LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE ONE

INTRODUCTION

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 1:1-11

The book of 2 Corinthians is unique in that it has a very long introduction. This Epistle contains thirteen chapters, and the first one and a half chapters are the introduction. No other book in the Bible has such a long introduction.

The introduction to 2 Corinthians is long because the background of this book is quite complicated. In 1 Corinthians Paul dealt with the Corinthian believers regarding many things. He argued with them and rebuked them. Because of this background, it was necessary for 2 Corinthians to have a lengthy introduction.

This introduction is actually a word of comfort. Paul realized that, because he had disciplined the Corinthians in the first Epistle, he needed to bind up their wounds in this Epistle. The first one and a half chapters of 2 Corinthians are related to this binding up of wounds. What Paul was doing here is similar to the comfort a parent may give to a child after the child has been disciplined. Suppose a child misbehaves and is seriously disciplined by his parents. After the child repents, the parents will spend time to comfort the child. In the first chapter and a half of 2 Corinthians, Paul pours oil into the wounds of the Corinthians, wounds caused by his discipline.

Another reason for this lengthy introduction is that Paul was a very emotional person. He was a person strong in his emotion in a proper way. Although he was restricted by the Spirit when he was rebuking the Corinthian believers, he was still strong. For example, in 1 Corinthians 4:21 he asks, "What do you want? Shall I come

to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness?" These words indicate that he was strong in his emotion. When Paul was pouring oil into the wounds and binding them up, he exercised his emotion and released it in a very positive way. Thus, he needed a longer time to express his emotion.

Verse 3 reveals Paul's emotion: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and God of all encouragement." Paul's reference to affliction, suffering, and encouragement in verses 4 and 5 also indicates that he was emotional. It seems to me that Paul could have condensed these three verses into one sentence and said, "Dear Corinthian brothers, since I have been encouraged by God, I would now encourage you." But because Paul was very emotional, he wrote in a way that seems repetitious. In verses 6, 7, and 8 he continues to speak of suffering, affliction, and encouragement. Because Paul was emotional, he needed the opportunity to release his emotion positively.

Another reason for this long introduction is that the Corinthians were very complicated. On the one hand, they liked Paul; on the other hand, they were somewhat unhappy with him. He used this long introduction to resolve their complications and calm them down so that they could receive his word.

I. THE WRITERS AND THE RECEIVERS

In this long introduction we can see Paul's person. I very much love Paul. He can be emotional, sympathetic, and tender. He can also be strong and even tough. He is honest, simple, and sincere. Sometimes he may be polite, but he is never political. I have learned a great deal from Paul. Throughout my life I have learned the most from two persons: the first is Paul; the second is Watchman Nee.

Verse 1 says, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Timothy the brother, to the church of God which is in Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia." Achaia was located south of Macedonia. A province of the Roman Empire, it formed the major part of today's Greece. The city of Corinth was in this province.

The writers of 2 Corinthians were Paul and Timothy; the receivers were the church of God in Corinth with all the saints in the whole of Achaia.

II. GREETING

Paul's greeting is found in verse 2: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." This greeting is commonly used by Paul in his Epistles.

III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF GOD

A. Encouraged to Encourage

In verses 3 and 4 Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and God of all encouragement; Who encourages us in all our affliction, that we may be able to encourage those who are in every affliction through the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God." The Greek word rendered compassions also means mercies, pity, sympathy. Encouragement is slightly different from comfort and consolation and has the sense of being cheered. Such a title as the Father of compassions and God of all encouragement is ascribed here to God because this Epistle is one of comfort and encouragement, written by the apostle after he was comforted and encouraged by the repentance of the Corinthian believers.

In verse 4 Paul says that we encourage those in affliction through the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God. First we must experience the encouragement of God. Then we shall be able to encourage others with the encouragement we have experienced of God. Hence, we are encouraged so that we may be able to encourage others. This requires experience. When we are experienced, we have the spiritual capital necessary for encouraging others.

If you have never suffered and have never been encouraged by God, you will not be able to encourage others. Your words of encouragement will be empty. You will be like someone writing a check for a large amount of money without having the funds in the bank to back up such a check. You do not have the reality, the experience,

the spiritual capital. First we ourselves must suffer for the Lord's interests and then be comforted and encouraged by God. Then this experience will become the spiritual capital to encourage others. In this way, we are encouraged and then we encourage others.

The first epistle to the Corinthians was the apostle's argument, an argument which defeated and subdued the Corinthians, who had been distracted and confused. Now the second Epistle brings them back into the experience of Christ, who was the subject of his argument in the first Epistle. Hence, the second Epistle is more experiential, more subjective, and deeper than the first. In the first, Christ, the Spirit with our spirit, the church, and the gifts are covered as the major subjects. In the second, Christ, the Spirit with our spirit, and the church are further developed, but the gifts are not even mentioned. They are replaced in this book by the ministry, which is constituted of, and produced and formed by, the experiences of the riches of Christ through sufferings, consuming pressures, and the killing work of the cross. The second Epistle gives us a pattern, an example, of how the killing of the cross works, how Christ is wrought into our being, and how we become the expression of Christ. These constitute the ministers of Christ and produce the ministry for God's new covenant. The first Epistle deals negatively with the gifts; the second speaks positively about the ministry. The church needs the ministry much more than the gifts. The ministry is to minister Christ whom we have experienced; the gifts are just to teach the doctrines concerning Christ. The proof that the apostles are ministers of Christ does not consist in the gifts, but in the ministry produced and formed by the experience of the sufferings of Christ, His afflictions.

B. In Affliction Pressed Down unto the Despairing of Life

In verse 5 Paul says, "Because even as the sufferings of the Christ abound unto us, so through the Christ our encouragement also abounds." Here the sufferings are not sufferings for Christ, but Christ's own sufferings as shared

by His disciples (Matt. 20:22; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24; 1 Pet. 4:13). "The Christ" is a designation of the condition of Christ, not a name (Darby). Here it refers to the suffering Christ, who suffered afflictions for His Body according to God's will. The apostles participated in the sufferings of such a Christ, and through such a Christ they received encouragement. According to verses 6 and 7 their affliction and encouragement were all for the encouraging of the believers.

Verse 8 says, "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, as to our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were excessively burdened, beyond our power, so that we despaired even of living." The word burdened here, the same Greek word as in 5:4, means weighed down, pressed down. Paul was in Asia when he wrote 1 Corinthians. At the time, he and his co-workers were in affliction. The persecution and attack upon them was extremely heavy. They were heavily burdened, burdened beyond their power. They were burdened to such an extent that by their natural power they could not bear it. They even despaired of life. According to their estimate of the situation, they had no hope of living. They were sure that they would die, that they would be killed by the persecutors.

In verse 9 Paul continues, "But we ourselves had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not have confidence in ourselves, but in God, Who raises the dead." Literally, the word sentence means answer, or response. When the apostles were under the pressure of affliction, despairing even of life, they may have asked themselves what the issue of their suffering would be. The answer, or response, was death.

While they were being persecuted, the apostles wondered what the outcome would be. According to their estimation, they were dying. This was a self-insight which led to a particular vital decision. It caused them to have no confidence in themselves. As far as they were concerned, there was no way out. Their confidence was in God, who raises the dead.

The experience of death ushers us into the experience of resurrection. Resurrection is the very God who

resurrects the dead. The working of the cross terminates the self that we may experience God in resurrection. The experience of the cross always issues in the enjoyment of the God of resurrection. Such experience produces and forms the ministry. This is further described in 4:7-12.

Toward the end of 1 Corinthians Paul speaks of resurrection. Now at the beginning of 2 Corinthians, Paul brings the believers back to this matter of resurrection. As we shall see, this is related to ministry. Ministry is not a matter of our doing; it is a matter of our living. Both the ministry and the living revealed in this Epistle are of resurrection life.

In 1 Corinthians Paul declares the fact of resurrection. Resurrection should be our daily life; it should be for us the power to overcome sin and death and live in the first day of the week. Now in 2 Corinthians Paul gives a testimony of how the apostles lived in the first day of the week. They had no way to live in the seventh day, no way to live in the old creation. This means that it was not possible for them to live in themselves. They had no confidence in themselves. To have no confidence in ourselves means that there is no longer any way for us to live in the old creation. Because the apostles were living in the first day of the week, their confidence was solely in the God of resurrection, the God who raises the dead. They regarded themselves as already dead. This indicates that Paul not only wrote about resurrection, but that he lived resurrection.

In verse 10 Paul goes on to say, "Who has delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver; in Whom we have hoped that He will also yet deliver." The words "will deliver" refer to the immediate future, whereas "will also yet deliver" refers to the future in a more general way. Here Paul does not say that God would deliver them from a great affliction, but out of "so great a death." God delivered them from a death situation.

Verse 11 says, "You also helping together by petition on our behalf, that for the gift unto us through many, thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf." The Greek words rendered "helping together" also mean working

together. The gift in this verse refers to the grace given (v. 12), the grace that the apostles enjoyed in the experience of resurrection out of death. Literally, persons means faces, implying that thanks are given by those with cheerful countenances.

The gift in verse 11 is very different from the gifts in 1 Corinthians. The gift is the grace of God, and this grace is resurrection life, the resurrected Christ. The resurrected Christ was given to the apostles as grace. This enabled the apostles to enjoy the experience of resurrection out of death.

Paul gives us a testimony of living in resurrection life. The apostles were living in resurrection. God had put them into a particular situation, a situation that was actually death. There was no way for a human being to escape out of such a situation of death or to have the power to overcome it. Only the God of resurrection, the God who is Himself resurrection, could deliver them. He came in to deliver the apostles out of that death situation. That deliverance was an experience of resurrection. God resurrected them out of death, and their experience was an experience of God as resurrection. Furthermore, it was an experience of the resurrected Christ as grace, the gift given to them by God.

In these verses Paul tells the Corinthians how the apostles were encouraged and thus were qualified to encourage others. He then goes on to speak of his experience of the resurrected Christ and of the God of resurrection. Because Paul and his co-workers experienced such a grace, they had the spiritual capacity necessary to encourage others. This kind of experience constituted them ministers of the new covenant, ministers of grace. Therefore, what we have in 2 Corinthians is not gift but ministry. Furthermore, ministry is actually a matter of being constituted of grace through experiences of suffering.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWO

INTRODUCTION

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 1:12-14

In this message we shall consider just three verses, 1:12-14. In these verses there is something very deep, not in doctrine but in experience. If we have not had the experience described here, we shall not be able to understand what Paul is talking about in these verses. Apparently Paul's word here is simple and easy to understand; actually Paul is referring to something deep and profound.

IV. THE APOSTLES' BOASTING OF THEIR CONDUCT IN THE GRACE OF GOD

In verse 12 Paul says, "For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God, we conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you." Here Paul says that their boasting was the testimony of their conscience regarding the way they lived and behaved themselves. We need insight to understand what Paul means.

The Greek word rendered singleness in verse 12 can also be translated simplicity. Instead of singleness or simplicity, some manuscripts read holiness. The deep thought and rich experience found in verse 12 are mainly related to the Greek word that means singleness, sincerity. In the New Testament this word is used at least five times. Different translations adopt different renderings: singleness, simplicity, liberality, generosity, bounty. Without adequate experience, it would be difficult to decide which word to use in the translation here.

Verse 12 opens with the word "for," indicating that this verse is to be an explanation of the preceding verses. Thus, in order to understand verse 12, we need to keep in mind what Paul has said in the foregoing verses. Paul has just pointed out to the Corinthian believers that he and his co-workers were in a death situation. In verse 10 he testified that God had delivered them "out of so great a death." Every difficulty, problem, or hard situation can be changed by human power, strength, wisdom, or methods. The only exception is death. No human being has a way to handle a situation of death. Wealthy people can solve problems by writing a check for a large amount of money. There is a proverb which says, "Money goes everywhere." This means that money can solve every problem. But not even the wealthiest person can handle a death situation. When death comes to a millionaire, no amount of money can enable him to avoid it. Before writing this Epistle, Paul was in a death situation. Humanly speaking, there was no way out of that situation. But for the apostle, and for those who believe in resurrection, there is a way out. The God of resurrection is the way.

The situation in which Paul found himself in Asia forced him to be single or simple in the way he dealt with it. Those who are rich, strong, or knowledgeable are not single in the way they deal with difficult situations. On the contrary, they apply their knowledge, their wisdom. If a certain method does not work, they turn to another method. Their mind is very complicated; they are far from being simple. Because they are knowledgeable and capable, they have many ways to deal with situations. A person who has many ways to deal with situations surely is not simple.

According to the preceding verses, Paul and his co-workers were in a situation that restricted them to such an extent that no human way was of any help. Only one way was available to them: the God of resurrection. They were not just in difficulty or afflictions, and they did not just have problems. They were in death. No matter how knowledgeable, capable, or wealthy we may be, there is nothing we can do about a death situation. For Paul and

his co-workers, the only way of escape was the God of resurrection.

A dead person is always simple. A living person, however, is not simple. On the contrary, he always has a way to face a situation. We human beings are not simple. We all have many different ways. But blessed are they who are simple. What kind of person can be simple? Only a dead person. When Paul and his co-workers were suffering affliction in Asia, they were pressed to such an extent that they regarded themselves as dead. They had no way to deal with their situation. Their confidence was not in themselves; it was only in the God who raises the dead.

A. The Testimony of Their Conscience

In verse 12 Paul refers to the testimony of the conscience. We must have a pure conscience (2 Tim. 1:3), a conscience without offense (Acts 24:16), to bear a testimony to what we are and do. Paul's conscience testified that he was sincere, faithful, and honest. In particular, he had the testimony of his conscience that he was single. He did not use any human way to deal with situations. He did not exercise his knowledge, ability, strength, or wisdom. He did not use any policy, and he did not play politics. Rather, he was single, simple. His conscience bore testimony concerning this. This testimony was his boast. Thus, Paul could say, "We live, behave, act, and work only in God, not in any way that is of ourselves. Our unique way is the God of resurrection. The God who raises the dead is our only way. Therefore, we did not play politics, and we did not exercise our wisdom. We were absolutely simple, as simple as those who are dead. Our confidence is in nothing other than the living Person who is the God of resurrection. This is our boast, and this is the testimony borne by our conscience."

B. Conducting Themselves in the World

1. In the Singleness and Sincerity of God

Why did Paul speak to the Corinthians about singleness? It was because the Corinthians were very

complicated. They had many different ways. This was the reason some preferred Apollos, and others preferred Cephas or Paul. Actually, 1 Corinthians is a book which deals with the complications of the believers at Corinth.

The source of confusion and division among Christians today is the complications that are within the believers. If all Christians became simple, there would be no problems among them. The problems in a local church always come from complications. If there is a problem in your locality, that problem comes from someone who is not simple, but who is complicated. For this reason, I always try to avoid being involved with a complicated person. Whenever you meet a complicated person, you should not try to argue with him or correct him. Any attempts at argument or correction will cause you to become trapped in complications.

In verse 12 Paul speaks of the singleness and sincerity of God. The sincerity of God is a divine virtue, a virtue of what God is. To conduct ourselves in such a virtue means to experience God Himself. Hence, it equals "in the grace of God" also mentioned in this verse.

God is wise and almighty. But in a sense He is also single; He is very simple. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was wise; yet He was also simple and single. I very much enjoy having contact with the Lord Jesus because of His singleness and simplicity. However, when you talk to certain brothers, you find that they are extremely complicated. But our God is simple. Whenever we talk to Him, we find that He is not full of complications. When He says yes, He means yes, and when He says no, He means no. Likewise, when He says white or black, He means white or black, not gray. No matter how God may feel about us at a particular time, He is always single. He may be unhappy with us or He may be happy, but He Himself is simple.

From experience we have learned that a person who is simple and single is also generous and full of liberality. Those who are simple are those who give freely. For example, suppose a brother approaches a person so single

and tells him that he is short of money to pay his rent. Immediately the one who is simple will be willing to give that brother whatever he needs. This illustrates the fact that to be simple is to be generous. But those who are complicated are not generous. Instead of being willing to give freely, they may consider the matter in a complicated way and then give an amount that falls short of the need. Paul was single, simple, and generous.

Only a person so single is a generous person. If you lack singleness, you will never be generous or bountiful toward others. Our God is bountiful toward us because He is single. Imagine what would happen to us if God were not single and if He thought about us in a complicated way. Probably He would not care for us. Would you like God to consider your situation and examine you in detail? Would you like Him to look at you from head to toe and consider what you are inwardly and outwardly? None of us would be favored by God if He examined us in this way. But because of God's singleness and generosity, we have received blessing from Him.

I would ask you to compare Paul to the Corinthians. Paul was like the simple God, but the Corinthians were extremely complicated. If Paul had not been single and simple, he probably would have forgotten about the Corinthians and would no longer have been willing to minister among them. Paul's conscience testified that toward the Corinthians he and his co-workers conducted themselves in the singleness of God. Therefore, they could be generous toward the Corinthians and be willing to give them anything. Toward those believers, Paul and his co-workers were generous and full of bounty.

The Greek word rendered singleness is rich in meaning. The words singleness or simplicity are not an adequate translation. This word implies generosity, liberality, bounty, and willingness to give. If a married brother is simple, he will be very generous toward his wife, no matter what she does or how she treats him. However, if a brother is complicated, he will deal with his wife in a strict way.

Paul was one who conducted himself in the singleness of God. He was a true imitator of God and one who lived God. God is simple, and Paul also was simple. God is generous, and Paul also was generous. He behaved himself in the singleness of God.

When we have singleness and generosity, we shall also be sincere. It is a common practice to close a letter with the words "sincerely yours." Actually, this usually means "politically yours," or, at best, "politely yours." A person may write a long letter full of complications, and then at the end say "sincerely yours." That is not sincerity. Only when you treat others in a single way and with generosity can you truly say "sincerely yours." Because Paul conducted himself in the singleness of God and because he was generous, he was truly sincere.

I certainly would not claim to be an absolute and faithful imitator of Paul. But I can testify that throughout the years, we have been trained, taught, and helped by the Lord's mercy and grace to behave ourselves in simplicity, singleness, sincerity, and generosity. I can testify to you before the Lord that I do not play politics. Furthermore I can say before Him that I am a simple person. My yes is yes, and my no is no.

2. Not in Fleshly Wisdom but in the Grace of God

In verse 12 Paul refers to fleshly wisdom and the grace of God. Fleshly wisdom is human wisdom in the flesh. This equals ourselves, just as the grace of God equals God Himself. The grace of God is God for our enjoyment. The grace in verse 12 is the gift in verse 11, which the apostles received for the experience of resurrection in their sufferings.

Being simple and single is an aspect of the expression of the life in resurrection. Only when we live in resurrection and by the God of resurrection, not by ourselves, are we simple. It is when we live in resurrection that we are imitators of God. Although others may play politics with us, we shall not be political with them. The most we shall do is try to remove ourselves from the snare of

complications. I want to follow Paul to conduct myself in the singleness and sincerity of God. This is an aspect of the manifestation of resurrection.

Only by living a life in the singleness and sincerity of God can we be constituted ministers of Christ and of grace. Those who are constituted in this way are needed in the church today. The elders and all the serving ones must be people of this kind. If you consider the history of the Lord's recovery, you will see that those who play politics and who do not live in the singleness of God cause damage and loss to the Lord's recovery and to themselves as well. Only those who truly live in the singleness of God have been a profit to the recovery. Regarding this, we have learned some important lessons. To live in resurrection is to live in the singleness of God. In 1:12-14 we see, as a continuation of 1 Corinthians, how to live in resurrection.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THREE

INTRODUCTION

(3)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 1:15-22

Second Corinthians 1:15-22 is part of the long introduction to this book. We have pointed out that Paul wrote such a long introduction in order to calm down the Corinthian believers and to soothe them. The complicated Corinthians talked about Paul and even criticized him. Some may have said, "Paul told us that he would come to Corinth, but he has not yet come. Paul seems to be changeable; he says yes one day and no the next day. Thus, Paul is not faithful or trustworthy. Let him say whatever he wants. He always changes his word." Because this was the situation with at least some of the Corinthians, Paul included 1:15-22 in his word of introduction.

V. CONCERNING THE APOSTLE'S COMING

Verse 15 says, "And in this confidence I intended to come to you previously that you might have a second grace." By "this confidence" Paul is referring to what he has just said in verses 12 through 14: the testimony of his conscience that he and his co-workers conducted themselves in the singleness and sincerity of God, not in human wisdom, but in the grace of God. It was in this confidence Paul intended to come to the Corinthians. His intention and decision to visit Corinth were not political or changeable. Paul and his co-workers did not live in such a way. On the contrary, they lived in the singleness and sincerity of God. Their yes was yes, and their no was no. They did not say yes at one time and no at another.

In verse 15 Paul speaks of the Corinthians having a second grace. This is a double grace by the apostle's coming to Corinth twice, once referred to in this verse, and again, referred to in the next verse. Through the apostle's coming, the grace of God, that is, the imparting of God as the life supply and spiritual enjoyment, is bestowed upon the believers. His two comings would bring them a double portion of such grace.

Verse 16 says, "And through you to pass through into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be sent forward to Judea." Macedonia was a province of the Roman Empire, north of Achaia, in which were the cities of Philippi and Thessalonica.

In verse 17 Paul asks, "This therefore intending, did I then use fickleness? Or the things which I resolve, do I resolve according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes and no, no?" Fickleness here means changeableness, turning from one thing to another. Here Paul indicates that he did not use fickleness; he did not change from yes to no and from no to yes. Furthermore, he did not resolve according to the flesh. To resolve is stronger than to decide. Paul was not two-faced. He did not say yes and no at the same time, for he did not resolve anything according to the flesh.

In verse 18 Paul declares, "But God is faithful, that our word toward you is not yes and no." "But" gives a contrast. In the preceding verse the apostle refers to the charge that he is a man of yes and no. In this verse he defends himself by saying that God is faithful, so that the word of their preaching is not yes and no. Hence, neither are they fickle persons of yes and no. Their being is according to their preaching. They lived according to what they preached. The word of the apostles' preaching (1 Cor. 1:18) in verse 18, their word toward the Corinthians, was their message concerning Christ (v. 19).

In verse 18 Paul indicates that he was one with God. Paul did not use fickleness; he did not say yes and then no. Rather, he was the same as God in being faithful. His word toward the Corinthians, the word of his ministry, was not

yes and no. Paul did not change his tune. From the first time he came to the Corinthians until the writing of this Epistle, his preaching sounded the same note. There was no change at all in the word of the ministry.

In verse 19 Paul continues, "For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, Who was preached among you through us, through me and Sylvanus and Timothy did not become yes and no but in Him is yes." "For" indicates that what follows is an explanation of what is mentioned in the preceding verse. God is faithful, never changing, especially in His promises concerning Christ, so that the word the apostles preached concerning Christ is likewise never changing, because the very Christ whom God promised in His faithful word and whom they preached in their gospel did not become yes and no, but in Him is yes. Since the Christ whom they preached according to God's promises did not become yes and no, the word they preached concerning Him was not yes and no. Not only their preaching but also their living was according to what Christ is. They preached Christ and lived Him. They were not men of yes and no, but men who were the same as Christ.

In verse 20 Paul says, "For whatever promises of God there are, in Him is the Yes; wherefore also through Him is the Amen to God, for glory through us." "For" again gives the reason for what is mentioned in the preceding verse. Christ, whom the faithful God promised and whom the sincere apostles preached, did not become yes and no, did not change, because in Him is the Yes of all the promises of God, and through Him is the apostles' and believers' Amen to God for His glory. Christ is the Yes, the incarnate answer, the fulfillment of all the promises of God to us. The Amen here is the Amen given by us through Christ to God (see 1 Cor. 14:16). Christ is the Yes, and we say Amen to this Yes before God. The phrase "for glory" means for the glory of God. When we say Amen before God to the fact that Christ is the Yes, the fulfillment, of all the promises of God, this is a glory to God through us.

The "us" in verse 20 refers not only to the apostles, who preached Christ according to God's promises, but also to

the believers, who received Christ according to the apostles' preaching. Through both there is glory for God when they say Amen to Christ as the great Yes of all God's promises.

It is not a matter of great importance to decide to go to a certain place. This certainly cannot compare with a major decision like the decision to get married. Nevertheless, the Corinthians criticized Paul over such a small matter. Some of them probably said, "Paul said that he would come to Corinth, but he hasn't come. This proves that he is a man of yes and no." Paul defended himself against this accusation. Thus, even in this Epistle of encouragement, there is an aspect of argument and vindication.

A. Resolved by Being One with the Unchanging Christ of the Faithful God

In these verses Paul seems to be saying, "You Corinthians are mistaken. When I resolved to come to Corinth, I did not resolve by myself or in myself; I resolved with the unchanging Christ of the faithful God." In his vindication Paul speaks of God and of Christ, indicating to the complicated Corinthians that he was absolutely one with God and with Christ. God is faithful, and Paul also was faithful. Christ, the Son of God, is unchanging, and Paul, a person who was one with this Christ, was also unchanging. He resolved not according to human wisdom, but in oneness with the faithful God and the unchanging Christ. In these verses we have a strong indication that Paul was living absolutely in Christ and in God. He was one with God and with Christ.

First Corinthians is a revelation of what God is seeking today. God is seeking a people who live Christ and who are one with Him. Such a people eventually become the church. Do you know what the church is? The church is a collective people who live Christ and who are one with God. To have such a people is the desire of God's heart, and it is what He purposed to have in eternity. It is revealed in brief in 1 Corinthians, where Paul was urging the believers to forget Judaism, Greek philosophy, and

human wisdom and

culture and realize that what God desires is a people who live Christ and who are one with God. Then in 2 Corinthians Paul shows them that he himself and his co-workers were such persons. All the apostles were people who were one with God and were living Christ. Therefore, even in the insignificant matter of himself, but in Christ and with Christ. He did not have any intention which was apart from God or separate from Him. No, Paul was one with the faithful God, and he lived the unchanging Christ. His intention to come to the Corinthians was resolved in oneness with the unchanging Christ of the faithful God.

1. Attached unto Christ

In verse 21 Paul goes on to say, "But He Who firmly attaches us with you unto Christ and has anointed us is God." The apostles, who preached Christ according to God's promises and lived Christ according to their preaching, and the believers, who received Christ according to the apostles' preaching, are joined to Christ, becoming one with Him, through whom they say Amen before God to the great Yes of God's promises, which is Christ Himself. However, they do not attach themselves, but God attaches them all together to Christ. Their being one with Christ is of God and by God, not of themselves and by themselves.

By the use of the word "but" in verse 21 Paul introduces a contrast. Paul has just indicated that he was one with the faithful God and that he lived the unchanging Christ. Why, then, does he introduce the next verse with a "But?" "But" used in this way often involves an unfavorable contrast. Paul uses "but" to indicate that even his being one with God and living Christ were not of himself or by himself. For this reason, Paul seems to be saying, "Yes, I am one with God and I live Christ. But this is not of me; it is of God, who firmly attaches us with you unto Christ and who has anointed us. My being one with God and living Christ are of God, not of myself. I have no ground to boast concerning this. Any boast must be of God Himself."

a. With the Believers

In verse 21 Paul speaks of being firmly attached with the believers unto Christ, the anointed One (Dan. 9-26; John 1:41). The Greek words rendered "firmly attaches us with you" can also be rendered "firmly connects us with you." Literally, the word attaches means establishes. God establishes the apostles with the believers in Christ. This means that God attaches the apostles together with the believers unto Christ, connecting the apostles and the believers with Christ, the anointed One. Hence, the apostles and the believers are one not only with Christ the anointed One, but also with one another, sharing together the anointing of Christ which He has received of God. Since we have been attached by God unto Christ, the anointed One, we are spontaneously anointed with Him by God.

Verses 21 and 22 are deep and profound. Although the Greek word rendered attaches in verse 21 is establishes, the true meaning of the word here is not establish; it is attach. Here Paul is saying that God attaches us unto Christ; he does not refer to being established in Christ.

We should not take this verse for granted or assume that we understand it. What does Paul mean when he says that God "firmly attaches us with you unto Christ"? The word "us" denotes the apostles, and "you" refers to the believers. God attaches the apostles together with the believers not in Christ, but unto Christ. Apparently there is no difference in saying that God attaches us to Christ or unto Christ. Actually, the preposition "unto" used here is stronger than the preposition "to," for "unto" implies a result, a particular end that is in view. For example, we have been justified unto life. This means that justification results in life, that justification is with a view to life. Here Paul is saying that God attaches the apostles with the believers with a certain result in view. This result is that we are unto Christ.

b. Anointed by God

In Greek Christ means the anointed One. Christ is actually the anglicized form of the Greek word. Christ, the

anointed One, is full of ointment, full of anointing. Hallelujah, God attaches the apostles with all the believers to this anointed One! Because we have been attached to Him, the ointment flows in us.

Verse 21 says that God firmly attaches us and has anointed us. How does God anoint us? He anoints us by attaching us to the Anointed One. Again we may use electricity and electrical appliances as an illustration. There is no need for the power plant to supply electricity directly to the lamp. Once the lamp is properly attached by having the plug inserted in the socket, the electricity flows into it. Likewise, we are anointed by being attached to Christ, the anointed One. As believers, we have all received the Spirit in this way. If anyone asks you if you have received the Spirit, you may want to reply, "I have been attached to the anointed One, and daily I receive the Spirit. I am anointed day by day."

Paul realized that he could be one with the faithful God and live Christ because he had been attached to Christ and anointed by God. Because God anointed him by attaching him to Christ, he could be one with Christ and one with the faithful God. To declare such a word is the proper preaching of the full gospel.

Praise the Lord, we have been attached to the anointed One! Because we have been joined to the universal anointed One, we have been anointed also. In the universe there is only One who has been anointed by God. This One is Christ, the anointed One. Now we are all in this anointed One. We have been anointed by being attached to Him. Now because we have been attached to the anointed One, we can be one with the God of resurrection and live a life of resurrection.

In 1 Corinthians 6 Paul speaks of being members of Christ. What does it mean to be a member of Christ? It means that we are part of the anointed One. Hallelujah, we all are part of the anointed One, for God has attached us to Him!

I would call your attention to the fact that in verse 21 "attaches" is present tense, whereas "has anointed" is perfect tense. This is quite unusual. It indicates that the

anointing took place before the attaching. This should cause us to ask this question: When were we anointed? The answer is that we were anointed when Christ was anointed. When the Head was anointed, the Body was anointed also. Psalm 133 illustrates this. The ointment poured upon Aaron's head flowed down to the beard and then to the skirts of his garments. Likewise, the anointing on the Head flows down to the Body. Because we were anointed when Christ was anointed, we were anointed even before we were born. However, it is during our lifetime that God attaches us to Christ. God attaches us in this present age, but He anointed us long before we were born, when Christ Himself was anointed. To repeat, as members of the Body, we were anointed at the same time the Head was anointed. If we understand this, we shall understand why the verbs "attaches" and "has anointed" are in different tenses.

c. The Seal and the Pledge

In verse 22, another deep and profound word, Paul goes on to say of God, "Who has also sealed us and given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts." The anointing in the preceding verse is the sealing. Since God has anointed us with Christ, He has also sealed us in Him.

We should not regard the sealing as something separate from the anointing. Actually, anointing implies sealing. As we are under the anointing, the anointing becomes a sealing. In this way we become different from others. Furthermore, the seal causes us to bear the appearance of God. Suppose, for example, that I place a certain mark on a piece of paper with a rubber stamp and ink. Immediately the paper is sealed and bears the image of the stamp. The seal is the image. In the same principle, when God anoints us, the anointing is the sealing. The anointing brings the divine essence into us, just as the rubber stamp applies the element of the ink to the paper. First God through the anointing adds the essence of Himself to us. Then this anointing seals us with the essence of God and makes us the image of God.

In verse 22 Paul also says that God has given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts. The pledge of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself as the pledge. Sealing is a mark that we are God's inheritance, God's possession, belonging to God. The pledge is a guarantee that God is our inheritance or heritage belonging to us. The Spirit within us is the pledge, an earnest, of God being our portion in Christ.

God's attaching us to Christ issues in three things: first, an anointing that imparts God's element into us; second, a sealing that forms the divine element into an impression to express God's image; and third, a pledging that gives us a foretaste as a sample and guarantee of the full taste of God. Through these experiences of the anointing Spirit, with the experience of the cross, the ministry of Christ is produced.

These three matters--the anointing, the sealing, and the pledging--are actually one. They are one thing with three aspects. First we are anointed, then we are sealed, and then we have the pledge as a guarantee. Hallelujah, we have the essence, the image, and the guarantee! All these are the processed God who is now the Spirit. The Spirit is the oil with which we are anointed, the essence with which we are sealed, and the pledge which guarantees that God belongs to us and that He is our portion. Because we have been anointed and sealed and have received the pledge, we can be one with the faithful God and live Christ. Now we are qualified and equipped to live the unchanging Christ.

According to Paul's word in verse 22, the pledge of the Spirit is in our hearts. The Spirit as the earnest of God being our portion is a foretaste to us; so here it says that He is in our hearts. Romans 5:5 and Galatians 4:6 refer to the matter of love. Hence, these verses speak of the Spirit in our heart. But Romans 8:16 refers to the work of the Spirit, for it says the Spirit witnesses with our spirit. Our heart is a loving organ, but our spirit is a working one.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FOUR

INTRODUCTION

(4)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 1:23--2:11

In this message we shall consider 1:23--2:11. In these verses Paul gives the reasons for his delay in coming to Corinth.

B. The Reasons for Delay

1. To Spare the Corinthians

In 1:23 Paul says, "But I call on God as a witness against my soul, that to spare you I have not yet come to Corinth." For Paul to spare the Corinthians was to forbear. The apostle would not come to visit the Corinthian believers with a rod for discipline, but would come in love and a spirit of meekness for building (1 Cor. 4:21). In order to avoid any unpleasant feeling, he refrained from coming. He treated them leniently and would not come to them in sorrow (2 Cor. 2:1). He did not like to lord it over their faith, but longed to be a fellow-worker of their joy (1:24). This is the truth. He calls on God to witness this for him.

a. Calling on God as a Witness against His Soul

According to verse 23, Paul called upon God against his soul. The apostle called on God to be a witness against his soul, that is, against himself, if he was speaking falsely.

To call on God is not only to pray to God or ask Him to do something for us. To say, "O God," or, "O Father," is not just to pray; it is to call upon God. Many Christians today do not have a calling spirit, a strong spirit in which to call upon God. If the circumstances or situation allowed it, I would like to call, "O my Father," or, "O Lord Jesus,"

continually. There is a difference between calling and praying. For example, someone may pray like this: "Father God, You are faithful. You never change. Help me to be faithful and unchanging also. I ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen." Although this is a good prayer, it may not be very living. We may also pray to the Lord Jesus in a manner that is not so living. We may say, "Lord Jesus, I thank You that You love me. Lord, I also love You. But, Lord, You know that I am weak. Lord, please help me in my weakness." Many Christians pray like this, but they may pray with little heart and with no exercise of the spirit. They may not even understand what it means to exercise the spirit in prayer. In John 4:24 the Lord Jesus said, "God is Spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and reality." Worshipping God includes praying to Him. Since to pray is to worship, and since the Lord Jesus says that our worship of God must be in spirit, then our prayer must be in spirit also. The words we use to express ourselves in prayer are secondary. The primary matter is that we exercise our spirit to contact God. When we pray, we need to call on God, exercise our spirit, and say, "O Father, O my God, my Father." This is to call upon God.

God the Father is happy to hear us calling on Him. According to the Lord's word in John 4, the Father today is seeking those who worship Him in spirit.

I do not know of a better way to exercise the spirit than to call upon God. It is not necessary to call aloud. Often it is not convenient or suitable to call aloud. For example, others may be working or sleeping, and your calling in a loud way would disturb them. Even by calling in a very quiet way, our spirit is exercised.

Paul wrote all his Epistles in a careful manner and with much consideration regarding the use of words. In 1:23 he did not say, "I ask God"; neither did he say, "I pray to God." Instead, Paul said, "I call on God." This calling upon God implies the exercise of the spirit. Paul was a person who lived in spirit and who worshipped God in spirit. If we do not live in spirit, it certainly will be difficult for us to worship God in spirit.

In verse 23 Paul called upon God as a witness against his soul. This means that he called upon God to witness for him in a negative way. Here Paul seems to be saying, "Brothers in Corinth, I did not behave in the soul. If I had done this, God would witness against me. I am not a person living in the soul and behaving in the soul. I did not resolve in the soul to come to you. If this had been my situation, God would be a witness against me."

It is interesting that Paul did not say, "I call on God as a witness for my spirit to testify that I resolve in my spirit to come to you." On the contrary, he called on God to witness in a negative way against his soul. He called upon Him to testify that he did not resolve anything in the soul, that is, in the self. God would witness against such a resolving in the soul. This kind of negative witness is sometimes stronger than a testimony from the positive side.

The reason Paul did not come to Corinth was that he wanted to spare the Corinthians. It was not because he was fickle and was saying yes and no at the same time. Paul did not want to come to Corinth with a rod to discipline them; rather, he wanted to spare them and come to them in love. He called upon God to witness of this concerning him.

Paul is a good example for us to follow. By the Lord's mercy, we all need to learn of him and follow him. Paul was a wonderful person. He was spiritual, he was constituted of Christ, he was experienced, and he was mature in the riches of Christ. As such a person, he wanted to spare the Corinthians and for this reason had not yet come to Corinth.

b. Not Lording It Over the Believers' Faith, but Being Fellow-workers of Their Joy

In verse 24 Paul goes on to say, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but are fellow-workers of your joy; for in faith you stand." For the believers to stand in the objective faith (1 Cor. 16:13), subjective faith is needed. To lord it over their subjective faith weakens it, but to be a fellow-worker of their joy strengthens it.

2. Not to Come in Sorrow

In 2:1 Paul says, "But I determined this in myself, not to come again to you in sorrow." On the one hand, Paul called on God as a witness against his soul; on the other hand, he tells us that he determined something in himself. Is this not a matter in the soul? In 2:1 Paul's self is a spiritual self, a spiritual soul, a soul under the control and direction of the spirit. In a human way, Paul determined in himself not to come again to the Corinthians in sorrow. This determination was not inspired by the Spirit; it was a human matter determined by Paul in himself. We need to remember, however, that this was determined by one who was under the control and direction of the spirit. This is another example of the principle of incarnation. This principle is found in Galatians 2:20. The principle of incarnation always operates in this way. The Lord Jesus, as a man, performed miracles, but it was God who did these miracles and not the Lord Jesus Himself. This is what we mean by the principle of incarnation.

In verse 2 Paul asks, "For if I cause you sorrow, who then is the one that makes me glad, except the one who was made sorrowful by me?" This sentence is very philosophical, logical, and spiritual.

In verse 3 Paul continues, "And I have written this very thing, that coming I should not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all." The word "written" refers to what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in the first Epistle.

In verse 4 Paul says, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you through many tears, not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you should know the love which I have more abundantly to you." Here Paul refers to himself. Some so-called spiritual people insist that we should never talk about ourselves. During my years with the Brethren, I was told that the believers should never say anything about themselves. I adopted this practice for a number of years. Later I learned that this is not always right. Whether or not we speak about ourselves

depends on our motive. In 2 Corinthians Paul had much to say concerning himself. In this introductory section he not only speaks about himself--he also argues on his behalf and vindicates himself. Sometimes we need to speak about ourselves. Christ needs witnesses. Christ is the reality, and we are witnesses of this reality. As witnesses, we should be neither proud nor humble. When the time comes, we need to testify for the Lord honestly and boldly. This is exactly what Paul was doing here when he told the Corinthians that in the first Epistle he wrote to them out of much affliction and anguish of heart, and that he wrote through many tears. He wrote to the Corinthians in this way, not that they should be made sorrowful, but that they should know the love which he had toward them.

Verse 5 says, "But if anyone has caused sorrow, he has not caused me sorrow, but in part (lest I be burdensome) all of you." Paul was careful not to exaggerate. He wrote in a cautious way, using the phrase "in part." To be burdensome here is to press too heavily, to say too much. Paul says that the offender in part caused all of the church to have sorrow. He says in part, lest he press too heavily, or say too much. This indicates that he was a tender, cautious, and considerate person.

In verse 6 Paul says, "Sufficient to such a one is this punishment by the majority." This indicates that, after reading Paul's first Epistle, the majority of the believers in Corinth rebuked and punished the one who had committed incest. Here Paul points out that this punishment by the majority has been sufficient. Therefore, in verse 7 he goes on to say, "So that on the contrary you should rather forgive and encourage him, lest somehow such a one should be swallowed up with excessive sorrow." To forgive here also means to deal graciously. Instead of rebuking, there is now the need for encouragement and forgiveness, also for soothing and the binding up of the wounds. Therefore, in verse 8 Paul says, "Wherefore I beseech you to confirm your love to him."

Verse 9 continues, "For to this end also I have written,

that I might know your approvedness, if in all things you are obedient." To "know your approvedness" means to "put you to the test." Approvedness is a tried quality, an approved character. Paul's goal in writing the first Epistle to the Corinthians was to know the approvedness. He wrote that he might test them to see whether or not they would be obedient. Now Paul realizes that the Corinthians were obedient and approved. Their obedience to the first Epistle approved them to Paul.

Verse 10 says, "But whom you forgive anything, I also forgive; for what I also have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, it is for your sake in the person of Christ." Some may think that to forgive in the person of Christ means to forgive on behalf of Christ. Those who hold this view may refer to the Lord's word in John 20:23 about the disciples having authority to forgive sins. According to this interpretation, to forgive a sinful brother means to forgive him on behalf of the Lord and as the Lord's representative. This understanding is not wrong, but neither is it an accurate interpretation of what Paul says in verse 10.

Literally, the Greek word rendered person means face, as in 4:6. It is the part around the eyes, the look as being the index of the inward thoughts and feelings to signify the presentation of the whole person. This indicates that the apostle is one who lives and acts in the presence of Christ, according to the index of His whole person expressed in His eyes. Second Corinthians 1:1 through 2:11, as the first section, is a long introduction to this Epistle, which follows his first Epistle to the disorderly believers in Corinth. Paul received information (7:6-13) that they had accepted his rebukes in the first Epistle, and that they had repented. This information caused him to be comforted and encouraged. Thus, he writes this Epistle to comfort and encourage them in a very personal, tender, and affectionate way, so much so that this Epistle may be considered to some extent his autobiography. In it we see a person who lives Christ, according to what he wrote concerning Him in his first Epistle, in the closest and most intimate contact with Him, acting according to the index of His eyes; a

person who is one with Christ, full of Christ, and is saturated with Christ; one who is broken and even terminated in his natural life, softened and flexible in his will, affectionate yet restricted in his emotion, considerate and sober in his mind, and pure and genuine in his spirit toward the believers for their benefit, that they may experience and enjoy Christ as he does for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose in the building up of Christ's Body.

We have pointed out that the word "person" here denotes that part of the face around the eyes, that part which is the index of a person's thoughts and feelings and which thereby signifies the presentation of the whole person. If you want to know how someone feels toward you, whether he is happy or sad, satisfied or dissatisfied, you do not look at his face in a general way, but at that part around the eyes, which is the index of the person's thoughts and feelings. When Paul forgave that sinful brother, he did so by looking at the index of the eyes of the Lord Jesus. If the index of the Lord's eyes indicated that He was not pleased with Paul's forgiving that brother, Paul would not have forgiven him. He would have realized that the Lord was not happy with what he was doing. As Paul was forgiving the brother, he was looking at the Lord Jesus and realized that the Lord was encouraging him. Therefore, Paul could say that he forgave in the person of Christ. This indicates that Paul was one who lived and acted in the presence of Christ.

In 1940 Brother Nee pointed out that Deuteronomy may be considered the autobiography of Moses and 2 Corinthians, the autobiography of Paul. In 2 Corinthians Paul speaks a great deal about himself. In fact, he talks more about himself than about Christ. In this autobiographical writing Paul witnesses of Christ. In this book we see a person who lives Christ according to what he wrote concerning Him in 1 Corinthians. Paul lived in the closest and most intimate contact with Christ, acting according to the index of His eyes. He was truly a person who was one with Christ, full of Christ, and saturated with Christ.

In verse 11 Paul says, "That we may not be taken advantage of by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his thoughts." This verse discloses that the evil one, Satan, is behind the scenes in everything and works in everything. The Greek word translated thoughts here means plans, plots, devices, schemes, designs, wiles, intentions, purposes. Even in the church life, Satan may be behind the scenes. Do not think that the matter of forgiving a brother involves only the church and does not involve the devices of Satan. Even behind such a matter as this, Satan may be crouching, looking for a way to execute his evil plans and devour the weak ones.

In these verses we see that Paul was personal, spiritual, and alert. He took care of the saints in an intimate way, he lived in the index of Christ's being, and he was on the alert regarding the enemy's subtle plots behind the scenes in the church life. We all should learn of Paul to care for the saints, to live Christ, and to be aware of the subtlety of the enemy.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIVE

THE MINISTRY OF THE NEW COVENANT

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 2:12-17

After the introduction (1:1--2:11), Paul comes to the ministry of the new covenant (2:12--3:11). The ministry is absolutely different from the outward, miraculous gifts. In 1940, while giving messages on 2 Corinthians, Brother Nee strongly emphasized the difference between 1 and 2 Corinthians. He pointed out that the first book deals with the outward, miraculous gifts, especially tongue-speaking. Brother Nee used the illustration of Balaam's donkey speaking a human language, pointing out that that was a genuine miraculous gift. It certainly was a miracle for a donkey suddenly to receive the ability to speak a human language. Brother Nee went on to say that a gift can be received in a sudden way. However, he pointed out that it may take twenty years to produce a ministry.

In speaking concerning the ministry, Brother Nee said that Christ must be woven into our being. This means that Christ must be constituted into us. The ministry is a matter of constitution. We need to be constituted with what Christ is, with what He has done, with what He has attained, and with what He has obtained. Christ has obtained the throne, the glory, and the highest power. Christ also has certain attainments. His attainments are the result of what He has accomplished and achieved. Today what Christ is, what He has done, what He has obtained, and what He has attained are all in the life-giving Spirit. This means that the life-giving Spirit is the embodiment of Christ in these four matters. The all-

inclusive Spirit is the embodiment of what Christ is, of what Christ has done, of what Christ has obtained, and of what Christ has attained. This all-inclusive Spirit is an all-inclusive drink, a drink that has many ingredients.

As we have pointed out a number of times, the all-inclusive Spirit is typified by the ointment in Exodus 30. This ointment is composed of oil compounded with four different kinds of spices: myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, and cassia. This ointment portrays the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. This Spirit is now being constituted into us. The result is a constitution of the processed God with redeemed human beings. A believer who is so constituted with this all-inclusive Spirit will become a minister of Christ, and his work and service will be the ministry in the New Testament.

The ministry in the New Testament is unique. The New Testament has just one ministry. Both Paul and Peter had a part of this ministry. All the apostles shared in the one ministry in the New Testament. This unique ministry is the ministry of the new covenant. Such a ministry is not gained by prayer and fasting. Anything received in that way would be a gift, not a ministry. The ministry is brought forth as a result of being constituted of the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. Christ, with all that He is, has, and has obtained and attained, must be constituted into the fiber, into the very being, of God's chosen and redeemed people. This is the only way to have a ministry.

My burden is not simply to preach the gospel or teach the Bible. My burden is to carry out this New Testament ministry and to help those who sincerely seek the Lord and care for the desire of His heart to have a share in this ministry. This is the ministry Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians, especially in chapter three, where the word ministry is used a number of times. Paul compared this ministry to that of the old covenant. The ministry of the new covenant is far superior to that of the old covenant. The new covenant ministry is not only a matter of life; it is a constitution in life and of life. Therefore, this ministry takes time to grow and mature.

In 1943 I contracted tuberculosis and came very close to death. I thank the Lord that, for Himself and for His ministry, He spared me and has kept me. Brother Nee used to tell us that because it takes years for the Lord to gain one who has been constituted of Himself, we need to take care of our health in a proper way. This means that we should do everything possible to prevent an early death. If we are truly spiritual, we shall learn how to take care of our health in order to have a long life.

