings about Apollos' going to Corinth.

Some have condemned me and accused me of being a dictator; they have claimed that I have autonomous authority to control all the churches and all the saints. It is a fact that I do not exercise control over the churches or over the saints. As many can testify, when others come to me for advice, I encourage them to go to the Lord and pray. I tell them that it is not for me to decide what they should do. Paul did not exercise control, and we do not exercise control today.

In verse 13 Paul says, "Watch, stand firm in the faith, be a man, be strong!" Here Paul charges the Corinthians not to be shaken by any heresy, especially the heresy that says there is no resurrection. The faith in this verse is objective; it refers to what we believe. To be a man is to be a full-grown man, strong in the faith and firm in his standing, not like a child in understanding (14:20), or a babe tossed by waves and carried about by the wind of teaching (Eph. 4:14). Growth in life is needed (1 Cor. 3:1,6).

Verse 14 says, "Let all you do be done in love." This is the love defined in chapter thirteen.

In verses 17 and 18 Paul says that Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus "refreshed my spirit and yours." This must have been by the riches of Christ ministered by their spirit in order to touch the spirit of others. This indicates that our contact with the saints and our relationship with them must be in and by our spirit, not our soulish emotion. If these brothers had come to Paul with a lot of gossip, they could not have refreshed his spirit. The fact that they refreshed the spirit of the apostle and of all the Corinthians indicates that they lived and behaved in the spirit.

B. Loving Greetings and Warning

Verse 19 says, "The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you much in the Lord, with the church which is in their house." This indicates that the church in Ephesus met in the house of Aquila and Prisca when they lived there (Acts 18:18-19, 26). When they lived in Rome, the church in Rome met in their home (Rom. 16:5; see Col. 4:15-16; Philem. 2).

Verses 10 through 21 present a picture of the actual practice of the Body life in a beautiful harmony, not only among the apostle and his co-workers, but also between them and the churches for the building up of the Body. As we have seen, this building up is emphasized strongly in chapters twelve through fourteen.

In verse 22 Paul declares, "If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed! The Lord comes!" The Greek word *anathema* denotes a thing or person accursed; set apart, devoted, to woe. To love God makes us those who are blessed of God to share the divine blessings He has ordained and prepared for us beyond our apprehension (2:9). Not to love the Lord makes us those who are accursed, set apart to a curse. This is a serious warning.

The sentence, "The Lord comes!" is actually a translation of the Greek word *maranatha*, a phrase taken from Aramaic. It may also be rendered, "Our Lord come!"

It is an exclamation that reminds us of the Lord's second coming with judgment.

Verse 23 says, "The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you." As we pointed out in a foregoing message, this grace is the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit to bring the processed God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply.

As a rule, Paul concludes his Epistles with a word concerning grace. But in this Epistle he ends with a word of love: "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus" (v. 24). This is not natural love, but love in Christ, love in resurrection (4:21), the love of God that becomes ours through the grace of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). Of Paul's fourteen Epistles, only this one ends with such a word of the assurance of love. It is because of the apostle's dealings with strong rebukes (1:13; 3:3; 4:7-8; 5:2, 5; 6:5-8; 11:17). He is faithful, honest, and frank to them in the love of God in Christ (2 Cor. 2:4), without any politics. Hence, the Lord honors his dealings so that the Corinthians accept his rebuke and gain much benefit through their repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-13).

First Corinthians concludes in a pleasant spirit with a pleasant picture of fellowship. Although it is a book of dealings and rebukes, it ends in such a pleasant way. It shows us that in the ancient time there was a sweet fellowship among the co-workers, between the co-workers and the churches, and among all the churches. The co-workers and the churches were all in this pleasant fellowship.

We have seen that the second section of this Epistle covers five matters related to God's administration: headship, the Body, the gifts, resurrection, and material possessions. God's administration requires the headship. Then to carry out the divine administration under God's headship, there is the need of the Body. If the Body is to carry out God's administration, all the members of the Body need gifts for functioning. Thus, we have the headship, the Body, and the gifts, the abilities. Furthermore, there is the need for power, strength. This is

resurrection life. Resurrection life enables the members to function with their gifts so that the Body may operate to carry out God's administration under His headship. The last item covered in this section--money and material possessions--is a test to prove how much we are living in resurrection life.

The very practical test of material possessions is a matter related to the first day of every week. A day refers to our living. The kind of living we have depends on the kind of day we have. If we are defeated in our living, this means that we have a day of defeat. Moreover, if we live in the old creation, we are living in the seventh day. But if we are living in the resurrection life, we are living in the first day of the week. If we are not in resurrection, we are through with the gifts, the Body, and God's headship. However, if we live in the first day of the week, that is, live in resurrection life, then we are surely under God's headship, we are in the Body, and we exercise our gifts in a profitable way. Then we shall have a daily living that declares to the universe that we are those who live a life absolutely in resurrection.

To Christ, the last enemy is death. But to us, the last enemy is mammon, material possessions. Resurrection life enables us to overcome the power of sin. Resurrection is also the power for Christ to rule over the rebellious ones and subdue all His enemies. The last enemy that will be subdued by Him is death. As the continuation of chapter fifteen, chapter sixteen indicates that the resurrection life in us overcomes our final enemy--material possessions.

From observation and experience, I can testify that with many spiritual people, the last matter to be overcome is the matter of money. Some Christians are victorious over their temper, their weakness, and their sin, but they are not victorious in the area of material possessions.

From the time I was a young Christian, the Lord began to discipline me in the matter of money and material possessions. The Lord trained me to use money for Him. Even as a young person, I used any money I had to print gospel tracts I had written. After some experience, I can truly testify that material possessions are the last enemy.

Therefore, from experience I realize that the overcoming of material things in chapter sixteen is both a continuation and a conclusion of the matter of resurrection dealt with in chapter fifteen.

Praise the Lord that we have the headship, the Body, the gifts, the resurrection, and the victory over material possessions! The victory proves that we are living in the first day of the week. We are not those living in the Sabbath, that is, in the old creation. We are a people of the Lord's Day living in resurrection. By resurrection life, we have overcome everything, and everything is under our feet.