It takes more than a few years to grow and be constituted of the Triune God. As one who has passed through many things over the years, I can testify that a person needs to be at least sixty years of age before this constitution reaches maturity. However, for this to take place in a person by the age of sixty, he should be saved before the age of twenty. One who is saved in his forties probably cannot be matured in the divine constitution by the age of sixty. During the first twenty years of our Christian life, we need to learn certain matters. Then we need another twenty years to be constituted of the life-giving Spirit.

When the young people hear this word about how long it takes to be constituted into a minister of the new covenant, they may be disappointed. Young people, I encourage you not to be discouraged by the fact that it may take twenty years to learn things and another twenty years to be constituted. We are dealing with the highest life, the divine life, constituted into our human life. Surely this requires time. Even in the natural human life, a man is not adequately matured by the age of forty. I certainly would not have confidence in a president who is only forty years old. In everything we do, we need experience. This is true even in driving a car. The more years we drive a car, the more experienced we become, and the more skillful. I do not believe that a person under sixty years of age is mature enough to be fully adequate as a president or head of state. This is an illustration of the fact that life needs time to grow.

There is the need of more among us who are matured. I

hope that in the years to come there will be a number of fathers in the Lord's recovery. It is a blessing to have such fathers, such matured ones, among us. Their very presence among us is a great blessing.

I say again, the ministry cannot be formed in a short time. I am happy that I heard such a word concerning the ministry from Brother Nee in 1943. Approximately twenty years later, the Lord sent me to this country.

Now we are ready to consider 2:12-17, some verses which are the introduction to the section on the ministry of the new covenant. Chapter 1:1--2:11 is the introduction to the entire book of 2 Corinthians. But 2:12-17 is the introduction to the section on the ministry. Following this section, we have a long section concerning the ministers of the new covenant (3:12--7:16).

I. ITS TRIUMPH AND EFFECT

A. Caring for the Church More Than for the Gospel

Paul introduces the ministry in a very personal, intimate way, in a way that is not at all doctrinal. In 2:12 Paul does not say, "I have finished my introduction. Now I want to give you some doctrine concerning our ministry." On the contrary, Paul says, "Furthermore, when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ, a door also being opened to me in the Lord, I had no relief in my spirit when I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went forth into Macedonia" (2:12-13). In addition to what he has mentioned in verses 10 and 11, the apostle furthermore tells the Corinthian believers of his concern for them. Although a door was opened to him in Troas, even in the Lord, not of human effort, he had no relief in his spirit when he did not find Titus there. He was anxious to meet Titus to receive information concerning the effect of his first Epistle among them. Therefore, he left Troas and went forth to Macedonia (v. 13), being anxious to meet Titus for the information because of his great affection for them. His concern for the church was much more than that for the preaching of the gospel.

Paul was one who lived and acted in his spirit, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 16:18. A door had been opened to him in the Lord. Paul deliberately inserted the phrase "in the Lord" to indicate that he did not open the door through any kind of natural skill or maneuvering. The door was opened by the Lord, not by human effort. But even though a door had been opened in the Lord, Paul had no relief in his spirit. How can we reconcile the fact that the door was open by the Lord and yet Paul did not have the relief in his spirit to remain there? This seems contradictory. Before we answer this question, I wish to emphasize that the reason Paul did not have relief was that he had not yet found Titus. His concern was not mainly for the preaching of the gospel; it was to find Titus in order to know the situation among the Corinthians. Paul was waiting for Titus to give him a report concerning how the believers at Corinth had responded to his first Epistle. Therefore, Paul went forth into Macedonia. This Epistle was written in Macedonia after his stay in Ephesus on the third journey of his ministry (8:1; Acts 20:1).

We have seen that the Lord opened the door, but Paul left that open door. It seems that he did not go along with the Lord's opening of the door, but only went along with what gave relief to his spirit. Here we find the answer to the question concerning the open door and the relief in the spirit. When you have something done by the Lord outwardly, but inwardly your spirit is not at rest, which will you follow, the outward situation or the sense in your spirit? Paul followed the sense in his spirit. Sometimes the Lord will do two things at once: He will open up something outwardly, but inwardly He will not give you a feeling of relief. This leaves you in a position of needing to choose between the outward circumstance and the inward feeling. If in this kind of situation you exercise your spirit to take care of the spirit, you are truly spiritual. This means that if you obey the inner feeling and do not go along with the outward open situation, you are a truly spiritual person. This was the case with Paul in these verses. He went along with what gave relief to his spirit, departing into

Macedonia in order to gain information from Titus regarding the believers at Corinth.

B. A Triumphal Procession for the Celebration of Christ's Victory

In verse 14 Paul says, "But thanks be to God, Who always leads us in triumph in the Christ, and manifests through us the savor of the knowledge of Him in every place." Concerning this verse, Conybeare has this to say: "The verb here used means to lead a man as a captive in a triumphal procession; the full phrase means, to lead captive in a triumph over the enemies of Christ....God is celebrating His triumph over His enemies; Paul (who had been so great an opponent of the gospel) is a captive following in the train of the triumphal procession, yet (at the same time, by a characteristic change of metaphor) an incense-bearer, scattering incense (which was always done on these occasions) as the procession moves on. Some of the conquered enemies were put to death when the procession reached the Capitol; to them the smell of the incense was an odor of death unto death; to the rest who were spared, an odor of life unto life." The same metaphor is used in Colossians 2:15. God always leads the apostles in such a triumphant way in their ministry. The word "us" here refers to the conquered captives in the train of Christ's triumph, celebrating and participating in Christ's triumph. The apostles are such captives; their move as captives of Christ in their ministry for Him is God's celebration of Christ's victory over His enemies.

In the second section of this Epistle, from 2:12 through 7:16, the apostle speaks about his ministry and that of his co-workers. He first likens their ministry to a celebration of Christ's victory. Their move in their ministry for Christ is like a triumphal procession from one place to another under God's leading. Paul and his co-workers were Christ's captives, bearing the fragrant incense of Christ for His triumphant glory. They had been conquered by Christ and had become His captives in the train of His triumph,

scattering the fragrance of Christ from place to place. This was their ministry for Him.

In verse 14 Paul indicates that he was a captive of Christ. He fought against Christ, the heavenly General, but eventually he was defeated, subdued, and captured, and thereby became a captive of Christ. Saul of Tarsus fought against Christ, against God's economy, and against the churches. But while he was fighting, he was defeated and subdued by Christ on the way to Damascus. At that time, the Lord Jesus told him not to kick against the pricks, that is, not to fight against Him. It seems as if the Lord Jesus was saying to Saul, "What are you doing? Why are you kicking against the pricks? Don't you know that it is easy for Me to subdue you? All I need to do is move My little finger, and you will be defeated, subdued, and captured." After Saul of Tarsus was captured, he was placed in Christ's triumphal procession. The first three captives in this procession were Peter, John, and James. As one of the captives in a train of defeated foes, Paul was being led in Christ's triumphal procession.

Paul uses the metaphor of a procession held in honor of the victory of a Roman general to illustrate what he was in the ministry. Paul's ministry was a triumphal procession of a victorious General, the Lord Jesus, leading many captives. Paul and his co-workers were captives in that procession. This indicates that the proper ministry of the New Testament is a triumphal procession celebrating Christ's victory. Inwardly, I also have the sense that I am a captive in Christ's triumphal procession. As such a captive, I am a witness that once I was an enemy, but I have been defeated, subdued, captured, and made submissive to Christ.

The ministry of the New Testament is to testify of Christ as the Winner and the Victor. I believe that as Paul was marching in Christ's triumphal procession, he could praise the Lord for His victory and in this way testify of Him. Likewise, as a captive of Christ, I also witness of Him today. I can testify that I have been defeated by Him, captured by Him, and subdued by Him. Now I am a

submissive captive, saying amen to His victory and praising Him. This is our ministry. We in the Lord's recovery are in a procession celebrating Christ's victory. If someone asks you what you are doing in the church life, you may want to answer, "We are having a procession, a triumphal procession celebrating Christ's victory. We have all been defeated, subdued, and captured by Him, and now we are submissive to Him."

We have pointed out that Paul first likens the ministry to a celebration of Christ's victory. The apostles' move in the ministry was like a triumphal celebration from one place to another under God's leading. Wherever that procession moved, they celebrated the victory of Christ and witnessed of Christ's triumph over them. Hallelujah, we all have been defeated by Christ! Now we are submissive captives in Christ's procession.

Perhaps you have been a Christian for years without realizing that the New Testament ministry is a procession celebrating the victory of Christ. Who has defeated us, subdued us, captured us, and made us submissive? The victorious Christ has done this. Hallelujah for the New Testament ministry being a procession celebrating the triumph of Christ!

In verse 14 Paul also likens himself and his co-workers to incense-bearers scattering the savor of the knowledge of Christ in His triumphant ministry as in a triumphal procession. The apostles are such incense-bearers in their ministry of Christ as well as captives in the train of His triumph. Concerning the phrase "the savor of the knowledge," Vincent says, "According to the Greek usage, savor and knowledge are in apposition, so that the knowledge of Christ is symbolized as an odor communicating its nature and efficacy through the apostle's work." The apostles' excellent knowledge of Christ became a sweet savor.

In verse 15 Paul goes on to say, "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God in those who are being saved and in those who are perishing." The apostles, being permeated with Christ, become a fragrance of Christ. They are not merely a sweet savor produced by Christ, but Christ Himself is

the savor being exhaled in their life and work to God, both in those who are being saved, as a savor from life to life, and in those who are perishing, as a savor from death to death.

Verse 16 says, "To the one a savor from death unto death, to the other a savor from life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?" The phrases "unto death" and "unto life" mean resulting in death or resulting in life. This refers to the different effects of the apostles' ministry upon different persons. It is a matter of life and death! Only the captives of God in Christ, who are saturated with Christ by the Spirit, are sufficient and qualified for this (3:5-6). The Greek word rendered sufficient also means competent, qualified, fit, worthy. The same word is used in 3:5.

C. Ministering the Word of God

In verse 17 Paul says, "For we are not as the many, peddling the word of God; but as out of sincerity, but as out of God, before God we speak in Christ." In this verse to speak in Christ is to minister the word of God. The word peddling also means retailing, hawking, the selling of inferior things at high prices by low class peddlers in a tricky way. Many engaged in this kind of hawking, adulterating the word of God for their profit. However, the apostles did not do this. Out of sincerity and out of God in their ministry, they spoke in Christ the word of God in the sight of God. How sincere and genuine was the apostle's ministry!

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIX

THE MINISTRY OF THE NEW COVENANT

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:1-6

In the foregoing message we covered the triumph and effect of the ministry of the new covenant. This ministry is a triumphal procession. Wherever this ministry goes, it shows forth the triumph of Christ becoming the victory of the ministry. Wherever Paul and his co-workers went, that was the triumphal procession celebrating Christ's victory. Such a celebration always brought in the victory of Christ. Thus, there was the triumph of the ministry. The triumph of the ministry is the celebration of Christ's victory by the conquered captives in the train of this procession. All of those in this procession have been conquered, subdued, and captured. Today we also have been captured and subdued by Christ. We need to have this realization in faith. Since we are in the procession, we have been captured and subdued, whether or not we feel this is our situation. If we had not been captured and subdued, we could not be in the procession. Praise the Lord that we are all in Christ's triumphal procession!

Paul's concept was that the preaching ministry was a triumphal procession celebrating Christ's victory. Today we ourselves are an example of Christ's victory over us. Because we have been conquered, subdued, and captured by Christ, we are now in His procession preaching Him. The fact that we are in this procession preaching Christ is a testimony that we have been conquered by Christ.

In Philippians 3 Paul says that he counted everything as refuse for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. Here in 2:14 he speaks of the savor of the knowledge of Christ. The excellent knowledge of Christ was a fragrance,

an aroma. This means that we who have been conquered and captured and brought into the triumphal procession to celebrate Christ's victory speak to others the excellent knowledge of Christ. Whatever we speak, that is the excellent knowledge of Christ. We know Christ by our experience of Him and enjoyment of Him. As we march in the triumphal procession, we speak to others about Christ. What we say concerning Him is a sweet smelling savor. The manifestation of the savor of the knowledge of Christ has a twofold effect, a twofold result: either it results in life unto life, or it results in death unto death. This is the triumph and effect of the ministry, which is the constitution of Christ within us.

II. ITS FUNCTION AND COMPETENCY

In this message we come to the function and competency of the ministry of the new covenant (3:1-6). After giving us a picture of the ministry's triumph and effect, Paul shows the function of this ministry and also its competency. What kind of work does this ministry do? What is its function? Furthermore, who can bear such a responsibility, a responsibility of life and death? Because the ministry results either in life unto life or death unto death, Paul exclaimed in 2:16, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Therefore, in 3:1-6 he gives us a picture showing the function and sufficiency of this ministry.

A. Its Function--Writing Letters of Christ

In 3:1 Paul says, "Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?" These questions are raised because of the apostle's frank and faithful word in the preceding verse concerning himself and his co-workers. From what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians and also in this Epistle, the Corinthians may have thought that Paul and his co-workers were commending themselves. Therefore, Paul asks the two questions in 3:1. The answer to both

questions is a definite no. They were not commending themselves, and they did not need letters of commendation.

Verse 2 says, "You are our letter, inscribed in our hearts, known and read by all men." The believers were the fruit of the apostles' labor, commending the apostles and their ministry to others. Thus, they became the apostles' living letters of commendation, written by the apostles with the indwelling Christ as the content in every part of their inner being.

Paul says that the Corinthians were a letter "inscribed in our hearts." The Corinthian believers, as the apostles' living letter of commendation were inscribed in the apostles' hearts. Thus, they were carried by the apostles and could not possibly be severed from them. They were in the apostles' hearts (7:3), brought by them everywhere as their living commendation.

Verse 3 is the continuation of verse 2: "Being manifested that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but in fleshy tablets of the heart." A letter of Christ is one composed of Christ as the content to convey and express Christ. All believers in Christ should be such a living letter of Christ that others may read and know Christ in their being. These letters are written by the ministry of the apostles. The apostles are filled with Christ so that their ministry spontaneously ministers Christ to those they contact, inscribing Christ in their heart and making them living letters conveying Christ.

In verse 2 Paul speaks of "our letter." In verse 3 he tells the Corinthians, "You are a letter of Christ." It seems that here there are two kinds of letters--the letter inscribed in the hearts of the apostles, and the believers as the letter of Christ. Actually, there are not two kinds of letters. Grammatically speaking, in these verses Paul is saying, "You are our letter because you are a letter of Christ." "Being manifested" means something that is evident. It was evident that the Corinthians, as the apostles' letter, were a letter of Christ. But which comes first, a letter of

Christ, or "our letter"? The letter of Christ must come first. It is because the believers are a letter of Christ that they are also the letter inscribed in the heart of the apostles. They are the apostles' letter because they are first a letter of Christ.

Verse 2 says, "inscribed in our hearts," and verse 3 says, "in fleshy tablets of the heart." Verse 2 speaks of the apostles' hearts, whereas verse 3, the hearts of the believers at Corinth. The one kind of letter is inscribed both in the hearts of the apostles and in the hearts of the believers. For years I have been puzzled by this matter and have been seeking to understand it. Where is this letter inscribed, in the hearts of the apostles, or in the hearts of the believers? If we can answer this question, we shall grasp the main point of this message.

We need to see that the same letter is inscribed in the hearts of two categories of people: in the hearts of the apostles and in the hearts of the believers. What does this mean? This certainly presents a problem in our understanding of 2 Corinthians 3. However, recognizing a problem is a sign that we are proper students of the Bible. If we cannot find any problems as we read the Word, then we are not reading it in a proper way. Now that we have found the problem here--one letter inscribed in the hearts of the apostles and the believers--we must find out how to explain it.

It is not the function of the new covenant ministry to do a work; its function is to write letters. This is, of course, a figure of speech. Often in his deeper teachings Paul uses metaphors. When he comes to a deeper truth, he may use a metaphor. For example, in 2:14 there are two metaphors: the first is that of the captives in the triumphal procession celebrating Christ's victory; the second is that of the incense-bearers scattering the excellency of the knowledge of Christ as a fragrance resulting in either death or life. Now in chapter three Paul uses another metaphor, that of writing letters.

According to verse 3, the letter of Christ is "inscribed not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." The

Spirit of the living God, who is the living God Himself, is not an instrument, like a pen for writing, but the very element, like the ink, with which the apostles minister Christ as the content for the writing of living letters that convey Christ. The writer of this letter is not the Spirit of God; the writer is the apostles. The Spirit of the living God is the "ink," the element, the essence, of the writing. This means that the Spirit of the living God is the element with which the letter is written. This is a very crucial matter.

The ministry of the apostles is to write letters with the life-giving Spirit as the essence. The more the apostles minister to you, the more they put into you the element of the life-giving Spirit. We may use as an illustration writing with ink on a piece of paper. The more we write on the paper, the more ink is added to the paper. In the same principle, through the ministry of the apostles, the life-giving Spirit is added to the believers. This is a very important matter that we all need to see.

In verse 3 Paul says that the letter of Christ is inscribed "not in tablets of stone, but in fleshy tablets of the heart." Our heart, as the composition of our conscience (the leading part of our spirit), mind, emotion, and will, is the tablet upon which the living letters of Christ are written with the living Spirit of God. This implies that Christ is written into every part of our inner being with the Spirit of the living God to make us His living letters, that He may be expressed in us and read by others in us.

A letter that is properly written is centered on a sheet of paper. We may say that the writing is on the heart of the paper. When you write a letter, you do not write in the corners or in the margin, but in the center. The principle is the same with the writing of the letter of Christ in our being. This letter is written on our central part, on our heart, a composition of the soul and the conscience, the leading part of our spirit. Therefore, the letter of Christ is written on our spirit and on our soul. When the apostles preach Christ or minister Christ, they minister Him into the heart and spirit of the believers. First Christ as the life-giving Spirit is ministered into a believer's spirit. This

means that Christ is written in the spirit of that believer. Then by further ministry Christ spreads from the spirit into the mind, emotion, and will. Eventually, Christ will be written into every part of our inward being. In the words of Ephesians 3, this is Christ settling Himself, or making His home, in our heart. Christ making His home in our heart equals the writing of Christ throughout our inner being. This writing causes a believer to become a living letter of Christ. Such a person expresses Christ in whatever he says and does. He becomes a living letter for others to read. All believers should become such letters.

The writing that takes place in our hearts by the ministers of the new covenant has the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit as the element. This element is actually the processed God. This means that it is the Triune God who is being written into our being. This is the letter written by the ministers of the new covenant with the processed Triune God as the life-giving Spirit. God is being written into us, and as a result we become a letter of Christ.

How can this same letter also be inscribed in the heart of the ministers of the new covenant? This is not easy to explain. A question like this can be answered only according to spiritual experience. Without adequate experience, we shall have no way to answer this question. From our experience we know that while Paul was ministering Christ into the Corinthian believers, writing Christ as the life-giving Spirit into them, the very thing he was writing on them was also being written on his heart. Today while we are ministering Christ to others, Christ is simultaneously written in the one to whom we are ministering and also in us. Therefore, the same writing produces two copies of the one letter. One copy is in our heart, and the other copy is in the heart of the one to whom we are ministering.

As Paul was ministering to the believers at Corinth, the writing was taking place both in the hearts of the believers and also in his own heart. In this way they became a letter of Christ, and this letter was also within the heart of the writer, the apostle. Therefore, the same letter was written in Paul's heart that was written in the

hearts of the believers. Wherever Paul went, this letter was in him, for the believers had become his letter. On the one hand, they were the letter of Christ; on the other hand, they were the letter of the apostles inscribed in their hearts.

I can never forget those to whom I have ministered Christ. While I was writing Christ into them, the same Christ was being written into me. The one writing produced two original copies. This kind of writing does not take place, however, during the course of superficial preaching, such as that common among Christians today. Superficial preaching does not produce letters. But the proper, adequate ministry always writes something of Christ both in the hearts of those receiving the ministry and in the heart of the one ministering. I can testify that in my heart there are many letters that have been written in this way.

In verses 2 and 3 Paul points out that because the Corinthians were manifestly a letter of Christ, they were also the letter inscribed in the hearts of the apostles. Thus, these two letters were composed by one writing. The one writing brought forth a twofold result, in the hearts of the apostles and in the hearts of the believers.

The apostles did not minister anything in a light, superficial way. On the contrary, whatever they ministered was full of spiritual weight. Therefore, it could be written in the hearts of the believers and also in their own hearts. This was the reason the apostles could assure the Corinthians that they would never forget them, for the believers had been written in their hearts. Wherever the apostles went, they carried the believers with them by having them written in their hearts. This matter is very subjective and experiential. It goes beyond being attached together, for it involves two hearts becoming one.

I would encourage you to compare the ministry of the apostles with the works carried on among Christians today. The apostles' ministry is absolutely a matter in life and full of spiritual weight. Actually, their ministry is not a work--it is the writing of letters. As we have seen, this is the function of the ministry of the new covenant. We do

not

have the adequate utterance to speak of this. Perhaps this is the reason Paul used the metaphor of the writing of letters. If you meditate on this metaphor, pray about it, and have fellowship concerning it, you will see more and realize more. You will see that this truly is the function of the ministry in the New Testament.

God does not have the intention to use His ministers to carry out a work on a large scale. The ministry of the apostles is not a work of mass production. A human life is not produced in such a way. In order for a child to be born, he must develop in his mother's womb for nine months. There is no way to speed up this process and to mass-produce human beings. This illustrates the fact that God's way is the way of life, not the way of mass production.

Do not expect that the Lord's recovery will ever be a work of mass production. Some brothers may have this concept. They may think that in just a short period of time those in their country in the Lord's recovery will number in the millions. When Paul came forth to minister, we are not told that thousands were gained for the Lord through his ministry. The church at Ephesus, for example, met in a home. The very fact that a church meets in a home indicates that the number of believers there is not large. Do you think any believer in ancient times had a home that could accommodate a thousand believers? Certainly no one lived in such a home.

In 1 Corinthians 16:8 and 9 Paul says, "But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost; for a door is opened to me, great and operative, and many are opposing." When we read of such a door being opened to Paul, we may think that thousands were being added to the church through his ministry. But the church in Ephesus continued to meet in the home of Aquila and Priscilla. How, then, could they have had a large number of believers? I mention this to point out that God's way is not that of gaining a large number by mass production.

We may use the growing of real flowers versus the making of artificial flowers as an illustration of the difference between the way of mass production and God's

way of life. It takes time to grow real flowers in a garden. But a factory can produce hundreds, even thousands, of artificial flowers in a day. Likewise, to produce a child requires a long, slow process. No mother can ever forget a child born of her, for that child is part of her very being. This is what we mean by the way of life.

Paul's word about the inscribing of letters implies that God's way is the way of life. Actually, the believers were not merely written in his heart--they were inscribed in his heart. Therefore, Paul could never forget them. This inscribing was by life, by means of the life-giving Spirit.

B. Its Competency

Who is qualified to do the work of writing living letters of Christ? Only God is qualified to do this. It must be God in us who is writing the letters. In ourselves we are of no account in this matter. There is no place for what we are in ourselves or for what we can do. We need the Triune God to be constituted into our being. Only then can we become such a writer.

I am not here just to preach the gospel or teach the Bible. My burden is to write living letters of Christ. If I am to be this kind of writer, I must be one who is constituted of the Triune God. Then, actually I will not be the one doing the writing; the very God who has been constituted into me will be the real writer. He as the writer will inscribe Himself into the believers.

In verses 4 and 5 Paul says, "And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." Here we see that the living God Himself is the sufficiency, competency, and qualification of the apostles' ministry for God's New Testament economy to dispense Christ into God's chosen people for the building up of Christ's Body. We ourselves are of no account, and what we can do is likewise of no account. Only the Triune God constituted into us is sufficient to carry on the work of writing living letters of Christ.

Speaking of God, Paul says in verse 6, "Who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, not of letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The Greek word rendered "made" also means enabled, qualified, made competent. The phrase "not of letter" modifies ministers; it does not modify covenant. By "letter" here Paul means the written code of the law. The Spirit is the Spirit of the living God, with whom the apostles minister Christ into the believers to make them His living letters. The apostolic ministry for the New Testament is not of dead letters like the Mosaic ministry for the Old Testament, but of the living Spirit, who gives life.

In verse 6 Paul tells us that the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. The letter which kills is the letter of the law, which only requires of man but is unable to supply man with life (Gal. 3:21). Due to man's inability to fulfill its requirements, it kills man (Rom. 7:9-11). The Spirit, who is the ultimate expression of the processed Triune God, imparts the divine life, even God Himself, into the apostles and all other believers, making them ministers of a new covenant, the covenant of life. Hence, their ministry is one constituted of the Triune God of life by His life-giving Spirit.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SEVEN

THE MINISTRY OF THE NEW COVENANT

(3)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:7-11

In 2:12-17 Paul speaks of the triumph and effect of the apostolic ministry; in 3:1-6, of its function and competency; and in 3:7-11, of its glory and superiority. As we shall see, verses 7 through 11 show the inferiority of the glory of the Mosaic ministry, the ministry of law, a ministry of condemnation and death, and the superiority of the apostolic ministry, the ministry of grace, a ministry of righteousness and the Spirit. The former was through glory temporarily; the latter remains in glory forever.

After speaking of the triumph and effect of the ministry of the new covenant, Paul goes on to speak of the function and competency of that ministry. The function is to inscribe living letters of Christ, and the competency, the qualification, is God Himself. The writer of these living letters is actually not Paul; the writer is the very God who has been constituted into Paul's being. Therefore, God is not only the writer; He is also the "ink," the substance or element, of what is written. This means that God is writing Himself into His chosen people. The result of this writing is a constitution of the Triune God into His people. Thus, the writer is God, the writing substance is God, and the issue, the result, is also God.

We may take writing with a ballpoint pen as an illustration of how God writes Himself into us. First a pen is filled with ink. Then it is used for writing certain words on paper. It is not the pen that actually does the writing; it is the ink, the substance which fills the pen, that does this. Nothing of the pen is put on paper. Rather, it is the substance of the ink that is inscribed on the paper.

Eventually, the writing on the paper is a composition, a constitution, of the ink. In the same principle, the processed Triune God as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit is both the writer and the writing substance. In the writing of living letters of Christ, the Spirit is the substance that is inscribed into us.

In this message we come to the glory of the new covenant ministry. The writing substance is inward, but the glory is outward. The writing element is hidden, but the glory is expressed. Actually, the glory is the shining out of the hidden substance. Once again, we may use electricity as an illustration. The element of electricity flows into a light bulb. This element is the substance of the light that shines from within the bulb. But the shining of the light is the glory of the electricity. Hence, with electricity there is both the essence, the element, and the shining out, the glory.

Paul's writing concerning the ministry of the new covenant is in a good sequence. First he shows that the new covenant ministry is triumphant and effective. This ministry is triumphant because Christ has triumphed and gained the victory. It is triumphant also because the apostles have been captured and have become submissive to Christ. All the early apostles were conquered, subdued, and captured by Christ and became very submissive to Him. Their preaching was a sign of their submission. Consider the example of Saul of Tarsus. How rebellious he was against the Lord Jesus, against the churches, against God's administration, and against God's New Testament economy! But even though he had been so rebellious, he was conquered, subdued, and captured. Then he became so submissive to Christ that he had no problems with God's economy. On the contrary, wherever he went, he preached the New Testament economy of God. This preaching was a strong indication that he had become submissive to God's government and administration. Paul, therefore, became a submissive captive of Christ. His submission was an expression of Christ's victory.

Every captive in Christ's triumphal procession is a proof of Christ's victory. This procession celebrates the

victory of Christ. As the apostles were marching in this procession, they could say, "Jews and Gentiles, look at us and realize how triumphant Christ is." This was Paul's concept in 2:14. As he passed through Ephesus, Troas, and Macedonia, he was in Christ's triumphal procession. Today, God is also leading us in a triumphal procession to celebrate Christ's victory. We all are captives in this procession. Christ has conquered us, subdued us, and made us submissive to Him. Praise Him!

The ministry of the new covenant is not only triumphant--it is also effective. It is so effective that to some it results in life unto life, and to others, in death unto death. Therefore, this ministry is a matter of life and death.

As we have emphasized, the function of the ministry of the new covenant is to write, even to inscribe, living letters of Christ. And the competence of this ministry is the processed Triune God as the life-giving Spirit. The glory of this ministry is its shining, its expression.

III. ITS GLORY AND SUPERIORITY

A. Its Glory

1. The Glory of the Ministry of the Old Covenant

In 3:7 Paul says, "Now if the ministry of death, in letters engraved in stone, came in glory, so that the sons of Israel were not able to gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, which was being done away." The ministry of death is the ministry of the old covenant, a covenant of the dead letter that kills. The glory in verse 7 is the glory that shone temporarily on Moses' face (Exo. 34:29, 35).

Verse 7 begins with the word "now." It may be better to translate the Greek word as "furthermore" or "in addition to." This would be more in line with Paul's thought. After talking about the triumph and effect of the ministry and also about the function and competency of the ministry, he in addition goes on to speak of the glory and superiority of the ministry. The ministry of the new covenant has glory,

and this glory is much better than that of the old covenant ministry.

2. The Glory of the Ministry of the New Covenant

Verse 8 says, "How shall not rather the ministry of the Spirit be in glory?" This ministry is the apostolic ministry of the new covenant, a covenant of the living Spirit, who gives life. The glory here is the glory of God manifested in the face of Christ, which is God Himself shining forever in the hearts of the apostles (4:6), surpassing the glory of the Mosaic ministry of the old covenant (v. 10).

Paul is very careful in his use of words. In verse 7 he says that the ministry of the old covenant came in glory, but in verse 8 he indicates that the ministry of the Spirit is in glory. In verse 7 he says "came"; in verse 8 he says "be" in glory. Why does he change from came to be? If we had been writing this Epistle, we probably would have said that both the ministry of condemnation and the ministry of the Spirit came in glory. But there is a difference between came and be. To come is temporary and also may be somewhat superficial. However, to be is permanent and rather deep. The old glory came, but the new glory is and will continue to be. The old glory came for awhile and then disappeared. The new glory, however, is here and will remain.

As Paul was writing this Epistle, he knew that the glory of the old covenant ministry was temporary, but that the glory of the new covenant ministry would remain forever. Furthermore, in verse 9 Paul says that the "ministry of righteousness abounds in glory." The apostolic ministry of the new covenant not only has glory, but also abounds in the glory of God. This glory surpasses the glory of the Mosaic ministry of the old covenant (v. 10).

In verses 7 and 8 Paul gives us a strong comparison between the ministry of death and the ministry of the Spirit. We do not ordinarily regard the Spirit as the opposite of death. Instead, we always think of life as the opposite of death. Thus, we would expect Paul to speak not of the ministry of the Spirit, but of the ministry of life. However, Paul does not use the term ministry of life.

Rather, he speaks of the ministry of the Spirit. Yes, the ministry of the New Testament is a ministry of life. The reason Paul speaks of the ministry of the Spirit here and not of the ministry of life is that the Spirit is the source, the element, and the sphere of life. Without the Spirit, there is no source of life. Neither is there the element or sphere of life. Therefore, to speak here of the ministry of life would be to say much less than to speak of the ministry of the Spirit. Paul chose the best expression and instead of comparing death with life, he compared death with the Spirit.

In verse 9 Paul goes on to say, "For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much rather the ministry of righteousness abounds in glory." The ministry of the old covenant became one of death because the old covenant brought in condemnation unto death (Rom. 5:13, 18, 20-21) and death unto condemnation. Hence, it was also the ministry of condemnation. The ministry of the new covenant is one of the Spirit that gives life (vv. 8, 6) because the new covenant brings in God's righteousness unto life (Rom. 5:17, 21) and life that brings forth righteousness. Hence, it is also the ministry of righteousness.

In this verse we see that the ministry of condemnation has glory, whereas the ministry of righteousness abounds in glory. Abounds is a much stronger word than has. Notice that the word "has" in verse 9 is in italics. This means that it was supplied by the translators. Perhaps in this verse it may be better to use the word came, already used of the glory of the old covenant in verse 7. It is rather difficult to say that the old covenant had glory, but we know that it came in glory. To come in glory is different from having glory. For example, a person may not have any money, but he may come to you with money in order to perform a service for someone else. To have money is one thing, and to come with money is another. Likewise, for the old covenant ministry to come in glory is different from this ministry having glory. But the New Testament ministry abounds in glory. It is in glory, and it abounds in

glory. This means that the glory is spreading and increasing.

B. Its Superiority

In verse 10 Paul continues, "For that which has also been glorified has not been glorified in this respect, on account of the surpassing glory." The ministry of the old covenant was glorified temporarily in the shining of Moses' face, but it was not glorified in the fact that the glory of the ministry of the law was a temporary glory shining on Moses' face. In this respect, it was being done away, on account of the surpassing glory. Because of the glory of the new covenant ministry (which is the glory of God, even God Himself, manifested in the face of Christ forever, surpassing the temporary glory of the old covenant ministry shining on Moses' face), the temporary glory of the ministry of law disappears and no longer exists.

To understand the contrast between the glory of the old covenant ministry and the glory of the new covenant ministry, we may compare artificial light with sunlight. The lights in the meeting hall may seem rather bright. But if it were possible for the room to be filled with sunlight, the artificial light would seem to be no light at all. In the same principle, when we compare the glory of the New Testament ministry with that of the Old Testament ministry, the glory of the old seems to be no glory at all.

In verse 10 Paul uses the word glorified in a very careful way. The old covenant ministry was glorified because it did shine upon the face of Moses. Therefore, in this sense it was glorified. When Moses came down from the mountain, his face shone, and the children of Israel could gaze upon that shining. No doubt, that was the glorification of the ministry which brought the law to God's people. However, glorification is one thing, and the glory itself is another thing. Something may be glorified, but it still may not have any glory. The old covenant ministry was glorified temporarily, but it never had any glory, on account of the surpassing glory. With the old covenant

ministry there was glorification, but with the new covenant ministry there is the glory itself, even the surpassing glory. When the glorification of the Old Testament ministry is compared to the surpassing glory of the New Testament ministry, that glorification becomes nothing.

Verse 11 says, "For if that which was being done away was through glory, much rather that which remains is in glory." "Being done away" refers to the process of abolition through the spreading of the new covenant ministry.

In verse 11 Paul does not say that that which was being done away was with glory or in glory. As we have pointed out, in verse 7 he says that it came in glory. Here he says that it was through glory. But the new covenant ministry is in glory. The one was through glory temporarily, whereas the latter remains in glory permanently.

Furthermore, the glory of the old covenant ministry shone upon the face of one man. However, the glory of the new covenant ministry shines within millions of believers. The glory came merely as a visit to Moses, staying on his face only for a while. But once the glory of the new covenant ministry comes, it remains forever. It will never leave. Even though it shines, it does not shine upon the surface of the believers, that is, on the skin of our face. Instead, this new glory shines from within our being. Instead of coming to visit us, this glory comes to invade, pervade, permeate, soak, and saturate us. It comes first to saturate us and then to shine forth from within us. The old glory shone on Moses' face individually, but the New Testament glory shines from many different believers.

As we consider all these points related to the glory of the new covenant ministry, we shall realize that it is much superior to that of the old covenant ministry. Hallelujah, the glory of the ministry of the New Testament is shining in us all!

I can testify that when I came to this country for the Lord's ministry, the Lord was shining within me. He honored the ministry and used it. Doors were opened here and there, and I was invited to visit different places. No

doubt, God was leading me in Christ's triumphal

procession. I was a captive in this procession and also an incense-bearer scattering the sweet knowledge of Christ. A good number of believers received spiritual help. Today the Triune God as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit is shining in many believers. This is very different from the glory of the old covenant. The New Testament glory does not come to visit us; it comes to remain in us and to shine out from within us.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE EIGHT

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:12-18

In 2 Corinthians Paul first speaks concerning the ministry and then concerning the ministers. In 2:14 he likens the ministry to a triumphal procession celebrating the victory of Christ. Then he goes on to speak of the function and competence of the ministry and also of its glory and superiority. In 3:12--7:16 Paul comes to the ministers of the new covenant. According to 3:12-18, these ministers are constituted by and with the Lord as the life-giving and transforming Spirit. These two aspects of the Spirit are covered in these verses. If we understand these aspects of the Spirit, we shall see the constitution of the New Testament ministers. These ministers are not merely trained or taught; they are constituted.

I. CONSTITUTED BY AND WITH THE LORD AS THE LIFE-GIVING AND TRANSFORMING SPIRIT

A. Their Hope and Boldness

1. Using Much Boldness

Verse 12 says, "Having therefore such hope, we use much boldness." This is the boldness in speaking openly and freely about their ministry; not hiding anything, as Moses did when he covered his face with a veil (v. 13).

The lasting glory of the new covenant ministry is the basis of the apostles' hope. In their ministry they have a hope. In the ministry of Moses, by comparison, there was no hope. Moses put a veil on his face to conceal the shining. When we read Exodus 34, we may have a positive

impression about this. In 2 Corinthians 3, however, Paul does not interpret the veil in a positive sense, but in a negative sense. According to Paul's interpretation, Moses put a veil on his face because he was afraid that the children of Israel would see the fading of the glory. Fading means termination. Thus, according to Paul's understanding, Moses realized that the shining on his face would not last very long. In this sense, Moses did not have any hope. On the contrary, he had a fearful concern. But in verse 12 Paul says that the ministers of the new covenant have hope, for the shining glory of the new covenant ministry remains forever.

Having such a hope, the apostles used much boldness. If you read the book of Exodus carefully, you will see that Moses did not have as much boldness in giving the law as the apostles did in ministering Christ. The more they ministered, the more boldness they had. The longer they ministered, the more bold they became. Their boldness came from their confidence in the everlasting glory.

The principle is the same with us today. I can testify that the more I minister Christ, the more bold I become. Even though there is opposition to this ministry, I still have hope. Eventually the opposition will fade. We have the confidence that we are ministering the truth that carries the glory and that the glory in this truth will remain. Others may not believe what we are preaching. But in the next age, or in the New Jerusalem, they will believe it.

2. Not as Moses

In verse 13 Paul continues, "And are not as Moses, who put a veil on his face, that the sons of Israel should not gaze unto the end of that which was being done away." While Moses spoke the word of God to the sons of Israel, he kept his glorified face unveiled. After speaking, he veiled his face (Exo. 34:29-33) lest they see the end of his ministry, which was passing away. He did not want them to behold the termination of the fading glory of his ministry of the law.

3. The Veil Done Away in Christ

Verse 14 says, "But their thoughts were hardened; for until the present day the same veil remains at the reading of the old covenant, it not being revealed that it is being done away in Christ." Here the word thoughts denotes "things which proceed out of the mind (2:11; Phil. 4:7). Hence, derivatively, the minds themselves" (Vincent).

In this verse the preposition "it" refers to the fact that the veil is being done away in Christ. Since this fact was not revealed to the sons of Israel, their thoughts were hardened, and their minds were blinded. The veil is being done away in Christ through the new covenant economy, yet it still remains in their minds when they read the old covenant (v. 15).

Verse 15 says, "But unto this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart." Moses here refers to Moses' writings, the Pentateuch (John 5:47).

B. The Process of Their Being Constituted

1. Their Heart Turning to the Lord and the Veil Being Taken Away

Verse 16 says, "But whenever it turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." According to verse 15, "it" must refer to the heart of the sons of Israel. This indicates that their heart is away from the Lord when the veil lies on their heart. When their heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Actually, their turned-away heart is the veil. To turn their heart to the Lord is to take away the veil.

Do you know why Christians have no light, no revelation? It is because they are covered by a thick, heavy veil. Of course, there may be a small number who turn their heart to the Lord. When their heart is turned to Him, the veil is taken away, and they see light. Many Christians today are covered by such a thick veil. This is the reason there is so little light among them.

Many among us can testify that when we turned to the Lord we were enlightened. We became clear concerning ourselves, our situation, and the condition of our inner being. By turning to the Lord and coming to the church, we became more clear than ever before.

Those who are constituted apostles are believers whose hearts have been turned to the Lord. Saul of Tarsus became this kind of believer. When he was on the way to Damascus, the Lord Jesus said to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Immediately and unconsciously Saul's heart was turned to the Lord, and he called, saying, "Who art thou, Lord?" (Acts 9:5). Although he did not know who the Lord was, he still called Him Lord. He called on Him foolishly and even blindly. Many of us have done the same thing. Some time later, however, we realized what happened, and our spiritual sky became very clear.

After the Lord appeared to Saul and he called on Him, Saul became blind. Before that time he was a religious leader and led others to persecute the church. But after he called on the name of the Lord, he needed someone to lead him. The Lord Jesus said to him that he should go into the city and that he would be told what to do (Acts 9:6). Eventually, Ananias came to him, and the scales fell off Saul's eyes. This indicates that the veil was taken away and that he received light. Because the heart of Saul of Tarsus was turned to the Lord, the veil was taken away. What light this man received! His Epistles were all written under the shining of this light. The reason Paul received so much light was due to one factor: the turning of his heart to the Lord and the taking away of the veil.

2. Freed from the Bondage of the Law and Enjoying the Lord as the Spirit

Verse 17 says, "And the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." When the heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. And, furthermore, the Lord is the Spirit who would give us freedom. Since the Lord is the Spirit, when the heart turns to Him, the veil is taken away, and the heart is freed from the bondage of the letter of the law.

According to the context of this section, which starts at 2:12, the Lord here must refer to Christ the Lord (2:12, 14,

15, 17; 3:3, 4, 14, 16; 4:5). This, then, is a strong word in the Bible, telling us emphatically that Christ is the Spirit. "The Lord Christ of ver. 16 is the Spirit who pervades and animates the new covenant of which we are ministers (ver. 6), and the ministration of which is with glory (ver. 8). Compare Romans 8:9-11; John 14:16, 18" (Vincent). "The Lord of verse 16 is the Spirit,...which giveth life, verse 6, meaning, 'the Lord', as here spoken of, 'Christ', 'is the Spirit', is identical with the Holy Spirit:...Christ, here, is the Spirit of Christ" (Alford). "All that transforming and indwelling Spirit is Christ Himself. 'The Lord is the Spirit'" (Williston Walker).

Some deny that the Lord in verse 17 refers to Christ the Lord. They claim that it denotes God in a general way. Furthermore, using John 4:24, they claim that verse 17 is simply saying that God is the Spirit. However, if we consider this verse according to the context, we shall realize that the Lord in verse 17 must refer to Christ. Therefore, this verse tells us emphatically that Christ the Lord is the Spirit. Furthermore, the phrase, "the Spirit of the Lord" indicates that the Spirit and the Lord are one. The Spirit of the Lord is actually one with the Lord. Where the Spirit of the Lord is means where the Spirit, the Lord, is.

Throughout the centuries there have been a number of teachers who believed that, according to verse 17, Christ the Lord is the Spirit. Many Christians, however, are still under the influence of the creeds, especially the Nicene Creed. At the time of the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), the book of Revelation had not been officially recognized. This may be the reason that in the Nicene Creed nothing is said regarding the seven Spirits. In the book of Revelation the third of the Trinity is the seven Spirits of God. Furthermore, according to Revelation 5:6, these seven Spirits are the seven eyes of the Lamb. For those who claim that the Spirit is a separate Person from the Son, we would like to ask how the third Person, the Spirit, can be the eyes of the second Person, the Son. We cannot deny what the book of Revelation says concerning the seven

Spirits, that the third of the Trinity is the eyes of the second. For this reason, we should not speak of Christ and the Spirit as being two separate Persons.

The Spirit in verse 17, who is the ultimate expression of the Triune God, was not yet in John 7:39, because at that time Jesus was not yet glorified. He had not yet finished the process which He, as the embodiment of God, must pass through. After His resurrection, that is, after finishing all of the processes, such as incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, which the Triune God had to pass through in man for His redemptive economy, He became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45). This life-giving Spirit is called "the Spirit" in the New Testament (Rom. 8:16, 23, 26-27; Gal. 3:2, 5, 14; 6:8; Rev. 2:7; 3:22; 14:13; 22:17), the Spirit who gives us the divine life (2 Cor. 3:6; John 6:63) and frees us from the bondage of the law. The Spirit of the Lord is the Lord Himself, with whom there is freedom. The freedom here is the freedom from the letter of the law under the veil (Gal. 2:4; 5:1).

3. With Unveiled Face Beholding and Reflecting as a Mirror the Glory of the Lord

In verse 18 Paul goes on to say, "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." "And" here indicates something further. First, the heart turns to the Lord that the veil may be taken away (v. 16); second, the Lord as the Spirit frees us from the bondage of the law (v. 17); and last, with unveiled face we, as a mirror, behold and reflect the glory of the Lord and thus are transformed into His image from glory to glory.

In verse 18 "we" denotes the apostles, who, as examples and representatives of all believers, are the ministers of Christ. Although these verses describe the apostles, we should not think that these verses are not for us. The apostles are examples and representatives of the believers. This means that what the apostles should be, we should be also. Therefore, these verses are also related to us.

The unveiled face is in contrast to the veiled mind, the veiled heart (vv. 14-15). It means that our heart has turned to the Lord so that the veil has been taken away, and the Lord as the Spirit has freed us from the bondage, the veiling, of the law, so that there is no more insulation between us and the Lord.

According to verse 18, we behold and reflect as a mirror the glory of the Lord. Beholding is to see the Lord by ourselves; reflecting is for others to see Him through us. We are such a mirror beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord. As such, our face should be fully unveiled that we may see clearly and reflect accurately.

The glory in verse 18 is the glory of the Lord as the resurrected and ascended One, who is both God and man, passing through incarnation, human living on the earth, and crucifixion, entering into resurrection, accomplishing full redemption, and becoming a life-giving Spirit. This Spirit dwells in us to make Him and all He has accomplished, obtained, and attained real to us so that we may be one with Him and be transformed into His image from glory to glory.

4. Being Transformed into the Image of the Lord

When we with unveiled face are beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord, He infuses us with the elements of what He is and what He has done. Thus, we are being transformed metabolically to have His life shape by His life power with His life essence, transfigured, mainly by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2), into His image. Being transformed indicates that we are in the process of transformation.

The constitution of life involves the life essence, the life power, and the life shape. Every kind of life has these three things--the essence, the power, and the shape. For example, a carnation flower has an essence and a power. Therefore, it is formed into a certain shape. As it grows with the life essence and by the life power, it is shaped into a particular form. It is the same with the divine life. This life has its essence, power, and shape. The shape of the divine life is the image of Christ. Thus, in verse 18 we

have the thought of being transformed into the same image. This means that we shall be shaped into the image of Christ. Based upon this fact and upon Paul's use of the word transformed, we speak of being metabolically constituted. This term is based upon the concept of transformation into the image of Christ.

According to 2 Corinthians 4, we are vessels. As vessels we need to have an unveiled face; that is, we need to be open to the divine life with its power, essence, and shape. As we open to the Lord, He as the life-giving Spirit enters into our being to infuse His life essence into us, to operate within us by His life power, and to shape us into His image. This is the constitution of life to make us ministers of the new covenant.

The image in verse 18 is the image of the resurrected and glorified Christ. The "same image" means we are being conformed to the resurrected and glorified Christ, being made the same as He is (Rom. 8:29).

To be transformed into the same image from glory to glory means from one degree of glory to another degree. This indicates a continuing process in life in resurrection. This is "from the Lord Spirit." "From" indicates that the transformation is proceeding from the Spirit rather than caused by Him.

The Lord Spirit may be considered a compound title like the Father God and the Lord Christ. This expression again strongly proves and confirms that the Lord Christ is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Lord Christ. In this chapter, this Spirit is revealed as the inscribing Spirit (v. 3), the life-giving Spirit (v. 6), the ministering Spirit (v. 8), the freeing Spirit (v. 17), and the transforming Spirit (v. 18). Such an all-inclusive Spirit is crucial to the ministers of Christ and to their ministry for God's new covenant economy.

After speaking about the ministry of the new covenant, the apostle continues to speak about the ministers of the new covenant. From verse 12 through 18 he first depicts the new covenant ministers as persons whose hearts have

turned to the Lord, whose faces are unveiled, who are enjoying the Lord as the Spirit, freeing them from the bondage of the law, and who are being transformed into the image of the Lord by beholding and reflecting Him. Through such a process of transformation they are constituted to be ministers of Christ by the Spirit with the elements of Christ's Person and work. Hence, their person is a constitution of Christ and with Christ, and their ministry is to minister Christ to others, infusing them with the all-inclusive Christ as the indwelling, life-giving Spirit. All believers should imitate them to be the same kind of person and to accomplish the same kind of ministry.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE NINE

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 4:1-7

In 3:12-18 we have the first aspect of the description of the ministers of the New Testament. The ministers of the new covenant are constituted by and with the Lord as the life-giving and transforming Spirit. Chapters four through seven are a further description of the New Testament ministers. According to 4:1-6, they conduct themselves for the shining of the gospel of the glory of Christ. Thus, the second aspect concerning the ministers of the new covenant is how they conduct themselves, the way they behave.

II. CONDUCTING THEMSELVES FOR THE SHINING OF THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST

Before we consider how the ministers of the new covenant conduct themselves, let us first see the goal, the aim, and the purpose of their conduct. Their conduct is governed and controlled by a purpose. This purpose is to shine the glory of the gospel of Christ. They conduct themselves in such a way that the gospel of Christ may shine through them and out from within them. This is the goal, the purpose, of their living. They do not merely preach the gospel--they shine out the gospel of the glory of Christ.

The gospel preached by Paul was a gospel of glory, a gospel full of light and glory. This glory cannot be conveyed just by speaking, by preaching. It must be expressed through shining. Furthermore, this shining must be the living of the New Testament ministers. Their living is the very shining of the gospel they preach. For

them, the

gospel is not merely a doctrine. There is no need for a doctrine to have any shining. But the gospel they preach, the gospel of glory, is full of shining. This glory is God Himself, God embodied in the gospel they preach. Therefore, the gospel preached by the ministers of the new covenant is not a theory, a philosophy, or a mere doctrine. It is the embodiment of the God of glory. This gospel cannot be carried out simply through preaching. There must be shining.

The ministers who carry out this gospel of glory are luminaries; that is, they are shining ones. As luminaries, they themselves do not have light, but they have the ability to reflect light that comes from another source, just as the moon reflects the light of the sun.

The gospel can be compared to Christ shining forth as the sun, the God of glory embodied in His redemptive work. We all need to understand the gospel in this way. Do not regard the gospel as a philosophy or a teaching. No, the gospel is the embodiment of the very God of glory. This gospel needs many shining ones, many luminaries, to reflect its light. Reflecting the light of the gospel of glory is the living of all the ministers of the new covenant. This reflection is the conduct of the apostles.

In verse 4 Paul uses the word illumination. Deep in his spirit, Paul considered himself and his co-workers luminaries. Today we also need to be such luminaries reflecting the glory of the gospel of Christ. The goal, the aim, and the purpose of the living of the New Testament ministers is to shine in this way. The goal of Paul's conduct was to shine out the gospel. He and his co-workers, ministers of the new covenant, conducted themselves for the shining of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

A. Their Conduct

In 4:1 Paul says, "Therefore, having this ministry, as we received mercy we do not lose heart." In 3:12-18 the apostle depicts how the ministers of the new covenant are constituted. In this chapter, he goes on to tell, from verse 1 through 6, how they as the ministers of the new covenant

conduct themselves for the carrying out of their ministry, and, from verse 7 through 18, what kind of life they live.

1. Having This Ministry of the New Covenant

In 4:1 Paul speaks of having "this ministry." This is the ministry described in 2:12 through 3:18. "This ministry" indicates that we, all the apostles of Christ, though many, have one unique ministry--the ministry of the new covenant for the accomplishing of God's New Testament economy. All the apostles' works are to carry out this unique ministry of ministering Christ to others for the building up of His Body.

In verse 1 Paul speaks of ministry in the singular. This is a strong proof that the co-workers all had one ministry, the unique ministry. Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament there is one unique ministry. The unique ministry in the New Testament is the ministry of righteousness and of the Spirit. In this ministry Christ is ministered to others.

Today it is common for preachers to talk about different ministries. Although I would not say that it is wrong to speak of ministries, we need to be careful in speaking concerning ministry in this way. What is crucial here is what we mean by the words ministry and ministries. In 2 Corinthians the ministry is unique; it is not spoken of in the plural. "This ministry" is the unique ministry of the New Testament.

In chapter one of Acts Peter refers to the ministry. There was the need for someone to fill the gap among the Apostles, for someone to join the eleven in bearing the ministry. The twelve Apostles all had one ministry. This ministry was to preach Christ in resurrection. In 2 Corinthians the apostles also have one ministry--to minister Christ to others.

2. Not Losing Heart

The first aspect of the way the apostles conducted themselves was that they did not lose heart. I can testify that because I also have a part in this ministry, I do not

lose heart. The ministry is an incentive and a motivation. This ministry strengthens me, supports me, backs me up, and causes me not to lose heart. Even the opposition is a sign that this ministry is under the Lord's blessing and that it is effective. We do not lose heart, no matter how much the opposition may rise up against us.

3. Having Renounced the Hidden Things of Shame

In verse 2 Paul says, "But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience before God." We need to have a conscience that can declare to the angels and the demons that we do not have any hidden things of shame, but are transparent and crystal clear.

The Greek word rendered adulterate primarily means to ensnare; then to corrupt, as in the case of gold or wine that is not pure. The meaning is narrower than that of the word for peddling in 2:17, which adds the sense of being for the sake of gain. To adulterate gold is to mix it with some inferior metal for the purpose of selling it at a price higher than its actual value. Likewise, to adulterate wine is to mix it with another kind of liquid for the purpose of presenting it as if it were wine of good quality. Even in the first century, certain so-called preachers adulterated the Word of God in this way. They added inferior things to the Word.

Some preachers today adulterate the Word of God. In their sermons they may use verses from the Bible, but they add adulterating elements. They claim that what they preach is God's Word. Actually, only a small percentage may be the Word, with the remainder being the adulterating elements that have been added to the Word. In this way, they adulterate the divine gold and the divine wine in the Bible. Paul's way of conducting himself was absolutely contrary to this. He certainly did not adulterate

the word of God, but presented the pure gold, even the refined gold, of the Word.

By the manifestation of the truth, Paul and his workers commended themselves to every man's conscience before God. The truth here is another expression of the Word of God (John 17:17). It means reality and denotes all the real things revealed in God's Word, which mainly are Christ as the reality of all the things of God. The manifestation of the truth refers to the apostles' living of Christ. When they live Christ, who is the truth (John 14:6), they manifest the truth. As Christ is lived out of them, the truth is manifested in them. By this, they commend themselves to every man's conscience before God. The apostles behave themselves not in the way of adulterating the word of God, but of manifesting the truth for the shining of the gospel of the glory of Christ, by the excellent power of the priceless treasure, the very Christ who entered into them and became their content (2 Cor. 4:7) through the enlightenment of God's shining (v. 6).

B. The Shining of the Gospel of the Glory of Christ

1. Their Gospel Veiled in the Perishing Ones

In verse 3 Paul goes on to say, "And if also our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in those who are perishing." In some the gospel is veiled by old concepts, especially the concept concerning the law (3:14-15). In principle, anything like philosophy or cultural traditions that hinders others from apprehending the gospel of Christ is a veil. Hence, the preaching of Christ must unveil them, just as in photography we remove the cover from the lens of a camera in order to take a picture.

Paul's word in verse 3 implies that the gospel preached by the apostle should not be veiled. There is no reason for it to be veiled. But if it is veiled, it is veiled in those who are perishing, that is, in those for whom the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ is death unto death.

In verse 4 Paul continues, "In whom the god of this age

has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, so that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God, should not shine in them." The god of this age is Satan, the deceiver, the ruler of this present age. He dominates today's world and hunts for man's worship by blinding his mind and his thoughts. In this verse blinded means to veil a person's understanding. Furthermore, the thoughts here denote the understanding or the mind.

Christ as the image of God is the effulgence of His glory (Heb. 1:3). Hence, the gospel of Christ is the gospel of His glory that illuminates and shines forth. Satan, the god of this age, has blinded the minds and the thoughts of the unbelievers, so that the illumination of the gospel of Christ's glory should not shine into their hearts. This is similar to covering the lens of a camera so that the light cannot shine into the camera.

What Paul describes in verse 4 is a kind of spiritual photography. We are like cameras with a lens and a shutter. When the shutter is pressed, there is a way for the light with the object, the figure, the image, to shine into the camera and be impressed on the film. The light brings the figure to the film and forms an image on it. However, if the lens of the camera is covered, there is no way for the light to shine into the camera. Sometimes when we preach the gospel to others, they are like a camera with the lens covered. The light cannot shine into them. Praise the Lord that, by His mercy and grace, the satanic cover has been removed from our minds! We have not only an unveiled face, but also an uncovered mind.

The unveiled face in 3:18 is the uncovered mind in chapter four. According to Paul's concept, these two things are one. To have an unveiled face, therefore, is to have an uncovered mind. It is to be like a camera open to the shining of light.

As light shines into us, it brings in the image of Christ. This illumination shines into our spirit through our mind. Our spirit can be compared to the film. When the shining comes into us through our open mind, it reaches our spirit and brings the figure of Christ, the image of God, into us.

In the church we are practicing such a spiritual and heavenly photography.

Literally, the Greek word translated shine in verse 4 first means to see distinctly, to discern; second, it means to shine. Hence, the translation of the second part of this verse may read, "So that they should not see the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God." Since the god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, they cannot see the illumination of the gospel's glory, just as a blind man, or a man with his eyes veiled, cannot see the light of the sun.

2. Not Preaching Themselves, but Christ as the Lord

Verse 5 says, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake." "For" explains why the apostles' gospel, which is the gospel of the glory of Christ, should not be veiled, for they do not preach, exalt, themselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord of all, and they conduct themselves as the believers' slaves for Jesus' sake, as Jesus did, who was the Master, yet came to serve as a slave (Matt. 20:26-28).

Christ Jesus as Lord comprises Christ as God over all blessed forever (Rom. 9:5), the eternal Word incarnated to be a Man (John 1:14), Jesus crucified as a Man to be our Savior (Acts 4:10-12) and resurrected to be the Son of God (Acts 13:33), and Christ exalted to be the Lord (Acts 2:36), even the Lord of all men (Rom. 10:12; John 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:3) and the Lord of all things (Acts 10:36), who is the image of God, the effulgence of God's glory (Heb. 1:3). This is the very content of the gospel. Hence, the gospel is the gospel of the glory of Christ, which illuminates, radiates, and shines in the heart of man. If man's heart is not veiled with anything, not blinded by Satan, the god of this age, man can see its illumination.

The word slaves in verse 5 is in contrast with Lord. The apostles exalt Christ as Lord, but consider themselves merely slaves to serve the believers. They were slaves not only to Christ, but to the believers as well.

3. God Shining in Their Hearts

Verse 6 says, "Because the God Who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One Who shined in our hearts for the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." This explains what is mentioned in the preceding verse. The apostles preach Christ as Lord and themselves as the believers' slaves, because the very God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shined in their hearts. His shining in the universe produced the old creation. Now His shining in their hearts has made them a new creation. Therefore, they are able to exalt Christ as the Lord in their preaching and conduct themselves as slaves to the believers in their service. What they do for Christ and what they are to the believers are the issue of God's shining. God's shining produces the new covenant ministers and their ministry.

In our hearts is much deeper than on the skin of Moses' face (3:7; Exo. 34:29-30). This presents a comparison between the glory of the apostolic ministry of the gospel and that of the Mosaic ministry of the law. In the heart is related to the inner life, whereas on the skin of the face has nothing to do with the inner life. The glory of the old covenant is on the surface, but the glory of the new covenant is full of depth.

"Our hearts" denotes the hearts of the apostles. They represent all the believers of the new covenant.

God's shining in our hearts results in the illumination of knowing the glory of God in the face of Christ, that is, in the enlightenment that causes us to know the glory of the gospel of Christ. The illumination, the enlightenment, that makes the glory of Christ's gospel known to us issues from the shining of God in our hearts.

The face of Christ is in comparison with the face of Moses (3:7). The glory of the gospel in the face of Christ is much superior to the glory of the law on the face of Moses. The glory of the gospel shines in the face of the One through whom grace and reality came, issuing in righteousness and life (3:8-9). The glory of the law shone on the face of one through whom the law was given (John 1:17), resulting in condemnation and death (3:7, 9). The

purpose of God's shining in our hearts is not related to our knowing the glory on Moses' face. God's shining is to illumine us so that we may know the glory in Christ's face. It is to enlighten us so that we may know not the law of Moses of the old covenant, but the gospel of Christ of the new covenant.

God has had two creations: the old creation and the new creation. The old creation came through God's outward shining in the darkness. The new creation is accomplished through God's inward shining in our hearts. By God's shining in our hearts we have become a new creation. This shining is in the face of Christ. To experience it, we need to have direct, personal, and intimate contact with Christ. This contact will cause the shining of God in our heart. God may shine upon us, but if we want Him to shine in us, we need to have direct, intimate contact with Him. This is the reason we call on Him and say, "O Lord Jesus." Even Saul of Tarsus was saved by calling on the name of the Lord. By calling on the Lord he was brought into face-to-face contact with Him. When Saul said, "Who art thou, Lord?" the Lord immediately replied: "I am Jesus." This answer was intimate and personal. It was not a long distance call; it was a face-to-face conversation. Saul of Tarsus experienced God's shining in his heart.

Suppose you are preaching the gospel to an unbeliever. He nods and says that he believes in the Lord Jesus and receives Him as Savior. Do not assume that he has truly been saved. You need to ask if he has called on the Lord, thereby having direct contact with Him. If such an unbeliever would call on the name of the Lord Jesus, he would be brought to the face of Christ and immediately have personal contact with Him.

Only when we have such direct, personal, and intimate contact with the Lord do we have the inner shining. This is just as true of us as it is of an unbeliever coming to the Lord for the first time. If we would have the Lord's shining once again, we need to have intimate contact with the Lord. Whenever we call on the Lord in a dear, intimate way, we are before His face, and the shining of God is in

our heart. In this way the apostles received the inner shining. Then they shined out what they had received. This was their way of conducting themselves for the shining of the glory of the gospel of Christ. The power for this shining is that spoken of in verse 7.

4. God Shining in Their Hearts Bringing a Treasure into Them, the Earthen Vessels

In verse 7 Paul says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." God's shining in our hearts brings into us a treasure, the Christ of glory, who is the embodiment of God to be our life and our everything. But we who contain this treasure are earthen vessels, worthless and fragile. A priceless treasure is contained in the worthless vessels. This has made the worthless vessels ministers of the new covenant with a priceless ministry. It is by the divine power in resurrection. The excellence of the power is surely of God and not of us.

In the apostles' speaking concerning their ministry for God's new covenant, five very significant and expressive metaphors are used to illustrate how they, as the ministers of the new covenant, and their ministry are constituted, how they behave and live, and how their ministry is carried out. These metaphors are: captives in a triumphant procession for the celebration of Christ's victory (2:14a); incense-bearers to scatter the fragrance of Christ (2:14b-16); letters written with Christ as the content (3:1-3); mirrors beholding and reflecting the glory of Christ in order to be transformed into His glorious image (3:18); earthen vessels to contain the Christ of glory as the excellent treasure (4:7). These vessels are like today's camera, into which the image of Christ enters through the flashing of God's shining light (4:4, 6).

This treasure, the indwelling Christ, in us, the earthen vessels, is the divine source of the supply for the Christian life. It is by the excellent power of this treasure that the apostles as the ministers of the new covenant are capable

of living a crucified life that the resurrection life of Christ whom they minister may be manifested. Thus, they manifest the truth for the shining of the gospel.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TEN

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(3)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 4:7-15

Chapters three and four of 2 Corinthians are the most crucial chapters of both 1 and 2 Corinthians. No other chapters in these Epistles are so related to the constitution of Christ for the deeper experience of life. These two chapters are very deep in the experience of life. First, these chapters reveal how the apostles, as ministers of the new covenant, were constituted. They were reorganized, rearranged, having been made ministers of the new covenant.

Paul considered himself the chief among the sinners. How could such a rebel against God become a minister of the new covenant, a minister of Christ for the carrying out of God's economy? It is certainly a great matter to convert a rebel against God into a minister of Christ for the accomplishing of God's administration in the New Testament age.

In order for Paul to become a minister of Christ, he was first reborn and then reconstituted. Rebirth is not sufficient to make someone a minister of the new covenant; it is also necessary for that one to be reorganized, rearranged, reconstituted. A new constitution, however, requires a new element. Without the element as the essence of the constitution, it is not possible for us to be constituted of anything. The redemption of Christ brings us back to God, but it does not do the work of constitution. This work requires some element in addition to the redeeming blood of Christ. This element is not only life, or the Spirit; it is the processed God.

I would call your attention to the steps of the process through which God has passed: incarnation, human living,

crucifixion, and resurrection. These four major steps of God's process are also the ingredients of the processed God as the element with which we are constituted. These ingredients are typified by the four spices compounded with olive oil to make the ointment in Exodus 30. The olive oil was the basic element, and the four spices were the ingredients compounded with this element. The compound produced as a result of this process was the ointment with its ingredients.

God is the Spirit, the olive oil, the basic element. The four spices are related to incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. Incarnation brought divinity into humanity and made them one entity. But neither divinity nor humanity was changed in nature. No, divinity remains divinity, and humanity remains humanity. This is illustrated by the mingling of oil with fine flour in the meal offering. The oil and the flour are mingled together to form one entity with two natures. However, each nature remains separate and complete. The oil does not lose its nature, and the flour does not change its nature. Nevertheless, the oil and the flour are mingled together to produce one entity. But this entity is not a third nature, something that is neither oil nor flour. Rather, it is a complete entity with two natures, the nature of oil and the nature of flour. This is an illustration of incarnation bringing divinity into humanity, making them one and causing them to live as one.

The Lord Jesus, a wonderful Person with two natures, divinity and humanity, lived in the home of a carpenter in Nazareth for thirty years. After completing His ministry, He was crucified. His human living implies that He passed through everything in humanity related to the first creation. When He was crucified, He brought the entire old creation to the cross and terminated it. Because the old creation has been terminated, we should not be bothered by our problems. In the sight of God, all these problems have been terminated. God sitting on the throne can say to Satan, "Little Satan, what are you trying to do? Are you still causing trouble? I'll give you a little more time to play. However, you must realize that I have already terminated

you. You, along with the old creation, have been terminated." Satan and the old creation have been terminated, and we also were terminated by the death of Christ on the cross. This termination is the true significance of the crucifixion.

Through His resurrection Christ brought God's chosen and redeemed people into God. Incarnation brought God into man; resurrection brought man into God. Today we, the redeemed people of God, not only have God in us; we also are in God. It is wonderful to have God in us, but it is even more wonderful to be in God.

Perhaps you are not very conscious of the fact that you are in God. By the Lord's mercy I can testify that I definitely have the sense, the consciousness, that I am a man in God. Apparently, I am a man living on earth; actually, I am a man in God. God is in me, and I am in Him.

God has been brought into us through incarnation, and we have been brought into God through Christ's resurrection. This is the Triune God, the processed God. The processed Triune God is the very element with which we have been constituted.

Some may say, "I do not feel as if I have been constituted with the processed Triune God." You may not feel this, but you need to believe it. As Christians, we need to live by faith and walk by faith, not by sight (5:7). We are believers, not those who walk by sight. Are you a believer or one who walks by sight? A believer is one who does not trust in things that can be seen, but he takes certain unseen things, confesses them, and realizes them by faith. To be one who walks according to feelings is even worse than being one who walks by sight. You may not feel that you are living in a certain place. Actually you are living there. Feelings are not trustworthy. You may feel that you are wonderful, but your condition may be pitiful. Do not believe in your feelings--believe in the facts. It is a fact that we all have been brought into God. The processed Triune God is the very element with which we have been constituted. You may not feel constituted, or that there has been any change within you. Again I say, be a believer,

one who walks by faith, not one who walks according to his feelings. When God says a certain thing, you should also speak that thing simply because the Bible tells you so. The Bible reveals that God has been processed through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. Now in resurrection, He is the life-giving Spirit dwelling in our spirit as the constituting element. The Bible says this, and we must believe it.

Brother Nee often said that first we have fact, then faith, then experience. The sequence is not experience, faith, and fact. The facts are always first. But how do we know about the facts? The facts are recorded in the New Testament. This testament is a will, something stronger and better than a covenant. A covenant is an agreement similar to a contract. But a testament, a will, refers to something already accomplished. Suppose a will declares that a person has been given a million dollars. The evidence, the proof, of this is the will.

The New Testament is a will. This will says that the processed God is now in us, that He is our portion, and that He is the element with which we have been constituted. Yes, we *have been* constituted. We need to believe this fact, just as we believe that we are children of God. Sometimes the Devil says, "Look at yourself. Are you a son of God? How can you say you are a son of God when you lost your temper this morning?" Even when we lose our temper, we must insist on believing that we are sons of God. Thus, we should say, "Satan, even though I have lost my temper many times, I am still a son of God. Losing my temper does not change the fact that I am a son of God. Satan, with my declaration of this fact, I chase you away."

III. LIVING A CRUCIFIED LIFE FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF THE RESURRECTION LIFE BY THE EXCELLENT POWER OF THE TREASURE IN THE EARTHEN VESSELS

A. The Treasure in the Earthen Vessels

Second Corinthians 4:7 opens with the words, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels." The word "but"

indicates a contrast with what has gone before. In verse 6 Paul says, "Because the God Who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One Who shined in our hearts for the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." The phrase "this treasure" refers to verse 6. Because of the shining in our hearts, we have this treasure, a treasure that is wonderful, precious, and marvelous. However, we have this treasure in earthen vessels, in something that is not at all marvelous. Because the treasure is in earthen vessels, Paul opens verse 7 with "but."

All of verse 7 reads like this: "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." The Greek word for excellence also means transcendence, surpassingness, exceeding greatness. The fact that we are earthen vessels proves that the excellence of the power is of God and not of us. Here Paul seems to be saying, "I am nothing more than an earthen vessel, low and worthless. In myself I am sinful, fallen, and low. How can such a person manifest the truth and shine forth the glory of the gospel? I do not have the power to do this. The excellence of the power is not of me--it is of God. Although I am a worthless earthen vessel, God has shined this precious treasure into me. Now this treasure becomes the source of the power energizing me and enabling me to shine forth God's glory and to manifest the truth."

Do you not have a divine motor within you? The marvelous treasure is now a heavenly motor empowering us from within. This motor may not trouble us while we are sleeping, but during the rest of the day it bothers us. Preachers often tell others that Christ will give peace. In my experience, He often does not give me peace. He gives me joy, but instead of giving me peace, He bothers me. If I do not go along with His inward bothering, I cannot have peace. Sometimes I cooperate with His bothering and have joy, but still there is no peace.

According to your experience, can you sit quietly at home and enjoy peace? Is it not true that the Lord often

bothers you inwardly? Christ is a bothering One. This treasure is a living and active treasure operating within us. This treasure even constrains us to do certain things. According to 2 Corinthians 5, the love of Christ constrains us. Christ not only bothers us; He constrains us, pushes us on. This is the power, the source of strength, for the apostles to behave themselves in such a way as to shine the gospel and manifest the truth.

B. A Crucified Life for the Manifestation of Resurrection Life

Beginning at verse 8 we see that the apostles did not live a glorious life, but a crucified life. To live a crucified life is to live a life under grinding. It is to be like grains under a grinding stone. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He lived a life under grinding. His mother, His brothers, all His disciples, and His opposers and persecutors functioned as grinding stones. Daily the Lord Jesus was under the grinding.

In grinding grain two stones may be used: a stationary stone on the bottom and a movable stone on the top. We may say that the Pharisees and Sadducees were the bottom stone for the Lord Jesus, and the top grinding stone, the movable stone, was His mother, brothers, and disciples. For grinding, the bottom stone needs a top stone to match it and cooperate with it. This means that the Lord's mother, brothers, and disciples helped the Pharisees and Sadducees to grind the Lord Jesus.

Our experience today is the same in principle. Those who oppose the Lord's recovery are the bottom stone, the stationary grinding stone. But our husband or wife, the elders in the church, the co-workers, and the saints are the top stone. Therefore, the members of our family and the saints in the church cooperate with the persecutors and opposers to put us under the grinding. Brothers, is it not your experience that your wife grinds you much more than the opposers do? Her criticism is a grinding. If it were not for the dear ones around us, the opposers would not be able to grind us. The real grinding comes from those close to us. The opposers simply lay the foundation for the

grinding to take place. Once this foundation has been laid, your husband or wife or certain of the saints will do the actual grinding.

If you read the four Gospels again, you will see that it was those close to the Lord Jesus who caused Him to experience the grinding. When the Lord was persecuted, He was happy. But one day as He was preaching to the multitude, His friends thought He was beside Himself (Mark 3:21). At one point the Lord Jesus even asked, "Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?" (Matt. 12:48). Then He said, "For whoever does the will of My Father Who is in the heavens, he is My brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50). Today we also experience grinding from those close to us, those who love us and care for us in a natural way.

1. Afflicted in Every Way, but Not Straightened

In verse 8 Paul says, "We are afflicted in every way, but not straightened; perplexed, but not despairing." The Greek word rendered "afflicted" can also be translated pressed on every side. The word straightened also means cramped. This description of the apostles' life from this verse through verse 18 shows that they lived a crucified life in resurrection, or the resurrection life under the killing of the cross, for the carrying out of their ministry.

2. Perplexed, but Not Despairing

Literally, perplexed here means unable to find a way out. The word translated despairing literally means utterly unable to find a way out; that is, the way is entirely shut up. Here the apostle is saying they were perplexed, unable to find a way out, yet not despairing, not utterly unable to find a way out.

3. Persecuted, but Not Forsaken

Verse 9a says, "Persecuted, but not forsaken." The Greek word for persecuted also means pursued by enemies. To be forsaken is to be abandoned, deserted; literally, it means to be left behind in some evil plight.

4. Cast Down, but Not Destroyed

Verse 9b says, "Cast down, but not destroyed." Cast down also means struck down, and destroyed also means perishing, as in verse 3, that is, killed.

5. Bearing About in the Body the Putting to Death of Jesus

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

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

The continual daily grinding works for a specific purpose: that the life of Jesus might be manifested in our body. This life is resurrection life. The Lord Jesus lived resurrection life even before He was crucified. The life He lived on earth was a life of resurrection. This resurrection life is a life that can withstand being put to death.

In verse 11, Paul goes on to say, "For we who live are always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh." The title Jesus in verses 10 and 11 implies that the apostles lived a life as the Lord Jesus did on earth, a life under the killing of the cross for the manifestation of the resurrection life. The interchangeable use of "flesh" and "body" in these verses indicates that the mortal flesh is in our fallen body.

6. Death Operating in Them, but Life in the Believers

Verse 12 says, "So then death operates in us, but life in you." When we are under the killing of the Lord's death, His resurrection life is imparted through us into others. The impartation of life into others is always the issue of our suffering the killing of the cross. In verse 12 Paul seems to be saying, "We are dying, but you Corinthians are being made alive. Our dying infuses life into you and makes you alive. For us, it is a matter of being put to death; for you, it is a matter of the impartation of life."

7. Having the Spirit of Faith

In verse 13 Paul says, "And having the same spirit of faith, according to that which is written, I believed, therefore I spoke; we also believe, therefore also we speak." The "same spirit" refers to the same spirit as set forth in the quotation from Psalm 116:10.

Concerning the spirit in verse 13, Alford says, "Not distinctly the Holy Spirit,--but still not merely a human disposition: the indwelling Holy Spirit penetrates and characterizes the whole renewed man." Vincent says, "Spirit of faith: not distinctly the Holy Spirit, nor, on the other hand, a human faculty or disposition, but blending both." This means it is the mingling of the Holy Spirit with our human spirit. We must exercise such a spirit to believe and to speak, as the psalmist did, the things we have experienced of the Lord, especially His death and resurrection. Faith is in our spirit, which is mingled with the Holy Spirit, not in our mind. Doubts are in our mind. The "spirit" here indicates that it is by the mingled spirit that the apostles lived a crucified life in resurrection for carrying out their ministry.

Verse 14 says, "Knowing that He Who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will present us with you." This indicates that the apostles considered themselves dead persons (1:9), for they were always being delivered unto death for the Lord's purpose. Their only hope was in the God who raised up the Lord Jesus and who would also raise them up. They lived with this kind of

faith.

In verse 15 Paul declares, "For all things are for your sakes, that the grace, abounding through the many, may cause the thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God." Grace, according to the context, is the very Christ who lives in the apostles as their life and life supply for them to live a crucified life for the manifestation of the resurrection life, that they may carry out their ministry for God's new covenant. As the apostles were under the killing, life was being imparted to others, and grace was abounding through the many. As a result, much thanksgiving will also abound. Paul did not care for the sufferings, because he realized that his being killed imparted life to many and this life became grace to them. As a result, all will give thanks to God. This was the life lived by the apostles, a crucified life for the manifestation of resurrection life by the excellent power of the hidden treasure in the earthen vessel.

Sooner or later, we shall all experience the grinding. We shall be ground between the top stone and the bottom stone. In this matter we have no choice, for we all need the grinding. It is this grinding that causes resurrection life to be manifested.

Yes, in the sight of God we have already been constituted. But we still need the testing to determine how much we have been constituted, and we also need the grinding to work out this constitution in a practical and experiential way. Although we have been constituted, we still need this constitution to be carried out. This is done mainly through opposition and the grinding of the dear ones close to us.

Every church is a grinding mill. Perhaps you do not like the church in your locality and desire to move elsewhere. If you move to escape the grinding, you will find that in the place to which you move you will be ground even more. Therefore, if you move to escape the grinding, you should be prepared for even more grinding. We cannot avoid it. This has been ordained for us; it is our destiny. Praise the Lord for the grinding which causes the resurrection life to be manifested!

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE ELEVEN

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(4)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 4:16-18

In this message we come to the last three verses of chapter four, verses 16 through 18. These verses are still related to the living of a crucified life for the manifestation of the resurrection life by the excellent power of the treasure in the earthen vessels.

In chapters three and four we see that first the apostles were constituted of God Himself. That constitution was everything in relation to their life and behavior. Every aspect of their living and behavior was based on this constitution. Furthermore, this constitution afforded them the life supply with the power, strength, riches, wisdom, and even the ministry. They ministered with what had been constituted into them.

The apostles did not preach something which they had merely heard or had been taught. What they ministered was not something that had only been revealed in a vision. What they preached, taught, and ministered was altogether what had been constituted into them. The apostles were constituted in a certain way, having become constituted persons. Therefore, what they ministered was their constitution. They ministered what they were, what they had become. This means that their reconstituted being became their ministry.

Paul's writings are very different from today's Christian writings. Paul's writings are a record of his constitution, whereas today's writings are mainly concerned with theology, doctrines, teachings, expositions, and interpretations. Among the fourteen Epistles written by Paul, chapters three and four of 2 Corinthians are the

richest as far as his personal experience of Christ is concerned. In these chapters we have an accurate and precious record of Paul's spiritual constitution. If we would know what kind of person Paul was as a minister of the new covenant, we need to spend much time in these two chapters, chapters which reveal Paul's spiritual constitution.

Because ministry requires constitution, Brother Nee told us that we could receive a gift immediately, but we could never have a ministry in a short time. It takes years to become constituted. This involves growth into maturity.

Everything related to this constitution is organic and of life. This life is by the Spirit, the ultimate consummation of the processed God. Paul was a person constituted of God. It is not sufficient to speak of him as a God-man, for he was actually a person constituted of God. Therefore, Paul's ministry was his being. What he preached and taught was what he was. He ministered his very being to others. As Paul ministered in this way, Christ was imparted into others, for Paul and Christ had become one. Paul was one with Christ and had been constituted of Christ. His ministry was a ministry of the Christ who had been constituted into his being. Without this kind of ministry, there is no way to have the church adequately built up or to have the bride properly adorned.

The Bible indicates that what God initiated at the beginning will be accomplished. Moreover, God is a God of resurrection. As the God of resurrection, His purpose cannot fail, and He Himself cannot be defeated. Rather, all frustrations and distractions prove His unchangeableness, prove that He is the unchanging God. What He has determined, He will accomplish. What He set out to do at the beginning, He will fulfill at the end. In the New Testament God began with a group of ministers. Paul was among them. At the end God will also have a group of the same kind of ministers. Here and there around the world, He must have ministers of the new covenant. My burden is that many among us will become ministers of the new covenant.

I hope that these messages on the ministry and the ministers of the new covenant will remain with you. I hope especially that the leading ones, the co-workers, and all those who have a heart for the Lord's recovery will aspire to be today's new covenant ministers. We need to have a heart not only to love the Lord in a general way, but also to become ministers of the New Testament. If we have such a heart, we must be serious with the Lord and dwell on these two chapters of 2 Corinthians, praying over them, having fellowship concerning them, and telling the Lord that we are willing to open ourselves for His working in us. We need to tell Him that we are willing to be broken, ground, and constituted; that we are willing to live a crucified life; that we are willing to renounce ourselves and deny ourselves and be constituted daily with the elements of the processed Triune God; that we are willing to be today's Paul, not a great person or a famous believer, but a small man, a crucified man, even a Nazarene.

Jesus of Nazareth did not seek to be great or famous. On the contrary, He was a grain of wheat that fell into the ground and died. In this way Jesus became the first minister of the new covenant. We need to follow Him also to become ministers of the new covenant. Concerning this, we must look to the Lord and pray desperately to Him.

C. The Decaying of Their Outward Man and the Renewing of Their Inward Man

1. Not Losing Heart

In 4:16 Paul says, "Wherefore we do not lose heart, but if indeed our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day." In this verse Paul says, as he does in 4:1, "We do not lose heart." Many things had happened that could have caused Paul and his co-workers to be disappointed or to lose heart. Hardly anything was encouraging. Nevertheless, because they were in resurrection, they did not lose heart. Actually, resurrection requires death, discouragement, and disappointment in order to be manifested. Without death, how could there be the manifestation of resurrection life? Death allows

resurrection to be manifested. Therefore, as they passed through death, the apostles did not lose heart. Although many disappointing things happened, they were not discouraged.

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

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

In verse 16 I prefer the word consumed to the word decayed. Decay implies that something is disintegrating by itself without anything acting upon it. Here Paul does not mean that the apostles were decaying. According to the context, their being put to death was not initiated by them. If they had taken the initiative, then we may say that they were decaying. But since the initiative was taken by the persecutors and by the circumstances and environment, it is better to say that they were being consumed. They were being wasted away. The meaning of the Greek word includes decaying, being consumed, and being wasted away.

The persecutors and the environment were working on the apostles. This was not a work carried out by the apostles on themselves. Grinding is never initiated by the grains. Rather, the grinding work is carried on by the person doing the grinding. The apostles were not the grinders; they were the ones under the grinding. Their outward man was being consumed, destroyed, put to death.

Teachers of the Bible have different interpretations and explanations of the term the outward man. Certain of the so-called inner life people regard the outward man as the soulish man, the natural man, and they consider the spiritual man, one who lives in the spirit, as the inner man. In 1 Corinthians 2 and 3 Paul does speak of the spiritual man, the soulish man, and the fleshly man. A fleshly person is one who lives in the lust of his flesh, whereas a soulish person lives in the soul. Those who are soulish are divisive. In the church life they have their own preferences and choices. The spiritual person, like Paul and the apostles, lives and walks in the spirit. According to some inner life teachers, we may either be soulish ones who live in the outward man, or spiritual ones who live in the inward man.

According to the context of 2 Corinthians 4, the outward man refers mainly to the body in verse 10 and to the mortal flesh in verse 11. These terms are used interchangeably, for our fallen body has become the mortal flesh. The outward man in verse 16 certainly refers to this fallen body, to this mortal flesh. However, it is not adequate to say that the outward man simply denotes the body. This understanding is not complete, for the body itself cannot be a man, a person. The body is merely an organ. In 1 Corinthians 15:44 Paul speaks of a soulish body, a natural body animated by the soul, a body in which the soul predominates. Therefore, the outward man has the body as its organ and the soul as its life and person. Hence, the outward man comprises both the body and the soul. The body is not the person. The person is the soul, and the body is an organ. Likewise, the body is not the life; the life of the outward man is the soul. The soul is both the person and the life of the outward man. Yes, the body is a major part of the outward man. Nevertheless, it is merely an organ directed, animated, and used by the soul.

The inward man is our regenerated spirit with the soul as its organ. The spirit is the life and person, and the renewed soul is the organ. The life of the soul, the soulish

life, must be denied. But the functions of the soul--the mind, the will, and the emotion--must be renewed. In the church life we are experiencing the renewing of the mind and the uplifting of the mind. As our mind is subdued by the Lord, it is renewed. Then it can be used by our spirit, which is the person of the inward man. The outward man is being consumed. It is being worn out and put to death. But the inward man is being renewed day by day. Being consumed implies decreasing, and being renewed implies increasing. Thus, our outward man is decreasing, and our inward man is increasing. Outwardly my body is getting older, but my inward man is getting younger and newer. Outwardly we are all getting older, but inwardly we are becoming newer.

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

Being renewed is similar to being constituted. In both cases there is the need for a particular element. In order for us to be renewed, some element must be added to us. This renewing element is the treasure hidden within us (v. 7). However, for us to be renewed, it is not adequate simply to have the treasure within. There is also the need for the killing, the destroying, the consuming, the grinding. For this reason, inwardly we have the treasure, and outwardly we have the environment. Through our environment, God sovereignly places us under the grinding stones.

It is impossible for us to escape God's hand. Are you mature? Have you been broken? You may still use your cleverness to escape the breaking and the grinding. No one is able to deal with you. However, those who try the hardest to escape the breaking eventually suffer the most. It is our destiny to be consumed. Brothers, the Lord will probably use your wives to grind you. Even the best wife is used by Him in this way.

The Lord sovereignly uses our environment to consume us. Do not think that it is because you are wrong that you need to be consumed. Actually, it is because you are right that you need to be consumed. The more right you are, the more you need to be consumed. Paul was very right. This was the reason he needed a great deal of consuming. This does not mean, however, that you should purposely try to do something wrong. If you are wrong, you may be punished.

You may wonder what you should do, since you will be consumed if you are right and punished if you are wrong. The answer is that you should not do anything. Sooner or later, the Lord will put you under the grinding stone.

Because we love the Lord, we are willing to be ground. But this does not mean that we should place ourselves between the grinding stones. That is suicide, not grinding. Let the Lord sovereignly put you under the grinding. There is no need to do anything concerning this; it will happen spontaneously.

Only by the consuming of the outward man can Christ be lived out and ministered to others. This is the Lord's way. Only in this way can the bride be prepared for Him.

2. The Momentary Lightness of Affliction Working Out for Them an Eternal Weight of Glory

In verse 17 Paul says, "For our momentary lightness of affliction works out for us, more and more surpassingly, an eternal weight of glory." The affliction here refers to the putting to death, the working of the cross. Literally, more and more surpassingly means excessively unto excess. The eternal weight of glory is in contrast to the momentary lightness of affliction. Glory here is the expression of God as resurrection life and is in contrast to affliction.

The momentary lightness of affliction works out for us an eternal weight of glory. This weight of glory will become the beauty of the adorned bride.

3. Not Considering the Things Which Are Seen and Temporary, but the Things Which Are Not Seen and Eternal

Verse 18 says, "While we do not consider the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." The things seen are of the temporary affliction, but the things not seen are of the eternal glory. Paul did not care for the affliction, the environment, the poverty, the opposition, the persecution, or the grinding. Those things, things which are seen, are temporary. He cared only for eternal things. He knew that while he was in the condition of being ground, the affliction was working out something weighty, beautiful, and eternal. In this way we shall be adorned as the bright and beautiful bride for Christ at His coming back.

In these chapters we see the ministers with the ministry, and we also see the result of the ministry. Here we have a portrait of the ministers of the new covenant with a beautiful and wonderful ministry that builds up the church and beautifies the bride.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWELVE

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(5)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 5:1-8

Second Corinthians 5 continues the description of the New Testament ministers. This description began in 3:12 with the word concerning their constitution. In chapter four we see the way these ministers conduct themselves (4:1-6), and we have a record regarding their living (4:7-18). They were constituted of the Triune God, they conducted themselves in such a way as to shine out the gospel of the glory of Christ, and they lived a crucified life for the manifestation of resurrection life. In 5:1-8 we see another characteristic: their longing to be clothed upon with the transfigured body.

IV. LONGING TO BE CLOTHED UPON WITH THE TRANSFIGURED BODY

As the ministers of the new covenant were conducting themselves according to their inner constitution and living a crucified life for the manifestation of resurrection life, they were longing, desiring, aspiring, to be clothed upon with the transfigured body. This means that they were longing for the redemption of their body. Their spirit had been regenerated and their soul had been renewed and transformed, but there was still a problem related to the fallen, mortal body. This body was a burden to them. They sighed, groaned, under this burden. They did not have any problems in their spirit or in their soul. Their soul had been constituted of the divine element. But they still had a problem with the mortal body.

In God's full and complete salvation, there is a matter which takes care of our mortal body. This is transfiguration. Transfiguration changes our mortal body into a body of glory, just like the resurrected body of the Lord Jesus. This aspect of God's salvation is very promising; it is the hope of glory.

After giving us a clear view of how the new covenant ministers have been constituted of the Triune God and how they conduct themselves for the shining of the gospel and live a crucified life, Paul goes on to speak of their longing to have the fallen body redeemed. In this Epistle, however, Paul does not speak of the redemption of our body, a term used in Romans 8. Rather, he chooses another kind of word, a somewhat deeper expression.

A. An Eternal House in the Heavens to Replace Their Earthly Tabernacle-house

1. A Building from God

Second Corinthians 5:1 says, "For we know that if our earthly tabernacle house is taken down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens." "For" indicates that what is to be mentioned is an explanation of what is spoken of in 4:13-18. In this chapter the apostle tells us of the apostles' aspiration for the redemption of their body (Rom. 8:23), their ambition to please the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9-15), and their commission from the Lord for His new creation (vv. 16-21). They cared for the things that are not seen, not for the things that are seen.

The word "earthly" in verse 1 does not mean made of earth; it means upon the earth. The word "tabernacle" indicates that our physical body, in which our person dwells, is not only for living, but also for worshipping God (see 1 Cor. 6:19). The word "building" denotes a building with a foundation, not like a tabernacle without a foundation. This building is from, or out of, God, a "house" that is our spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44). In contrast to something upon the earth, it is a house in the heavens.

The expression "tabernacle house" is unusual. Our body is a house and also a tabernacle. The word house indicates that the body is our dwelling place, and the word tabernacle indicates that this house is a temporary dwelling place. It is not a building with a foundation, but a tabernacle similar to the one erected in the wilderness. As Paul indicates, some day this tabernacle-house will be taken down. Here Paul does not simply say that our mortal body will die. Instead, he speaks of the earthly tabernacle-house being taken down. When this happens, we shall have a building from God, not another tabernacle. This building will be solid and will have a foundation. Furthermore, this house is not heaven, but it is in the heavens in contrast to upon the earth.

This building will be our resurrected, transfigured body, the spiritual body mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15. Today our body is a soulish one, but one day it will be transfigured into a spiritual body. As a soulish body, it is now animated by the soul. When it becomes a spiritual body, it will be directed by the spirit. That building will become our house, a house not made with human hands, but a house from God in the heavens.

In verse 2 Paul says, "For indeed in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our dwelling place from heaven." The word "this" refers to the tabernacle in verse 1. To be clothed upon is to be transfigured and conformed to the body of Christ's glory. The apostles were longing for this. Our dwelling place from heaven, or out of heaven, refers to the house in the heavens in verse 1.

In our spirit we rejoice and in our body we groan. If you want to rejoice, get into the spirit. But if you want to groan or sigh, remain in the body. As Paul says, in the body we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our dwelling place from heaven. Since we have not experienced this kind of clothing, we cannot say much about it. We know what it is to rejoice in the spirit and to groan in the body, but we do not know what it is to be clothed upon with the resurrected, spiritual, heavenly body. But according to what is prophesied in the New Testament, we shall eventually be clothed with such a body. This is one item in

the New Testament, in the will. I have the full confidence this will happen, and I am waiting for it.

2. Not to Be Found Naked

Verse 3 continues, "If indeed, being clothed, we shall not be found naked." To be naked is to be without a body. A dead person, being disembodied, is naked, without a body as a covering before God. The apostles were expecting to be transfigured in their body, to be clothed with a spiritual body to meet the Lord before they died and were disembodied, that they might not be found naked.

Many Christians think that when a believer in Christ dies, he goes to heaven. If this is true, then there are a great many naked persons in heaven, for those who have died are now disembodied. God, however, will not allow such naked persons to come into His presence. In the Old Testament it says that someone who is not properly clothed cannot come into the presence of God. The priests, in particular, had to wear a long robe. This was a type. If we would be in the presence of God, we cannot be naked; that is, we cannot be disembodied.

When Paul said that he did not want to be found naked, this means that he did not want to die. To die is to be naked. Paul's desire was to be clothed and thereby not to be found naked. Of course, after our bodies are transfigured, none of us will be found naked. We shall live eternally. The point here is that in verse 3 to be naked means to die.

3. Groaning, Being Burdened

In verse 4 Paul says, "For indeed, we who are in the tabernacle groan, being burdened, in that we do not desire to be unclothed, but clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." To be burdened here means to be weighed down, depressed, oppressed. The apostles groaned in the desire not to be unclothed, disembodied, that is, not to die but to be clothed upon, to put on the spiritual body. This is to have our body transfigured (Phil. 3:21), to have it redeemed (Rom. 8:23).

In verse 4 "what is mortal" denotes our mortal body (2 Cor. 4:11; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:53). To have our mortal body "swallowed up by life" is to have it transfigured by resurrection life swallowing the death in our mortal body (1 Cor. 15:54).

Our fallen, mortal body is a great burden to us. Under the weight of this burden, we groan, not that we would be unclothed, or be found naked, but that we would be clothed with a transfigured body.

Paul did not want to die, but he certainly did desire to be raptured. He wanted to be clothed upon, to have his body transfigured. Then what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. When we are raptured, transfigured, and clothed with the heavenly, spiritual, and resurrected body, then that which is mortal will be swallowed up by life. This was Paul's longing. Most of us have not yet come to this stage in our Christian life. Rather, the younger ones may prefer to linger on earth. But those who are older desire to be raptured.

4. God Having Wrought Us for This

Verse 5 says, "Now He Who has wrought us for this very thing is God, Who has given to us the pledge of the Spirit." The Greek word rendered "wrought" can also be translated fashioned, shaped, prepared, made fit. God has wrought us, fashioned us, shaped us, prepared us, made us fit, for the very purpose that our mortal body might be swallowed up by His resurrection life. Thus, our entire being will be saturated with Christ. God has given us the Spirit as the pledge, the earnest, the foretaste, the guarantee, of this wonderful and marvelous part of His complete salvation for us in Christ.

In what way has God prepared us? First, He has sown Himself into our being. This is indicated by the parable of the sower in Matthew 13. The Lord Jesus came as a sower to sow Himself into us. Our heart is the soil for growing Christ. Eventually Christ will grow in us and saturate our entire being. This is the preparation for Christ's saturating our body. On the one hand, when we are transfigured, we

shall be clothed with a spiritual body outwardly. On the other hand, transfiguration means that the indwelling Christ is saturating our body and swallowing up the element of death in it. He has been sown into our spirit and heart, and now He is saturating our soul. Then one day He will spread from the soul into the body and saturate the body. When our body has been saturated in full, it will become a new body, a new building, with which we shall be clothed.

According to verse 5, as the One who has wrought us for this very thing, God has given to us the pledge of the Spirit. The Spirit is the guarantee that God will accomplish this. The Spirit is Christ, and Christ is the embodiment of God. Actually, therefore, God has put Himself into our being as the guarantee that He will change our body so that we shall be entirely conformed to Christ in resurrection.

B. At Home in the Body

In verse 6 Paul continues, "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that being at home in the body, we are away from home from the Lord." Our body is in the material realm; the Lord is in the spiritual realm. In this sense, we are absent from the Lord when we are present in our body.

Verse 7 says, "For we walk by faith, not by appearance." Appearance refers to that which is seen; hence, to sight. The apostles regulate their life and conduct themselves by faith, as testified in Hebrews 11, not by that which is seen. It is in this way they realize that they are away from the Lord while they are in their physical body. This corresponds to the word in 4:18.

Today nearly all of mankind walks by appearance. Doctors, scientists, and professors take the lead to walk by what they can see. When we speak about a building in the heavens made by God and eternal, they regard this as nonsense. But eventually it will be proved that they are wrong to doubt this truth and that we are right to believe it. We shall have a heavenly body. Until we are

transfigured, we walk by faith, not by appearance, not by what we see.

In verse 8 Paul says, "We are of good courage then, and well pleased rather to be away from home out of the body and to be at home with the Lord." To be away from home out of the body is to die, to be out of the material realm and to be with the Lord in the spiritual realm. The apostles, who are always being persecuted unto death (1:8-9; 4:11; 11:23; 1 Cor. 15:31), are well pleased rather to die, to be out of their confining body that they may be released to be at home with the Lord in a better realm (Phil. 1:23).

As the apostles lived according to their spiritual constitution to shine out the glory of the gospel, and as they were living a crucified life, they were constantly longing to be clothed with a heavenly body. Their desire was to be raptured, to be transfigured. This is a description of the ministers of the new covenant. They are people who do not belong to the earth. Rather, they belong absolutely to another realm and are living in that realm. Although they are on earth, their aspiration is to be in another realm. Their desire is to be clothed with another body and to be in another home with the Lord.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTEEN

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(6)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 5:9-15

In chapters three and four Paul speaks concerning the qualifications of the New Testament ministers. The first qualification is that of being constituted of the Triune God. This qualification is basic. We become competent, sufficient, equipped, and qualified to be ministers of the new covenant by being thoroughly constituted of the Triune God, who is now the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. As these ministers are constituted of such a One, the effectiveness of Christ's all-inclusive death operates within their being, terminating the old creation and killing the flesh and the natural life.

In the constitution received by the apostles, there are a number of factors or ingredients. These ingredients are typified by the spices used to make the ointment in Exodus 30. One of these factors is the effectiveness of Christ's death. Daily this ingredient, this factor, works within the apostles. For this reason, in their daily living there is nothing of the old creation: no self, no flesh, no natural life. This killing element can be compared to an antibiotic used to kill germs.

Along with the factor that puts to death the old creation, there is another factor, a positive one. This is the factor of resurrection. This ingredient includes not only divinity, but also Christ's resurrected and uplifted humanity. The resurrected Christ Himself is resurrection.

The all-inclusive life-giving Spirit is the processed God. The processed God as the life-giving Spirit includes divinity, humanity, incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. Therefore, it is a very significant matter

to be constituted of the processed God. God has been processed, and we have been constituted. God has been processed through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. Today the resurrected Christ is also the ascended One, the exalted and enthroned One.

A person can be helped by medicine without understanding all the ingredients of the medicine. Likewise, although it is helpful to know all the elements of the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit, we can be helped by these ingredients even without understanding them. We simply need to take the "dose" of the Spirit. Then the elements of death and resurrection will work within us. As resurrection works within us, we become heavenly, empowered, and authorized. The ingredient of resurrection often works in us apart from our consciousness. This can be compared to the way an antibiotic works in us apart from our consciousness of it. Today the ingredient of resurrection is working in us.

In his living Paul had the highest humanity. Paul's humanity was actually an expression of the human living of Jesus. He had been constituted of the life of Jesus and thereby became properly human, "Jesusly" human. When we come to the remaining chapters in this book, we shall see how outstanding is Paul's humanity.

We have pointed out that the basic qualification of a new covenant minister is to be constituted of the processed Triune God. The constitution is the base, the foundation, of the qualifications. We today also need this foundation. In doing anything or learning anything, we need a base. If we would be ministers of the new covenant, we must have the constitution as a basic qualification.

The second qualification of the ministers of the new covenant is to conduct themselves for the shining out of the gospel. Their conduct and behavior were based on their constitution. Because they had been constituted in a certain way, they could live a life that manifests the truth and shines forth the glory of the gospel. It was not necessary for them to determine to do something to cause

themselves to shine. No, apart from their consciousness and intention, simply by the way they lived, there was a shining forth from their being. Their constitution became their shining. For example, charcoal does not shine, but a gold coin shines. Between the charcoal and the gold there is a difference of constitution. Because of their constitution, the apostles shined forth the glory of the gospel. It was not necessary for them to preach, for their being was shining.

Because this shining came out of their being, their constitution, their behavior was not a performance of any kind. Today people often behave in a certain way to match the occasion. This behavior is a performance. For example, on some occasions they may conduct themselves with pride, as if they were dignitaries. But on other occasions they may conduct themselves humbly as subordinates. All this is a performance. However, those who are qualified to be ministers of the new covenant do not behave in this way. On the contrary, their behavior, based on their constitution, is genuine. This is the second qualification of a new covenant minister.

I aspire to follow Paul's example. By the Lord's mercy, I do not want to perform in any way, but I want to have a behavior which comes out of my constitution.

Third, the apostles lived a crucified life. Day by day they were under the grinding. As Jesus of Nazareth lived a crucified life, so the apostles also lived this kind of life. The Lord Jesus was crucified throughout His life. He lived a crucified life from the time He was born in the manger. Then through all the years He was continually being crucified. He was under the grinding, the killing, the putting to death. But this killing afforded Him the opportunity to manifest the resurrection life from within Him. Before Christ was actually nailed to the cross, He had already lived a crucified life. In like manner, before Christ was resurrected, the resurrection life had already been manifested in Him.

In their ministry the apostles were, on the one hand, captives in the Lord's triumphal procession. On the other

hand, they were crucified ones, those who daily lived a crucified life. They were put to death, crucified, not only by the opposers, but even by the believers. By reading the book of 1 Corinthians we can see that the Corinthian believers put the apostles on the cross. This was the reason Paul said, "Daily I die" (1 Cor. 15:31). Daily he was being put to death. This is the living of a crucified life for the manifestation of resurrection life and for the truth of everything ministered by the apostles to others.

Under the grinding, the outer man of the apostles was consumed. But simultaneously they were renewed in the inner man. They were constituted of the Triune God, they behaved themselves according to this constitution to shine out the glory of the gospel, and they lived a crucified life for the consuming of the outward man and the renewing of the new man. These were the qualifications for them to be ministers of the new covenant.

I hope that not only the leading ones in the churches but all the saints, including the young ones, will be impressed with these matters. Do not think that you are too young to have some experience of these things. Yes, I did point out that it takes many years to be constituted by the Lord. Nevertheless, it is also true that the Lord can use even those who are young. I can testify that not long after I was saved, the Lord began to use me, for there was some amount of the divine constitution within me. This constitution is the base, the foundation, for us to be used by the Lord as a new covenant minister. This constitution affects our behavior. When I was saved, there was a change in my inner constitution. Spontaneously I began to behave according to this constitution. Although I was never taught to live a crucified life, I automatically began to live this kind of life. As a result, early in my Christian life, I became a little minister of the new covenant.

Being a minister of the new covenant is a matter of degree. We all can be new covenant ministers, as long as we have the constitution and conduct ourselves according to it and live a crucified life with the elements of resurrection and ascension. Then we all, brothers and

sisters alike, can be used by the Lord as little ministers of the new covenant.

By the end of chapter four, Paul has recorded fully the qualifications of the New Testament ministers. In 5:1 he expresses his aspiration, his desire and longing, to be raptured. Paul was mature and ready to be raptured. He was like ripened wheat in a field that is ready for harvest. This wheat is golden, no longer green. Hence, it is ready to be reaped.

This understanding of the rapture is very different from the sugar-coated doctrines common today. D. M. Panton once pointed out that today's preachers often give people "admission tickets" that will not be accepted by those guarding the "gate." Yes, you may have a certain "ticket," but eventually it will be exposed as invalid and unacceptable. Christians today are being given a "ticket" which they think entitles them to be raptured. Eventually they may realize that they have been cheated. Rapture is a matter of maturity. What farmer would harvest grain that is still tender, young, and green? No farmer would do this. Instead, he would allow such unripe grain to remain in the field and grow until it is ready for harvest. Paul was one mature in Christ, mature in life. Therefore, he was truly ready to be raptured. However, at Paul's time, not many believers were mature. For this reason, the harvest could not take place. Even after nineteen hundred years, the Lord Jesus still has not come. The reason for the delay is that not very many have matured in life.

Many believers do not have the genuine desire or longing to be raptured. The reason they lack such a desire is that they are not mature. Little children, for example, desire only to play and have a good time. But as they grow older and mature, they desire to graduate from school, have a good job, and get married and raise a family. Desire is always related to maturity. An infant has only very simple desires because with an infant there is no growth and certainly no maturity. But the more we grow and mature, the deeper and higher our desires become. If you claim that you have the desire to be raptured, to be clothed

upon with a heavenly building, then you must pass through 2 Corinthians 4. Only after experiencing this chapter can we have this desire. Otherwise, we shall be like children in kindergarten who claim they have the desire to graduate from college.

In 5:1 Paul speaks of "our earthly tabernacle-house," a rather particular expression. In the Bible tabernacle is a special term indicating God's dwelling place. Paul's use of this word in 5:1 indicates that our dwelling place is also the dwelling place of God. Furthermore, this tabernacle is not only a dwelling place for both God and us; it is also a place for us to worship God. Our physical body today is a tabernacle, a temple. Our physical body, in which our person dwells, is not only for our living, but also for worshipping God. This is the reason Paul refers to our body as a "tabernacle-house."

Paul's thought here is profound. His thought is fully saturated with God. He surely was mature and ripe. Therefore, his longing was to be raptured. He did not desire to be unclothed, but he longed to be clothed upon with a transfigured body. When you have such a longing, such an aspiration, you are a mature believer, one who is ready to be reaped, ready for the harvest.

V. AMBITIOUS TO PLEASE THE LORD BY LIVING TO HIM

A. Their Ambition

In addition to the desire to be raptured, we need an ambition to please the Lord. Paul speaks of this in verse 9: "Wherefore also we are ambitious, whether at home or away from home, to be well-pleasing to Him." After describing the longing to be clothed upon with the transfigured body in 5:1-8, Paul goes on to speak concerning an ambition to please the Lord by living to Him (5:9-15). In verse 9 ambitious means to be zealous with a strong aim, striving earnestly to be well-pleasing to the Lord. Whether "at home or away from home," this was Paul's ambition. The phrases "at home" and "away from home" mean to live to remain in the body, or to die to be with the Lord.

In verse 9 Paul seems to be saying, "I am ambitious to please the Lord. I am matured and ready to be raptured. There is nothing more for me to do. But while I am waiting, I have one thing in my heart--to please my Lord. I have no other ambition, aim, or goal. My only ambition is to please the Lord by living to Him."

Why in 5:9 does Paul speak of living to the Lord and not living by Him, for Him, or with Him? To answer this question, it will be helpful to read Galatians 2:19: "For I through law have died to law that I might live to God." Although the phrase "live to God" is difficult to define, it is rich in its implications. In Galatians 2:19 Paul says that he lives to God, not to the law. To live to the law means that we are under the law, directed by the law, governed by the law, and have the responsibility to fulfill the law. To live to God, or to the Lord, means that we are under the Lord's direction and control and that we want to fulfill His requirements, satisfy His desires, and complete what He intends.

In 5:15 Paul says, "And He died on behalf of all, that those who live may no longer live to themselves, but to Him Who died for them and has been raised." Worldly people live to themselves. But the love of Christ constrains us to live to Him and not to ourselves. To live to ourselves means that we are under our own control, direction, and governing and that we care for our own aims and goals. This is to live not only for ourselves; it is to live to ourselves. But the apostles, who were ripe and ready for rapture, had the single ambition of pleasing the Lord by living to Him. They were absolutely under the Lord. They were under His direction, control, and governing. Everything they did was to fulfill the Lord's purpose and desire. As such persons, they did not live to the law, to themselves, or to anything other than the Lord.

Those who work for a particular company may live to that company in order to gain a promotion. In everything they do, they may wonder what the boss will think of them. Therefore, in their behavior, dress, and hairstyle, they live to their company. Even in selecting a new pair of shoes they live to their company. By so doing, they seek to

please the boss so that they may be given a promotion. No doubt, by living to a company an employee will advance and achieve success. Likewise, a pastor of a certain congregation may live to that congregation. Everything he does, including the way he dresses, may be to that church. He realizes that if he does not live in every respect to those in that church, he may be dismissed from the position of pastor.

Paul did not live to himself or to anything other than his Master, Christ. He was always exercised to do what would please the Lord. He was very different from the rabbis who lived to the law and did everything with a view to the law. As one who was mature, ripe, and ready for the rapture, Paul's only aim was to please his Master, the very One whose coming he was awaiting. Paul sought to please the Lord not by doing a work, but by living to Him in every aspect of his daily life. Likewise, we today should not seek to please ourselves, but seek to please the Lord by living to Him. All that we do must be to Him. This is the vital matter in this portion of 2 Corinthians 5.

I have pointed out that some employees live to their company. I would also illustrate the matter of living to Christ by going on to say that some wives seek to please their husbands by living to their husbands. Everything they say and do is to their husbands. Any wife who lives to her husband in this way will certainly please him. The way to please others is to live to them.

In 1934 I visited some believers in the south of China. Out of their love for me, they tried to make a certain kind of bread. Actually I preferred simply to have a bowl of rice, because the southern Chinese did not know how to prepare that kind of bread properly and adequately. Nevertheless, they constrained me to eat the bread they had prepared. In this matter, they did something for me, but what they did was not done to me. I use this as an illustration of the fact that many Christians who love the Lord do not live to the Lord. Instead, they live to themselves. They are different from Paul whose ambition was to please his Master not by doing things for Him, but by living to Him.

In verse 10 Paul says, "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for the things done through the body, according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad." "For" explains the reason for the ambition mentioned in verse 9. The judgment seat is where Christ will judge His believers at His coming back, not concerning their eternal salvation, but concerning their dispensational reward (1 Cor. 4:4-5; 3:13-15). The word "recompensed" here is the technical word for receiving wages (Alford). While we are still at home in the body, we should do things through it to please the Lord so that we may be rewarded for them by the Lord at His coming.

In verse 11 Paul goes on to say, "Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord we persuade men, but we have been made manifest to God; yet, I hope that we have been made manifest also in your consciences." Knowing the fear of the Lord means to be conscious of fearing the Lord. "Therefore" indicates that this is due to the judgment seat of Christ in verse 10. Furthermore, the fear of the Lord as mentioned here does not refer to the Lord's being fearsome; it refers to our fearing the Lord. The apostles, conscious of fearing the Lord, persuaded men concerning their integrity, concerning what kind of persons they were, toward both God and men. But they did not need to persuade God, for what they were was already made manifest to God. Yet the apostles hoped that they would have been made manifest also in the believers' consciences.

Verse 12 continues, "We are not again commending ourselves to you, but we are giving you an occasion to boast on our behalf, that you may have something for those who are boasting in outward appearance and not in heart." The word "something" denotes something for facing those who are boasting. Literally, the Greek word appearance is face, the outward appearance of the Judaizers. The heart is where the sincerity and reality of virtues are.

Verse 13 says, "For whether we were beside ourselves, it was for God; whether we are sober-minded, it is for you." To be beside ourselves for God is to be mad, as a fool, for God's glory (Acts 26:24-25). The apostle's ecstasy was not an excitement of folly, but was to God and with God for His glory. To be sober-minded here is to be self-controlled for the good of others in love.

B. The Love of Christ Constraining Them to Live to Him

In verse 14 Paul explains, "For the love of Christ constrains us, having judged this, that One died on behalf of all; therefore all died." The love of Christ toward us was made manifest on the cross through His death for us (Gal. 2:20). This love constrains us. Literally, it presses on us from all sides, holding us to one end, forcibly limits, confines us to one object within certain bounds, shuts us up to one line and purpose, as in a narrow, walled road. (The same Greek word is used in Luke 4:38; 12:50; Acts 18:5; Phil. 1:23.) In such a way the apostles were constrained by the love of Christ to live to Him.

The phrase "having judged this" means having concluded this, probably at the time of conversion. Paul concluded that because One died on behalf of all, therefore all died. Christ's loving death was the motivating factor of the apostles' being constrained to live a loving life for Him. Since Christ died as our substitute, suffering the sentence of death on behalf of us all, in the eyes of God we all died. Hence, we do not need to die in the way it is reserved for men to die and face judgment (Heb. 9:27).

As we have pointed out, Christ died on behalf of all so that we may no longer live to ourselves but to Him. Christ's death not only saves us from death so that we do not need to die, but it also causes us, through His resurrection, to live no longer to ourselves, but to Him.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FOURTEEN

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(7)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 5:16-21

VI. COMMISSIONED WITH THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION FOR THE LORD'S NEW CREATION

In 5:16-21 we see that the apostles have been commissioned with the ministry of reconciliation for the Lord's new creation. After speaking concerning the qualifications of the ministers of the new covenant in chapters three and four, Paul tells us of his longing to be raptured and of his ambition to please the Lord, not by working for Him but simply by living to Him. Spontaneously such persons have a ministry to bring others fully back to the Lord. This is the ministry of reconciliation.

According to the context, the ministry of reconciliation was a commission given to the apostles. As those who were mature and ready to be raptured, the apostles were commissioned by the Lord to bring others back to God in full. This is complete and thorough reconciliation.

In 2 Corinthians 5 we see that reconciliation has two steps. Fallen human beings cannot be fully brought back to God simply by the first step. The second step is necessary. As Paul speaks of his ministry of bringing others back to God, he spontaneously presents a clear view of the two steps of reconciliation.

These steps are typified by the two veils in the tabernacle. There was a veil separating the Holy Place in the tabernacle from the Holy of Holies. There was another veil, called the first veil in Hebrews 9, at the entrance to the tabernacle. In our translation of Exodus, we speak of

this first veil as the screen. The function of a screen is to keep out negative things (such as insects) and to allow the positive things to come in. The second veil, the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, is called a veil, not a screen. The area outside the tabernacle was the outer court. According to typology, the outer court typifies the world. Hence, the tabernacle in the outer court signifies God's dwelling place in the world. In the world there is a place where God dwells, and that place is the tabernacle.

The entire human race is in the world, outside the tabernacle. But whenever a person repents and desires to return to God, he comes to the altar. The altar signifies the cross, where Christ died for our redemption. In the Old Testament, sacrifices were offered to God for atonement. But in the New Testament Christ died on the cross for redemption. In the typology of the Old Testament there was atonement, but in the fulfillment in the New Testament there is redemption. In the outer court there was also a laver, with water used for washing. Once a person had repented, had been redeemed, and had experienced the washing, he could enter the Holy Place. This is to be reconciled to God. Therefore, passing through the first veil signifies the first step of a sinner and a rebel being brought back to God and being reconciled to Him.

The believers at Corinth once were sinners and rebels, but they had been reconciled to God. However, they were still in the Holy Place, not in the Holy of Holies. Paul's purpose in 1 and 2 Corinthians was to bring these believers into the Holy of Holies.

In the *Economy of God* I pointed out that the outer court corresponds to Egypt, that the wilderness corresponds to the Holy Place, and that the good land, the land of Canaan, corresponds to the Holy of Holies. For the children of Israel to come out of Egypt and enter into the wilderness is equal to leaving the outer court and coming into the Holy Place. This was precisely the situation of the Corinthian believers. As the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness, so these believers were wandering in the soul, in particular in the mind. Because

they were wandering in the Holy Place of the soul, Paul wrote these two Epistles for the purpose of bringing them into the spirit, where Christ is. The spirit is also related to the good land and the Holy of Holies.

The believers at Corinth had experienced the first step of reconciliation, but they had not experienced the second. They had not been reconciled to God in full. As there was a veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, so a veil still remained between the Corinthians and God. According to Hebrews 10:20, this veil is the flesh. The flesh was the veil that kept the Corinthian believers away from the direct presence of God in the Holy of Holies.

Paul and the other ministers of the new covenant, those who had been constituted of the processed Triune God and who were mature in life, were no doubt in the Holy of Holies. They lived in the spirit, and they were ripe, ready to be raptured. Their only goal was to please the Lord by living to Him. Spontaneously, being such persons, they were able to bring others thoroughly back to God. For this reason, at the end of chapter five Paul indicates that they, the ministers of the new covenant, are those who seek not only to reconcile sinners to God, but also to reconcile the believers to God in full. These ministers of the new covenant were qualified to bring back to God anyone who had not been fully reconciled to Him.

As long as we have not been brought back to God fully, we need someone like the apostles to bring us back to Him. It does not matter whether the distance between us and God is great or small. We need to be reconciled to God entirely. The ministry of the new covenant is to bring people back to God in a full and thorough way; it is to reconcile us to God entirely and completely.

A. A New Creation in Christ

1. Knowing No One according to Flesh

Second Corinthians 5:16 says, "So that we, from now on, know no one according to flesh; even if we have known

Christ according to flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer." Since the apostles judge that Christ's death makes us all, through His resurrection, a new man, a man not according to flesh, they from now on would know no one according to flesh. They did know Christ in this way, but now they know Him so no longer.

To know others according to the flesh is to know them according to the old creation. But to know others according to the spirit is to know them according to the new creation. Formerly, as Saul of Tarsus, Paul knew Christ according to the flesh. He regarded Him merely as a Nazarene. The Jewish people all knew Christ in this way, according to the flesh. But after his experience on the way to Damascus, Paul's concept changed from knowing Christ according to the flesh to knowing Him according to the spirit. He also learned to know the saints not according to flesh, but according to spirit.

2. One Who Is in Christ Being a New Creation

Verse 17 says, "So that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, they have become new." This confirms what is mentioned in verse 16. The apostles would know man no longer according to flesh, because anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old things of the flesh have passed away through the death of Christ, and all has become new in Christ's resurrection. To be in Christ is to be one with Him in life and in nature. This is of God through our faith in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Gal. 3:26-28).

The old creation does not have the divine life and nature, but the new creation, the believers born again of God, does (John 1:13; 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:4). Hence, they are a new creation (Gal. 6:15), not according to the old nature of flesh, but according to the new nature of the divine life.

The words, "Behold, they have become new," are a call to watch the marvelous change of the new creation. The word "they" refers to the old things.

Paul, on the one hand, regarded the Corinthians as the old creation, because they were still living in their flesh.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, Paul regarded them the new creation, for he knew that they were in Christ. Because they were in Christ, the old things had passed away, and they were a new creation.

B. The Commission of the Ministry of Reconciliation

1. All Things of God

Verse 18 continues, "But all things are of God, Who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation." The "all things" here refer to all the positive things mentioned in verses 14 through 21, of which God is the Originator and Initiator. It is of God that Christ died to save us from death that we may live to Him. It is of God that we become a new creation in Christ. It is of God that Christ was made sin for us that we may become God's righteousness in Him. It is of God to reconcile the world to Himself. And it is of God that the apostles are made ambassadors of Christ, commissioned to represent Him for reconciling men to God, that they may become God's righteousness and a new creation for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose.

Paul had the assurance that the apostles had been fully reconciled to God. They had experienced both steps of reconciliation and therefore were in the Holy of Holies. God had reconciled them to Himself through Christ and given them the ministry of reconciliation. Because they had been brought back to God, they had the ministry of reconciling others to God. In this Epistle Paul was not seeking to reconcile sinners to God. Rather, he was seeking to bring the believers into a full experience of reconciliation. He was seeking to bring them not from the outer court into the tabernacle, but to bring them from the Holy Place, where they were lingering, into the Holy of Holies.

In verse 19 Paul says, "How that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them, and putting in us the word of reconciliation." The word of reconciliation is the word for the ministry (v. 18).

2. Ambassadors on Behalf of Christ

In verse 20 Paul goes on to say, "On behalf of Christ, then, we are ambassadors, as God entreating you through us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God." Paul's use of the word "ambassadors" indicates that the apostles are commissioned with a definite ministry; they represent Christ to accomplish God's purpose.

In verse 19 it is the world that is reconciled to God; in verse 20 it is the believers, who have already been reconciled to God, who need to be reconciled to God further. This clearly indicates that there are two steps for men to be fully reconciled to God. The first step is as sinners to be reconciled to God from sin. For this purpose Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3) that they may be forgiven by God. This is the objective aspect of Christ's death. In this aspect He bore our sins on the cross that they might be judged by God upon Him for us. The second step is as believers living in the natural life to be reconciled to God from the flesh. For this purpose Christ died for us--the persons--that we may live to Him in the resurrection life (2 Cor. 5:14-15). This is the subjective aspect of Christ's death. In this aspect, He was made sin for us so that we might be judged and done away with by God in order that we may become the righteousness of God in Him. By the two aspects of His death, He has fully reconciled God's chosen people to God.

We have indicated that these two steps of reconciliation are clearly portrayed by the two veils of the tabernacle. The first veil is called the screen (Exo. 26:37, lit). A sinner was brought to God through the reconciliation of the atoning blood to enter into the Holy Place by passing this screen. This typifies the first step of reconciliation. The second veil (Exo. 26:31-35; Heb. 9:3) still separated him from God who is in the Holy of Holies. This veil needed to be rent that he might be brought to God in the Holy of Holies. This is the second step of reconciliation. The Corinthian believers had been reconciled to God, having passed through the first veil and having entered into the Holy Place. Yet, they still lived in the flesh. They needed to pass the second veil, which has been rent already (Matt.

27:51; Heb. 10:20) to enter into the Holy of Holies to live with God in their spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). The goal of this Epistle is to bring them here that they may be persons in the spirit (1 Cor. 2:14), in the Holy of Holies. This is what the apostle means by saying, "Be reconciled to God." This is to present them full-grown in Christ (Col. 1:28).

I wish to emphasize the fact that the words, "Be reconciled to God," in 5:20 were spoken not to rebels and sinners in the outer court, but to believers in the Holy Place. Paul seems to be saying, "Corinthians, dear believers in Christ, you need to be reconciled to God further. You may say that you have already been reconciled to Him. Yes, you have been reconciled, but you have been reconciled only halfway. You have the first step of reconciliation. Now you must go on to the second step and be fully reconciled to God. You have been reconciled to God from the outer court to the Holy Place. But God is not in the Holy Place; He is in the Holy of Holies. You have been reconciled to God through one veil, but there is still another veil separating you from God. This veil is you yourself, your flesh, your natural life. As I have already told you, you Corinthians are still fleshly. As long as you are in the flesh, you are not in the Holy of Holies. Because the veil of the flesh, the veil of the natural life, remains with you, you are not yet in the Holy of Holies. Corinthians, my burden is to help you realize that this second veil has already been riven and that you must deny your flesh and crucify it. Thus, to you who have been partly reconciled to God, I issue this word: Be reconciled to God in full."

C. The Ground of Reconciliation

1. Christ Not Knowing Sin

Verse 21 says, "Him Who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf, that we might become God's righteousness in Him." Paul had the boldness to say that God made Christ sin on our behalf. Since Christ knows everything, how can Paul say that He did not know sin? Christ did not know sin in an experiential way by contact or personal

experience (see John 8:46; 1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 4:15; 7:26). In the Bible the word "know" often has a deeper meaning than to know something merely in a mental way. According to Matthew 7:23, the Lord Jesus will one day say to those who work lawlessness, "I never knew you." This does not mean, of course, that the Lord had no knowledge of them. The principle is the same in 2 Corinthians 5:21. In experience, in direct contact, the Lord Jesus had nothing to do with sin, and He did not know sin.

2. God Making Christ Sin on Our Behalf

Sin came from Satan as the rebel against God (Isa. 14:12-15), entered into man (Rom. 5:12), and made man not only a sinner, but sin itself under God's judgment. Hence, when Christ became a man in flesh (John 1:14), He was made sin (not sinful) on our behalf to be judged by God (Rom. 8:3) that we might become God's righteousness in Him.

In order to understand what it means to say that God made Christ sin on our behalf, we need to read John 1:14 and Romans 8:3. John 1:14 says that the Word, which is God Himself, became flesh. Flesh refers to fallen man. When Christ became a man, man had already fallen. This fallen man is the flesh. Thus, when Christ became man, He became flesh. When we put John 1:14 together with 2 Corinthians 5:21, we see that when Christ became flesh, He was made sin. In the sight of God we, as fallen flesh, are actually sin. We are not only sinful and are not only sinners--we are sin itself. Because Christ became flesh, in this sense He was made sin on our behalf.

Romans 8:3 says, "God sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Yes, Christ was made sin. But in this verse we are told that He was in the likeness of the flesh of sin. This means that He was made in the form of sin. This is what is signified by the type of the brass serpent. When the children of Israel were bitten by serpents, they received the poisonous nature of the serpent. In the sight of God, they all became serpents. Therefore, God told Moses to

hang a bronze serpent on a pole. This bronze serpent is a type of Christ dying on the cross as our substitute. As John 3:14 clearly indicates, this serpent on the pole was a type of Christ lifted up for us. As that serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, so Christ was lifted up on the cross. Furthermore, as the bronze serpent had the form but not the poisonous nature of a serpent, so Christ had the form, the likeness, of the flesh of sin, but He did not actually have the nature of sin. He had the form of the serpent, but He did not have the serpentine nature.

For us to experience the first step of reconciliation, it was necessary for Christ to die for our sins. In 1 Corinthians 15:3 Paul declares, "Christ died for our sins." But in order for us to be reconciled further, even fully, to God, it was necessary for Christ to die also for us, not only for our sins. For Christ to die for our sins is one thing, but for Him to die for us is something else. Christ died for our sins so that our sins may be forgiven by God and taken away. Christ also died for us so that we may be terminated. Christ's dying for our sins accomplishes the first step of reconciliation, and His dying for us accomplishes the second step.

Paul has this second step in mind when he says, "One died on behalf of all" (5:14). According to this verse, Christ died not for sins; He died for persons. The objective aspect of Christ's death involves His dying for our sins. But the subjective aspect of Christ's death involves His dying for us. This subjective aspect enables the believers to be reconciled to God in full. Furthermore, in the objective aspect of His death Christ bore our sins. However, in the subjective aspect He became sin. Today there is much teaching among Christians about Christ dying for our sins and bearing our sins, but not much is said about Christ being made sin on our behalf.

Since we, as fallen human beings, are sin, for Christ to be made sin actually means for Him to become us. The subjective aspect of the death of Christ puts us to death. According to Romans 8:3, God condemned sin in the flesh. This means that He condemned us; He condemned the

natural man. Furthermore, the veil, the natural man, the natural life, the flesh, was cleft through the subjective aspect of Christ's death. When sin was condemned and when the veil was rent, we were terminated. As a result, the second veil was taken away and we may be fully reconciled to God. Therefore, we should not remain in the Holy Place; we should come forward into the Holy of Holies. Moreover, we should no longer know one another according to flesh, but we should know one another according to spirit.

Paul's concept in this chapter is to show us that the apostles, as ministers of the new covenant, are those who can spontaneously bring others back to God fully and thoroughly. I would ask you to compare the situation of the new covenant ministers with that among Christians today. Some are brought back to God only in name. They are in the outer court. The situation of others is better. They have been brought back to God in the Holy Place. The genuine, saved, blood-washed, and Spirit-regenerated Christians have all been brought into the Holy Place. However, many still live in the flesh, in the natural life, and some still live in gross sin. Those who are in the outer court can bring others into the outer court, no further. Likewise, the genuine Christians who are in the Holy Place have been brought there by some who were already in the Holy Place. They have been reconciled to God to this extent, but not to the full extent. How far can you bring another person? How close can you bring others to God? It depends on how much you have been reconciled to Him. Those who have been brought to God by you cannot advance further than you have advanced. If you have entered the Holy Place, you can bring others there. If you are at the entrance of the Holy Place, you can bring others to the entrance. But if you are in the center of the Holy Place, you can bring others there. The point here is that we can bring others only as far as we ourselves have gone.

This is Paul's thought in chapter five. Here Paul seems to be saying, "We apostles have been brought into the Holy of Holies. God has reconciled us to Himself fully and

thoroughly. Therefore, spontaneously He gives us a commission to reconcile others to God fully and thoroughly. Because we have been reconciled to Him to this extent, we can help others to be reconciled to the same extent."

The ministers of the new covenant have been reconciled to God to the uttermost. All the veils are gone, and there is nothing between them and God. They have been reconciled to God completely and also thoroughly constituted of the Triune God. They behave according to their constitution. They live a crucified life for the manifestation of the truth and the shining of the gospel, and they are mature, ripe, and ready to be raptured. Their only aim, their only ambition, is to please the Lord by living to Him. These are the ones who can bring others back to God thoroughly. Because they are in the Holy of Holies, they can bring others there also.

3. Becoming the Righteousness of God in Christ

Eventually, those who have been brought back to God in the Holy of Holies will enjoy Christ to the uttermost and even become the righteousness of God in Him. Paul speaks of this in 5:21 where he says, "That we might become God's righteousness in Him." Righteousness issues from God for His administration (Psa. 89:14; 97:2; Isa. 32:1), which is Christ to be our righteousness (Phil. 3:9; 1 Cor. 1:30), making us God's righteousness in Him, not merely righteous before God. Through His redemption, man as a sinner, even as sin, is made God's righteousness, reconciled to the righteous God, and a new creation living to Him for God's eternal purpose. The apostles are commissioned to minister such a Christ, with all the glorious issues of His marvelous achievement, to His believers who are His members to form His Body. Praise and glory be to Him forever!

The phrase "in Him" means in union with Christ, not only positionally, but organically in resurrection. We were enemies of God (Col. 1:21) by becoming sin, which came from the one who rebelled against God. Christ was made sin for us by becoming one with us through incarnation.

God condemned Him in flesh as sin for us, through His death, that we might be one with Him in His resurrection to be God's righteousness. By this righteousness, we, the enemies of God, could be and have been reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Rom. 5:10).

In the organic union with Christ, those who have been brought thoroughly back to God are made the righteousness of God. They not only become righteous; they *are* the righteousness of God. This means that they not only become righteous persons, but they become righteousness itself.

God desires to have a people on earth who are not only righteous persons; He wants a people who, in the sight of God, the Devil, the angels, and the demons, are the very righteousness of God. To be made righteous before God is one thing; to be God's righteousness is another thing. To become the righteousness of God is the highest enjoyment of the Triune God in Christ.

In Adam we fell so low that we became sin. Not only were we sinful before God--we became sin itself. But now in Christ, having been brought thoroughly back to God, we may enjoy Christ to such an extent that in Him we become God's righteousness. What a salvation! What a reconciliation! To have this enjoyment is to be on the peak of God's salvation, to be on the peak of our holy Zion.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTEEN

A PATTERN OF LIVING CHRIST FOR THE CHURCH

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 1:8-9, 12, 17-22

Our God is always going on. For this reason, we should not remain in yesterday or try to live in tomorrow. We should live in today. Proper Christians do not have a yesterday, and they do not yet have tomorrow. We only have today. Therefore, the Bible says, "As long as it is called today" (Heb. 3:13). God is not the God of yesterday or the God of tomorrow; He is the God of today. Every day God is advancing, moving on. Therefore, we need to be open to God's speaking today. God's speaking is His going on.

The title of this message is "A Pattern of Living Christ for the Church." How marvelous it is to live Christ for the church! I do not believe that before 1980 any of us knew this expression "live Christ for the church." This saying has come forth only recently. However, we are concerned not simply with living Christ for the church, but with seeing a pattern of living Christ for the church. Paul is a pattern of living Christ for the church.

A BOOK ON LIVING CHRIST FOR THE CHURCH

In 1 Corinthians we see the matter of living Christ for the church, but it is only in 2 Corinthians that we have the pattern of living Christ for the church. I would ask you to consider what is revealed in the sixteen chapters of 1 Corinthians. These chapters reveal how to enjoy Christ, how to take Christ as our life, how to live Christ so that we may have the church and that He may have the Body to fulfill God's eternal purpose. Not many readers of the

Bible have seen that 1 Corinthians is a book on living Christ for the church.

In the Life-study of 1 Corinthians I pointed out that 1 Corinthians deals with many problems. These problems are of two categories: the problems in the realm of human life and the problems in the realm of the divine administration. It is very important to have a proper human life. Of course, the divine administration is very crucial. We certainly need to have a proper human life to carry out God's administration. But how can we have such a human life, and how can we carry out God's administration? By what kind of life can we have a proper human life, and by what means, by what instrument, can we carry out the divine administration? Christ is the factor for solving the problems in the realm of human life, and the church is the factor for solving the problems related to the divine administration.

THE UNIQUE SOLUTION

Christ is a heavenly, divine antibiotic which kills the negative germs within us. Because of the fall, these germs have come into our family life and also into the church life. First Corinthians reveals that the church at Corinth had been invaded by these negative germs. The result was ruin and corruption. Christ is the only "antibiotic" that can effectively deal with these germs. Thus, in the first ten chapters of 1 Corinthians we see Christ as the factor, the element, the "medicine," to heal all the problems in human life and to cure the diseases in the church life.

The church at Corinth was indeed sick. The saints suffered spiritually from such illnesses as divisiveness, the claiming of rights, fornication, and the abuse of God-given rights in eating and in marriage. What could cure the believers of these diseases? The only cure was Christ, the divine medicine.

OUR PORTION

Let us review what is covered in chapters one through ten of 1 Corinthians concerning Christ as the antibiotic to

cure all the diseases in the church. First, Christ is our unique portion, the One into whose fellowship we have been called by God (1 Cor. 1:2, 9). First Corinthians 1:2 says that Christ is "theirs and ours." Verse 9 says, "God is faithful, through Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Because God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, the Son is now our portion.

OUR DAILY RIGHTEOUSNESS, SANCTIFICATION, AND REDEMPTION

In 1 Corinthians 1:30 we see certain aspects of this portion: "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption." Christ is God's power and God's wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24). As wisdom to us from God, Christ becomes our daily righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Daily we may enjoy Christ as our righteousness. If we enjoy Him in this way, we can declare, "Angels and demons, and all human beings, I am right with God and man. I am right with my family and with all the brothers and sisters in the church. This is my testimony because daily Christ is my righteousness."

We can also testify that Christ is our daily sanctification and holiness. Day by day we enjoy Him as such a portion to us. Therefore, we can expect the angels and demons to confirm the fact that we are sanctified. We can say, "Angels and demons, you must realize that I am holy. I ask you to confirm the fact of my holiness in Christ. The Son of God, who is both the wisdom of God and the power of God, is becoming my daily holiness and sanctification."

Holiness is the substance, whereas sanctification is the activity of being made holy. Day by day we have not only holiness, the element, but we also have sanctification, the process. The Christ who is our portion for our enjoyment is sanctifying us daily.

A married couple can experience Christ as their righteousness and sanctification in their married life. Suppose a husband is unhappy with his wife and gives her

a difficult time. If the sister calls on the name of the Lord Jesus, she will gain Him as righteousness and also as sanctification. She will experience the Lord sanctifying her from within. The Lord's moving inwardly will keep her from losing her temper with her husband. Otherwise, she may be offended and begin to argue with her husband.

Simply by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus, we experience something mysterious and wonderful within us sanctifying us and keeping us from losing our temper. Eventually, this sanctification becomes our holiness. Furthermore, this holiness is a Person, the Son of God, the unique portion into which God has called us. God has called us into the fellowship of Christ. Now, daily and hourly, we need to enjoy Him, first as righteousness, then as sanctification, and then as redemption.

THE DEEP THINGS OF GOD

In 1 Corinthians chapter two we see that Christ, the mysterious One, is the deep things of God. In order to discern Him and realize Him, we must be a spiritual person, a person who exercises the spirit and lives in the spirit. If we are soulish, those who live in the soul, we shall not be able to know Him. Only by living in the spirit and exercising our spirit can we know Christ in order to experience Him.

A LIVING FOUNDATION

According to Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 3, Christ is a living foundation, a foundation that grows. In this chapter Paul says that he planted, that Apollos watered, and that God gives the growth. To give the growth is a matter of growing Christ. The Christ who grows within us is the unique foundation. Hence, it is a living, growing foundation.

As the foundation grows in us, this growth produces gold, silver, and precious stones, the materials needed for the building up of the church. This is to experience Christ, to enjoy Christ, and to partake of Christ so that we may be

transformed for the building. In this way we have the precious materials for the building up of the Body. This is to live Christ for the church.

OUR FEAST

In 1 Corinthians 5:8 we have Christ as our feast. Christ is not merely our Passover; He is our Passover feast. Now we are feasting on Him and enjoying Him as the unleavened bread. As our portion, Christ is our unleavened enjoyment. When we enjoy this portion, we are cleansed from every kind of leaven. Enjoying Christ as the unleavened bread causes us to become unleavened. This purification from every kind of leaven is not a suffering. It is not the result of being placed on a surgical table; it comes from sitting at a table of feasting where we enjoy Christ as unleavened bread.

MEMBERS OF CHRIST

In chapter six we see that Christ is the Spirit and that we are one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17). Eventually the Spirit will saturate us and cause even our physical bodies to become the members of Christ. This means that not only is our spirit organically united with Him, but even our bodies become Christ's members. Even our body is grafted into Christ.

We often think of our physical body as being the flesh, full of lusts. This is true when the body is viewed from the standpoint of the fall. But according to Christ's full salvation, which includes metabolic transformation, our body is grafted into Christ and becomes a member of Christ. When I saw this, I was very happy and said, "O Lord Jesus, hallelujah! Not only am I a member of You in my spirit, but even my body is Your member. My body is part of You, a member of Christ!" Do you believe that your body is a member of Christ? We all must believe this. The more you believe it, the more the indwelling Spirit will saturate your body and cause it to be organically united with Christ.

A TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Furthermore, our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. We often say that it is our spirit which is the habitation of God. Ordinarily we say that God's temple is in our spirit. But 1 Corinthians 6:19 definitely indicates that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

How can our body be a member of Christ on the one hand and the temple of the Holy Spirit on the other hand? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 6:17: "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." Because we are one spirit with the Lord, our body becomes a member of Christ. Furthermore, because we are one spirit with Him, our body even becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. This is more than redemption or holiness. This means that our entire being is joined to God and made His temple. Our whole being is joined to Christ, and our body becomes a member of Christ.

First Corinthians 6:15-20 involves the Triune God and the tripartite man. In our whole being--spirit, soul, and body--we are united with the Triune God. Now the Triune God is involved with our tripartite being. This is Christ as the factor to heal us of all spiritual diseases. When we experience the Triune God becoming involved with the three parts of our being, we become genuine saints. We become even more holy than the angels.

If we would understand Paul's writing, we must know Paul's spirit and touch the burden in his spirit. We must also touch Paul's deep concept. Paul's Epistles are always related to his concept, his burden, and his spirit. In 1 Corinthians he had some concepts regarding the church in Corinth. Moreover, in his spirit there was a burden to write to the church there. In chapter six Paul's concept was that the Corinthian believers must know that they are one spirit with the Lord and that their body should be permeated and saturated by the Spirit and thereby become the members of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Paul was burdened that the entire being of the Corinthians would be taken over and possessed by the Triune God. This was Paul's burden in 1 Corinthians 6.

CHRIST FOR OUR EATING AND DRINKING

Chapter ten reveals that the very Christ who is our portion, who is our daily righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, who is so one with us that He is making our bodies His members and the temple of the Holy Spirit, has given Himself to us for our eating and drinking. Christ's giving of Himself to us for our eating and drinking is for our enjoyment of Him.

The way Christ gave Himself to us was through death. The fact that the blood is separated from the body shows the way of death. Whenever the blood is separated from the body, that indicates death. Christ died on the cross, shedding His blood and sacrificing His body, not only for the purpose of redeeming us, but also for the purpose of giving Himself to us. Now when we come to the Lord's table, we eat Him and drink Him. Eating and drinking denote receiving. Whenever we drink something or eat something, we receive that thing, we take it into us. Christ has given Himself, and now we are receiving Him. Hallelujah for this enjoyment of Christ!

The rich Christ revealed in 1 Corinthians is the unique factor to solve all the problems in human life. If we enjoy this Christ to a full extent, we shall not have any problems. Every problem will be solved, for we shall have the unique solution to all problems. The second Epistle to the Corinthians indicates that the diseases among the Corinthians were healed by the "medicine" ministered by Paul in his first Epistle. In chapter after chapter, Paul "injected" them with Christ. As a result, the Corinthians began to live a proper human life. Such a human life is a life that lives Christ.

If we do not live Christ, we cannot have a proper human life. We can have such a life only by receiving Christ and living Him. This kind of living is for the church. We need to live Christ for the church.

THE BODY FUNCTIONING UNDER THE HEADSHIP

The divine administration is carried out by means of the church under the headship of Christ and of God. Under

this headship, the members of the body function with their gifts. This is the operation which carries out God's administration. This can be done only in resurrection life. In the realm of the divine administration first we have the headship, then the body, then the functions of the members by the gifts, and then resurrection life.

Resurrection is Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit. This Spirit, the reality of the resurrected Christ, is resurrection. Before His crucifixion and resurrection, the Lord Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). Resurrection, therefore, is a living Person, the wonderful Christ. In this resurrection the Body functions under the headship to carry out God's administration.

THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

The last matter dealt with in 1 Corinthians is the collection for the needy saints. As Paul says, the offerings were given on the first day of every week. The first day of the week, the Lord's day, was a sign, a symbol, of the resurrected Christ. The Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, was a sign of God as the Creator. Now the first day is a sign that the Triune God has been processed in resurrection to become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

Today our God is not the God of the seventh day. That is the Jewish God. Our God is the God of the first day of the week. This means that He is God not only in creation, but, much more, He is God in resurrection. Now we have God not only in creation, but also in resurrection. God in creation is for our worship, but God in resurrection is not only for worship, but also for our enjoyment. The Jews know only how to worship God as the Creator. However, we enjoy our Triune God as the life-giving Spirit. The God in resurrection is for enjoyment.

Everything we do in the church life in principle must be on the first day of the week. This means that everything must be done in resurrection. If we live Christ and enjoy Him, experiencing Him, every day He will be resurrection to us. Then every day will be the first day of the week.

The first day does not symbolize a day; it symbolizes the Triune God who, having been processed, has become an enjoyable, all-inclusive, life-giving Spirit. Now we may enjoy this Spirit. By enjoying the Spirit we are on the first day of the week. This is for God's administration.

I can testify that in my experience I am in the first day of the week. I am in resurrection enjoying the all-inclusive Spirit, the One who is the processed God to be my portion. Hallelujah for such a portion! In our meetings we may now carry out the divine administration in resurrection on the first day of the week, participating in the processed Triune God as the life-giving Spirit. Whenever I come to this point, inwardly I am beside myself with joy. Praise the Lord for the marvelous revelation in 1 Corinthians!

THE NEED OF A PATTERN

First Corinthians is a book that speaks of living Christ for the church, a book that tells us how to live Christ for the church. Throughout the centuries, the Lord's people have not realized that 1 Corinthians tells us to live Christ for the church. Believers have not had this language because they have not had the spiritual experience that gives rise to it. Language with its words and terms meets the needs of experience. For example, many years ago there was not such a word as computer. But after the invention of a computer, there was the need for a term to describe it. Hallelujah for our new spiritual experience! According to this experience we need to live Christ for the church. I can testify that my entire being is occupied with this. I do not have room for anything else. Every one of my messages issues from this experience. Outwardly I may do many different things, but inwardly I am always occupied with living Christ for the church.

I can testify that before giving this message, I was not clear what I should speak. I prayed like this: "Lord, we are open to You. We have made no decision concerning this message. Lord, we don't know what You want us to say. Lead us and guide us, Lord. Infuse us with Your thought and feeling." Then deep within I began to sense that I

should speak on the subject of a pattern of living Christ for the church life.

We have emphasized that 1 Corinthians reveals that we should live Christ for the church. But it is in 2 Corinthians that we have the pattern of living Christ for the church. The wonderful and marvelous revelation in 1 Corinthians needs the pattern presented in 2 Corinthians. Therefore, after the first Epistle, Paul wrote the second Epistle for the purpose of showing the believers at Corinth a pattern of one who lives Christ for the church. In the following message we shall consider the details of this pattern.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SIXTEEN

A PATTERN OF LIVING CHRIST FOR THE CHURCH

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 1:8-9, 12, 17-22

First Corinthians reveals the matter of living Christ for the church. If we read this Epistle in a thoughtful way, we may wonder if there is a pattern of living Christ for the church. We may say as we read this book, "Paul, show us a pattern. We have seen many things in our parents, relatives, neighbors, friends, and colleagues, but we have never seen a person living Christ for the church. We would like to see a pattern, for a pattern is much better than thousands of words." Realizing the need for such a pattern, Paul presents this pattern in 2 Corinthians. Therefore, in this Epistle we see a living pattern.

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Paul opens each of his Epistles in a different way. For example, the way he opens Romans is different from the way he begins Ephesians. The Epistle of 2 Corinthians also begins in a particular way. After the greetings and the word about grace and peace in 1:1 and 2, Paul goes on to speak, not in a doctrinal way or in the way of revelation, but in the way of giving a personal testimony. In 1:8 he says, "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, as to our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were excessively burdened, beyond our power, so that we despaired even of living." It seems as if Paul is saying, "Corinthian believers, I want to give you my testimony concerning how I live Christ for the church. When we were in Asia, we were excessively burdened, heavily pressed. We were pressed beyond our power, beyond our ability to

withstand pressure, so that we despaired even of living. It was very clear to us that we were dying." There is nothing doctrinal here. On the contrary, Paul is giving a testimony. This testimony is part of the pattern.

THE GOD OF RESURRECTION

In 1:9 Paul continues, "But we ourselves had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not have confidence in ourselves, but in God, Who raises the dead." Because they realized they were dying, the apostles did not have any confidence in themselves. Their confidence was in God.

The God in whom they were confident was not simply the One who created the heavens and the earth. Rather, their confidence was in the God of resurrection, in the God who raises the dead. Here Paul does not say, "I call upon the God who created heaven and earth to witness for me." In verse 9 Paul refers not to the God of creation, but to the God of resurrection.

Paul's confidence was not in himself; it was in the resurrecting God, the God who raises the dead. To have confidence in the God of resurrection and have no confidence in ourselves is to live Christ. If I have confidence in myself, then surely I am living myself. I am not living Christ. But here is an apostle who had no confidence in himself. His confidence was fully in the very God who raises the dead. In this matter he is a pattern of living Christ.

THE SINGLENESS AND SINCERITY OF GOD

In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, "For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God, we conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you." This testimony is related to the pattern of living Christ for the church. Paul's conscience testified that he lived in singleness; being political was not his manner of living. With Paul there was no politics. On the contrary, he was single. However, Paul did not live his own singleness and sincerity; he lived the singleness and sincerity of God.

The expression "the singleness of God" implies that God Himself is this singleness. Likewise, the phrase "the sincerity of God" actually means that this sincerity is God Himself. In 1:12 Paul does not speak of his human singleness or sincerity. His singleness and sincerity were God Himself.

THE GRACE OF GOD

In 1:12 Paul also says that he conducted himself not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God. Grace is the processed Triune God. First Corinthians reveals that the Triune God has been processed to become the life-giving Spirit for us to enjoy. This enjoyment of the processed Triune God is grace.

In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul says, "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." The expression "the grace of God" in this verse and in 2 Corinthians 1:12 actually indicates that grace is God Himself. The grace of God is the very God. Hence, grace is not something which belongs to God; grace is God Himself.

Furthermore, the unprocessed God is not grace. Rather, grace is the Triune God in resurrection. It is not God only as He is revealed in Genesis 1; it is the God revealed in the Epistles of Paul. The God in Paul's ministry is not merely the God of creation, but He is the God in resurrection. Resurrection involves the processes of incarnation, human living, and crucifixion. After passing through this process, the Triune God entered into resurrection. Therefore, when we speak of God as the God of resurrection, we imply the process through which He has passed.

Christ passed through incarnation, through thirty-three and a half years of human living, and through crucifixion, which lasted six hours. After he died, He was placed in a tomb. Then He went into Hades and had a tour of the realm of death. Following that, He came forth in

resurrection. Now He is the God not only of creation, but also of resurrection. This processed God is now our grace. How happy I am in Him! He is my enjoyment, my feast, my rest, my strength. This is my God.

ONE WITH THE UNCHANGING CHRIST

In verse 17 Paul says, "This therefore intending, did I then use fickleness? Or the things which I resolve, do I resolve according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes and no, no?" Paul was neither political nor fickle. He was not the kind of person who would say yes at one time and then shortly afterward change his answer and say no. With Paul, yes was yes, and no was no. Whatever he resolved, he resolved by being one with the unchanging Christ of the faithful God.

Paul was absolutely one with Christ, with God's anointed One. This was the reason he could say, "But God is faithful, that our word toward you is not yes and no; for the Son of God, Christ Jesus, Who was preached among you through us, through me and Sylvanus and Timothy, did not become yes and no, but in Him is yes" (vv. 18-19).

In verses 20 and 21 Paul continues, "For whatever promises of God there are, in Him is the Yes; wherefore also through Him is the Amen to God, for glory through us. But He Who firmly attaches us with you unto Christ and has anointed us is God." Christ is God's anointed One, and Paul was firmly attached to this One. This One is the unchanging Christ of the faithful God. As a person who lived Christ, Paul was one with the unchanging Christ of the faithful God. If we would live Christ, we must also keep ourselves one with Him.

Paul could say of himself, "I am a person who is always one with Christ. Christ is not yes and no, but in Him is yes. If you say yes and no, you are not living Christ. In Christ is the yes. Whenever He says yes, it is yes forever. With Him there is no change. I am one with this unchanging Christ. When I resolved to come to visit you, I resolved with Him. I did not do this in myself or by myself. In oneness with

Christ, I made a strong decision to come to you. He is the anointed One, and I am firmly attached to Him." This also is part of the pattern of living Christ for the church.

A LIVING PATTERN

My burden in this message is to point out that in the introductory word to 2 Corinthians Paul presents himself to the believers at Corinth as a pattern of a person who lives Christ for the church. Paul seems to be saying, "Corinthians, in my first Epistle I gave you a revelation of what it means to live Christ for the church. Now I know that you also need a pattern of such a living. In my second Epistle, I present myself to you as this living pattern. I ask you to look at me and see that I have no confidence in myself. My confidence is fully in the God of resurrection. Because I have confidence in Him, I live Christ. Furthermore, whenever I decide something, I make a decision by taking Christ as my person. I am one who is firmly attached to Christ, to God's Anointed. He is the Christ of the faithful God, the God with whom there is no shadow due to change. Therefore, I, Paul, am one with the Triune God." This is a person living Christ for the church.

Paul's purpose in living Christ was that God's administration may be carried out through the church. If we want to know how to live Christ for the church, we need to consider the life of Paul and learn of him. He is our pattern, our example.

Among the Epistles written by Paul, 2 Corinthians is unique. This Epistle opens with Paul's personal testimony. This testimony is not given in a brief way. Rather, it is presented in a detailed way. Paul tells the Corinthians that he did not want them to be ignorant of the afflictions they experienced in Asia. He wanted the believers at Corinth to know that the apostles were heavily pressed, that the pressure was so heavy that it was beyond their capacity to endure. They even despaired of life and had the sentence of death within themselves. According to their feeling and realization, they were dying. Why did God put them into such a situation? God did this because He wanted them to

be terminated. Therefore, Paul could say, "God's intention is to terminate us. He does not want us to live any longer. Instead, He wants Christ to live in us."

TERMINATED TO LIVE CHRIST

It is easy to talk about termination. But for us to actually be terminated we need to experience a great deal of suffering. For example, the Lord will use your husband or wife and your children to terminate you. If you are a wife, the Lord will use your husband to terminate you. If you are a husband, the Lord will use your wife to cut you to pieces. Furthermore, your children will also be helpful to Him in bringing you to an end so that Christ may live in you.

It is easy to say in a doctrinal way that we have been crucified with Christ, that we no longer live, and that Christ lives in us. This may be nothing more than a teaching. It is possible to go on speaking like this for years, quoting Galatians 2:20 again and again, but still not live Christ for the church.

We all need to experience the inward cutting in a practical way so that we may be terminated. The Lord will even use the saints in the church life to accomplish this for us. In a sense, the church life is a life of slaughter, a life of termination. Praise the Lord that we are willing to be slaughtered because our desire is to live Christ.

If we live Christ, our confidence will be in the God of resurrection, in the God who raises the dead. Then we shall conduct ourselves in the grace of God, and we shall be one with the unchanging Christ of the faithful God, the Christ who is the unique yes. Thank the Lord that in all these verses in 2 Corinthians 1 we see that Paul was a pattern of living Christ for the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE SEVENTEEN

ATTACHED, ANOINTED, SEALED, CAPTURED, SUBDUED, AND LED TO SCATTER THE INCENSE OF CHRIST

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 2:14-16

In the previous message we saw a pattern of living Christ for the church. Paul is not a pattern of living a certain culture; he is a pattern of living Christ for the church. When we speak of living Christ for the church, we need to know who Christ is and also what the church is.

CRUCIAL QUESTIONS

Who is Christ? Christ is God processed to be the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. This expression, brief and accurate, is an explanation of Christ that is according to both the New Testament revelation and our spiritual experience.

For what purpose should we live Christ? Should we live Christ for evangelism? For spirituality? We must live Christ for the church.

Since we need to live Christ for the church, we need to answer an important question: What is the church? First, the church is the assembly of the called-out ones. Second, the church is the organic Body of Christ. Furthermore, the church is the fullness of Christ and also of God, the new man, the habitation of God, and the bride. This is the sequence followed by Paul in the book of Ephesians. Furthermore, according to the book of Revelation, the church is the lampstand. Ultimately in the Bible the church is called the bride. Therefore, if we would know what the church is, we must see that the church is the

called assembly, the organic Body of Christ, the fullness of Christ and of God, the new man, the habitation of God, the lampstand, and the bride.

CHRIST WITH THE CHURCH

Now I would go on to ask another question, a question that seems very common and ordinary: What does the Bible reveal to us? In particular, what is revealed in the New Testament? Many Christian teachers would say that the New Testament is a revelation of Christ. Perhaps those with a more thorough understanding would say that it speaks concerning Christ and the church. I would say that the best answer to the question regarding what is revealed in the New Testament is that it reveals Christ with the church.

THE MEAT OF THE WORD

We need to know Christ not merely in a superficial way, but in a deep, profound, and mysterious way. Some believers would say that Christ is God incarnated to be a man named Jesus. This Jesus, a man from Nazareth, eventually was crucified and resurrected. This, of course, is true; it is according to the Bible. We believe all this concerning Christ, for the Bible tells us these things. However, the Bible also reveals deeper matters related to Christ. The Bible shows us not only things that can be compared to "feathers" and "skin"; it also reveals things that can be compared to "meat."

Many kinds of living things have either skin or feathers. Even garlic has some very thin layers of skin. Before you eat garlic, you first need to peel off the skin. Chickens and other kinds of birds have feathers. When we eat chicken, we pay attention to the meat, not to the feathers. There is a Chinese proverb which refers to insignificant matters as chicken feathers and garlic skins. When we say that a certain matter can be compared to chicken feathers or garlic skin, we do not mean that the matter in question is meaningless or useless. Chicken feathers may be used to stuff a pillow, and garlic skin may

be used in making medicine. My purpose in using this illustration is to say that even the divine revelation in the Bible contains "skin" and "feathers," that is, matters that are necessary and important but are nevertheless somewhat superficial.

We may also use as an illustration the shell of an egg. Without a shell an egg could not exist. But when we eat eggs, we do not eat the shells; rather, we eat what is inside the shell. The revelation in the Bible can be compared to an egg with its shell and contents. Many Christians devote their attention to the "shell." Using the illustration of the chicken feathers and the garlic skins, we may say that these same Christians concentrate on the "feathers" and "skins" found in the Bible. The shells, the skins, and the feathers all refer to matters that are true and important. Nevertheless, as we shall seek to make clear, they are not the "meat" of the divine revelation.

During the period known as the Dark Ages, from approximately the sixth century to the sixteenth, the Bible was locked away, and even the skins and the feathers were lost. In the Reformation the Bible was opened to a certain extent, and the revelation of the divine Word was somewhat recovered. During the Reformation the skins and the feathers were recovered; however, the depths of the Word were not opened very much.

PARTAKING OF RICH FOOD

Let us take some examples from 1 Corinthians to illustrate what we mean by the feathers, skin, and meat in the Word. First Corinthians 1:12 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 verse speaks of divisiveness. Regarding division, some of the Brethren teachers said something like this: "In 1 Corinthians 1:12 Paul rebukes those who say that they are of Cephas, of Apollos, of Paul, and of Christ. Why, then, do you take such names as Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, or Wesleyan? To say that you are a Lutheran means that you are of Luther. Does not Paul's word apply to the matter of

assuming denominational names? This practice must be rebuked." This is sound, fundamental teaching. Nevertheless, this teaching is skins and feathers. It is not the meat of the Word.

If we would learn to eat in a healthy way, we should not eat the feathers and the skins. Instead, we should eat the meat. When I eat chicken, I eat only the meat, not the feathers, the skin, or the bone. In the same principle, when we come to 1 Corinthians 1, we should pay attention not merely to the feathers in verse 12, but to the meat in verse 9.

Does 1 Corinthians primarily reveal the matter of division? No, the basic revelation here concerns the fellowship of God's Son. Furthermore, this chapter teaches that Christ, the crucified One, is God's wisdom and power to us. This Christ is now our daily righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. This is the basic revelation in chapter one of 1 Corinthians.

If we would eat the meat of a chicken, we need to pluck out the feathers and peel off the skin. In like manner, if we would find the meat in 1 Corinthians 1, we must go deeper than the feathers and the skin in this chapter. Then we shall see past the divisions and the divisive spirit and see that Christ, the Son of God, is our portion and that He, God's wisdom and power, may be enjoyed as our daily righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We all need to see Christ in this way and partake of such rich food. If we remain in verse 12, concentrating on the matter of division, we shall have only the feathers and the skins. We shall not enjoy the healthy meat--Christ as our portion. I can testify that when I read 1 Corinthians 1, I do not pay attention only to the skin of divisiveness; much more, I enjoy the crucified Christ as my portion and as my righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Many Christians have not seen the meat in chapter one of 1 Corinthians. Some see only the feathers; others, going somewhat deeper, see the skin. But when I tell the believers that they must go beyond the skin and the feathers and touch the meat, some are offended and even oppose me. They are like my grandchildren who complain

when I tell them to eat the meat of the chicken and not to eat the skin. In my ministry I am doing my best to show the Lord's people the meat that lies beneath the feathers and the skin.

MINISTERING THE MEAT OF THE WORD

Recently I read an article in which I was accused of destroying the practice of Christmas. Actually I do not have any intention to attack the practice of Christmas. My time is fully occupied with ministering Christ to others. But while I am ministering Christ, Christmas is spontaneously exposed. Yes, I have said that we should care fully for Christ and forget about the so-called Christ-mass or Christmas. I have also said that we should be Christians, but not care for the "-anity" of Christianity. I certainly do not have the intention of opposing either Christmas or Christianity. Nevertheless, in my ministry I have said that we should care for Christ and be real Christians, but have nothing to do with the "-mass" or "-anity." When certain ones hear such a word, they accuse me of opposing Christianity and ruining the practice of Christmas.

Actually, Christmas and the system of Christianity include many things that are not even the genuine feathers and skins in the Bible. It is a fact that Christ was born in a manger and raised in Nazareth. These definitely are truths in the Bible; however they are "feather-truths" or "skin-truths," not "meat-truths." An example of a "meat-truth" is John 1:1 and 14. These verses declare that the Word, which is God, became flesh and tabernacled among us, full of grace and reality. John 1:16 goes on to say, "For of His fullness we all received, and grace upon grace." Verse 4 of the same chapter says this: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." In these verses we have meat, not feathers or skin.

More meat is found in chapters fourteen and fifteen of the Gospel of John. John 14:23 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." This verse says nothing about Christmas, Easter, or the system of Christianity. Neither do any other verses in the Gospel of John. This verse declares that the Son and the Father will make an abode with the one who loves the Lord Jesus. Furthermore, in John 15:4 the Lord says, "Abide in Me and I in you." In this chapter He also says, "I am the vine, you are the branches" (v. 5). Verses such as these do not have any feathers or skin. Rather, they are full of nourishing meat.

When you eat a chicken dinner, do you pay attention mainly to the skin or to the meat? Certainly we would all concentrate on the meat. If my wife were to serve me a meal of chicken skin, I would be very unhappy. However, my wife would never do such a thing. Instead, she would serve the nourishing meat of the chicken. I enjoy this kind of meat, and I am strengthened and supplied by it.

What kind of Bible do you have? Is your Bible a book only of feathers or of skins, or is your Bible more a book of meat? We should be careful about the way we answer this question. The best answer is to say, "My Bible is not only a book of feathers and skins, but also a book of rich meat." A chicken needs feathers and skin as well as meat. Without feathers and skin, a chicken would not be able to grow. In like manner, in the Bible we have the skin, the feathers, and the meat. But the tragedy among Christians today is that they care for the feathers and the skin, but they do not care much for the meat. Therefore, my burden is to minister the meat of the Word to the Lord's people.

FEASTING ON CHRIST

In the book of 1 Corinthians there are many feathers, and there is a great deal of skin. But in our spiritual cooking we need to pay more attention to the meat. Most readers of 1 Corinthians 5 pay attention to an uncomely feather, the case of the sinful brother who committed incest. In reading this chapter we cannot avoid this matter. But this is not the only matter covered in this chapter. In verses 7 and 8 Paul says, "For indeed our Passover, Christ, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore

keep the feast...." Paul's word about the Passover and keeping the feast is not skin or feathers--it is meat. Here Paul indicates that we are keeping the feast of unleavened bread. Christ is our Passover and our feast of unleavened bread. We can enjoy Him and feast on Him throughout our Christian life.

The feast of unleavened bread lasted for seven days. These seven days typify the entire course of our Christian life. Therefore, during our whole Christian life, Christ is our feast, our unleavened bread. The more we feast on Him, the more we become unleavened.

A HELP IN STUDYING THE BIBLE

By comparing the meat in 1 Corinthians 5 with the feathers, we learn the proper way to study the Bible. As we read the Bible, we need to pay attention not only to the feathers and the skin, but much more to the meat. I hope that this word concerning the feathers, the skin, and the meat will be helpful to us in our reading of the Word of God.

ASPECTS OF THE PATTERN

In the foregoing message we pointed out that Paul is a pattern of a person who lives Christ for the church. Now we must go on to ask what kind of person Paul was as such a pattern. The answer to this question is that Paul was an attached person, a person attached to Christ, the anointed One. In 2 Corinthians 1:21 Paul says, "But He Who firmly attaches us with you unto Christ and has anointed us is God." Anyone who is not attached to Christ, any unattached person, cannot live Christ for the church. If we would live Christ for the church, we must learn of Paul as our pattern to be a person attached to Christ.

According to 1:21, those who are attached to Christ are anointed by God. Hence, one who lives Christ for the church must be an anointed person. It is not sufficient to be educated, instructed, or trained; we must be anointed. If we are not anointed, we cannot live Christ for the church. We all need to be anointed.

In 1:22 Paul goes on to say that God "has also sealed us and given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts." One who

lives Christ for the church is also a person who has been sealed by God. To be sealed by God means to be owned, possessed, by Him. If we have not been sealed by God, we cannot live Christ for the church.

In 2:14 Paul says, "But thanks be to God, Who always leads us in triumph in the Christ, and manifests through us the savor of the knowledge of Him in every place." As we have pointed out, the verb "leads us in triumph" means to lead a man as a captive in a triumphal procession. Therefore, in this verse Paul refers to being captured by Christ. According to the human concept, it is not a good thing to be captured. No one wants to be a captive. But we need to be captured by the Lord so that we may live Christ for the church.

We also need to be subdued. However, neither the brothers nor the sisters like to be subdued. It is surely very difficult for a young woman to be subdued by her husband. Rather, her attitude may be that even though she married her husband, she has no intention of being subdued by him. Naturally speaking, none of us likes to be subdued. For us, it is humiliating to be subdued. Nevertheless, if we would live Christ for the church, we must be subdued. It is not humiliating to be subdued by the Lord--it is glorious.

Finally, if we would live Christ for the church, we must be led by Him. We need to be captured, subdued, and led. We, however, prefer to lead others, not to be led by someone else. If we would live Christ for the church, we all need to be led.

Concerning living Christ for the church, we have listed six matters: attached, anointed, sealed, captured, subdued, and led. As we shall see in the next message, all this is that we may scatter the incense of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE EIGHTEEN

ATTACHED, ANOINTED, SEALED, CAPTURED, SUBDUED, AND LED TO SCATTER THE INCENSE OF CHRIST

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 2:14-16

Paul is a pattern of living Christ for the church. According to his word in 2 Corinthians, if we would live Christ for the church, we need to be attached, anointed, sealed, captured, subdued, and led to scatter the incense of Christ. In 2:14 Paul says, "But thanks be to God, Who always leads us in triumph in the Christ, and manifests through us the savor of the knowledge of Him in every place." In this verse Paul uses two metaphors: captives in a triumphal procession and incense-bearers scattering incense in such a procession. As incense-bearers, the apostles scatter the savor of the knowledge of Christ in His triumphal ministry as in a triumphal procession. The apostles are such incense-bearers in the ministry of Christ and captives in the train of His triumph as well. Paul was attached, anointed, sealed, captured, subdued, and led to scatter the incense of Christ. We also need to experience all these matters so that we may scatter the incense of Christ.

SCATTERING INCENSE

Second Corinthians 1:21 and 22 and 2:14-16 are wonderful verses. In these five verses there are a number of marvelous truths. According to 1:21 and 22, we must be firmly attached to Christ, we must be anointed by God, and we must be sealed with the Spirit. Furthermore, according to 2:14-16, we need to be captured, subdued, and led. All this is that we may scatter the incense of our

Savior, the

incense of the One whom we love to the uttermost. In my ministry I am not merely a teacher or a preacher--I am one scattering the incense of my Lord. I am beside myself with love for Him, and I desire to scatter His incense. Every one in the Lord's recovery must be a person scattering the incense of Christ. Wherever we go we should scatter this incense.

Some have wondered why a number of Christians in this country have been willing to receive my ministry. The reason is that I am scattering the incense of Christ. This is my unique occupation, my unique profession. My major in the heavenly university was scattering the incense of Christ. I expect that in the years to come many among us, especially the young people, will rise up to scatter Christ's incense. Young people, your aspiration should be to scatter the incense of Christ. Regarding this, you need to say, "By the Lord's grace, I shall become one who scatters the incense of Christ wherever I go."

I believe that in the next ten years many of today's young people will become those who scatter the incense of Christ. I believe there will still be time for the young people to grow up and be used by the Lord. Because of the immaturity of Christians, the bride is not yet ready for the Lord's coming. The Lord will not come for the bride until she is mature and ready for Him. Until the bride is prepared, the Lord will continue to execute God's government and carry on His heavenly ministry to hasten the process of our maturing. We cannot mature overnight. Anything of life needs time to grow. It is possible to make hundreds of artificial flowers in a day, but genuine flowers need time to grow. I believe that during the time required for the bride to grow and mature, many young people will scatter the incense of Christ. In the years to come, the Lord may lead certain ones to different places. Wherever we may go, we should scatter the incense.

I can testify that the opposition to the Lord's recovery is actually a positive sign. It is a sign that the recovery truly is of the Lord and that it is His move on earth. Hallelujah,

we are in the Lord's recovery! We are growing up, and we are being raised up to scatter the incense of Christ.

ATTACHED CORPORATELY TO THE ANOINTED ONE

In 1:21 Paul says, "But He Who firmly attaches us with you unto Christ and has anointed us is God." Paul was not attached to Christ in an individualistic way. Rather, he says that the apostles were attached with all the other believers. The Greek word rendered "with" in verse 21 means together with. Together with the rest of the believers, the apostles have been attached to Christ, the anointed One. This proves that Paul was not individualistic. Even though he was the greatest apostle, he still needed all the other believers. It was with the believers in Corinth that he was attached to Christ. Hence, he was attached to Him corporately, not individualistically.

The One to whom we have been attached is Christ, God's anointed One. The Bible reveals that all the ointment of God has been poured out upon God's anointed One. Apart from Him, there is no ointment, no anointing. When the anointing was poured upon Christ, the process of anointing was completed. There is no ointment other than that which is on Christ, the anointed One. God does not do any more anointing. What He does concerning us today is to attach us together to this anointed One. Because we have been attached to Him, we are attached to the anointing. For this reason, the anointing follows the attaching. God has attached us, and He has also anointed us. After we are attached, we are anointed spontaneously.

Do you know what it means to be anointed by God? It means that we are put into all the riches of the Triune God. The riches of the Triune God are now the ointment, and the ointment has been poured out upon Christ. When we are attached to Christ, we are under the anointing. In this way, we are anointed. We are put into the practical enjoyment of all the riches of the Triune God.

POSSESSED BY THE LORD

In 1:22 Paul goes on to say that God has also sealed us

and given the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts. The anointing in verse 21 is the sealing. Since God has anointed us in Christ, He has also sealed us in Him. This seal is a mark placed upon us by God. This mark can be compared to a person's signature. Whenever I purchase a new book, I immediately write my name in it. Every book belonging to me bears my signature. Writing my signature in a book illustrates what it means to be sealed by God. If we would live Christ, we must be attached to Him and enjoy the anointing. Then this anointing will become a seal indicating that we are possessed by the Lord. Now that we have been anointed and sealed, we no longer belong to Satan or the world. We do not even belong to ourselves. We belong to the Lord, to Christ, God's anointed One. Hallelujah, we are His!

In order to live Christ, we must first have Christ. The same is true in principle with spending money. Spending money requires that we have money to spend. If we are in debt and have no money in our account, then we do not have any money to spend. Likewise, if we do not have Christ, we cannot possibly live Him. But because we have been attached to the anointed One, anointed with the riches of the Triune God, and also sealed, we have the spiritual wealth required to write "checks" and draw on the riches from our spiritual bank account. We can live Christ because we have Christ, and we have Christ because we have been attached, anointed, and sealed. Paul, the pattern of a person who lives Christ for the church, was attached, anointed, and sealed. Such a one has an abundance of riches to use for the church.

FULLY CAPTURED AND SUBDUED

Although we have been attached, anointed, and sealed, we still need to be captured by Christ in full. Is it not true that at least part of your being has not yet been captured by the Lord? Perhaps a rather large percentage of your inner being has not yet been captured by Him. A brother who has been partially captured by Christ may say to himself, "Tomorrow is the Lord's Day once again. I don't want to go to the church meeting, but it is necessary for

me to go. I'm sorry that I became a Christian. Now that I have been saved, I know that I can't escape from the Lord. I would like to get away from Him, but it is impossible. Christ will not let me go. Furthermore, my wife loves the Lord and is fervent for the church life. She brings all the children to the church. I would much rather do something else instead of attending the meeting tomorrow, but I am overruled by my family. They all want me to attend the meeting. Therefore, I have no choice in this matter. I must go to the meeting tomorrow to suffer and feel miserable." This is the attitude of one who has been captured by Christ only to a very limited degree.

Unless we have been captured by Christ, we cannot live Him. I surely have learned this secret. Do not think that I am always willing to be captured by the Lord. Sometimes a part of my being is not pleased to be captured by Him. I have learned that if we would be captured, we need grace. Whenever you sense that part of you is not willing to be captured by the Lord, remember that you have been attached, anointed, and sealed. Sometimes when I sense such an unwillingness within me, I recall the fact that I have been attached, anointed, and sealed. Then I realize that it is my destiny to be captured and subdued so that I may live Christ. Only those who have been captured by Christ and subdued by Him can live Him for the church. This is our destiny and, ultimately, concerning this we have no choice, preference, or opinion. We must be captured and subdued.

Have you been subdued by the Lord? I know of some wives who eventually were subdued by their husbands. After a period of years, they were willing to recognize the husband as the head. But to be subdued by one's husband is not nearly as good as being subdued by Christ. Christ is always gentle, but He is strong and persistent. He is able to wait as long as necessary until we are willing to be subdued by Him. If we are not willing to be subdued today, He may wait for another year or even longer. If we are not subdued in this age, He knows we shall be subdued in the

next age, or in the New Jerusalem. Eventually we all shall be subdued by the Lord. It is much better to be subdued today. It is wise and also very profitable to be subdued now. To wait even a short time before we are subdued may cause us to suffer loss.

I can testify that I do not regret being subdued by Christ. When I was young, I had a good job with a good income. Then one day Christ came in to require me to give up my job and serve Him full time. However, I had a number of questions. The Lord told me simply to believe in Him. I said to the Lord that I was willing to suffer hunger for Him as long as He would take care of my wife and children. The Lord encouraged me to trust my wife and children to His care. Nevertheless, I was concerned about what would happen to my family if I left my job to serve the Lord. I realized that the Lord is the almighty One, but still I felt it was safer to have the family in my own care. I struggled with the Lord for a long time. I wondered why He had provided me with a wife and children if it was His intention that I serve Him. But after a while, I gave in to the Lord. This was nearly fifty years ago, and I can testify that the Lord has rewarded me a hundredfold. My point here is that whenever the Lord demands that we do something, He will most assuredly supply us for that matter. To live Christ is not only a demand; it is a requirement that implies a promise. Every demand in the New Testament implies that the Lord will supply what we need to meet that demand. The more He demands of us, the more He will supply us.

In order to live Christ, we must first be captured by the Lord and then subdued by Him. If I had stayed with my job and not left it to serve the Lord full time, that would have been a sign that I had not been captured and subdued. If that had been the situation, I could not have been used by the Lord for the raising up of churches in His recovery. Whether or not so many churches could be raised up depended upon the capturing and subduing of one person. What the Lord is able to do through you also depends on your willingness to be captured and subdued

by Him. Therefore, it is a very significant matter to be captured and subdued by Christ.

LED BY CHRIST

Paul could say to the Lord, "Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You have attached me, anointed me, sealed me, captured me, and subdued me. Now I am ready to be led by You." Then the Lord could come in to lead Paul in His triumphal procession. As an apostle, Paul did not do anything according to his own choice, preference, or taste. On the contrary, he was truly led by the Lord. Paul took the Lord's leading, no matter what it was. Concerning the Lord's leading, Paul did not have any choice. As the metaphor in 2:14 indicates, he considered himself a captive who had been placed in Christ's triumphal procession, a procession celebrating Christ's victory. How could such a captured one have any choice? There is no choice for captives. Because Paul, a captive, was willing to be led, wherever he went was the Lord's leading. Paul did not travel in Asia Minor to carry on a work of evangelization. No, his travel was a move in Christ's procession. Christ's triumphal procession was advancing through Asia Minor and onward to Macedonia and Achaia. Paul was in a procession led by God to celebrate the victory of God's Son.

I do not believe that my coming to this country was any kind of missionary work. It also was a move in Christ's procession, the Lord's celebration of His victory in His recovery. As one captured, subdued, and led, I am a captive in this procession. Praise the Lord that the procession celebrating Christ's victory in the recovery has come to this country!

By being attached, anointed, sealed, captured, subdued, and led, we scatter the incense of Christ. This scattering of the incense is actually to live Christ. The Christ we live has incense, and He even is this incense. Therefore, when we scatter the incense of Christ, we scatter Christ Himself.

This scattering of Christ as the incense has an effect: it is a matter of life or death. For those who have been

chosen by God, the scattering of the incense is unto life. But to others, it is unto death. This is a very serious matter, and Paul asks, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2:16).

We praise the Lord that it is possible for us to be those who scatter the incense of Christ. When we have been attached, anointed, sealed, captured, subdued, and led, we shall scatter the incense of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE NINETEEN

COMPETENT OF CHRIST AS THE ALPHABET TO WRITE LIVING LETTERS WITH THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:3-6

In the book of 2 Corinthians, a very deep book, Paul presents himself as a pattern of living Christ for the church. In this Epistle Paul presents us his living, the way he lives. Paul's life is a pattern for all Christians.

When I was a young Christian, I heard again and again that Christ is our example and that we should imitate Him. I was also taught that the Apostle Paul is an example for us. In 1 Timothy 1:15 and 16 Paul says that he was the greatest sinner, the chief of sinners, but he received mercy in order to become an example, a pattern, for the believers. However, I never heard that in 2 Corinthians Paul presents himself as a pattern of living Christ for the church.

Paul is a pattern not only of living Christ, but of living Christ for the church. As God's new creation, we are destined to live Christ. Furthermore, we are to live Christ not merely for salvation, spirituality, power, or evangelical work, but for the church. To live Christ for the church is the destiny God has appointed to His new creation.

JUSTIFICATION UNTO LIFE

The matter of living Christ for the church is something that has been lost and that needs to be recovered. At the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther recovered justification by faith. By God's grace, Luther was willing to risk his life for the recovery of justification by faith. Justification by faith in an objective way can be compared

to the skin of a chicken; it is not the meat. According to Romans and Galatians, justification by faith must have a result. These books reveal that justification by faith is unto life. This means that justification is with a view to life. It should not stand by itself; rather, it must result in life.

Caspar Schwenckfeld saw that justification must result in life. He may be regarded as one who touched not only the "skin" of the revelation in the Bible, but also began to see the "meat" under the skin. One day I was very surprised to learn that Schwenckfeld used some of the expressions we use today to speak of life. He even spoke of the life-giving Spirit. My point in referring to Luther and Schwenckfeld is to say that the Lord wants to recover not only the skin, that is, certain fundamental doctrines; He also wants to recover the meat under the skin of the Word.

CHRIST AS OUR NOURISHING PORTION

In message seventeen of this Life-study I pointed out that the truths of the Bible can be compared to the feathers, skin, and meat of a chicken. In reading 1 Corinthians 1, for example, we may pay attention to the feathers and neglect the skin. In 1 Corinthians 1:12 Paul 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." In this verse we have feathers, not meat. Readers of 1 Corinthians 1 often pay attention to the feathers in this verse; however, they neglect the meat in verse 9. There Paul says, "God is faithful, through Whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." Many read 1 Corinthians 1 without paying adequate attention to this verse and to the meat contained in it. Others may study this verse, but without an adequate understanding of the word fellowship. They may think that to have fellowship with the Son is merely to contact the Son of God in a prayerful way. Not many believers realize that the fellowship of the Son refers to the enjoyment of the Son of God. The Son of God here is rich meat to be our portion.

The thought of enjoying the Lord as rich, nourishing

meat is found in Luke 15. In the parable of the prodigal son, the prodigal repented and came back home. The father received him and had the best robe put upon him. Some Bible teachers use this parable to teach that salvation is by grace, not by works. The son planned to tell the father to make him like one of the hired servants. The father, however, interrupted him and told the servants to put the best robe upon him. This robe signifies Christ as our righteousness. We received this robe not by our working, but by grace, the free gift, of God the Father.

I myself preached gospel messages from Luke 15 emphasizing this point. But there is more in this parable than the robe. There is the fatted calf. The robe can be likened to the skin, and the fatted calf to the meat. For years, I preached a "robe gospel," that is, the message that salvation is by grace. But eventually I came to see that Luke 15 also speaks of the fatted calf. The robe is outward; it is something that covers us. The fatted calf is related to something inward; it is food for nourishment. After I saw this, I began to preach the gospel in a somewhat different way, emphasizing the fatted calf as well as the robe. However, certain ones who saw only the robe and not the fatted calf, only the skin and not the meat, were not happy with this kind of gospel preaching. They did not agree with the teaching concerning the eating of the fatted calf.

Sometimes in my preaching from Luke 15 I said that the prodigal son repented and returned not because his clothes were dirty but because of hunger. The son came back home because he was hungry, so hungry that he was even willing to feed on the husks that were given to swine. Luke 15:17 says of the prodigal, "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" Therefore, he resolved: "I will arise and go to my father" (v. 18). He did not say to himself that in his father's house were many robes. No, he remembered that there was "bread enough and to spare." Instead of remaining where he was and starving to death, he decided to return home.

Suppose the father had said, "Poor son, you look like a beggar. I'll tell the servants to get the robe I have prepared for you and put it on you so that you may have a proper appearance." If the father had provided only a robe to cover him, the son might have said, "Father, I'm hungry. You are satisfied with the robe, but I need something to eat. Please give me some food." The father, however, did not care only for the robe. After telling the servants to bring forth the best robe, the father said, "And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry" (v. 23).

Furthermore, the elder son was jealous not because of the robe, but because of the feast. He complained to his father: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" (v. 29). The elder son did not say that the prodigal son had the best robe. He was jealous because the fatted calf had been prepared for his younger brother.

In certain points the teaching in the Lord's recovery is different from that common among today's Christians. Some who care only for the robe and not for the fatted calf go so far as to say that our teaching is heretical. In the recovery we have both the robe and the fatted calf. Luther recovered the robe, but now we are also enjoying the recovery of the fatted calf. By the Lord's mercy we are in His recovery enjoying Christ, the fatted calf, as our rich, nourishing portion.

MEMBERS OF CHRIST

When you read chapter six of 1 Corinthians, what will attract your attention, the feathers or the meat? Paul's word condemning fornication is a "feather truth." Anyone who is ethical or moral will appreciate Paul's word regarding this matter. In reading this chapter, some Christians pay attention to verse 19, where Paul says that our body is the temple of God and that we should glorify God in our body because we have been purchased with a price. Others in reading this chapter would pay attention to Paul's word concerning lawsuits between brothers. Not

many would recognize that the key verse in this chapter is verse 15.

Some may wonder why I say verse 15 is the key verse when I have placed such strong emphasis on verse 17. In verse 17 Paul says, "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit." In verse 15 he says, "Your bodies are members of Christ." Verse 17 explains how it is possible for our bodies to be the members of Christ. Because our bodies are members of Christ, we should not misuse them. Our bodies have been organically united to Christ; they are now a part of Christ. How can we use such holy bodies to commit sin? But how is it possible for our bodies to be the members of Christ? This is possible because we are one spirit with the Lord. Since our spirit has been joined to the Lord as one spirit, our spirit should be the predominant part of our being. Then our body should be under the control of the spirit and saturated by the spirit. First the spirit becomes the spirit of our mind and, eventually, the spirit of our body. In this way our bodies become the members of Christ. This is the meat in 1 Corinthians 6.

LIVING LETTERS

In chapters two, three, and four of 2 Corinthians it is difficult to find any feathers or skin. There certainly are not any feathers, but in chapter three there may be a thin layer of skin. In 3:1 Paul asks, "Are we beginning again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?" With this verse as the basis, some Christian groups have set up a system of writing letters of recommendation for those moving from one place to another. Those who follow this practice claim that letters of recommendation were written for the saints during Paul's time. This, however, is a thin layer of skin; it definitely is not the meat in 2 Corinthians 3. It was not Paul's intention in this chapter to write concerning such letters of commendation. Rather, his intention was to speak concerning the writing of living letters by the life-giving Spirit of the living God.

As one who was a pattern for living Christ for the church, Paul was competent to write living letters. He was

qualified, and he had a mastery of the skill necessary for this. Paul was competent of Christ to write these living letters with Christ Himself as the spiritual alphabet. The book of Revelation says clearly that Christ is the alpha, the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and also the omega, the last letter. Surely Christ is also all the letters between alpha and omega.

No matter how long a particular composition may be, it is written with words composed of the letters of the alphabet. If we use a typewriter to write the word God, we simply have to press the keys G-o-d. We can go on to write other words and then sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. In the same principle, with Christ as the heavenly alphabet, Paul could write living letters.

Based upon the statement in the book of Revelation that Christ is the alpha and the omega, we also say that He is all the letters of the heavenly alphabet. Do you believe that Christ is only two letters and not the remainder of the letters? No, He is all the other letters. Anyone who lives Christ for the church knows Christ as alpha, beta, gamma, delta and every other letter of the heavenly alphabet.

INSCRIBING CHRIST INTO THE SAINTS

Paul also knew how to use the divine typewriter to write Christ on others. Whenever he was with the saints, he would write Christ upon them. Paul knew Christ in a detailed way. He also knew how to write living letters of Christ. If Paul were to speak with you for a period of time, a certain amount of Christ, perhaps a paragraph, would be written on your heart.

In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul uses the word "inscribe" to portray the way he wrote living letters of Christ. His writing did not merely write Christ on the saints; it inscribed Christ into them. In my ministry I also endeavor to follow Paul to inscribe Christ into the saints. It is not my desire merely to pass on doctrine. I do not even like to talk about being one spirit with the Lord simply as a doctrine.

Rather, I care for the writing of Christ in life. Then the saints will receive not only the knowledge of doctrine, but the actual inscribing of Christ in their hearts.

Suppose a brother learns the doctrine that he is one spirit with the Lord. But this doctrine may not help him in his relationship with his wife. However, if a brother has Christ inscribed into him, he will experience being one spirit with the Lord in his married life. This is a proof that he has been helped by the ministry that inscribes Christ into his being.

Paul, a pattern of living Christ for the church, was made competent, sufficient, qualified, to write living letters. His qualification was of Christ and of all that Christ is. In Paul's spiritual writings, Christ was every letter, word, sentence, paragraph, and chapter.

This inscribing of Christ into others is a deeper aspect of living Christ for the church.

My concern is not only for living Christ, but also for inscribing Christ into the saints. This inscribing of Christ into others is not for my work; it is for the church so that God's administration may be carried out and His eternal purpose may be fulfilled.

The Lord's recovery has a very promising future. The future is bright because Christ is all the letters of the heavenly alphabet. I believe that in the years to come the Lord will use many of the saints to inscribe Christ into others. These saints will not preach the gospel merely in a doctrinal way; they will write Christ into the inner being of others. Those who hear such a preaching of the gospel may not remember all the doctrinal points, but they will not be able to erase the Christ who has been written into them.

We also may forget many of the messages we have heard. Nevertheless, Christ has been inscribed into us, and He remains in our being. Even if you rebel against the Lord, you will not be able to remove what has been inscribed of Christ into you. Some have written to me saying that they are not able to forget the Christ I ministered to them. Even though they do not agree with me in certain matters, they still appreciate my ministering

Christ to them. This proves that we cannot erase the Christ who has been inscribed into our being.

Religion is a matter of mere doctrine, not of the experience of Christ. Many are still arguing over doctrines. But in the Lord's recovery we care for Christ in a deep way, not in a superficial way. We want to go deeper than the feathers and skin to touch the meat of Christ, to experience Christ as the deep things of God to be our portion.

I came to this country with a positive burden to write Christ into others. Sinners are not the only ones who need to have Christ written on them. Even pastors, theologians, and professors need more of Christ written into their being. Some have spent a great deal of time to gain academic knowledge, but they do not have much of Christ written into them. Some have a thorough knowledge of the Greek language; however, they do not experience Christ as all the letters of the heavenly alphabet.

LETTERS OF CHRIST READ BY OTHERS

On the one hand, we should seek to write Christ on others; on the other hand, we are living letters of Christ, living epistles, and others can read the Christ who has been inscribed into us. Young people, when you visit your parents, be assured that they are reading the Christ who has been written into you. They may read you in a secret way, without letting you know that they are reading you. Some may even oppose you and criticize the church life in the Lord's recovery. I would encourage you not to be bothered by this kind of opposition or criticism. Instead of being offended or discouraged, you need to realize that your parents are reading the Christ who has been inscribed into you. Sometimes even opposition is a sign that others are reading us.

I know of many cases of parents who eventually turned to the Lord's recovery because of what they read of Christ in their children. A father may repent, weep in the presence of his son, and say to him, "Son, I am sorry for the way I offended you. Over the years I opposed you and even rebuked you. But all the time I was reading you. I

must

admit that I saw something in you. What I have seen in you now causes me to weep before you and before the Lord. I would like to go with you to one of the church meetings." Parents who oppose their children may later come into the church life. It may take time for a young person to exhibit before his parents the Christ who has been written into him. But after a while the parents will be convinced of the genuineness of this experience of Christ.

Young people, when you visit your parents, you should exhibit Christ to them, but you should not perform in any way. Neither should you try to defend the Lord's recovery by arguing with your parents or by claiming to know many things. Simply be what you are. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul says, "By the grace of God I am what I am." When you visit your parents at home, simply be what you are by the grace of God. Christ has been inscribed into you. Others will be convinced not by your performance, but by what you are. What a young person is in his being especially convinces his parents, for every parent desires good things to happen to his children. Eventually, if you continue to have Christ written upon you and manifest this Christ to your parents, they will be convinced and may even decide to follow you into the church life.

The important matter is that Christ is inscribed into us. The more Christ is written into our being, the more others will be able to read Him in us.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY

COMPETENT OF CHRIST AS THE ALPHABET TO WRITE LIVING LETTERS WITH THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT OF THE LIVING GOD

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:3-6

In 3:3 Paul says, "Being manifested that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but in fleshy tablets of the heart." Here Paul speaks of a letter of Christ ministered by the apostles. Such a letter is written, inscribed, with the Spirit of the living God. All those who are co-workers and leading ones in the churches must look to the Lord for His mercy and grace in order to carry on the work of writing Christ into the saints. Instead of merely teaching doctrines to others or only teaching the Bible, we must do the unique work of writing living letters of Christ.

CHRIST IN OUR EXPERIENCE

If we would inscribe Christ into others, we must first have Christ in our experience. If we do not have Christ in an experiential way, then with what shall we write a letter of Christ? We shall, of course, have nothing with which to write. If we try to do any writing, it will be like trying to type with a typewriter that has a dry ribbon. One day I was typing and discovered that nothing was on the paper. Then I learned that the ribbon was completely dry. There was no ink on the ribbon to transfer the letters to the paper. I use this to illustrate the fact that in order to write

a living letter of Christ, we must first have the experience of Christ ourselves.

HEAVENLY INK

Living letters of Christ are written with the life-giving Spirit of the living God. The life-giving Spirit is the heavenly ink. If we would have this kind of ink, we need to experience Christ and be filled with Christ. This means that we must be thoroughly saturated with the life-giving Spirit. If we are persons full of Christ, saturated with the life-giving Spirit, we shall have the riches of Christ to use in writing Christ into others. We shall also have the life-giving Spirit of the living God as the heavenly ink. The ink is the Spirit, the essence of the ink is Christ, and we are the pen.

Any kind of ink must have a particular essence. Ink is different from plain water. It is not possible to write a letter using only water. There must be a certain substance added to the water to make ink. Praise the Lord, the heavenly ink is the Spirit, and the essence of this Spirit-ink is Christ with all His riches. To have this ink in our experience, we must enjoy Christ, possess Christ, be filled with Christ, be saturated with Christ, and be covered with Christ.

Others should always find us in Christ. In Philippians 3:9 Paul speaks of being found in Christ. He wanted to be found by others in Christ, not in anything other than Christ. Paul did not want to be found in himself, in his culture, or in his particular way of living.

We also should aspire to be found in Christ, to be one with Christ, saturated with Christ, and even constituted of Christ and reorganized with Him. Then, being anointed with the Spirit and filled with the life-giving Spirit, we shall have the Spirit as the ink to write Christ into others. Then as we speak to others, we shall spontaneously write upon them with the life-giving Spirit of the living God. The element of the riches of Christ will be infused into them, imparted into their being. In this way, Christ will be

inscribed into them. To write Christ into others in this way is truly to live Christ for the church.

EXPERIENCING THE TRIUNE GOD

The title of this message is "Competent of Christ as the Alphabet to Write Living Letters with the Life-giving Spirit of the Living God." This title refers to the Triune God: Christ, the life-giving Spirit, and the living God. First, we are competent of Christ, the Son. Because we are competent of Christ, we may write living letters with the life-giving Spirit. Thus, we have the Son and the Spirit. These living letters are of the living God, that is, of the Father. Hence, in the writing of living letters, we have the experience of the Trinity in a real way.

The pure revelation of the Trinity in the Bible is very different from the tritheistic concept of the Trinity held unconsciously by some Christians today. In certain fundamental groups the believers are taught that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are separate and distinct Persons. Actually, this is tritheism, the belief that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three Gods. Of course, hardly anyone would teach explicitly that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three Gods. However, some believers hold this concept subconsciously and unconsciously.

COEXISTENCE AND COINHERENCE

Several years ago certain ones put out a written statement in which they said that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three distinct and separate Persons. In our rebuttals we pointed out that the three of the Triune God are distinct, but They are not separate. As a result, some of them are careful not to use the word separate with respect to the three of the Trinity.

It is heretical to teach that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are separate. According to the Bible, it is impossible to separate the Father from the Son, or the Son from the Spirit. In John 14:10 the Lord Jesus said, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words which I speak to you, I do not speak from

Myself; but the Father Who abides in Me, He does His works." The Lord's word here clearly indicates that the Father and the Son are inseparable. In verse 11, the Lord went on to say, "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me." Here we have not only the coexistence of the Father and the Son, but also Their coinherence. The three of the Godhead--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--are both coexistent and coinherent. We all should be familiar with the terms coinhere, coinherence, and coinherent.

The Father, the Son, and the Spirit all exist at the same time. This is coexistence. Furthermore, the Father exists in the Son and the Spirit; the Son exists in the Father and the Spirit; and the Spirit exists in the Father and the Son. This is coinherence. Therefore, if we would have a proper understanding concerning the Trinity, we must recognize not only the coexistence of the Father, Son, and Spirit, but we must also believe in Their coinherence.

THE THREE-ONE GOD

We do not believe in tritheism; rather, we believe in the Triune God. The word "triune" means three-one. It is composed of two Latin roots: tri-, meaning three and -une, meaning one. Hence, triune is three-one. We are not able to understand how God can be triune, that is, three-one. This eternal, divine mathematics is beyond our ability to understand. Nevertheless, according to the divine mathematics, God is three-one.

This matter of God's being triune may be illustrated by the fact that the Bible speaks of the Spirit of God and also of the seven Spirits. Is God's Spirit one or seven? Perhaps the best answer is to say that the Spirit of God is seven-one or one-seven. On the one hand, we all know that God's Spirit is uniquely one. On the other hand, in the book of Revelation, where we have the ultimate and consummate revelation of the Triune God, we read of the seven Spirits. Revelation 1:4 and 5 say, "Grace to you and peace from Him Who is, and Who was, and Who is coming, and from the seven Spirits Who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ." The seven Spirits here undoubtedly are the

Spirit of God, for They are ranked among the Triune God in these verses, mentioned between the Father (the One who is, who was, and who is coming) and the Son, Jesus Christ. In substance and existence, God's Spirit is one. In the intensified function and work of God's operation (signified by the number seven), God's Spirit is sevenfold. In Revelation 4:5 and 5:6 we also read concerning the seven Spirits.

However, in the Nicene Creed composed in A. D. 325 at the Council of Nicea held under Constantine the Great, there is no mention of the seven Spirits of God. At the time that council was convened, seven books of the New Testament, including Revelation and Hebrews, had not yet been officially recognized as authoritative. Perhaps this is why the Nicene Creed says nothing regarding the seven Spirits. This is one reason we say that the Nicene Creed is not complete. Other Christians may go by the decrees of the councils and follow the creeds, but we follow the entire Bible, the pure Word of God. It is a serious and significant matter to battle for the truth revealed in the Word of God.

We have pointed out that some Christians unconsciously believe not in the three-one God, but in three Gods. Others try to explain the Trinity by saying that the three Persons are one in essence, but separate in person; that is, in substance they are one, but in units they are three. This can be compared to saying that three coffee tables are one in substance, or essence, since all are made of the same kind of wood, but are different in shape. Are there three coffee tables or one? Certainly there are three. This illustration indicates that to speak of the Trinity in this way is to teach tritheism.

Many believers unconsciously hold to the concept of three Gods. We believe in the unique God, who is triune. In writing living letters with the life-giving Spirit, we experience the three-one God. We are competent of Christ, we write letters with the Spirit, and this Spirit is of the living God. Hallelujah, this is the Triune God!

OVER ALL, THROUGH ALL, AND IN ALL

Have you ever noticed that the description of the Father in Ephesians 4:6 implies the Triune God? This verse says, "One God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all." This indicates that even the Father Himself is threefold. The phrase "above all" denotes the Father as the source; the phrase "through all," the Son as the course; and the phrase "in all," the Spirit as the indwelling One. Therefore, this threefold description of the Father as above all, through all, and in all implies the Triune God.

NOT A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Traditional, fundamental theology has become a systematized or systematic theology. Many Christians admire such a systematic theology. However, I cannot agree with systematic theology, because the divine revelation in the Bible cannot be systematized. To systematize the divine revelation is like trying to systematize a living organism.

If you try to systematize any living thing, that thing will die. Can you systematize your physical human life? Can you systematically arrange your mind, emotion, will, soul, heart, conscience, and spirit? Do you know where your soul is? Can you locate your mind or your spirit? Can you say where your psychological heart is? If we are honest, we shall admit that we cannot locate these parts of our inner being. If we are not able to systematize our own finite being, then how can we presume by our limited human mentality to systematize the unlimited, infinite God? This is ridiculous! I believe it was Augustine who said that to try to analyze the Triune God is like using a dipper to measure the ocean.

Instead of trying to systematize the Triune God, we should simply believe whatever the Bible reveals concerning Him. Although we cannot systematize God, we can be competent of Christ to write living letters with the Spirit of the living God. This means that in our experience we enjoy the Triune God in writing living letters.

We are living letters of Christ. Paul was one who wrote such letters. Now we must follow him also to inscribe Christ into others and thereby to compose living letters of Christ. Wherever we go, we should write Christ into others. People are tired of theology and religion. Their need is to have Christ inscribed into them. Let us pray that many of us will go forth to write living letters with the life-giving Spirit of the living God.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-ONE

SHINING THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:7-11, 18; John 17:1; Luke 24:26; Acts 3:15; Rom. 6:4

TOUCHING THE INWARD REALITY OF THE WORD

In foregoing messages I have pointed out that if we would touch the "meat" in the Bible, we must go beyond the "feathers" and the "skin." Along with many other things, the Bible has both an outward appearance and an inward reality. For example, a human being has an outward appearance and also an inward reality. If you know a person merely according to his outward appearance, you actually do not know him at all. In order to know a person thoroughly, you need to know him according to his inner being. This requires that you spend much time with that person to know what he is like inwardly.

In 5:16 Paul says, "So that we, from now on, know no one according to flesh." To know others according to the flesh means to know them merely according to the outward appearance. Paul's desire was to know others according to the spirit, that is, according to the inner reality.

This was also the way Paul knew Christ: "Even if we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer." This means that Paul knew Christ no longer according to the outward appearance, but according to the inward spirit. This principle applies also in our study of the Bible. If we would know the Bible, we must know not only the outward form of the Word, but also the inward reality.

I was born into Christianity and as a little child learned the song, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." This is a good song; however, the truth contained in it is only a feather truth. It is not even part of the skin in the Word. Many of the sermons given in today's Christian circles are either in the category of feathers or in the category of skin. Few messages given among Christians take the listeners deeper than the skin and help them touch the genuine meat of the Word.

Prior to World War II, books were still being published that contained some weighty messages dealing with the meat of the Word. But in recent years it has been extremely difficult to find newly published books of this kind. Throughout the years, I have been observing the situation among Christians. I have been especially interested to see what kind of books and articles have been published concerning spiritual matters. According to my observation, since 1945 few books touching the meat of the Bible have been published. If others know of more books, I would appreciate knowing the titles and the authors. In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul speaks of the shining of the glory of the new covenant. This is part of the meat of the Word; it is not feathers or skin.

GLORY AND THE SPIRIT

What is the glory of the new covenant? In answer to this question, some may say that the shining of the glory of the new covenant is the Spirit. Others may reply that it is resurrection, or Christ in resurrection. It is surely true to say that the glory of the new covenant is the Spirit. Second 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." In this verse the preposition "from" is used twice. The first time is in the phrase "from glory to glory"; the second, in the phrase "from the Lord Spirit." There is a connection between "from glory to glory" and "from the Lord Spirit." This connection is made apparent by Paul's use of the words "even as." This indicates that the matter of being from

glory to glory is a matter that is from the Spirit. This gives us the basis to say that glory is intimately related to the Spirit. In fact, in this verse the glory is equal to the Lord Spirit.

In 3:18 Paul says that we are being transformed into the same image. When we with unveiled face behold and reflect the glory of the Lord, He infuses us with the elements of what He is and what He has done. As a result, we are being transformed metabolically to have His life shape by His life power with His life essence, transfigured, mainly by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2), into His image. Being transformed indicates that we are in the process of transformation. The phrase "from glory to glory" means from one degree of glory to another degree. This points to a continuing process in life in resurrection. Furthermore, the phrase "from the Lord Spirit" indicates that the process is proceeding from the Spirit.

THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE

The first use of a divine title in the Bible is in Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (lit.) This verse speaks of God. The word God in Hebrew is Elohim. But in the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, we have another divine title. Revelation 22:17 says, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come!" Here we do not have God, Elohim; we have the Spirit. Furthermore, the Spirit and the bride speak together. How can this be, since the Spirit is divine and the bride is not? There is not this kind of utterance in Genesis 1. There is no verse which says, "In the beginning God and the angels created the heavens and the earth." On the contrary, Genesis 1:1 speaks only of God; it does not say "God and...." But Revelation 22:17 speaks concerning the Spirit and the bride.

We need to notice two important aspects of Revelation 22:17. First, as we have seen, the Spirit is mentioned with the bride; that is, the Spirit is mentioned with something additional. Second, this verse is not a demand; instead, it contains a promise related to the water of life.

When a young brother gets married, he is no longer single, no longer a bachelor, for he gains a wife as an addition. Now instead of a single person, there is a couple. Before he is married, whatever a young brother says, he says by himself alone. But after he gets married, it is possible for him and his wife to speak as one. Then it can be written concerning this couple, "He and his wife say...."

A UNIVERSAL COUPLE

The principle is the same in the Bible regarding the Spirit and the bride. The entire Bible tells us of a universal romance, the romance of a universal couple. This couple consists of God as the Husband and His chosen people as the bride. Therefore, at the end of the Bible we have the revelation of this universal couple.

When the Lord Jesus came, John the Baptist spoke of Him as the Lamb of God. According to John 1:29, John declared when he saw the Lord Jesus coming to him, "Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!" According to the third chapter of the Gospel of John, John the Baptist later spoke of the Lord Jesus as the Bridegroom. Some of John's disciples were jealous because of the fact that so many were coming to the Lord Jesus and following Him. They said to John, "Rabbi, He Who was with you across the Jordan, of Whom you testified, behold, He is baptizing and all are coming to Him" (John 3:26). As part of his reply, John said, "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices with joy because of the bridegroom's voice" (v. 29). By this we see that the Lord Jesus is not only the Lamb of God, but He is also the Bridegroom who deserves to have the bride.

The concept of a universal couple is found not only in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament as well. Even in the Old Testament we see that God desires to have a married life with His chosen people. For example, Isaiah 54:5 says, "For thy Maker is thine husband: The Lord of hosts is his name." God loves His people as a bridegroom

loves his bride. Thus, God's desire is to marry His people, to have them as His addition.

The provision of Eve to be a counterpart for Adam also illustrates that marriage involves a man gaining a wife to be his addition. According to Genesis 2, Adam was created first. According to Genesis 2:18, the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him." God did not want Adam to remain single, that is, to remain a bachelor. Therefore, He caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, took one of his ribs, and fashioned it into a woman. Before the woman was made and presented to him, Adam could not find anything to match him. Genesis 2:20 says, "Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him." But when God brought the woman to him, Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man" (v. 23). Eve was Adam's increase, his addition. This illustrates the principle that marriage means addition.

We may also compare a husband and his wife to the two halves of a melon. The husband is the first half of the melon, and his wife is the second half. Only when the two halves are put together is there a whole, complete melon.

Just as it was not good for Adam to be alone, single, so it is not good for God to be alone, to be a "bachelor." Without His chosen people as His bride, God is "single." He is only half of the universal couple. I realize that this thought is frightening to the doctrinal or theological mind. When they hear this, some may say, "Are you teaching that God in Himself is not complete? How can you compare God to a bachelor or to one half of a melon? This is heresy! No one should follow such a false teaching! God is almighty, perfect, and complete. As the great One, the King, the Ruler in the heavens, He is the object of worship. We have been created by Him, and we must prostrate ourselves before Him in worship." Of course, God in Himself is complete. However, many who use the truth of God's completeness to argue against the revelation in the Bible

concerning the universal couple see only the outward appearance of the Word. They know only the feathers and the skin. If we grasp the inward reality of the Word, we shall realize that God will never be satisfied with mere outward worship from His creatures. We shall know that, deep in His heart, He wants a bride.

A friend may do many things for a brother. Nevertheless, deep within, that brother may not be satisfied. Rather, he may say, "I'm not happy with any of these things. I only care for a wife. What I want is not my friends to buy things for me or do things for me. My unique desire is to enjoy a loving wife." If we truly know the Bible, we shall realize that the Lord's unique desire is for a bride. For this reason, one day, according to Revelation 19, there will be a proclamation: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). Ultimately, in Revelation 21 and 22, the Lord will have His bride for eternity. He will then be satisfied, and the Spirit and the bride together will say, "Come!"

In China it was the custom for announcements or invitations to be signed only by the husband. However, it is the custom in the West for both the husband and the wife to sign an invitation. This western practice illustrates the revelation in the Bible concerning the Spirit and the bride. In Revelation 22:17 we see that God is no longer single; He is coupled with His wife. For this reason, the Spirit *and* the bride say come. This means that God has a wife.

THE DEPTHS OF THE WORD

Those who regard it as heretical to speak of God having a wife know the Bible only in a superficial way. They have not touched the depths of the Word. In order to know anything, we must know the depths of that thing. This is also true, as we have indicated, of knowing a person. If you merely know my outward appearance, not the depths of my being, you do not actually know me.

Today few preach what is in the depths of the Bible. They only talk about what is on the surface, the feathers or the skin. They do not serve the meat of the Word to

others.

But if you are invited to someone's home for a turkey dinner, do they serve you the feathers and the skin? Certainly not! You will be served with the meat of the turkey. However, many Christians today are not being served with meat. Only the feathers and the skin are being set before them.

We should not be fully satisfied with any kind of teaching or preaching that does not serve the meat of the Bible. Do not give too much credit to those who only present the feathers and the skin. What we urgently need is to touch the depths of the Bible.

THE ALL-INCLUSIVE SPIRIT

The God revealed in Genesis 1:1 is a "bachelor" God. We may also say that He is the unprocessed God, the "raw" God. The sixty-six books of the Bible reveal the process through which the "single" God has passed. First He created the heavens and the earth as the environment for this process. One day God was incarnated; He was born of a virgin in Bethlehem. Certainly this was part of the process. If you do not regard this as a process, what would you call it? Through the process of incarnation, God became a little child. Isaiah 9:6 says that the name of the child born to us was the mighty God. The One who was born in a manger in Bethlehem and who grew up in the home of a carpenter in Nazareth was the very mighty God.

The Lord Jesus lived there in Nazareth, a small town, for thirty years. Then He came forth to minister. No one really understood Him. Those who thought they knew Him said, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" (Matt. 13:55-56). They were not able to understand where He gained "this wisdom and these works of power" (Matt. 13:54).

Eventually, the Lord Jesus went to the cross. Apparently when He died on the cross, He alone died on that cross. But in the sight of God, the entire universe, the

whole old creation, died with Him. Christ's death was all-inclusive, for this death terminated everything. After the Lord Jesus was crucified, He was buried in a tomb. Then He took a tour of Hades, the realm of the dead. On the third day Christ resurrected bodily and spiritually. Now, in resurrection, He is the life-giving Spirit.

As the life-giving Spirit, Christ is all-inclusive. This Spirit includes divinity, humanity, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. In this Spirit we have the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, even the seven Spirits. Because this Spirit contains the reality of every positive thing, we say that the Spirit is all-inclusive.

The compound ointment in Exodus 30 is a type of this all-inclusive Spirit. This ointment was composed of olive oil and four kinds of spices. The olive oil typifies the Spirit of God. The ointment, however, was constituted not only of oil; it was made of oil to which four spices had been added. These spices typify Christ in His humanity with His crucifixion and resurrection. The olive oil and the spices were mingled to produce an ointment. This ointment typifies the Spirit.

The olive oil was single; it was not all-inclusive. However, the ointment was all-inclusive, as signified by the fact that it was compounded of a number of elements. In Genesis 1 the Spirit of God likewise was single, but in Revelation 22 the Spirit is all-inclusive.

The Spirit is the ultimate expression of the Triune God. This Spirit includes all that Christ has achieved, attained, and obtained. This all-inclusive Spirit also includes all that Christ is. Furthermore, this Spirit has a counterpart, an increase, an addition. This means that the Spirit has something to match Him. God is no longer single, no longer a bachelor, for He has a bride to match Him. For this reason, the consummate revelation in the Bible is that of the all-inclusive Spirit with the bride.

The term "the Spirit" is short and simple, containing just two words. However, this simple title is all-inclusive. The Spirit comprises all that the Triune God is, all that He has accomplished, and all that He has achieved, obtained,

and attained. This Spirit also includes the process through which the Triune God has passed. Because God has passed through a long process and because the Spirit is His ultimate expression, Revelation 22:17 does not say, "God and the church"; it says, "The Spirit and the bride."

QUALIFIED TO BE THE BRIDE

If we would be qualified to be the Lord's bride, we must grow and pass through many things. Being the bride involves more than being the church. For example, a little girl is not qualified to be a bride. Before she can be a bride, she must grow to maturity. She must also attend school and learn many things. Then a man will choose her for his bride.

Different men may have different standards concerning whom they will consider for a wife. For example, someone with a doctoral degree may want a bride with a high education. He would regard anyone with less than a master's degree as unqualified to be his bride. Likewise, the Spirit has very high requirements for His bride. Will the Spirit take a bride who is immature? Surely, the answer is no. The Lord will not come for His bride until she is mature and fully prepared for Him.

Do not think that as long as we are the church, we are qualified to be the bride. This is similar to saying that any female, regardless of age or maturity, is qualified to be married. No, certain requirements must be fulfilled in order for us to be the bride. It is easy for Christians to say that we are all the church. But when the Lord Jesus comes as the Bridegroom, will we be qualified to be His bride? The Lord may tell us at that time that we are not yet qualified, that we need further growth and maturity. This understanding of the Bridegroom and the bride is according to the revelation of the holy Word.

Many Christians have been cheated and even drugged by teachings that go no further than the feathers and skin in the Word. Oh, we must see the depths of the truths the Lord has revealed from His Word to His recovery! How I thank Him that He has opened His Word to reveal what is

found in the depths! I praise the Lord for this. I can testify that I treasure the words, "the Spirit and the bride." When I read of this in Revelation 22:17, I want to leap for joy. I can testify that I earnestly desire to be included as part of the Lord's bride. Is this not your desire also?

But do you have the assurance that you will be included as part of the bride? Are you content merely to attend the church meetings as a so-called Sunday-goer? I do not believe that anyone who is merely a Sunday-goer can be part of the Lord's bride. When the time comes for the Lord to take His bride, will you be ready? Will you be qualified and matured? Will it be necessary for the Lord to say to you, "I saved you, but you have not yet grown"? We all need to grow and mature so that we may be qualified at the Lord's coming to be included as part of His bride.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-TWO

SHINING THE GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:7-11, 18; John 17:1; Luke 24:26; Acts 3:15; Rom. 6:4

The shining of the glory of the new covenant is actually the living of Christ. This means that to live Christ is to shine forth the new covenant glory.

COMING IN GLORY AND ABOUNDING IN GLORY

In 3:7 and 8 Paul says, "Now if the ministry of death, in letters engraved in stone, came in glory, so that the sons of Israel were not able to gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, which was being done away, how shall not rather the ministry of the Spirit be in glory?" Paul says that the ministry of death, that is, the ministry of the old covenant, came in glory. He does not say that the old covenant ministry had glory.

The proper translation of verse 9 should be this: "For if the ministry of condemnation came in glory, much rather the ministry of righteousness abounds in glory." The ministry of death came in glory but it did not have glory. We may use the matter of riding in a car as an illustration. Although you may not have a car, you may come to the meeting in a car belonging to someone else. The fact that you came in a car does not mean that the car belongs to you. Hence, to have a car is one thing, and to come in a car is another thing. In the same principle, having glory is very different from coming in glory.

Furthermore, in verse 9 Paul says that the ministry of righteousness abounds in glory. There is a great difference between the two predicates came and abounds. Once again

using the illustration of riding in a car, we may say that one person comes in a car, whereas another may own several cars, that is, he abounds with cars. The old covenant came in glory, but the new covenant ministry has glory and abounds in it.

What was the glory with which the old covenant came? Paul speaks of this glory in 3:7, where he says that the sons of Israel were not able to gaze at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, a glory which was being done away. That glory was the light which was shining temporarily on the face of Moses. The glory in which the old covenant came was a temporary glory. It perhaps did not last even a day. The shining on Moses' face lasted for only a short time.

CHRIST BLOSSOMING IN RESURRECTION

What, then, is the glory of the new covenant? What is the glory which the new covenant has and with which it abounds? Basically, in the Bible glory signifies the expression of God. Whenever God is expressed, that is glory. The expression of God is God glorified. Therefore, to say that God is glorified simply means that He is expressed.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was God incarnate. He did not come as God expressed; He came as God concealed. God was concealed within the physical body of the Lord Jesus. Inwardly there was God; outwardly there was the flesh. With this flesh there was no glory. According to John 17, when the Lord Jesus was about to die, He prayed, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You" (v. 1). In John 17:5 the Lord went on to say, "And now, glorify Me with Yourself, Father, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." In His prayer the Lord seemed to be saying, "Father, now is the time for You to glorify Your Son. Father, let Your Son glorify You. The disciples have not yet fully seen what Your Son is and what You are in Me. Father, You are concealed, and I am hidden. For this reason I pray that You will glorify Your Son so that Your Son may glorify You."

We may use the blossoming of a carnation flower as an illustration of what it means for the Lord Jesus to be glorified. A carnation seed does not have any glory. After a carnation seed is sown into the earth, the seed dies and then it begins to grow up. It sprouts, it grows into a plant, and eventually it blossoms. This blossoming is the glorification of the carnation seed. Because a carnation seed dies when it is sown into the soil, we may say that its blossoming is its resurrection. Glorification, therefore, is equal to resurrection. The sprouting of the carnation seed is the beginning, the initial, stage of resurrection. The further growth of the carnation plant is the continuation of the process of resurrection. But the blossoming of the carnation flower is resurrection in its fullness.

When the Lord Jesus prayed that the Father would glorify Him, He actually prayed that He would enter into glory through death and resurrection. In Luke 24:26 the Lord Jesus asked the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" When the Lord Jesus spoke these words, He was already in resurrection. Thus, for Him to enter into His glory was for Him to be in resurrection. This verse reveals clearly that Christ's glorification was His resurrection. The Lord's resurrection was His blossoming. Christ's blossoming, His glorification, refers to His resurrection in its fullness.

THE RESURRECTED CHRIST AS THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT

With this understanding, now we are able to answer the question concerning what the glory of the new covenant is. The glory of the new covenant is actually the resurrection of Christ in fullness. In other words, the resurrected Christ is Himself the glory of the new covenant. Furthermore, this Christ in resurrection, or the resurrected Christ, is the life-giving Spirit. Therefore, the glory of the new covenant as the resurrected Christ, or the resurrection of Christ, is the Spirit. Now we have the proper understanding of the glory

of the new covenant. The glory of the new covenant is the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit.

To say that Paul was shining forth the glory of the new covenant means that he lived out the resurrected Christ. Paul lived Christ in resurrection; that is, he lived the life-giving Spirit.

Second 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." The glory in this verse, the glory of the new covenant, comprises many elements. It is the glory of the Lord as the resurrected and ascended One, the One who is both God and man. This One passed through incarnation, human living, and crucifixion, entered into resurrection, having accomplished full redemption, and became a life-giving Spirit. As the life-giving Spirit, the resurrected Christ dwells in us to make Himself and all He has accomplished, obtained, and attained real to us so that we may be one with Him and may be transformed into His image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit. This is the glory of the new covenant.

Some Christians have rather strange concepts concerning God's glory. I know of some believers who regard this glory as nothing more than a physical light. In their meetings they even claim to see a great light of this kind. I once attended a meeting where someone shouted out claiming that he had seen a great light. This has nothing to do with what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 3 with respect to the glory of the new covenant.

LIVING THE RESURRECTED CHRIST

The glory of the new covenant is the reality of the resurrected Christ, who is now the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit indwelling our spirit. We need to live this resurrected Christ by walking and behaving ourselves daily and even moment by moment in our spirit. On the one hand, we need to live in the spirit. On the other hand, we need to allow the life-giving Spirit to saturate our entire

being. The Spirit must not only permeate our inward parts; it must even saturate our physical bodies and thereby make them the members of Christ. This is to live Christ, to shine the glory of the new covenant.

If we live Christ by shining Him forth in resurrection, then wherever we go, we shall be shining. When others meet us, they will realize that with us there is a certain kind of shining. Parents will realize that with their children there is the bright shining of Christ in resurrection.

Recently I gave a message about becoming living letters of Christ. In that message I pointed out that when Christ is inscribed into us, others will be able to read Him in us. In particular, the parents of the young people should be able to read the Christ who has been inscribed into their children. After that message was given, many saints testified that their parents have been able to read Christ in them. I was very happy with those testimonies regarding living letters of Christ. I hope that among all the saints in the Lord's recovery there will be many more such testimonies.

SHINING THE GLORY OF THE RESURRECTED CHRIST

We need to have bright testimonies, testimonies of the shining of the glory of the resurrected Christ. When we live Christ, He as the shining light will come out of us. Then others will not only read us; they will also be under our shining. This is the proper understanding of what it means to shine the glory of the new covenant.

Living Christ by shining forth His glory in resurrection is very different from merely trying to improve our behavior in an outward way. Living Christ by shining Him forth is not the same as trying to be a submissive wife or a loving husband. An ethical person may endeavor to be such a wife or husband. This, however, is not the shining of the glory of the new covenant.

A person may live an ethical life by following the teachings of Confucius. However, this is altogether different from what is revealed in the Bible regarding living Christ. The revelation in the New Testament is that

we live Christ, not that we have mere outward improvement of our behavior. Furthermore, from 2 Corinthians 3 we see that to live Christ is to shine forth Christ.

Today Christ in resurrection as the life-giving Spirit indwells our spirit. This is a reality. Christ as the life-giving Spirit is not a mere doctrine, theory, philosophy, or system of ethics. He is the living Triune God as the all-inclusive Spirit to be our life and life supply. He wants to saturate our being, including our mind with all its thoughts, our emotion with all its feelings, and our will with all its determinations, resolutions, and decisions. He desires even to saturate our physical bodies, making our bodies healthy, strong, and living and causing them to become the members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15). To be saturated with the life-giving Spirit in this way is to live Christ.

Living Christ by being saturated with Him and shining Him forth is very different from having a life that is simply ethical or moral. Living Christ in this way is much higher than human ethics or morality. Living Christ is a matter of the processed Triune God becoming our life supply to saturate our entire being so that we may live Him out from within us. This living is our shining forth and also Christ's glory. This living is the testimony of Jesus, the real expression of the Triune God in a local church. This is what the Triune God, the Lord Spirit, is seeking today.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-THREE

BEING TRANSFORMED INTO THE IMAGE OF THE LORD FROM GLORY TO GLORY AS FROM THE LORD SPIRIT BY BEHOLDING AND REFLECTING HIS GLORY WITH UNVEILED FACE

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:16-18

ASPECTS OF THE PATTERN

In the foregoing messages we have pointed out that Paul is a pattern of living Christ for the church. In 2 Corinthians this pattern is revealed in a number of aspects. We have already covered four of these aspects. First, a person who lives Christ for the church does not trust in himself, but trusts in God who raises the dead. Paul refers to this aspect in 1:9: "But we ourselves had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not have confidence in ourselves, but in God, Who raises the dead." Related to this aspect are the matters of conducting ourselves not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God and of being one with the unchanging Christ of the faithful God. In 1:12 Paul says, "For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God, we conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you." In 1:18 Paul declares that God is faithful; in verse 19, that in Christ is yes; and in verse 20, that "whatever promises of God there are, in Him is the Yes." Therefore, we speak of the unchanging Christ of the faithful God.

The second aspect involves being attached, anointed, sealed, captured, subdued, and led to scatter the incense of

Christ. Paul speaks concerning these matters in 1:21 and 22 and 2:14-16.

In 3:3-6 Paul comes to the third aspect of the pattern of living Christ for the church. This aspect is that we are competent of Christ as the spiritual alphabet to write living letters with the life-giving Spirit of the living God. The fourth aspect of this pattern is that of shining the glory of the new covenant (3:7-11), and the fifth aspect, which we shall consider in this message and in the message following, is that of being transformed into the image of the Lord from glory to glory as from the Lord Spirit by beholding and reflecting His glory with unveiled face.

I appreciate all these aspects of Paul as a pattern of living Christ for the church. Paul and the other apostles lived a life in which they had no confidence in themselves. Rather, their confidence was altogether in the God of resurrection. They did not conduct themselves in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God. They were also one with the unchanging Christ of the faithful God; that is, they were one with the Christ who is the Yes. Furthermore, they were attached to God's anointed One, and they were anointed by God and sealed. As those attached to the anointed One, they were also captured, subdued, and led by God to celebrate Christ's victory. As captives marching in Christ's triumphal procession, they scattered the incense of Christ wherever they went. Actually the apostles' journey of ministry was not an ordinary journey; it was a triumphal procession celebrating Christ's victory in the universe.

Paul and his co-workers were also competent of Christ as the heavenly alphabet to write living letters of Christ, with Christ, and for Christ. The "ink" used in writing these letters was the life-giving Spirit of the living God. The apostles inscribed Christ into the saints and in this way wrote living letters with the Spirit as the ink. As a result, the saints became living letters of Christ for others to read.

Furthermore, Paul and his co-workers were shining forth the glorified, resurrected Christ. In their lives the blossoming Christ, the Christ in resurrection, could be seen. They were shining forth the Christ who is the life-giving Spirit. With them there was such a shining, such a glory.

DAILY TRANSFORMATION

Daily and even hourly, they were also in the process of being transformed into the same image, the image of the glorified Christ. "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" (3:18). This transformation did not happen once for all; it was a gradual matter. The apostles were transformed from one degree of glory to another. They were transformed from glory to glory, as from the Lord Spirit.

It is possible to understand the word rendered "even as" in 3:18 to mean "that is." Hence, the apostles were being transformed from glory to glory, that is, from the Lord Spirit. They were being transformed into the image of the Lord from the Lord Spirit.

According to the book of 2 Corinthians, the pattern of living Christ for the church includes the aspect of daily transformation. Anyone who lives Christ for the church must be one who is daily being transformed. If we are not in the process of transformation, then something is wrong with us in our Christian life. Day by day we need to be transformed.

A METABOLIC PROCESS

The word transformed is a good word; however, it does not convey the full meaning of the Greek word. Instead of transformed, some versions of the Bible use the word "changed." This word is very inadequate; it is a poor equivalent of the Greek word. The King James Version renders this Greek word transformed in Romans 12:2, but translates it as changed in 2 Corinthians 3:18.

We need to know the difference between change and transformation. Transformation involves the process of

metabolism. However, something may change without being affected metabolically. Many things may change in an outward way without any inward metabolic transformation.

In the process of metabolism a new element is supplied to an organism. This new element replaces the old element and causes it to be discharged. Therefore, as the process of metabolism takes place within a living organism, something new is created within it to replace the old element, which is carried away. Metabolism, therefore, includes three matters: first, the supplying of a new element; second, the replacing of the old element with this new element; and third, the discharge or the removal of the old element so that something new may be produced.

The digestion and assimilation of the food we eat involves metabolism. First we take the food into our stomach. Then the food is digested metabolically to supply our being so that new elements may be added to replace the old and that new cells may be brought into being. Through this process of metabolism we grow and are strengthened. Also through proper metabolism we may be healed of certain illnesses. Constantly a healing is taking place in our physical bodies through the process of metabolism. This healing is not caused by medicine given by a physician; it is the healing that is caused by the proper functioning of the body itself. Daily by the process of metabolism we can experience healing.

I wish to emphasize the fact that transformation is a metabolic process, a metabolic change. We may define transformation as spiritual metabolism. Concerning this, I appreciate Paul's care in choosing words. Paul, a marvelous writer, is always precise in his choice of words. In 3:18 he deliberately chose a Greek word which is best translated by the English word transformed.

THE GLORY OF THE LORD

We have pointed out that transformation involves

metabolism and that metabolism includes the supplying of new elements to replace what is old. Now we must ask what in Paul's concept is the new element supplied to us as we undergo transformation. According to Paul's understanding, this new element is the glory of the Lord. The glory of the Lord is actually the resurrected Christ. We have seen that the glory of the Lord in 3:18 is the glory of the Lord Jesus as the resurrected and ascended One, the One who is both God and man and who has passed through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection to become the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit dwelling in our spirit. How rich is this resurrected Christ! The resurrected Christ with all His riches is the new element added to us for our transformation. This element, the resurrected Christ with His riches, is the glory of the Lord. This is not simply the meat of the Word; it is a choice portion of the meat.

The word transformed implies the unsearchably rich supply of Christ. As we receive this supply, it replaces the old element within us and causes it to be discharged and carried away. The result is that something new will be brought forth in us, just as new cells and tissues are produced in our body through the process of metabolism. This is Paul's concept of transformation in 3:18. Otherwise, Paul would not have said that we are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit. We are being transformed from glory to glory, that is, from one degree of glory to another.

FROM THE LORD SPIRIT TO THE LORD SPIRIT

For many years I have been trying to understand the phrase "from glory to glory" used in 3:18. I consulted a number of books, but I failed to find a satisfactory explanation. We should not take this matter for granted or assume that we understand it. What is the glory here, and what is the meaning of "from glory to glory"? From glory to glory means from the Lord Spirit to the Lord Spirit. The Lord Spirit is upon the Lord Spirit. This means that the Lord Spirit as the rich supply is continually added into our being.

We may use an illustration from our eating to understand the continual addition of the Lord Spirit into us. Suppose you are invited to stay with a family that eats a great deal of chicken. Day after day they serve you a meal containing chicken. In your eating you go from chicken to chicken. Eventually, by eating so much chicken, you will become constituted of the element of chicken. This element will permeate your tissues and cells. In a sense, your physical body will be transformed inwardly into chicken. Day by day and hour by hour Christ, the heavenly chicken, is being added to us, and we are being transformed into His image. This transformation is from glory to glory, from the Lord Spirit to the Lord Spirit.

A TESTIMONY OF TRANSFORMATION

In a previous message I pointed out that it is possible for the parents of young people in the church to read the Christ who has been inscribed into them. After that message was given, many testified that whenever they visit their parents, their parents read them, paying attention to the change in them because they have had Christ inscribed into them. I believe that eventually some of the parents will give a testimony in which they say something like this: "When our daughter came into the church life, we opposed her at first. But when she came home to visit us, we realized that something about her was different. Each time she came to see us, we noticed that the change in life had become greater and greater. To us the change was marvelous. Finally, after she paid us several more visits, we could no longer resist what was happening in her. We were subdued, and now we are here in the meeting testifying that we have read the Christ who has been written in our daughter." If the parents of this young person had the adequate understanding, they would speak not merely of change, but of transformation. They would say, "We have realized that over the years our daughter has been experiencing transformation. She is being transformed from glory to glory, from the Lord Spirit to the Lord Spirit."

In one of the foregoing messages we said that the glory in 3:18 is Christ blossoming in resurrection. We illustrated this glory by referring to the blossoming of a carnation flower. Christ's resurrection was His blossoming. This blossoming Christ, the resurrected Christ, is glory. Now we are in the process of being transformed from this glory to this glory. This glory is our supply day by day. This is the reason that to be transformed from glory to glory far surpasses a mere outward improvement of behavior according to religious or ethical teaching.

COPPER OR GOLD

Confucius had much to say concerning ethics. The ethical teachings of Confucius may be compared to copper, but what the Bible reveals regarding the Christian life may be compared to gold. Sometimes in appearance copper can be made to look like gold. This is the reason people may adulterate gold by using copper, just as they adulterate wine with water.

Some missionaries to China could not discern the difference between the ethical teachings of Confucius and the teachings of the Bible concerning the Christian life. I heard certain missionaries say that what the Bible teaches is exactly the same as what is written in Confucius' books. If this were true, then why did the Chinese need the Bible, since they already had the writings of Confucius? What was the need, then, for missionaries to come to China to teach ethics? In Ephesians 5 Paul talks about a wife submitting to her husband. But Confucius instructed a woman to have a threefold submission: first to her father, then to her husband, and then, in the case of her husband's death, to her son. It seems that Confucius teaches more regarding submission than the Bible does. However, I do not care for how much is said concerning submission; I care for the nature of that submission. Is it a "copper" submission or a "golden" submission? The submission taught by Paul in Ephesians 5 is golden, but the threefold submission taught by Confucius is copper. Do you want a

golden submission or a copper one? Certainly, we all would prefer gold.

If we did not have the Bible, I would surely treasure the writing of Confucius. But praise the Lord that we have the Bible and that it is filled with gold! As I read the Word, I want to gain more and more gold and forget about the copper of ethical teachings concerning improving our behavior. In the Lord's recovery we are not teaching others merely to improve their behavior in an outward way. That kind of teaching would do nothing more than help the saints to polish their copper and cause it to shine more brightly. We are not here for that kind of religious or ethical teaching. In the recovery we are having our copper replaced with gold. The more we receive the Lord's supply, the more our copper is replaced with gold.

Today most of us are a mixture of copper and gold. Some may be twenty-five percent gold and seventy-five percent copper. But no matter what the percentage of copper and gold may be at present, gradually the percentage of copper is being reduced and the percentage of gold is increasing. The gold is being added into us to replace the copper and to discharge it.

Let us take as an example a young person in the church life who is submissive to his parents and obedient to them. He behaves himself and is a good boy. Nevertheless, we need to ask him an important question: Is this submission and obedience copper or gold? Does it come from merely trying to behave properly as a human being, or does it come from exercising the regenerated spirit to live the indwelling Spirit? It may be that his good behavior, his submission and obedience, is all derived from himself. If this is the situation, then he is a "copper" boy. His submission, his obedience, and even his love--all are copper. This copper is not glorious, for it is not the resurrected Christ. His behavior may be very good, but it is not glory.

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION

What should we do when we realize that our behavior is

copper and not gold? We should go to the Lord desperately and say to Him, "Lord, now I have the revelation. I see what is You and what is me. The best I can be is bright, shining copper. But, Lord, You are gold. When I compare myself to You as the gold, I begin to loathe my copper behavior. I hate my own submission, obedience, and love. Lord, I need You to be my submission. Lord, I want to experience You as my obedience and love. Lord, if You don't love in me, I won't love either. Lord, I don't want to do anything without You. Lord, You live in me. Come in to replace my copper with Your gold. O Lord Jesus, replace me!" Then, throughout the day we should contact the Lord by calling on Him and allow Him to replace us with Himself. Gradually, we shall experience the Lord's living in us. We shall realize that our behavior does not originate with ourselves. Rather, it is the resurrected Christ Himself. This is glory.

If we practice this day by day, we shall be transformed from glory to glory. Furthermore, others will notice the difference in us. They will see a difference in our submission, obedience, and love. Yes, we are still submissive, but this submission is different in nature. Formerly, our behavior was copper; now it is gold. Because it is gold, it is much brighter than before. It is even glorious.

I hope we shall all see the difference between the copper and the gold. Once we were going from copper to copper, but now we are being transformed from gold to gold, from glory to glory. Over the years I have often said to myself, "You are still a mixture of copper and gold." However, I can testify that the copper has been decreasing and that the gold has been increasing.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TRANSFORMED

We all need to be impressed with what it means to be transformed. To be transformed is to have Christ added into our being to replace what we are so that Christ may increase and our natural life may decrease. As the process of transformation takes place within us, the old element of our natural being is carried away, and the glory, the

blossoming Christ, the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit, is added into us to replace the natural element. Today is different from yesterday, and tomorrow will be different from today, for each day we have less of the natural element and more of Christ. This is what it means to be transformed from glory to glory.

I did not acquire this understanding of transformation merely from reading books. None of the books I have read helped me to have a thorough understanding of "from glory to glory." Throughout the years, I have learned from my own experience and from my observations in the church life what it means to be transformed from glory to glory. More than twenty years ago I could not have given such a message as this. At that time I still did not have a clear understanding concerning Paul's expression "from glory to glory." Now I see that the glory here is the blossoming Christ, Christ in resurrection. Furthermore, this Christ as the glory is the life-giving Spirit. Therefore, both from my experience and observation I can testify that the glory in 3:18 is actually the life-giving Spirit.

The more we live and walk in this life-giving Spirit, the more glory is added into our being. Therefore, we live glory to glory. We are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, that is, from the Lord Spirit to the Lord Spirit. This is the experience of everyone who lives Christ for the church. Paul was a pattern of this kind of life, and this was his experience.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FOUR

BEING TRANSFORMED INTO THE IMAGE OF THE LORD FROM GLORY TO GLORY AS FROM THE LORD SPIRIT BY BEHOLDING AND REFLECTING HIS GLORY WITH UNVEILED FACE

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:16-18

In 3:18 Paul 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." We have seen that, as a pattern of a person who lives Christ for the church, Paul was daily experiencing transformation. Transformation in 3:18, a metabolic change, is from glory to glory, that is, from the Lord Spirit to the Lord Spirit. We covered these matters in the previous message. In this message we shall consider how to be transformed from glory to glory.

BEHOLDING AND REFLECTING

As the title of this message indicates, we are transformed by beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord. We are transformed not only by seeing the Lord, but also by reflecting Him. A mirror has the capacity both to behold an object and to reflect it. The English words "beholding and reflecting as a mirror" are the translation of a single word in Greek. The use of this word in 3:18 is metaphorical. On the one hand, a mirror beholds a person or an object. On the other hand, a mirror reflects what it beholds. These are the two aspects of the function of a mirror. Whenever you stand before a mirror, that mirror beholds you and also reflects you. Because the mirror functions in these two aspects, you can see yourself in it.

OUR NEED TO BE UNVEILED

In our experience we all should be mirrors looking at the Lord and reflecting Him. However, if we would be mirrors beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord, we must not have any veils over us. Suppose a mirror is proper in every way. It is in the right position with respect to the object it is to behold and reflect. But the mirror is covered with a veil. As long as a mirror is covered with cloth, veiled, it loses its function. The veil keeps the mirror both from beholding and from reflecting. Likewise, if we are veiled, we cannot behold and reflect the Lord's glory.

If, by the mercy and grace of the Lord, all the veils are removed, we shall be mirrors beholding and reflecting Him with unveiled face. As a mirror, are you veiled or unveiled? If you are veiled, you may call on the name of the Lord and still not behold Him. If we would behold and reflect the Lord, all the veils must be removed. Every one of us needs to be fully unveiled.

VEILED BY RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS

Many Christians cannot behold and reflect the Lord because they are covered by a thick veil or perhaps several layers of veils. Consider how many people there are in today's Catholicism, and how many have been veiled by the influence of Catholicism. Suppose there were no such thing as Catholicism and all those in Catholicism were unbelievers who did not know anything about God. How much easier it would be to preach the gospel to them and bring them to the Lord! Many would be quick to receive and understand spiritual things. However, if you try to speak to those in Catholicism concerning God's New Testament economy, you will discover that the majority are veiled. Therefore, it is extremely difficult for them to see the things of Christ in a genuine way.

A particular brother in the Lord's recovery was raised a

Catholic. As a child he even served as an altar boy. But when he was in high school, he received the Lord Jesus into him and was genuinely saved. Happy and very excited, he told others of his experience with the Lord. He said, "Now I have the Lord Jesus!" But one of his relatives pointed to an image of Jesus on the wall and replied that they already had Jesus. To be sure, that person was covered by a thick veil! I use this as an illustration of the fact that religion has caused a great number of people to be veiled. These veils keep them from seeing the Lord.

Those without a religious background often find it easier to enter into the truths of the New Testament than those who were raised in either Catholicism or Protestantism. Nevertheless, even those without a religious background may still be under the influence of religion. Even before certain ones became Christians, they had some concept concerning the way people worship God. They may already have the thought that in a Christian service of worship there is a pastor who does certain things and that the congregation will pray or sing in a certain way. Even those who are not Christians are affected or influenced by religious concepts. These concepts can be veils.

VEILED BY NATURAL CONCEPTS

In addition to the religious concepts that veil people, every person is veiled by certain natural concepts or ideas. Often these veils are related to the kind of people we are by our natural constitution. If you are a quiet person, you may prefer to worship God in a cathedral that has a high ceiling and stained glass windows and is dimly lit. Upon entering such a building, you immediately act in a reverent way. The atmosphere spontaneously causes you to be quiet and solemn. You want to be silent and not even speak to the person next to you. Because you were born a quiet person, you appreciate a quiet atmosphere in a cathedral. If this kind of person attends a church meeting in which the saints are praising the Lord, he would be very bothered and wonder how anyone could worship God in this way. He would not be able to appreciate anything of

value in the meeting. On the contrary, he would feel that he could not worship God in such a place.

Paul's word about beholding and reflecting the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face was written with his background in Judaism in mind. Paul knew from his experience that the Jews were veiled by their religion. Paul himself had once been veiled in this way. In particular, many Jews were veiled by their concept concerning the law, especially circumcision. Because Paul taught that the law was over and that circumcision was no longer necessary, many Jews were not willing to listen to him. Their doctrine regarding the law and circumcision was a veil that kept them from seeing the Christ preached by Paul.

VEILED BY OUR NATIONAL CHARACTER

In addition to religious veils and the veils of our natural concepts, we are also veiled by our racial and national character. For example, the Japanese character may prefer one thing, whereas the German character may prefer something absolutely different. Differences of national character can make it difficult for believers from different countries to worship together. The various national characters, dispositions, habits, and customs are veils that keep us from beholding and reflecting the Lord. Those who are veiled by their racial, national, or cultural characteristics are not able to receive the Christ ministered by one of a different race, nationality, or culture. They may hear a word concerning the glorious, resurrected, blossoming Christ, but it does not penetrate them. Because they are veiled, they cannot see anything of such a wonderful Christ. The light of the truth cannot shine into them. Those who are veiled in this way can be compared to cameras that have a cover over the lens. When the lens of a camera is covered, no light can come in, and no image can be impressed on the film.

We should not assume that we do not have any veils. Instead of taking it for granted that we are fully unveiled, we need to look to the Lord and pray for mercy that all the

veils will be taken away that we may behold and reflect the Lord.

VEILED BY OUR CONCEPT OF HOW TO MEET

Some who have been in the church life in the Lord's recovery for many years may be veiled by their concept of what is the best way to meet. Suppose someone who has been in the church life in the Far East moves to the United States and says, "The churches in the United States meet in a way very different from the way we met in the Far East. I cannot tolerate this way of meeting. The way we practiced before was certainly the best." This also is a veil keeping us from seeing the light of the truth.

If we would behold and reflect the glory of the Lord with an unveiled face, we need to pray like this: "Lord, I don't care if the meeting is quiet or noisy. Lord, I don't care about the way to meet. I am not concerned whether the church meeting in this place is different from what I have been accustomed to in the past. I care only for Christ." If this is our attitude when we come to a church meeting, then we truly have been unveiled. We have a heart, a spirit, and a mind without any coverings.

OPEN TO THE LORD AND BEHOLDING HIM

If we are still veiled in some way, we shall be like a camera with the lens covered. No light will be able to penetrate our inner being. If we want to be unveiled, we need to say to the Lord, "Lord, take away anything that is covering me. Lord, remove my veils. Take away any opinions that are veils to me. Lord, I want to be completely open, absolutely unveiled." Then with an unveiled face we shall behold and reflect the glory of the Lord and be transformed into His image from glory to glory.

Today the glory is the resurrected Christ, and this Christ is the Spirit. This means that the Lord as the glory is the Spirit living in us and dwelling in our spirit. Now that we have the Spirit indwelling our spirit, we need to exercise our spirit more and more by praying, reading the Word, and calling on the name of the Lord. The more we

exercise our spirit with an unveiled face, the more we shall behold the Lord. As we are gazing on Him, we shall also reflect Him. While we are beholding and reflecting Him in this way, His element, His essence, will be added into our being. This new element will replace and discharge the element of our old, natural life. Then we shall experience transformation, a metabolic change. We shall be transformed into the Lord's image.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-FIVE

THE ESSENCE OF THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:3, 6-9, 18; 4:1a

The title of this message is "The Essence of the New Covenant Ministry." The word essence is related to what Paul says concerning the glory and superiority of the ministry of the new covenant in 3:7-11. These verses show the inferiority of the glory of the Mosaic ministry, the ministry of law, a ministry of condemnation and death, and the superiority of the apostolic ministry, the ministry of grace, a ministry of righteousness and the Spirit. The former was through glory temporarily; the latter remains in glory forever. In 2:12-17 the apostle speaks of the triumph and effect of the apostolic ministry; in 3:1-6, of its function and competency; and in 3:7-11, of its glory and superiority.

In previous messages we have covered a number of basic points related to the new covenant ministry: the essence, the effect, the function, the competency, the glory, and the superiority. Now in this message we need to consider the essence of the ministry of the new covenant.

INSCRIBED WITH THE SPIRIT AS AN ESSENCE

Some may point out that the word essence is not found in 2 Corinthians 3. Although this word is not used here, the concept of essence is nonetheless implied in verse 3: "Being manifested that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but in fleshy tablets of the heart." In this verse the word "ministered" actually means served.

The Greek word means to serve something to someone, for example, as a waiter serves in a restaurant or a stewardess on an airplane. Thus, Paul is saying that the Corinthian believers are a letter of Christ served by the apostles. However, realizing that the word serve is not adequate, Paul went on to use the word "inscribed." This explains the meaning of ministered, served. Paul's way of ministering was by inscribing.

In 3:3 Paul says "inscribed not *with* ink"; he does not say "inscribed not *by* ink." The word "with" indicates that the spiritual ink, the Spirit of the living God, is an essence, an element, used by the one doing the inscribing or the writing. It is important that we pay careful attention to Paul's use of the preposition "with." This preposition indicates that the Spirit is neither the writer nor the instrument used for writing; rather, the Spirit is the essence, the element, the substance, used in writing. The Spirit of the living God, who is the living God Himself, is not an instrument, such as a pen, but an element, the heavenly ink used in writing, with which the apostles minister Christ as the content for the writing of living letters that convey Christ.

Let us take as an illustration the simple matter of writing a letter with a ball point pen. You may be the writer, but the pen is the instrument. The ink, however, is neither the writer nor the instrument--it is the element, the essence. But if your pen is out of ink, any writing you try to do with it will be in vain. You may write words on paper, but the paper will be blank. In such a case, there would be a writer and an instrument, but there would not be any ink as the necessary writing essence.

In 2 Corinthians 3:3 the Holy Spirit is not the writer, the instrument, or even the power. When many Christians today talk about the Spirit, their concept is related to power. But if we read this verse carefully, considering it in its context, we shall see that the Spirit here is a matter of essence, not of power.

Because many Christians neglect the Spirit as an essence, I purposely emphasize the word essence in this

message. What Christians today consider the Spirit as an essence? For the most part, Christians think of the Spirit as an instrument or as a power. Others go farther and speak of the Spirit as a divine person. But I do not know of any preachers who speak of the Spirit the way Paul does in 2 Corinthians 3. Paul's view of the Spirit in this chapter was that of an essence used for inscribing letters of Christ. Here he does not view the Spirit as a person, an instrument, or a power. Rather, the Spirit is the essence used for inscribing living letters of Christ.

The ministry of the new covenant is not that of mere teaching. None of your teachers in school ever inscribed an essence into your being. They may have put concepts into you, but they did not deposit the essence of anything into you. However, the new covenant ministry does more than merely teach us; it inscribes us. Furthermore, this new covenant ministry inscribes us not with concepts, knowledge, or theology, but with an essence, with something real and substantial.

In the church life in the Lord's recovery, do you not have the sense that you are under a spiritual inscribing? Many of us can testify that through the new covenant ministry Christ has been inscribed into us. A divine essence has been written into our being, and this essence is the Spirit.

However, we still need to define what this essence is. We realize we have been inscribed with the Spirit, but what is this Spirit?

DEATH VERSUS THE SPIRIT

Now we must go on to see certain terminology related to the ministry of the new covenant. In 3:7 Paul speaks of the ministry of death, and in verse 8, of the ministry of the Spirit. Thus, in these verses we have a comparison between the ministry of death and the ministry of the Spirit. The ministry of death refers to the old covenant ministry, the Mosaic ministry. Paul was bold in speaking of the ministry of death. No wonder the Jews were offended

because of him. Then Paul goes on to compare the ministry of death with the ministry of the Spirit.

Most of us would not contrast death with the Spirit, for death is always versus life. For us, the issue is a matter of life or death, death or life. But instead of using the word life in 3:8, Paul speaks of the Spirit. This indicates that the Spirit here is related to life, since life is what stands in contrast to death. In 3:6 Paul has already said that the Spirit gives life. Therefore, the Spirit here points to the Spirit who gives life and also to the life given by the Spirit. The old covenant ministry was a ministry of death; the new covenant ministry is a ministry of life embodied in the Spirit.

The essence of the Spirit inscribed into us is life. Life here is not an instrument, person, power, strength, ability, talent, or gift. If we realize that the Spirit here is of life, then we shall understand what is the nature of the essence with which we are inscribed through the new covenant ministry.

Often Christians refer to the Spirit as an instrument, power, or gift. Under the influence of tradition, we also may not pay adequate attention to the Spirit as the essence inscribed into us. For this reason, I want to emphasize the fact that the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3 does not denote a power or instrument--it denotes an essence.

FROM GLORY TO GLORY

This understanding is confirmed by verse 18: "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." Glory here is not an instrument, power, ability, or gift. Glory also is an essence. As we behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, we are being transformed with glory as an essence. In a previous message we pointed out that "from glory to glory" in verse 18 means from the Lord Spirit to the Lord Spirit, for in this verse the glory and the Spirit are synonyms. Therefore, to be transformed from glory to glory is to be transformed from the Spirit to the Spirit.

The Amplified New Testament renders the Greek words translated from glory to glory as "from one degree of glory to another." It is correct to say that we are transformed from one degree of glory to another degree of glory. But we still must find out what glory is. The glory in 3:18 is actually the Spirit. This glory also refers to the resurrected Christ, or to Christ in resurrection. The Lord Jesus was glorified by resurrection (Luke 24:26). Hence, the glory, the Spirit, and resurrection all refer to the same thing. Today the Spirit within us is glory and also the reality of resurrection. Therefore, once again we see that the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3 is an essence, not an instrument or power.

A MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT AND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

In 3:9 Paul goes on to say, "For if the ministry of condemnation came in glory, much rather the ministry of righteousness abounds in glory." The phrase "the ministry of condemnation" also refers to the Mosaic ministry of the old covenant. That ministry was both a ministry of death and a ministry of condemnation. Paul was bold to declare the fact that the ministry of Moses was a ministry of death and condemnation. But, as verse 9 indicates, even this ministry came in glory.

As the old covenant ministry was of death and condemnation, so the new covenant ministry is of the Spirit and of righteousness. Death is versus life, which is embodied in the Spirit, and condemnation is versus righteousness.

We may have expected Paul to use the word justification instead of righteousness. But here Paul speaks of righteousness, not of justification. Based upon the principle that the Spirit in this chapter is an essence, righteousness here should also be regarded as an essence. Hence, the new covenant ministry has an essence in two aspects: the first aspect is of the Spirit, and the second aspect is of righteousness.

We have pointed out that the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3 is related to life. The Spirit in this chapter refers to life. But to what does righteousness refer? If we would answer

this question, we need to realize that Paul places righteousness in the same category as the Spirit. Both righteousness and the Spirit are on the same level. The new covenant ministry is a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness, both of which are aspects of the essence of this ministry. Just as a table may be constituted of wood and of paint, so the new covenant ministry is constituted of the Spirit and of righteousness. Suppose a certain table made of wood is painted. Wood is the substance of the table, and the paint gives the table a particular appearance. Therefore, with the table there are both substance and appearance. The principle is the same with the new covenant ministry. This ministry has a substance, and it also has an appearance, an expression. The substance of the new covenant ministry is the Spirit, and the expression, the appearance, is righteousness.

THE SPIRIT AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN OUR DAILY LIVING

Let us consider the matters of the Spirit and righteousness in the light of our experience with the Lord. When, as one who loves the Lord and seeks Him, you live Christ, do you not have the sense that within you there is something substantial, living, and active? This living substance is not any kind of doctrine, teaching, or theology. On the contrary, this living, active substance is the Spirit.

Through the ministry today, we all have had the Spirit inscribed into our being. Many times after a meeting we realize that inside we have something living, substantial, and active. This living substance is the Spirit in us, the Spirit who has been inscribed into us. In other words, the divine essence has been added into our being. If a certain person has never experienced this, I would doubt that he has truly been saved and regenerated. I believe all of us in the church life can testify that we have experienced the Spirit inwardly in a way that is living, active, and substantial. Along with this inward substance, we also have an outward expression. This expression is righteousness.

Anyone who has been inscribed with the Spirit of the living God will have an expression of righteousness in his daily living. For example, a married brother may experience the Spirit as the living substance within him through the inscribing that comes from the new covenant ministry. Spontaneously his wife will realize that something has happened to her husband. She may say to herself, "Something has happened to him, but I don't understand what it is. He seems to be right in every way and right with everything. Formerly, he was wrong in the way he did many things. He was wrong even in the way he put things away, for he never put them back in the proper place. But now he takes care of everything in the right way. I also see a difference in the way he speaks to me. When it is time for him to go to work, he tells me in such a nice way that he is leaving. He says, 'Dear, I'm going to work now.' My husband is even right in the way he takes care of the dog. I don't know what is going on with him." Because the brother is experiencing the Spirit inwardly as the substance, he expresses righteousness in his life at home.

When we do not live Christ, we are wrong in many things. We may be wrong in the way we close a window or a door. Instead of closing a door in a proper way, we may slam it. But when we live Christ and experience something in us that is substantial and active, we become right in closing windows and doors. In fact, anything we do will be done in a right way.

Some may be very careless in putting away their shoes or their clothes. If you could see their bedroom, you would find that many things are out of order. But if those ones experience the Spirit as the substance within them, they will become right even with their shoes and clothes. Everything will be put in the right place.

If you experience the Spirit inwardly and express righteousness outwardly, others will realize that something is different about you. This is the result of the new covenant ministry. This ministry inscribes an essence into our being, an essence that has an inner aspect and an

outer aspect. The inner aspect is the living Spirit moving in us; the outer aspect is righteousness as our expression.

EXPRESSING THE IMAGE OF GOD

The Spirit and righteousness are both related to our expressing the image of God. The reason for this is that the Spirit and righteousness are actually God Himself. God as the Spirit is moving in you as a substance and living in you as an essence, for He Himself has been added into your being by the new covenant ministry. Thus, inwardly you have the Spirit. The righteousness you express outwardly is also God Himself. Therefore, you are not only right in so many ways, and you are not only righteous, but you have God Himself as your righteousness. God as righteousness becomes your appearance, your expression. First, God Himself is the life-giving Spirit who lives, moves, and acts within you. Then God Himself becomes the outward expression, the appearance, of righteousness. This is the essence of the new covenant ministry.

The work of the new covenant ministry is altogether different from that of most of today's preachers and teachers. The work of the new covenant ministry is not merely to teach us to improve our behavior. Rather, this ministry inscribes us with the Spirit. To inscribe is to add more of the essence of God into us. Inwardly this essence is the Spirit; outwardly it is righteousness. But as we have seen, both the Spirit inwardly and the righteousness outwardly are God Himself. Therefore, the ministry of the new covenant, a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness, is simply a ministry of God. To say that the ministry of the new covenant is of the Spirit and of righteousness is equal to saying that the new covenant ministry is of God. However, to say that this ministry is of God is to speak in a general way, whereas to say that it is of the Spirit and of righteousness is to speak in a more particular way. Praise the Lord that the Spirit is God within us living, moving, and acting, and righteousness is God expressed to become our appearance outwardly!

The central vision of the Bible is related to the image of God expressed by the life of God. Regarding this, the first two chapters of Genesis are very important. In Genesis 1 we have the image of God: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness....So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (vv. 26-27). God's intention is that we express Him with His image. However, if we would express God in this way, we need to have His life. The life of God is signified by the tree of life in Genesis 2:9. The life within is the Spirit, and the image outwardly for expression is righteousness. Praise the Lord for the new covenant ministry with the two aspects of life and expression! Inwardly we have the Spirit as life, and outwardly we have righteousness as our expression.

LIVING CHRIST

Among all the people on earth, the most righteous persons are those who live Christ. Whenever you live Christ, you will be right in every way. You will not need anyone to teach you to be right, for the Christ who lives within you will make you right in everything and right with everyone. If we are careless with our things or in the way we close a door, this is an indication that we are not living Christ. If we truly live Christ, we shall close a door in a right way. We shall also be proper when we knock on someone's door or ring the doorbell. Once again I say that it is not necessary for someone to teach us how to close a door, how to knock on a door, or how to ring a doorbell. The Bible does not contain such instructions. If the Bible contained a rule for every aspect of our daily living, it would be too big for any of us to carry. It is the Spirit within us who makes us righteous in our living. What we need is more inscribing of the Spirit. The ministry of the new covenant is a ministry of the Spirit.

When we are inscribed with the Spirit, the divine essence is imparted into our being. This essence causes the process of spiritual metabolism to take place within us. As a result of this process, we are transformed into the Lord's image.

INWARD TRANSFORMATION AND OUTWARD RIGHTEOUSNESS

We have seen that to be transformed into the Lord's image from glory to glory is to be transformed from the Spirit to the Spirit. If we experience such an inward transformation, spontaneously we shall have righteousness as our outward appearance. Then we shall be right with God, with others, and with ourselves. However, many people are not right with God, with others, or with themselves. Daily they offend God and those around them. Furthermore, because they are short of the divine essence, they are not right with themselves. Therefore, they need the ministry which inscribes the divine essence into them. Inwardly, this essence will be the Spirit in them, and outwardly it will be expressed as righteousness.

This understanding of 2 Corinthians 3, especially of verse 18, is not merely according to doctrine; it is according to experience. For years I have been seeking to understand 3:18. Now from my experience with the Lord I realize that the Spirit is the essence of God living, moving, and acting within me, and righteousness is the essence of God manifested outwardly as God's image to express Him. As a result of having the Spirit inwardly and righteousness as the image of God outwardly, I become right with God, with man, with myself, and with so many aspects of my daily living. Because we are right in every way, we have peace, joy, rest, and faith. This is the issue, the result, of the ministry of the new covenant.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX

THE ESSENCE OF THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:3, 6-9, 18; 4:1a

MINISTRY AND MINISTRIES

Today many Christians talk about different ministries and speak of receiving all kinds of ministries. The matter of the ministry or of the ministries is not simple. According to 2 Corinthians, there is just one ministry, the unique ministry. In 4:1 Paul says, "Therefore, having this ministry, as we have received mercy we do not lose heart." On the one hand, here Paul says "we"; on the other hand, he speaks of "this ministry," not these ministries. According to this verse, there are many who have the one ministry. However, in 1 Corinthians 12:5 Paul says, "There are distributions of ministries."

How can it be that the ministry is unique and yet at the same time there are many ministries? The answer is that in the New Testament God has only one operation. Furthermore, He has just one ministry to carry out His unique operation. All the apostles--Peter, James, John, Paul, Timothy--carried on the same ministry. Peter did not carry on one ministry, Paul another ministry, and Timothy yet another ministry. This is the situation among preachers, teachers, and ministers today, who carry on different kinds of ministries.

Because there are different kinds of ministries, there are many different denominations. The Baptists carry on the Baptist ministry to accomplish the Baptist operation. The Presbyterians carry on another kind of ministry to

accomplish the Presbyterian operation. The same is true of the Episcopalians, Lutherans, and Methodists. All these denominations carry on different kinds of ministries for the sake of their own operations. According to the New Testament, this practice is not right. The New Testament reveals that there is a unique ministry. Today the local churches are not carrying out different kinds of ministries to accomplish many operations. God has one operation to be carried out by the unique ministry.

Now we must see what this unique ministry does. The unique ministry in the New Testament serves Christ to others. It inscribes Christ into people as the Spirit within them and as righteousness outwardly. This is the function of the unique ministry. When we preach the gospel, we should preach in this way. Likewise, when we teach the Bible, edify the saints, or build up the churches, we should do these things in this way. Everything we do in the church life should be to inscribe Christ into the saints. Regarding this, we do not have many different ministries.

Although the New Testament clearly indicates that the ministry is one and unique, it also speaks of different ministries. These ministries refer to various services in the church. When 1 Corinthians 12:5 speaks of ministries, it means the different services. In the church life the saints are involved in different services. For example, some take care of the children. This is one kind of service. Some shepherd the younger ones or the weaker ones. This is another kind of service. These different services, however, all carry out the unique ministry, the unique service. As we have seen, the function of the unique service is to minister Christ into God's chosen people. In what way should we take care of the children? We should do so in the way of ministering Christ to them. Likewise, how should we shepherd the younger ones or the weaker ones? In shepherding we should minister Christ to others. Even when the sisters meet together to pray, they all should minister Christ. The many services are for the unique service; the many ministries are for the one ministry.

We accept all ministries that are accomplishing the

unique ministry for God's operation. But we cannot accept a ministry that is seeking to establish or accomplish something different from God's unique operation. For example, we cannot accept a ministry which has as its goal the establishing of the Presbyterian denomination; neither can we accept a ministry that seeks to carry out the Baptist, Lutheran, or Episcopalian operations. These ministries are divisive; therefore, we cannot accept them. The ministries we accept are those that are for the unique New Testament ministry.

If you take note of this understanding of the ministry and the ministries and read through the New Testament again, especially the Epistles, you will see that this understanding is accurate. I would encourage you to study the Epistles along this line, paying special attention to the words ministry and ministries. If you make such a study, you will see that the different ministries, services, are all for the carrying out of the one new covenant ministry.

For the carrying out of God's New Testament economy, the ministry is uniquely one. But for the accomplishing of this unique ministry, especially in the church life, there is the need of many services, the need of diverse ministries. But again I would emphasize the fact that these different ministries and services are all for the carrying out of the unique ministry, which is the ministry of the new covenant. This ministry inscribes the saints with the all-inclusive God, who is the Spirit within us and righteousness as our expression outwardly.

A MINISTRY OF INSCRIBING

As we pointed out in the foregoing message, the Spirit and righteousness are the two aspects of the essence which is inscribed into us by the ministry of the new covenant. The living Spirit is the inward aspect, and the perfect righteousness is the outward aspect. The essence of the new covenant ministry includes the two aspects of the Spirit and righteousness.

Our ministry in the local churches must be a ministry of inscribing. It should not be mere teaching. If we only

teach others, the divine essence will not be inscribed into them. Teaching does not require any essence; however, inscribing does require an essence, just as writing with a pen requires ink. If you try to write with an empty pen, there will be no words on the paper. In order to write, we must have the ink as the writing essence. Then the more we write, the more words will be inscribed on the paper. Likewise, we must have the divine essence in order to inscribe it into the being of the saints.

The ministry of inscribing is unique, and the essence used for inscribing is also unique. Peter did not do one kind of inscribing with one kind of essence, and Paul a different kind of inscribing with a different kind of essence. No, the apostles were not divided; neither were they divisive. Rather, they all practiced the same inscribing with the same essence. However, today's preachers have different kinds of inscribing, different kinds of teaching. As a result, the more they teach and preach, the more divisions are produced. Therefore, the unique inscribing must be with the unique essence.

THE PROCESSED TRIUNE GOD AS THE UNIQUE ESSENCE INSCRIBED INTO US

What is the unique essence which needs to be inscribed into the saints? This unique essence is the Triune God as the Spirit. The term "the Spirit" as used in the New Testament is very meaningful. The Spirit denotes the processed Triune God to be the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit.

In Genesis 1:2 we read of the Spirit of God. Elsewhere the Old Testament speaks of the Spirit of Jehovah. In the New Testament the term the Holy Spirit is used. Then in Acts 16:7 (lit.) we read of the Spirit of Jesus; in Romans 8:9, of the Spirit of Christ; and in Philippians 1:19, of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. In Romans 8 we are charged to walk in the Spirit. In the New Testament the emphasis is not on walking in the Holy Spirit or in the Spirit of God; the emphasis is on walking in the Spirit. Finally, at the end of the Bible, in Revelation 22:17, we read of the Spirit and the

bride. Thus, the Bible ends with a word not about the Spirit of God, nor about the Holy Spirit, but about the Spirit. The Spirit in Revelation 22:17 is the processed Triune God.

I realize that it is troubling to the religious mind to speak of God being processed. I can remember the first time I used the word processed concerning the Triune God in a message. Afterwards, I wondered if I had been too bold in saying that God is processed. In that message I pointed out that God today is no longer unprocessed, no longer the "raw" God. Today God is the processed God. But after I considered this matter further and prayed regarding it, I had the sense deep within, I believe of the Spirit, that if I did not use the word processed, I had no better term to use. I said to myself, "If you don't use such words as raw and processed, how will you be able to give messages concerning the Triune God as your enjoyment? How will you be able to express the truth concerning the steps through which God has passed to become the all-inclusive Spirit? Are you timid, afraid of being opposed and criticized?" Therefore, after much prayer and consideration, I felt confirmed in using this expression. Recently, we have learned that William Law and Andrew Murray also used this term in their writings.

In the Bible certain words are not used; however, there are facts which give us reason to use particular words to describe them. For example, the word Trinity cannot be found in the Bible. Nevertheless, the Bible reveals the fact of the Trinity. There is one God, but He is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Is this not the Trinity? Certainly it is. Trinity actually does not mean three in one; it means three-one. The adjective form of the word trinity is triune, composed of two Latin roots: tri-, meaning three, and -une, meaning one. Therefore, triune means three-one, not three in one. Because the Bible reveals that God is triune, what is wrong with using the word Trinity to speak of God as the Father, Son, and Spirit? We must have some word to express the fact. In the same principle, the Bible does not use the word processed with respect to the Triune God. Nevertheless, the Bible reveals the fact of God's process.

As I was struggling over the use of the word processed, I considered Christ's incarnation. Christ, the eternal God, was conceived in the womb of a virgin and was born in a manger in Bethlehem. He then lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years. Eventually, He was crucified and buried in a tomb. After visiting Hades, He came forth in resurrection. As I considered all this, I said to myself, "If this is not a process, then what is it? Since it is a process, you must be bold to use this term in your messages."

What is wrong in saying that God today is the processed God, that He is no longer the unprocessed God, the "raw" God? If you catch a fish and bring it home, that fish is raw. But after you cook it and serve it on the dining table for a meal, it is no longer a raw fish. It is now a processed fish. Our God is no longer raw. In Genesis 1 He was the raw God. Actually, throughout the entire Old Testament He was raw. He had not yet been "cooked." He had not yet been processed through incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection.

The incarnation of Christ was part of His process. His being conceived in the womb of Mary and His being born in Bethlehem were aspects of this process. For nine months the Lord Jesus was in the womb of a virgin. This was a process. Then He lived on earth for thirty-three and a half years. When He was crucified, He was on the cross for six hours. He then was in the tomb for three days. Is not all this a process? Some may say that the Lord's incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection were simply procedures, not a process. According to this understanding, incarnation was a procedure by which God became a man, and crucifixion was a procedure by which our Redeemer died for our sins. But even if you change the word process to procedure, the facts remain the same. Furthermore, this procedure, if you call it that, is actually a process.

THE SPIRIT AND THE BRIDE

In the New Testament the Spirit signifies the processed Triune God. Actually the Spirit is the ultimate expression of the processed Triune God. We have seen that Revelation

22:17 says, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." There is no expression in human language greater than this. The Spirit is the ultimate expression of the processed Triune God, and the bride is the ultimate expression of the transformed tripartite man. By the time of Revelation 22:17, the processed Triune God and the transformed tripartite man are married and become a universal couple. This means that the processed Triune God and the transformed tripartite man become one. What a wedding that will be! It will be the greatest wedding in the universe, and we all are invited to participate in it.

The Spirit as the processed Triune God is the essence inscribed into our being. Because this essence has been inscribed into us, we cannot remain the same. Transformation is taking place within us. Perhaps even as you have been reading this message, something of the divine essence has been inscribed into you. You may not remember the points of the message, but what has been inscribed into you of the divine essence will never be erased.

The divine essence that has been inscribed into us throughout the years in the local churches will have a particular expression, and this expression is righteousness. When we have righteousness as the expression of the essence inscribed into us, we become right with God, with others, and with everything in our daily life. This means that the indwelling God becomes our righteousness to be our appearance, our expression. This expression is God's image. This Spirit and this righteousness are the essence of the new covenant ministry.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-SEVEN

THE MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT AS THE LIFE SUPPLY AND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AS GOD'S EXPRESSION

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:8-9, 18; 5:21; Col. 3:10; 1 Cor. 1:30; 15:34; Rom. 8:2, 4; 14:17; Phil. 1:19; 3:9; Rev. 19:7-8; Eph. 4:24; Matt. 5:6, 10, 20

The ministry of the new covenant is a very great matter. It includes the entire New Testament of twenty-seven books. In foregoing messages we have seen from chapter three of 2 Corinthians that in the Old Testament age there was only one ministry, a ministry that was called in 2 Corinthians 3 the ministry of death and condemnation. Christians, however, often consider that in the Old Testament there were three different kinds of ministries: the ministry of the priesthood, the ministry of the kingship, and the ministry of the prophethood. Christians have this concept because the Old Testament speaks of three classes of people--the priests, the kings, and the prophets. Since these three kinds of people can be found in the Old Testament, many students and teachers of the Bible have thought that in the Old Testament there were three kinds of ministries.

Paul regarded the entire Old Testament as the law. In 1 Corinthians 14:21 he 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." In this verse Paul quotes a portion from the book of Isaiah. Although Isaiah was a prophet, Paul refers to the book of Isaiah as the law. This indicates that the books of the

prophets were also considered part of the law. Actually the entire Old Testament was regarded as the law. This is a proof that in Old Testament times there was a unique ministry. This was the ministry of the old covenant, the ministry of death and condemnation.

THE UNIQUE MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament there is also a unique ministry. The twelve Apostles all had this unique ministry. After Judas betrayed the Lord and committed suicide, Peter stood up and said that Judas had been numbered with them and "had obtained part of this ministry" (Acts 1:17). Then they prayed for the Lord to show whom He had chosen to "take part of this ministry and apostleship" (v. 25). This indicates that the apostles all had one ministry. It was not a case of Peter having a ministry, John having another ministry, and James having yet another ministry. If that had been the situation, the twelve Apostles would have had twelve different ministries. No, they had one ministry, the unique ministry. Eventually, more apostles were raised up by the Lord. The most prominent of them was Paul. Paul and his co-workers also had the same ministry, the unique ministry of the new covenant. Therefore, in the New Testament there are many apostles, but there is only one ministry. This new covenant ministry is a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness.

Throughout the centuries there have been only two ministries: the ministry of the old covenant and the ministry of the new covenant. However, among Christians today there are many different ministries. The reason Christians have been divided into groups and denominations is that they have invented many different kinds of ministries. Every denomination has its own ministry. The Episcopalians have an Episcopalian ministry, the Methodists have the Methodist ministry, and the Baptists, Presbyterians, and Pentecostals each have their ministries.

Today some who regard themselves as broad-minded want to embrace all the different kinds of ministries to

prove that they are not narrow, sectarian, or divisive. They want to be all-inclusive and receive ministries from Catholicism, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Protestant denominations, and all the independent groups. This is in contrast to the new covenant ministry, which is unique. The new covenant ministry is unique in nature, essence, function, and purpose.

In what kind of ministry are we? In particular, what kind of ministry do you have? Certainly none of us would say that we are in the old covenant ministry of death and condemnation. Are you in the ministry of Catholicism? of Greek Orthodoxy? of one of the Protestant denominations?

Those who have the Baptist ministry will certainly emphasize baptism by immersion. Those in the Episcopalian ministry will surely be in favor of bishops. Likewise, those who have the Presbyterian ministry will be in favor of the administration of the presbytery. Those in these denominations practice such ministries. Furthermore, these denominations have been established to carry out such ministries. The Pentecostals also have their own kind of ministry, a ministry that emphasizes tongue-speaking, healing, and miracles. But none of these ministries is the unique ministry of the new covenant. Is the ministry of the new covenant a ministry of baptism by immersion? A ministry of bishops, presbytery, or tongue-speaking? Certainly the answer to these questions is no. The new covenant ministry is absolutely a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness. This is the unique ministry in the New Testament.

When we say that the new covenant ministry is unique, we do not mean that it is the ministry of only one person. For example, it is slanderous to accuse me of saying that the unique ministry today is the ministry of Witness Lee. We do not say this, and we do not mean this. By the unique ministry, the new covenant ministry, we mean the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness. Whoever ministers the Spirit and righteousness to others is one in the unique ministry, no matter who he may be. Peter,

John, James, Paul, Timothy, Titus, Apollos--they all had the one ministry. The ministers are many, but the ministry is unique. As long as you minister the Spirit and righteousness to others, you are in this unique ministry.

A number of times I have been asked something like this: "Brother Lee, you say that the ministry is unique. This means that there is just one ministry. When you say that there is one ministry, that the ministry is unique, do you mean that your ministry is this unique ministry?" Some of those who question me like this may have the concept that I think of myself as someone like Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism. I always answer this question by saying, "No, I definitely do not mean that my ministry is the unique ministry."

Others may go on to ask if we accept all ministries. The answer is that we do not accept all different kinds of ministries. Then some may say, "On the one hand, you say that your ministry is not the unique ministry. On the other hand, you do not accept all ministries. What, then, do you practice regarding the ministry?" Because those who ask this question may be short of knowledge and may also be under the drugging effect of traditional concepts, it is not easy to explain the matter to them. I may say to myself, "I simply am what I am. But you have been drugged and cannot understand what the New Testament says concerning the ministry." The ministry of the new covenant is unique; it is the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness. Although we do not accept all different kinds of ministries, we do accept the ministry of anyone who truly ministers the Spirit and righteousness.

What I am speaking in this message concerning the ministry is something new and also something old. It is old because it was in existence nearly two thousand years ago. On the other hand, it is something new because it is a matter which has been lost and recovered. We thank the Lord that He has recovered the truth concerning the ministry. We thank Him for showing us from 2 Corinthians 3 that in the Bible there are two ministries: the old covenant ministry--the ministry of death and

condemnation; and the new covenant ministry--the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness.

As a Christian, or as one who regards himself as having a certain kind of ministry, what kind of ministry do you have? If you are not in the ministry of the new covenant, that is, in the ministry which ministers Christ as the life-giving Spirit and as righteousness to others, then you must tell us what kind of ministry you have. In what ministry are you? If you are not in the ministry of the Spirit and righteousness and not in the ministry of death and condemnation, in what ministry are you? Some may say that they have the ministry of gospel preaching. This answer is not adequate. You should be able to say that your ministry of gospel preaching is a part of the unique new covenant ministry in which you minister Christ to others as the Spirit and righteousness. It is better not to say that we have the ministry of gospel preaching. Rather, we should say that our preaching of the gospel is part of the unique new covenant ministry.

THE SPIRIT AS THE LIFE SUPPLY

Some Christians view the ministry of the Spirit primarily as a ministry of the Spirit as power. They expect that when they speak in the power of the Spirit, a large number of people will be gained for the Lord. But the ministry of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3 is a ministry of the Spirit as life and life supply. My ground for saying this is found in verse 6, where Paul says that God "made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, not of letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Here Paul does not say that the Spirit gives power, performs miracles, or imparts gifts. He declares that the Spirit gives life. Elsewhere in this chapter the Spirit is also related to life, not to power, gifts, or miracles.

This understanding of the Spirit as the life supply is confirmed by Paul's word in Philippians 1:19: "For I know that for me this shall turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." In this verse Paul does not speak of the bountiful

power or the bountiful ability. Rather, he speaks of the bountiful supply of the Spirit.

I emphasize this point because many Christians have a mistaken concept of the Spirit and think of the Spirit mainly as a source of power, ability, or impact. For example, some groups stress the matter of what is called being "slain in the Spirit." One woman was especially well known in this matter. Is that the Spirit as the life supply? Certainly not.

Not long after I began to minister in this country in 1962, I was invited to speak to a Christian group in San Diego. Some of the people there encouraged me to go to a certain place in Texas where many miraculous things were supposedly happening. The claim was made that, in a miraculous way, someone's teeth had been filled with gold and that others attending the meeting even smelled the gold. However, when I questioned them, they were not able to confirm that report. Furthermore, I told them that if such a thing actually happened, it would be reported in the newspapers. I went on to say that if our God wanted to fill our teeth, why would He simply not recover them in a proper way instead of using gold? Our God certainly would never heal someone's teeth by filling them with gold. Do not listen to such false reports.

In 2 Corinthians Paul does not speak of gifts or miracles, but he does say that the Spirit gives life. In 1 Corinthians Paul mentions tongue-speaking, for example, with the intention of limiting this practice in the church meetings. But in 2 Corinthians he does not say a word about speaking in tongues. The emphasis in this book is on the Spirit as the life supply. The ministry of the new covenant is a matter of the Spirit as the supply inwardly and of righteousness as God's expression outwardly.

THE MINISTRY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

In 2 Corinthians 3:8 Paul speaks of the ministry of the Spirit, and in verse 9, of the ministry of righteousness. We may understand what the ministry of the Spirit is, but what is the ministry of righteousness? Do you know what

Paul means by this? Years ago, I could not understand what Paul meant by the ministry of righteousness. I thought that by the ministry of righteousness he meant the ministry of justification, since in this chapter there seems to be a comparison between condemnation and justification, which is the opposite of condemnation. But instead of justification, Paul here speaks of righteousness. If he had said that the new covenant ministry was a ministry of justification, it would be easy to understand his meaning. We would immediately see that the ministry of the law was to condemn: that is the ministry of condemnation. But the new covenant ministry is to justify people: this is the ministry of justification. Since Paul in 2 Corinthians 3 says that the new covenant ministry is a ministry of righteousness, not a ministry of justification, we must try to understand his meaning. To be sure, it is a very significant matter that the ministry of the new covenant is a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness.

If we would understand what the ministry of righteousness is, we must first have a proper understanding of righteousness. Righteousness is a matter of being right. When we have the Spirit living, moving, and acting within us in a way that is real and substantial, we are automatically right with God, with others, and with ourselves. This understanding of righteousness is correct, but it is not adequate. Hence, we must go on to see something further regarding righteousness.

BECOMING SOBER RIGHTEOUSLY

In 1 Corinthians 15:34 Paul says, "Become sober righteously and do not sin, for some are ignorant of God." In this verse, to become sober is to awake to soberness from a drunken stupor. It is to cease, righteously, to be drunken. Anyone who is spiritually asleep is not right with God, with others, with himself, or with the church. The context of this verse is Paul's word concerning resurrection.

To say there is no resurrection offends God and man, and it is a sin. Hence, the apostle advised 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.

To take in the heretical thought that there is no resurrection is to allow one's self to be drugged, to be put into a drugged condition. This is also to be asleep. Those who are in such a drugged stupor talk in a nonsensical way with respect to resurrection. As a result, they are not right with God, with the church, or with themselves. Rather, they offend God, the church, and even others in their family. Those who are drugged often cause trouble without realizing it. Therefore, Paul charges the Corinthians to wake up, to become sober righteously.

What does it mean to become sober righteously? It means to become sober in such a way that we are right with God, with others, and with ourselves. A believer who is sober righteously will be right with his wife, with his children, with his neighbors, with all the saints, with the church, and also with himself. Those who are not right in all these ways are in a stupor.

EXPERIENCING THE MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH LIFE

If we did not have the new covenant ministry, we would not have the Spirit, and we would not have righteousness. Before you came into the church life and received the ministry in the Lord's recovery, how much did you experience of the Spirit as the life supply in you? Of course, as a saved person you had the Spirit dwelling in you. But probably you did not have much consciousness that the Spirit was living, active, real, and substantial in you. Many of us can testify that after coming into the church life, we began to realize that there is something within us that is living, real, and substantial. This is the Spirit within us working and making us joyful, peaceful, and restful. This is the Spirit of life ministered into us as the life supply by the ministry in the Lord's recovery.

Before you experienced the Spirit in this way, it may have been very easy for you to argue with your wife or husband. But if you experience the Spirit as your life supply, something within restrains you when you want to argue. For example, a sister may be tempted to blame her husband, but deep within she realizes that she should go into her room and pray. This experience comes from the Spirit as the life supply that is ministered into us through the new covenant ministry.

Perhaps in a church meeting not a word is spoken concerning the Spirit as the life supply. You may have no consciousness of the Spirit being ministered into you. But although nothing is said concerning this, it is nevertheless a fact that in the meeting the Spirit is ministered to you. There is a ministry in the recovery which inscribes the processed Triune God as the life-giving Spirit into our being.

Often in the meetings of the church we receive the supply of the Spirit without being conscious of this fact. I can testify that many times I have returned home after a meeting feeling somewhat unhappy. It seemed that I was angry with everyone and everything. Nevertheless, something within me was moving and living. This is the life-giving Spirit I experienced in the meeting. Even when we are angry or unhappy, this Spirit operates within us. If we turn to the Lord and say, "Lord," our unhappiness or our anger will be swallowed up. This comes from the life-giving Spirit who has been ministered into us without our being conscious of it.

Because I receive the supply of the life-giving Spirit in the church meetings, I very rarely miss a meeting. It does not matter to me who speaks in a particular meeting. My only desire is to be in the meeting and to receive the supply. In particular, I enjoy the prayer meeting of the church in Anaheim. During that meeting I am infused and saturated with the Spirit. Afterward, it seems that everything is golden and that within me the tree of life is growing and the river of life is flowing. Although there is no message and even no word of encouragement, the life-

giving Spirit is ministered into my being. Many among us can testify of this experience.

BECOMING RIGHTEOUS

As a result of experiencing the Spirit living and working within us, we become righteous. Spontaneously our inner being is transparent, crystal clear, and we know the heart of God. Immediately, without effort, we know the mind of the Lord and have a clear understanding concerning His will and work. Then what we do is according to the Lord's mind and will. This is righteousness.

Many Christians have the concept that when we do something wrong, we are not right with God. This concept of righteousness is too superficial. Even when we do not do anything wrong we still may not be right with God, for our being may not be in the mind and will of the Lord. Apparently we are not wrong in any way; however, our entire being may be far short of being right with God. We may not be according to the Lord's mind, and what we are doing may not be His will. As long as we are not doing God's will, we are not right. Instead we are wasting our lives and everything the Lord has given us.

Suppose a young person at school does not do anything wrong. But he does not study properly. Furthermore, when he sits in class, he is absent-minded. Even though he may not do anything wrong, he is more wrong than other students. Outwardly he may not be wrong, but inwardly his whole being is wrong. In the same principle, outwardly many saints are not wrong in anything. Actually, their being is not in the will of the Lord. This understanding of being right with God is not merely according to doctrine, but even the more, it is according to experience.

If you are infused and saturated by the life-giving Spirit, your inner being will become transparent. Then you will know what is in the Lord's mind. You will also understand what the will of the Lord is. Spontaneously, you will be in His will and do His will. As a result, you become right with Him. Moreover, you will realize how you should act toward others and even how you should deal

with your material possessions. Then you will become a righteous person, one who is right in small things as well as in great things, one who is right with God, with others, and with himself. This is a person who expresses God, for his righteousness is the image of God, God expressed.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-EIGHT

THE MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT AS THE LIFE SUPPLY AND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AS GOD'S EXPRESSION

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:8-9, 18; 5:21; Col. 3:10; 1 Cor. 1:30; 15:34; Rom. 8:2, 4; 14:17; Phil. 1:19; 3:9; Rev. 19:7-8; Eph. 4:24; Matt. 5:6, 10, 20

We need to have a proper definition of righteousness. Unbelievers, of course, do not know the meaning of righteousness in the Bible. But many believers in Christ also do not have a full understanding of the significance of righteousness. Strictly speaking, in the Bible righteousness signifies the expression of God's image. This means that, according to the Bible, righteousness is God expressed.

THE LIVING EXPRESSION OF GOD

How can we say that righteousness in the Bible signifies the expression of God? In order to answer this question, we need to see that in the Word righteousness refers in the first place to the fulfilling of the law. If we keep the law and fulfill it, we are right. We have righteousness. But if we break the law, or if we offend others by breaking the law, we are not right. We do not have righteousness. Hence, the first meaning of righteousness in the Bible is that righteousness is the fulfillment of the law.

The law denotes the Ten Commandments. But what is the significance of the Ten Commandments? The Old Testament indicates clearly that the Ten Commandments are the testimony of God. The ark was called the ark of the testimony (Exo. 25:16), and the tabernacle, the tabernacle

of the testimony (Exo. 38:21). The testimony here refers to the law. The law, therefore, is God's testimony.

As a testimony of God, the Ten Commandments were a picture of God, a description of Him. This means that the law is a clear description, definition, and explanation of God. It reveals what kind of God our God is.

If you study the Ten Commandments, you will see that our God is holy. He is not common. He is separate, different from everything outside of Himself. Therefore, one of the commandments declares that we should have only one God and not make any images or worship idols. Furthermore, we should not take the Lord's name in vain, and we should recognize that the Sabbath is a day of memorial of God as the unique Creator.

By studying carefully the first four commandments, we see that these commandments indicate that God is jealous. He is jealous because He is holy and unique. The Bible uses the marriage relationship to illustrate God's uniqueness. Just as a wife has a unique husband, so we, the people of God, should not have any other God. God is our unique Husband, and we should not have another husband besides Him. Just as a woman's husband is separate from all other men and thus is not common, so God is separate from everything else and is not common. This means that our God is holy.

If we read the last six commandments, we shall see that God is righteous. He is a just God, a God of justice. Furthermore, He is a God of love and of light. Therefore, according to the description of God contained in the Ten Commandments, God is holy and righteous and He is a God of love and light. This is our God.

The last six commandments definitely reveal that God is righteous and a God of love and light. To honor our parents is surely right. It is right not to murder, not to commit fornication, not to steal, not to bear false witness, and not to covet. If we fulfill these commandments, we shall be right with others in society. Moreover, fulfilling these six commandments is also a matter of love. Certainly someone who commits murder does not have love. If you

love others, you would not commit fornication, steal, or bear false witness. Neither would you covet others' possessions. Therefore, the Ten Commandments present a God who is holy and righteous and full of love and light.

If we keep the Ten Commandments, we have righteousness. This righteousness is the expression of God, that is, the image of God. Hence, according to the biblical meaning, righteousness is the keeping of the law to present to others an image, an expression, of God. In this way we make known what kind of God we worship. If we are righteous, full of righteousness, this righteousness becomes the expression of the God we worship and serve.

Suppose someone claims to be of God and says that he worships God and serves Him. However, this person steals, lies, and covets. This would cause others to say that they would never believe in that man's God. Such a person would give others the wrong impression of God. But suppose we worship God, serve Him, and claim to be of Him. Suppose we also live a life that is holy, separated unto God, and a life that is righteous and full of love and light, a life that is considerate of others. We honor our parents, we do not steal, we do not bear false witness, and we do not covet. In other words, we serve God and worship God and we are also righteous. As a result, we have the expression, the image, of God. Then others will realize that our God is surely the true God. They will have the desire to take this God as their God.

Christ, our precious Redeemer, now dwells within us as the life-giving Spirit to be our life and life supply. Now we have a wonderful motivation and supply in us. As the Spirit, Christ supplies us, motivates us, and even carries us all day long. If we live by Him and live Him out, our living will be genuine righteousness. This righteousness is the living image, the living expression, of God. This is the reason we say that the Spirit is within us as life and that righteousness is the expression outwardly.

The purpose of the ministry of the new covenant is to minister into the saints the life-giving Spirit and righteousness. Both the Spirit and righteousness are

actually Christ Himself. Christ living within us is the life-giving Spirit, and Christ expressed through us is righteousness as the image of God. How wonderful!

In 3:8 and 9 Paul speaks first of the Spirit and then of righteousness. In verse 8 he says, "How shall not rather the ministry of the Spirit be in glory?" Here we read of the ministry of the Spirit. In verse 9 Paul goes on to say, "For if the ministry of condemnation came in glory, much rather the ministry of righteousness abounds in glory." Here we have the ministry of righteousness. This is our reason for saying that the ministry of the new covenant is a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness.

A MINISTRY OF THE LORD'S IMAGE

In 3:18 Paul uses a word which is a synonym of righteousness in 3:9. This word is image. In 3:18 Paul 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." As we behold and reflect the Lord, we are transformed into His image. This image is synonymous with righteousness in verse 9. Thus, the ministry of righteousness is a ministry of the Lord's image.

How can we have this image? How can we have a living righteousness which is the image of the Lord? We can have this image, this righteousness, only by the Spirit. According to verse 18, we are transformed into the Lord's image from glory to glory even as from the Spirit. This means that the source and the substance for this image, this righteousness, is the Spirit. The Spirit within us is the factor that produces the image of God, the righteousness of God as His expression.

SPIRIT, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND IMAGE

I did not arrive at this understanding of the Spirit, righteousness, and the image merely by study. In addition to many years of study, there have also been many years of experience. Through my experience I began to realize that when I am infused with the life-giving Spirit, I

spontaneously have a living which is righteous in every way. I do the will of God, and I do not offend others, and I am not wrong with them. When I am saturated with the Spirit, my living becomes the expression of the indwelling Christ. The indwelling Christ lived out by me is righteousness as the expression of God, and this expression is God's image.

This understanding of righteousness being the image of God is confirmed by Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10. Ephesians 4:24 says, "And have put on the new man, which according to God was created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Here Paul speaks of righteousness in relation to the new man. In Colossians 3:10 he says, "And having put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him Who created him." If we put these verses together, we see that the new man is created in the image of God and that with this image there is righteousness. By these verses we realize that the living righteousness is God's image, God's expression. This image, this expression, is Christ lived out of us as the life-giving Spirit.

Do you know what the new covenant ministry is? Is this a ministry or service that teaches others to speak in tongues or instructs them to be baptized in a certain way? No, in every aspect and in every way, the new covenant ministry dispenses Christ into us as the life-giving Spirit. This life-giving Spirit then becomes the bountiful supply within us. Simultaneously, the new covenant ministry presents Christ to us as righteousness, as the living image of God to be His expression.

FOUND IN CHRIST

We know from the book of Philippians that Paul's aspiration was to be found in Christ. In Philippians 3:9 Paul declares, "And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God based on faith." According to this verse, the very Christ in whom Paul desired to be found is the

righteousness of God. Paul desired to be found in Christ, not having anything of himself as righteousness, but having Christ as the righteousness of God.

We may illustrate the matter of being found in Christ by the wearing of a certain suit of clothes and being found by others wearing that suit. Suppose I am wearing a gray suit. In the meeting you find me in this suit, and at home you would also find me wearing the same suit of clothing. Because I wear it, wherever you find me, you find me in this suit of clothes. In like manner, if we would be found in Christ, we need to wear the living Christ as our clothing, as our righteousness. This is to be found in Him as the expression of God, His image.

THE GOAL OF THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY

The goal of the new covenant ministry is nothing other than to minister Christ as the life-giving Spirit inwardly and as the living righteousness outwardly. Even though our experience may be somewhat limited, I believe that in the Lord's recovery the Spirit and the living righteousness have been ministered to us at least on a small scale through the ministry of the new covenant.

Before I came into the church life, I often ministered on such matters as the ten horns, the ten toes, and the seventy weeks. I was fully preoccupied with these matters. In a sense, I was in a spiritual stupor. I certainly needed to "become sober righteously," as Paul charges the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:34. When I met other Christians, I would ask them if they knew what the Bible teaches concerning the seventy weeks. If they did not know this, I would take the opportunity to explain it to them. I would also talk a great deal about the rapture. But, thank the Lord, one day I woke up righteously from my stupor, from my drugged condition. Instead of emphasizing things such as the ten horns, the seventy weeks, and the method of baptism, I began to care only for Christ with the church. Now my Bible dictionary consists only of one word--Christ. Along with this unique word, there is a footnote saying "with the church." Therefore, my Bible dictionary is a

dictionary of Christ with the church. I can testify that during all the years I have been in this country, I have not taught anything except Christ with the church. This is the New Testament ministry.

The new covenant ministry is a ministry of Christ. The old covenant ministry, on the contrary, was a ministry of the law. The priests, the kings, and the prophets all ministered the law to the people. Since the law kills, that ministry was a ministry of death. Furthermore, it was also a ministry of condemnation, for anything that is dead is also condemned. Thus, the unique ministry of the old covenant was a ministry of death and condemnation. But today there is also a unique ministry, the ministry of the new covenant. This ministry is a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness. It is vital that we all see this. Our ministry is not focused on matters such as baptism or speaking in tongues. Our ministry, the ministry of the new covenant, ministers one thing, one matter, one Person--the all-inclusive Christ as the life-giving Spirit as our life supply inwardly and as our righteousness outwardly. When Christ lives in us, He is our life and life supply. But when we live Him out, He becomes our righteousness. He was made sin for us, and now we are becoming the righteousness of God in Him. This is the ministry of the new covenant.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE TWENTY-NINE

THE MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT AS THE LIFE SUPPLY AND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AS GOD'S EXPRESSION

(3)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:8-9, 18; 5:21; Col. 3:10; 1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 8:2, 4; 14:17; Phil. 1:19; 3:9; Rev. 19:7-8; Eph. 4:24; Matt. 5:6, 10, 20

For a better understanding of the ministry of the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3, we need to consider some key verses in Romans 8.

In Romans 8:2 Paul says that the law of the Spirit of life frees us from the law of sin and death. The key phrase in this verse is "the Spirit of life." In Romans 8:4 Paul goes on to speak concerning walking according to the spirit. This involves walking according to the Spirit of life mentioned in verse 2. We must walk according to the Spirit of life so that the righteous requirements of the law may be fulfilled in us. This does not mean that we endeavor to keep the law; it means that the law is spontaneously and unconsciously fulfilled in us when we walk according to the Spirit.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW FULFILLED IN US

If we do not live in the Spirit of life and do not walk according to this Spirit and yet try to keep the law, we shall not succeed. Even if we are successful in keeping the law in an outward way, we still shall not have righteousness. But when we live in the Spirit of life and walk according to the Spirit of life, we shall keep the law

automatically, even though we may not have the intention to do so. Spontaneously, all the requirements of the law will be fulfilled in us.

Let us now consider in more detail how the law of God, the Ten Commandments, is fulfilled in us when we walk according to the Spirit of life. When we live and walk in the Spirit, we certainly will have only one God. We shall never have any other God than our God. This means that we spontaneously fulfill the first commandment.

Furthermore, we would never make an image to worship as an idol. We would make neither visible images nor invisible ones. Sometimes we make invisible images in our imagination or in our daydreams. For example, someone may think that in the future he will become a very wealthy doctor, a millionaire who owns vast properties. This daydreaming causes him to make an invisible idol, an invisible image. Then he may try his best to fulfill this dream. This is the worshipping of an invisible image.

It is easy for young people especially to make idols in their imagination. A brother may dream about the wonderful young woman he will marry someday. Then he may search for someone to be the fulfillment of his dream. When he comes to the church meetings, he may be seeking the perfect wife he has in mind. This dream is this brother's invisible idol. If we walk according to the Spirit, we shall condemn any such dreams. However, those who do not walk according to the Spirit may spend much time lingering in their dreams and enjoying them. By walking according to the Spirit, we spontaneously fulfill the second commandment.

The same is true regarding the third commandment, the commandment about not taking the name of the Lord in vain. If we live and walk in the Spirit of life, we would never mention the divine name, the holy name, in vain. On the contrary, we would always name the Lord in reality and with a definite purpose. Also we would spontaneously keep the memorial day of the Lord and thereby fulfill the fourth commandment. Thus, when we walk according to

the Spirit of life, the first four commandments are fulfilled in us.

What is true of the first four commandments is also true of the last six commandments. When we live and walk according to the Spirit, the last six commandments, which concern our relationships with others, are fulfilled spontaneously. The fifth commandment requires that we honor our parents. If we walk according to the Spirit, we shall honor our parents automatically. There will be no need for us to make up our minds to honor them or to endeavor to do this. There will be no need for a young person to say to himself, "In the past I did not have a proper attitude toward my mother and father. Now that I am a Christian I shall have the right attitude, I shall behave properly, and I shall become a good example for my younger brothers and sisters." Anyone who makes up his mind to honor his parents in this way will not be successful. This can be compared to a cat trying to fly in the air like a bird. A cat is a cat, and it cannot fly. It simply does not have the capacity, the ability, to fly. The same is true of anyone who tries in his natural life to fulfill the fifth commandment. But if we live Christ, if we live and walk in the Spirit of life, spontaneously and unconsciously we shall honor our parents. When our parents see this, they may be greatly surprised and wonder what has happened to us.

In 2 Corinthians 3:3 Paul says that the Corinthians were a letter of Christ ministered by the apostles. By having Christ inscribed into us, we also become living letters of Christ which can be read by others. I know of many cases of young people who have been read by their parents. At first, their parents opposed them because they had turned to the Lord or had come into the church life. But even while the parents were opposing them, they were reading what had been inscribed of Christ into them. As a result, after a period of time, many of these opposing parents turned to the Lord's way. I have heard many wonderful testimonies concerning this.

Even if your parents are opposing you, they are still watching you, reading you as a letter of Christ.

Eventually, if you live and walk in the Spirit of life in your relationship with your parents, they will be convinced. Although you may not intentionally try to honor your parents, spontaneously you render them the most excellent and wonderful respect because you walk according to the Spirit. Your parents will notice this, appreciate it, and eventually may be convinced and subdued by it.

During more than fifty years in the church life, I have seen many cases like this. At first, certain saints were opposed by their parents. In some cases the parents were Buddhists; in other cases, they were Christians. Because the way of the Lord's recovery was new to them and strange to their understanding, they opposed their children. Some said, "Other Christians attend church just once a week. Why must you go to meetings several times a week? What attracts you to go to church so often? Formerly you loved many things, but now you don't seem to care about them anymore. What has happened to you? Have you lost your mind? What kind of influence does this church have on you?" When their children loved worldly things, their parents were happy with them. But when they stopped loving those things, their parents were troubled. Wondering what was happening to their children, they decided to oppose the church and to do everything possible to keep them away from the church life. This kind of thing happened hundreds of times in China and also in the United States. But before the Lord I can testify that in the vast majority of cases, the parents eventually turned to the Lord and to His way. Some turned after a few years; others turned after more than thirty years. In some instances the parents came to the church meeting, and, with tears, stood up to give testimony of how they had opposed the church by opposing their children. Then they went on to say that they were convinced by the lives of their children and had repented.

Why has the Lord gained the victory in so many cases? He has been victorious simply because the saints have lived in the Spirit of life and walked according to the Spirit. Automatically, they respected and honored their

parents in such a way that their parents were convinced that the way their children had taken was of the Lord.

If we walk according to the Spirit, we shall also fulfill the commandments forbidding murder, fornication, stealing, giving false testimony, and coveting. If we make up our mind to keep these commandments, we shall not be fully successful. In Romans 7 Paul tells us that he tried to overcome coveting, but he was not able to do so. Rather, he was killed by this commandment. Then he condemned himself and cried out, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me?" (Rom. 7:24). Then in Romans 8 he could declare, "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed me from the law of sin and of death" (vv. 1-2). Paul also came to realize that the righteous requirements of the law were fulfilled in him automatically when he walked according to the Spirit of life. This also can be our experience today. There is no need for us to purpose to fulfill the Ten Commandments. Once again I say that if we walk according to the Spirit of life, every commandment will be fulfilled in us unconsciously and spontaneously. Each commandment will be thoroughly fulfilled in us.

THE EXPRESSION OF GOD

When the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in us because we walk according to the Spirit, then we have righteousness. Righteousness, as we pointed out in the previous message, signifies the expression of God, His image. When we have righteousness, we have the expression of the God we serve and worship. Because we have this expression as the spontaneous righteousness we live out by the Spirit of life, others can be convinced and subdued. For this reason, those who oppose us may eventually be convinced by seeing the expression of God lived out of us.

In Romans 8:4 Paul speaks of the righteous requirement of the law, and in verse 29 he speaks of the image of God's Son: "Because whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son,

that He should be the Firstborn among many brothers." If we

put this verse together with verses 2 and 4, we have the Spirit, righteousness, and the image. Day by day, we need to walk according to the Spirit of life so that we may fulfill the righteousness of the law. This is equal to being conformed to the image of God's Son.

We may wonder how we can be conformed to the image of the Son of God. The way to be conformed to His image is to walk according to the Spirit of life so that the righteous requirements of the law may be fulfilled in us. Then we shall have righteousness, and this righteousness is the very image of the Son of God. Therefore, the Spirit produces righteousness, and righteousness is the image.

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE KINGDOM

Romans 14:17 says, "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." In this verse Paul gives us another aspect of righteousness. In Romans 8 we have righteousness related to the Spirit of life and issuing in the image of the Son of God. But in Romans 14:17 righteousness is related to the kingdom of God. In this chapter the kingdom of God denotes the church life. The meetings of the church are an exhibition of the kingdom of God. In the church life we have a condition and a situation that shows others what the kingdom of God is. The church life is the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of God is righteousness.

Paul's word in Romans 14:17 corresponds to what is written in the Old Testament. According to Psalm 89:14, righteousness is the foundation of God's throne. This verse can also be translated to say that righteousness is the establishment of God's throne. God's throne is established with righteousness as the foundation. The book of Isaiah also has much to say about righteousness. For example, Isaiah 32:1 says, "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness." Here righteousness is again related to the kingdom. Where God's righteousness is, there His kingdom is also. Furthermore, Hebrews 1:8 and 9 say, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the scepter of uprightness

is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness." These verses are a quotation from Psalm 45.

In the Old Testament righteousness is often synonymous with the kingdom. Therefore, righteousness is related to government, administration, regulation, and rule. Righteousness means that things are set up and maintained in good order. Where there is righteousness, everything is headed up in a proper way. This is the kingdom.

Righteousness first issues in the image of God. Then righteousness establishes the kingdom of God. In Romans 8 we have righteousness and God's image, and in Romans 14 we have righteousness and God's kingdom. Both the image and the kingdom are based on righteousness.

Let us now apply this aspect of righteousness to our family life and our church life. When a husband and wife are not happy with each other and the situation at home is not pleasant, there is no righteousness, no image of the Son, in their family life. Likewise, the kingdom of God is not present, for God's kingdom is righteousness. Others observing the situation will not receive any impression of the image of Christ, the expression of God. However, suppose a brother and his wife live in the Spirit and walk according to the Spirit. They will be happy, and their children will be happy also. What a glorious family life that would be! Others will be able to see the image of God and realize that the kingdom of God is present in that family. This is righteousness in the family life.

Suppose in a particular church the saints are murmuring, criticizing, and gossiping. Furthermore, suppose that in the meetings there is disorder. If a church is in such a condition, there is no expression of God and no kingdom of God there. But suppose that instead of murmuring, criticizing, or gossiping, there are forbearance, praise, calling on the Lord, and fellowship. Moreover, suppose the meetings are living, in good order, and rich in function. Surely in such a church we can see the kingdom of God full of righteousness. Everything there is orderly and peaceful.

The goal of the new covenant ministry is to minister the all-inclusive Spirit of the processed Triune God into others to be their supply. Simultaneously, this ministry dispenses Christ into the believers as their righteousness. Then as the believers live and walk according to the Spirit, they will be in a condition that expresses God and that gives an impression of the Son of God. Furthermore, they will actually be the kingdom of God established in righteousness, set in order, and properly headed up. They will also have peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. This is the result of the new covenant ministry. By contrast, the result of today's different ministries is that there are differences of opinion, division, and disorder.

ADORNED WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS

Revelation 19:7 and 8 say, "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." The bride here refers to redeemed and transformed tripartite mankind. This bride will wear white linen, which is the righteousnesses of the saints.

If we would have a share in this bride, who is adorned with bright, shining, pure righteousness, we need to adorn ourselves with righteousness. Day by day we need to prepare bright linen clothing to cover ourselves. This is our daily righteousness.

How can we produce such a garment of righteousness? We produce it by walking daily according to the Spirit of life and by having a life that is a life of the Spirit. If we prepare our wedding garment day by day, month by month, and year by year by living such a life in the Spirit, we shall not be found naked when the Lord comes. Instead, at His coming, we shall be wearing a bright, pure wedding garment.

Ultimately, the bride in Revelation 19 will become the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 and 22. The city of New Jerusalem will bear the appearance of jasper. Speaking of the New Jerusalem, Revelation 21:11 says, "Her light was

like a most precious stone, as a jasper stone, clear as crystal." According to Revelation 21:18, "the building material of its wall was jasper." Also, the first foundation of the New Jerusalem will be jasper (Rev. 21:19). Therefore, the appearance of the city will be that of jasper. Revelation 4 indicates that God sitting on the throne in the heavens also has the appearance of jasper. Hence, jasper denotes God's image, His expression. The fact that jasper is the appearance both of God and of the New Jerusalem indicates that this holy city will bear the same appearance God does. The entire city will express God.

The jasper of the New Jerusalem is equal to the righteousness of the bride. Today we are preparing our bridal gown, a gown that will have the appearance of righteousness, which is the expression of God. Ultimately, in the New Jerusalem, this will be the appearance of jasper.

RIGHTEOUSNESS DWELLING IN THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

Second Peter 3:13 says, "Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." As used in this verse, the word righteousness is rich in meaning. To say that righteousness will dwell in the new heaven and new earth means that everything will be in order, headed up, and regulated. Everything will be governed, controlled, and under the proper rule, for the throne of God, the kingdom, the divine administration, will be there. The result will be peace and joy.

When righteousness dwells in the new heaven and new earth, the situation will be very different from what it is today. At present there is little righteousness on earth. Instead there are unrighteousness, disorder, and confusion. But praise the Lord that in the church, where we have a foretaste of the new heaven and the new earth, righteousness dwells! Moreover, we should be able to say that, by the Lord's mercy, righteousness also dwells in our family life.

Today, many Christians neglect the new covenant ministry. Instead of ministering the Spirit and righteousness to others, they argue about such things as the method of baptism. They debate whether someone should be baptized forward or backward, one time or three times, in the name of Jesus or in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The various so-called ministries have divided the children of God. These divisive ministries are not the ministry of the new covenant. The ministry of the new covenant simply ministers Christ to others as the Spirit to be the life supply inwardly and as righteousness to be the expression of God outwardly. This expression of God as righteousness, the image of God, brings in the kingdom, where everything is regulated, orderly, and headed up. This gives us a foretaste of the coming kingdom and of the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth. This is the function of the new covenant ministry.

Not only the co-workers and the elders in the churches but all the saints, including the young ones, should be today's ministers of the new covenant. This means that we must all carry on the ministry to minister Christ as the life-giving Spirit and as righteousness.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY

THE MINISTERS AND THE MINISTRY BECOMING ONE

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:8-9, 16-18; 4:6-7

Before we consider the matter of the ministers and the ministry becoming one, we need to consider the words of the Lord Jesus concerning righteousness. When He issued the decree of the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens (Matt. 5:1--7:29), He said some important things concerning righteousness. Again and again He emphasized righteousness. He declared, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matt. 5:6). Then He went on to say, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens" (Matt. 5:10). He also taught His disciples, "Unless your righteousness surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens" (Matt. 5:20). The Lord Jesus also emphasized righteousness when He said, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). Instead of worrying about food and clothing, we need to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. But what is this righteousness emphasized by the Lord Jesus? This righteousness is Christ lived out from within us to be the expression of God and the kingdom of God. When we have this righteousness, we surely have God's reign. We have God's ruling, administration, and government. This means that we have the kingdom with peace and joy in our daily life, family life, and church life.

Again and again I would emphasize the fact that the new covenant ministry is a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness. I never grow tired of repeating this. This

new covenant ministry is the ministry in the Lord's recovery. In the recovery we only minister Christ as the life-giving Spirit and as our living righteousness.

If we read 3:8, 9, and 16 through 18, we can see clearly that eventually all the ministers of the new covenant become one with their ministry. This means that the ministers are the ministry. Their ministry is what they are, not merely what they do or the work they accomplish. The very being of the new covenant ministers is their ministry. Therefore, we may speak of the ministers and the ministry becoming one.

TWO STAGES OF THE NEW COVENANT MINISTRY

Second Corinthians 3:8 and 9 say, "How shall not rather the ministry of the Spirit be in glory? For if the ministry of condemnation came in glory, much rather the ministry of righteousness abounds in glory." Notice that verse 8 says that the ministry of the new covenant is in glory, and verse 9 says that this ministry abounds in glory. Here we see two stages of the new covenant ministry. The first stage is the ministry of the Spirit; the second stage is the ministry of righteousness. When the ministry is of the Spirit, it is in the first stage. This is the ministry in glory. When the ministry is of righteousness, it is in the second stage. In this stage the new covenant ministry not only is in glory--it abounds in glory. The reason it abounds in glory is that righteousness comes forth.

These two stages of the new covenant ministry can be applied to our family life. Suppose a brother, his wife, and child receive the ministry of the Spirit. With the ministry of the Spirit there is glory, but this ministry does not abound in glory, for there is not yet any righteousness. But perhaps after a period of time the husband, the wife, and the child all live out righteousness according to the Spirit of life within them. This is the ministry of righteousness abounding in glory. Anyone visiting that family would be able to realize what a glory there is with them.

In the initial stage, the stage of the ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of the new covenant is in glory. But

when this ministry becomes the ministry of righteousness, the ministry abounds in glory. Whenever the ministry of the Spirit is lived out in us with the expression of righteousness, the ministry abounds in glory.

In 3:8 and 9 "in glory" and "abounds in glory" are both related to the ministry. But in verses 16 through 18 glory is related not to the ministry, but to the ministers. In verse 18 Paul 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." In this verse the word "we" refers to the apostles, who, as examples and representatives of all believers, are the ministers of Christ. Thus, in verses 8 and 9 the glory is related to the ministry, but in verse 18 it is related to the ministers.

Although the glory in verses 8 and 9 is related to the ministry, and the glory in verse 18 is related to the ministers, there are not two kinds of glory. There is not one kind of glory attached to the ministry and another kind of glory related to the ministers. No, there is only one kind of glory. This proves that eventually all the ministers of the new covenant become one with their ministry. What they are in their being, their person, is their ministry.

THE LIVING OF THE NEW COVENANT MINISTERS

The fact that the ministers and the ministry are one is fully proved in 2 Corinthians 4. In this chapter Paul gives us a strong indication that the ministry is just what the new covenant ministers are. Actually, the ministers in chapter 4 are not working; they are simply living. Hence, their living is their working. Apart from their living, there is no need for them to do any work, for their living is their work, their ministry. Their inner being is actually their ministry. What counts in the new covenant ministry is what the ministers of the new covenant are in their living and in their being.

The situation of the ministers of the new covenant is very different from that of many of today's Christian preachers. It is common for Christian ministers and

preachers to work in one way, but to live in a different way. This means that what they work is one thing, and what they are is another thing. They may teach others to be according to a certain high standard, but they themselves do not live according to this standard. Thus, there is a discrepancy between their work and their being. But the new covenant ministers are one with their ministry. What they do is what they are. The way they work is the way they live. Their living, their being, is their ministry. As a result, the glory of their ministry is their glory, and their glory is the glory of their ministry.

INVISIBLE GLORY

The glory of the new covenant ministers is not something visible or outward. This glory is inward and invisible; it is a matter of Christ realized by others in our living. For example, when you visit a brother's home, you may see in his family life a condition, a state, of glory. This glory is not Christ seen by others; it is Christ realized by them when they observe the daily living of this family. Others have the sense that in the life of this family there is something glorious. This is the glory of the new covenant ministers and their ministry.

When Moses came down from the mountain, glory shone from his face in a visible way. But there was no such shining of glory on Paul's face. With Moses, the glory was physical and visible. The shining of that glory, however, did not last very long. With Paul there was no visible, physical shining of glory. However, with him there was a spiritual, inward shining of glory. Anyone who stayed with Paul for a period of time would realize that with him there was an invisible shining. Although this shining could not be seen, it could be sensed, realized. This is the shining of the inward glory.

With Paul there was no outward shining. With him there was something glorious shining from within. I thank the Lord that today there are also ministers who shine not with an outward light, but with an inward light, with a light from within.

GOD'S SHINING IN OUR HEARTS

I have learned from experience that the new covenant ministers shine inwardly with an invisible glory. However, not wanting to put my trust in experience, I checked this matter according to the Bible. When I did so, I found that in 4:6 Paul says, "Because the God Who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One Who shined in our hearts for the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." The very God who commanded light to shine out of darkness has shined in the hearts of the new covenant ministers. His shining in the universe produced the old creation. Now His shining in the hearts of the new covenant ministers makes them a new creation. Therefore, they are able to exalt Christ as the Lord in their preaching and conduct themselves as slaves to the believers in their service (v. 5). What they do for Christ and what they are to the believers both issue from God's shining. God's shining produces the new covenant ministers and their ministry.

In the old creation the shining of God was outward. But with us in the new creation, the shining of God is inward. God has shined into our hearts. Now the shining, the glory, the illumination, is within us.

God's shining in our hearts results in the illumination of knowing the glory of God in the face of Christ, that is, in the enlightenment that causes us to know the glory of the gospel of Christ. The illumination, the enlightenment, that makes the glory of Christ's gospel known to us issues from the shining of God in our hearts.

Many of us know from experience what it is to have the glory of the Lord shining in our hearts. One day, something of the Lord began to shine within us. Before we experienced this inward shining, we were in darkness. This was my situation in organized Christianity for many years. I heard the stories about Christ, and I was taught concerning the cross. But not until I was saved did I experience the inward shining.

Today some religious people have a superstitious concept of a material cross. Some put a wooden or concrete cross on the top of their places of worship. Others wear a

gold cross on a chain around their necks. Still others practice making a so-called sign of the cross. Not long ago, a man came to me wearing a clerical collar and a large cross. That kind of cross does not save anyone. It has no power whatever. Nevertheless, some people actually believe that if they lay a material cross upon someone who is ill, that cross has the power to heal him. What superstition! This outward, material concept of the cross has nothing to do with the new covenant ministry.

The new covenant ministry is altogether in the Spirit. It has nothing to do with things visible or physical. The new covenant ministry is invisible, but it is nonetheless something we are able to lay hold of. It is something real that can be sensed, realized, experienced, and enjoyed. This is the glory, the shining, the reality, the power, and the strength of the new covenant ministry.

TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS

In 4:7 Paul goes on to say, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." God's shining in our hearts brings into us a treasure, the Christ of glory, who is the embodiment of God to be our life and our everything. But we who contain this treasure are earthen vessels, worthless and fragile. What a priceless treasure is contained in worthless vessels! This has made the vessels ministers of the new covenant with a priceless ministry. The excellence of the power is surely of God and not of ourselves. This treasure, the indwelling Christ, in us, the earthen vessels, is the divine source of the supply for the Christian life. It is by the excellent power of this treasure that the apostles as ministers of the new covenant are able to live a crucified life so that the resurrection life of Christ may be manifest.

The shining reality of Christ is the treasure in us, the earthen vessels. Outwardly we are earthen vessels, but inwardly we have a priceless treasure. This treasure is Christ as the embodiment of the processed Triune God to be in us the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit. This treasure

has a power, and this power is excellent. Christ as the life-giving Spirit in us is the One who shines and works. This is the treasure we have in us.

The new covenant ministers with their ministry are earthen vessels containing a marvelous treasure. Their ministry is altogether something in the Spirit, something that is real and living. It is something we can sense, enjoy, realize, and experience. This is what the Lord desires in His recovery today. This is the New Testament testimony, and it is what God wants among us. We must be in the recovery of this ministry. We must live this kind of life and be in a church that has this ministry. Furthermore, we must minister this to others not mainly by what we do, but primarily by what we are and by the way we live. This is the ministers with their ministry of the new covenant. Truly the ministers and the ministry are one.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE

THE MANIFESTATION OF LIFE THROUGH THE KILLING OF THE CROSS

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 4:1-18

DOCTRINE AND EXPERIENCE

Chapters three and four of 2 Corinthians are different in nature. Chapter three is actually a chapter of doctrine. I realize that for many of us doctrine is not a positive word. Because of our background, a background of religion full of doctrine, we do not regard doctrine as something pleasant or tasteful. In giving a testimony in a church meeting, we would want to say, "What I want to share with you is not a doctrine. It is a real and precious experience." We all appreciate the word experience, and whenever we have the opportunity, we would testify concerning our experience of the Lord or our experience in the Lord. We would hesitate to stand up and say, "What I am about to present to you is a doctrine." Nevertheless, I have the boldness to say that chapter three of 2 Corinthians is a chapter on doctrine. Of course, as a rule, doctrine should involve experience. In like manner, any genuine spiritual experience involves doctrine. Therefore, we may say that 2 Corinthians 3 is a chapter on doctrine with some amount of experience.

Let me give my reasons for saying that 2 Corinthians 3 is concerned with doctrine. Verses 8 and 9 speak of the ministry of the Spirit and of the ministry of righteousness. Thus, the new covenant ministry is first a ministry of the Spirit and then a ministry of righteousness. Is this not a matter of doctrine? If we are fair and if we are not influenced by a negative concept regarding doctrine, we shall admit that this is in fact a matter of doctrine.

Because the Bible is a book of doctrine, we cannot avoid doctrine or ignore it. In chapter three, in particular, we have the doctrine that the new covenant ministry is a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness.

Chapter three, however, also contains some amount of experience. For instance, in verse 18 Paul 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." This verse contains both doctrine and experience. Although Paul speaks here from the standpoint of experience, at the same time his word includes doctrine.

If 2 Corinthians 3 is basically a chapter on doctrine, what is the nature of chapter four? Second Corinthians 4 is a chapter on experience. How do we know this? Verse 1 gives us an indication that this chapter is concerned with experience: "Therefore, having this ministry, as we received mercy we do not lose heart." Here Paul refers to "having this ministry." Even this is related to doctrine as well as to experience. But the matter of not losing heart is definitely a matter of experience.

Even in chapter four, a chapter on experience, we can find doctrine. Likewise, in chapter three, a chapter on doctrine, there is experience. We may say that 2 Corinthians 3 is experientially doctrinal and that 2 Corinthians 4 is doctrinally experiential. Having such an understanding of these two chapters is essential to grasping what we shall cover in this message.

THE MANIFESTATION OF LIFE

What kind of experience do we find in chapter four? It is not the experience of salvation, justification, or forgiveness. Some may say that in this chapter we have the experience of the cross. However, this is to speak of the experience in chapter four in a way that is too negative. What we find here is the manifestation of life. This chapter is on the experience of the manifestation of life.

Christians may read 2 Corinthians 4 without realizing that this chapter is on the manifestation of life. Verses 10

and 11 say, "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our body. For we who live are always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh." In these verses Paul does not use the adjective manifest. Instead, he uses the verb "be manifested." There is a difference between something that is manifest and something manifested. The word manifest does not involve experience or a process. But manifested involves a process, a procedure. In these verses Paul does not say that the life of Jesus may be manifest. If he had said this, no process or procedure would be involved. There would be no need for us to go through anything in our experience. But when Paul speaks of the life of Jesus being manifested in us, that involves a process. For the life of Jesus to be manifested requires a process, a procedure. In 4:10-12 we can definitely see the manifestation of life. This indicates that this chapter concerns the experience of the manifestation of life.

The manifestation of life comes through the killing of the cross. For this reason, the title of this message is "The Manifestation of Life through the Killing of the Cross." Of course, in chapter four we cannot find the word cross. Nevertheless, the concept of the cross is implied. For example, the "putting to death of Jesus" in verse 10 surely implies the cross. The death of Jesus is not the same as the putting to death of Jesus. We should not think that putting to death is the same as death. No, there is at least some difference between them. The experience of the manifestation of life is related to the putting to death of Jesus.

After presenting the ministry of the new covenant in a somewhat doctrinal way in chapter three, Paul goes on in chapter four to present the experience of a new covenant minister. In doing so, why does he refer to the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus might be manifested? No doubt, Paul and the other apostles had many different kinds of experience. Why, then, does he present this particular experience in chapter four? The central focus of

this chapter is nothing other than the manifestation of life through the killing of the cross. In chapter three Paul tells us what the new covenant ministry is. Then in chapter four he testifies of this ministry from his experience. In order to testify of the new covenant ministry, the ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness, it is necessary for Paul to present the experience of the manifestation of life through the killing of the cross.

THE MINISTRY CONFIRMED

In 4:1 Paul says, "Therefore, having this ministry, as we received mercy we do not lose heart." Suppose Paul had composed this verse differently and had said this: "Therefore, having this service, as we have received abundant grace, we are comforted." Would this kind of writing confirm what Paul says in chapter three? Certainly not. There would be no beauty or riches to correspond to the matters covered in chapter three. In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul covers some marvelous points: the ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of righteousness, transformation from glory to glory. In chapter four there is something that corresponds to each of these points, points that describe the wonderful new covenant ministry, a ministry of the Spirit, a ministry of righteousness, a ministry for transformation from glory to glory. This ministry, described in a doctrinal way in chapter three, needs to be confirmed. In chapter four Paul gives us an experiential confirmation of the points he has just made regarding the new covenant ministry.

Someone reading chapter three might say, "Paul, you have just told us what your ministry is. Your ministry is of the Spirit and of righteousness, and it is for our transformation from glory to glory. This is wonderful. But can you confirm to us this excellent ministry from your own experience? Will you give us some experience as a confirmation of your ministry?" Almost as if to anticipate such questions, Paul seems to say in this Epistle, "In the following chapter, chapter four, I shall tell you of my experience." What Paul says in chapter four regarding his experience, therefore, must emphasize the crucial points

covered in chapter three. This means he must emphasize something related to the Spirit, righteousness, transformation, and glory. As we read chapter four, we need to find what matters correspond to all these points in chapter three.

What in chapter four corresponds to the Spirit in chapter three? It would not be correct to say the "spirit of faith" mentioned in verse 13, for this refers to something else. The matter in chapter four that corresponds to the Spirit is life. Life in this chapter is a synonym of the Spirit. In a chapter concerning doctrine Paul speaks of the Spirit, but in a chapter concerning experience he speaks of life. Life in doctrine is the Spirit, and the Spirit in our experience is life.

We may use the difference between groceries and cooked food to illustrate the difference between the Spirit and life. Before we prepare a meal, what we have on hand is different kinds of groceries. But we do not eat these groceries; we eat cooked food prepared from groceries. Doctrine can be compared to groceries, and our spiritual experience, to the cooked food we eat. The Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3 is the "groceries," but the life in chapter four is the "cooked food." Thus, we may say that life is the Spirit "cooked" or processed for our experience. Furthermore, we are all cooks. Whenever we cook the Spirit, the Spirit becomes life to us. Therefore, we are now enjoying cooked food. This means that the life in chapter four is the processed Spirit. After the Spirit is processed, cooked, He becomes life to us in our experience.

For the time being, we shall not seek to find what element in chapter four corresponds to righteousness in chapter three. Instead, let us ask what corresponds to transformation. Just as life is synonymous with the Spirit, so being renewed is synonymous with being transformed. Paul speaks of renewing in verse 16 when he says that "our inward man is being renewed day by day." Although transformation and renewal are synonyms, there is still a difference between them. Transformation involves a process. When the process of transformation takes place, it becomes renewing.

What is the synonym in chapter four for glory in chapter three? Actually, there is no synonym. No matter how much glory is processed, it remains glory. In both chapters three and four Paul speaks of glory. However, the glory in chapter three is not as weighty as that in chapter four. In 4:17 Paul speaks of "an eternal weight of glory." The glory in chapter three is dispensationally weighty in this age, but the glory in chapter four is eternally weighty. In other words, in chapter three glory has a weight for this age, but in chapter four glory has a weight of eternity. We should remember that 3:18 speaks of being from one degree of glory to another degree. No doubt, the glory in chapter four is the most advanced degree. At least, it is at a higher level than the glory in chapter three.

In chapter three the matters of the Spirit, transformation, and glory are somewhat doctrinal. But in chapter four the synonymous points are experiential. As we have seen, the Spirit becomes life, transformation becomes renewing, and the dispensational glory becomes the eternal glory.

THE SPIRIT AND LIFE

The manifestation of life is equal to the manifestation of the Spirit. In 3:8 Paul says that his ministry, the ministry of the new covenant, is a ministry of the Spirit. In chapter four he presents an experiential confirmation of this. In this chapter he seems to be saying, "Let me confirm for you that my ministry is a ministry of the Spirit. When I came to you, didn't you see something manifested in me? What did you see? Jewish religion? Jewish practices, habits, and customs? No, you did not see any of these things. You Corinthians must admit that what you saw in me was the manifestation of life, not the manifestation of any Jewish religion, philosophy, custom, or practice." The life manifested in Paul was the experienced Spirit, the processed Spirit, the Spirit that had been cooked.

When Paul was with the Corinthians, he was living and powerful, but he was also kind, humble, and forbearing. All these virtues were part of the manifestation

of the Spirit

experienced by him. His ministry was the ministry of the Spirit manifested in him as life. Therefore, Paul was full of life. Not only was life manifested upon him, but it also worked in the believers there at Corinth.

Life could be manifested in Paul because he experienced the killing of the cross. Suppose Paul did not have any problems, troubles, opposition, or persecution. Suppose he was also strong physically and never had any problems with his health. If such had been the case, it is not likely that there would have been the manifestation of life in Paul. But when Paul was with the Corinthians, he did have problems and difficulties, and he did encounter opposition and persecution. Sometimes even the saints in Corinth caused him trouble. Paul knew that if everything had been easy and comfortable, it would not have been possible to have the same manifestation of life.

When we are in a comfortable environment, there is less opportunity for life to be manifested. But when we are opposed, persecuted, and criticized, when we have problems with our health, and when we are troubled by the saints in the church, we are in a proper situation for the manifestation of life. When Paul was with the Corinthians, he was in that kind of situation. This afforded him an excellent opportunity to have the Spirit within him manifested as life.

In verses 8 and 9 Paul indicates the kind of difficult situation he was in. He says, "We are afflicted in every way, but not straitened; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." In these verses Paul mentions four things. First, he says that they were afflicted in every way, but not straitened. The Chinese version says that they were attacked in every way, attacked from four directions: the front, the rear, the right, and the left. Nevertheless, they were not straitened, cramped. This indicates life. Not to be straitened in such a situation is to have the manifestation of life.

Second, Paul says that they were perplexed, unable to find a way out, but not despairing. The apostles were shut up; they did not have a way out. However, they were not

utterly lacking a way out. This part of verse 8 contains in Greek a play on words. First Paul speaks of being unable to find a way out, and then, of not being utterly unable to find a way out. Once again, this is life. Seemingly they were unable to find a way out. But because of the Spirit in them as life, they were not utterly unable to find a way out.

Third, Paul says that they were persecuted, but not forsaken. This means they were pursued by enemies, but they were not abandoned, deserted; that is, they were not left behind in an evil plight.

Finally, in verse 9 Paul says that they were cast down, but not destroyed. Although they were struck down, they did not perish.

Paul was afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and cast down. All this provided an opportunity for life to be manifested. Life overcomes all these things. Even though he experienced affliction, perplexity, persecution, and being cast down, Paul was still very living. He was not straitened or despairing, and he was not forsaken or destroyed. Life certainly was manifested in him.

PAUL'S LIVING AND HIS MINISTRY

By presenting his own experience as a confirmation of his ministry, Paul indicated that he and his ministry were one. What Paul was and what he lived were his ministry. The ministry was what Paul was and not merely what he did or the work he accomplished. Paul lived in such a way that his living was a confirmation of his ministry. Paul's ministry was a ministry of the Spirit, and his living was full of life. This means that his living was the manifestation of the processed Spirit, the cooked Spirit. Paul lived by the Spirit, and life came out of him. Life was manifested to the Corinthians and ministered to them. When this life entered into them, it immediately became the Spirit. Then when they lived out the Spirit, the Spirit became life to others. This was the confirmation of Paul's new covenant ministry.

In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians, "Our living and our being are the

confirmation of our ministry. We and the ministry are one. This means that we are the ministry. The ministry is our being, our person, our living. What we live is the confirmation of the ministry. I have told you that the ministry is the ministry of the Spirit. Now I confirm this claim by testifying to you of my experience of the manifestation of life in the midst of a difficult environment."

AFFLICTED FROM EVERY SIDE

Sometimes the Lord allows us to be in a situation where we are afflicted on every side. Do you feel happy when you are in such an environment? Sometimes it seems as if the Lord drops us into the midst of this kind of environment, an environment where we are attacked from the front and the rear, from the left and the right. We are afflicted in every way, that is, according to the meaning of the Greek, we are afflicted from every side. This is for the manifestation of life.

Perhaps you are wondering who the attackers are, who are those who cause affliction on every side. The ones who attack you the most may be those in your own family. Your husband or wife, your children, and your in-laws may make things difficult for you. If you cry out for the Lord to have mercy on you, He may indicate that the greatest mercy is for you to be in such a situation in order to have the manifestation of life.

Life, the cooked Spirit, is the expression of the Spirit. Therefore, because Paul manifested life, his living and his being were the confirmation of his ministry. He and the ministry of the Spirit were one.

In chapter three Paul indicates that the apostles were all one with their ministry. Then in chapter four he presents a life that confirms the claim that the new covenant ministers and the new covenant ministry are one. What they are and what they live is their ministry. They minister life to others not merely by speaking, but even more by living. Their living confirms their speaking and strengthens their ministry. Thus, the ministers and the Spirit are one.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO

THE MANIFESTATION OF LIFE THROUGH THE KILLING OF THE CROSS

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 4:1-18

In the foregoing message we pointed out that 2 Corinthians 3 is a chapter on doctrine and that 2 Corinthians 4 is a chapter on experience. Furthermore, we saw that what Paul speaks of in chapter four is a confirmation from his experience of what he says concerning the ministry in chapter three. For each of the major points regarding the ministry in chapter three, there is a corresponding point in chapter four. Thus, life corresponds to the Spirit, renewing to transformation, and the weight of glory to the degrees of glory. But what corresponds to righteousness in 2 Corinthians 3? In order to answer this question properly, we need to say a further word about righteousness.

EVERYTHING IN GOOD ORDER

Righteousness refers to a condition, a state, where everything is in good order. Where there is righteousness, there is no disturbance, confusion, or mixture. For example, in a church meeting we often can see righteousness, for in the meeting everything is right and in good order. As a result, the meeting is in a condition, a state, of righteousness. But suppose the brothers are arguing, the sisters are upset, and the children are running around the meeting hall. What turmoil there would be! In that kind of a situation, a condition of turmoil, there would not be any righteousness. Righteousness refers to a state where everything is in good order.

Second Peter 3:13 says, "Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." The righteousness dwelling in the new heaven and the new earth indicates that everything will be in proper order, that nothing will be wrong, upset, or in turmoil. Instead of turmoil and confusion, there will be peace and order. In the sight of God, such a state is righteousness. The entire condition in the new heavens and the new earth will be righteousness. Nothing will be disorderly; rather, everything will be in good order. This orderly condition is a condition of righteousness.

In 4:8 Paul speaks of being afflicted in every way, or of being attacked from every side. But no matter how much he was afflicted or attacked, with him there was no turmoil. Instead, there was the manifestation of life. This manifestation of life produced a condition of peace and calm.

Suppose you are troubled on every side by your husband or wife, by your children, and by your in-laws. Nevertheless, instead of being disturbed or in turmoil, you manifest life. This means that life comes out of you in that situation. As a result, your condition will be one of peace and order. In spite of the trouble that comes to you from every side, you remain in such an orderly and peaceful condition. The processed Spirit, the "cooked" Spirit, within you experienced as life calms down the whole situation. This is righteousness.

In 4:8 and 9 Paul speaks of being afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and cast down. We would expect such a situation to result in turmoil. But if you find yourself in that kind of situation and yet everything becomes calm and orderly, that is the manifestation of life. Furthermore, that orderly state is a state of righteousness.

FULL OF LIFE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

Whenever the Spirit is expressed as life, there will be righteousness. When there is righteousness, everything will be calm, peaceful, and orderly. If you experience this in your family life, your children will be calmed down, and

your husband or wife will be subdued. Such a life always calms down turmoil. When others receive this life from you, they also will enjoy a peaceful state.

The church life is a life of righteousness. In the church life everything should be calm, peaceful, and orderly. To be sure, the millennium, the thousand-year kingdom, will be filled with righteousness. Because there will be righteousness in the kingdom, there will also be peace. The kingdom is simply a realm of righteousness with peace. This righteousness is the result of life.

According to the Bible, in the millennium death will be greatly reduced and restricted (Isa. 65:20). There will be abundance of life. As a result, the environment in the millennium will be peaceful. The Bible uses the term righteousness to denote this peaceful state and condition.

After the millennium, there will be the new heavens and the new earth with the New Jerusalem. In the New Jerusalem, there will be no death, and life will flow to maintain a peaceful condition (Rev. 21:4; 22:1). This will be an eternal righteousness. Then we all shall live out the divine life in a state of righteousness. The church life today should be a miniature of this kind of condition. The same should be true of our family life. By the Lord's mercy and grace, our church life and family life should be full of life and righteousness.

A living that is full of life and righteousness is a confirmation of the new covenant ministry. According to Paul's word in 2 Corinthians 3, the new covenant ministry is a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness. This ministry supplies Christ as the Spirit and as righteousness to others. In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul presents the experience of the Spirit and of righteousness. When we experience the Spirit, life is manifested. When life is manifested, we are brought into a condition of peace, where nothing is wrong or out of order. This is righteousness, a state where everything is living, right, and orderly. In the sight of God, this is righteousness. The apostles experienced the Spirit, manifested life, and lived in a condition of righteousness. Once again we see that their living and their ministry were one.

BEING CONSUMED

We have seen that renewing in chapter four corresponds to transformation in chapter three. In 4:16 Paul says, "Wherefore we do not lose heart, but if indeed our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day." The rendering "our outward man is decaying" is a correct translation. However, many of us would prefer to say that our outward man is being consumed, wasted away, worn out. The difference is that "is decaying" is active, whereas "being consumed" is passive.

We may use the falling of leaves from a tree as an illustration. In the autumn, many trees lose their leaves, and during the winter these trees are dormant. On the one hand, the falling of the leaves from a tree is an active matter, but in another sense, it is passive. It is active in the sense that the trees drop their leaves. No outside force causes the leaves to fall. It is the tree itself that drops its leaves. We may say that when a tree drops its leaves, the tree is decaying. This is active. But in another sense, the trees are forced to drop their leaves. If a tree could speak, it might say, "Help me! I don't want to lose my leaves. I would like the season to change from autumn directly to spring. Then my leaves will not be lost." A tree's losing of its leaves may also be regarded as passive. Paul's word, "our outward man is decaying," is active. But it can also be understood as if it were in the passive voice. Hence, we can speak of our outward man being consumed or being wasted away.

Let us now apply this understanding to our daily experience. Suppose a brother is afflicted on every side. Surely one who is afflicted, attacked, in this way would be worn out, consumed. If you were the one suffering such affliction, would you not cry out and say, "Please rescue me. I am being consumed. All of you are wearing me out and wasting me away. I am being consumed by you all." Nevertheless, this brother, along with all of us, needs to realize that just as a tree is destined to lose its leaves, so our destiny is for the outward man to be consumed.

The One who created the trees destined that many kinds of trees would drop their leaves. As Christian "trees," we also have been destined to "drop our leaves." Because our destiny is to drop our leaves, eventually something or someone will compel us to drop them. God never intended that our outward man would survive such a long time. Rather, He has determined that our old man, our outward man, will decay, will be consumed. The destiny, therefore, for our outward man is to die. You may live to be very old, but eventually your outward man will die. It is not God's intention to prolong the life of your outward man. Therefore, do not cry out for help to preserve your outward man, and do not ask to be rescued from those things or persons who are consuming you. Instead, you should say, "Lord, I thank You. All these persons and things are helping me to drop my leaves earlier and faster. Lord, I want to cooperate. I want to let go of my leaves quicker, for then I shall mature earlier. Lord, I praise You for this help!"

The Lord uses our married life to consume our outward man. Before a young brother gets married, he may dream about the kind of sister he will marry. Then he will look for the sister who will be the fulfillment of his dream. Likewise, the young sisters are looking for a "hero" to be their husband. All young people have a dream regarding their future married life. Some may travel from one local church to another hoping to find the brother or sister of their choice. But, young people, no matter how clever you are, you cannot defeat God. He has already determined your destiny regarding married life. There is no need for you to expend so much energy searching for the wife or husband of your dreams. Instead, you should simply pray, "Lord, You have already determined my destiny. I don't need to travel from place to place, looking for a spouse. I would rather be today's Isaac, waiting for You to send me the one You have destined for me." However, it is doubtful that very many young people will follow this way or take this word. But I am certain that after some years of married life, they will worship the Lord and say, "Lord,

You are sovereign. It has not been a matter of my choice, but of Your destiny."

Brothers, I assure you that the Lord will give you the wife most suitable to bring you affliction and even attack you so that your outward man may be consumed. Every wife knows the best time to attack her husband. This certainly is sovereign of the Lord. Sometimes when you make a mistake, your wife will be very kind to you and tell you not to be concerned about it. But when you are not mistaken, she may attack you strongly for no reason. Actually, there is a reason: God in His sovereignty allows her to do so in order that you, as a tree, may drop your leaves.

On the one hand, a tree drops its leaves on its own; on the other hand, the season and the environment force a tree to do this. When autumn comes, a tree must drop its leaves, no matter how green and flourishing it has been during the summer. In like manner, when the autumn and winter seasons come in the Christian life, we may be afflicted by the members of our family. During a time of severe cold, we shall be forced to drop our leaves. This means that, on the one hand, our outward man is decaying and that, on the other hand, it is being consumed.

When we experience the decaying of our outward man, we may tell the Lord that we are not able to take it any longer. The Lord, however, may indicate that we shall take it much longer, for our destiny is to have the outward man consumed. This is my understanding of this matter according to my experience.

THE RENEWING OF THE INWARD MAN

Also from experience I can testify that something issues from this decaying, this consuming--the renewing of the inward man. Yes, our outward man is decaying, but our inward man is being renewed. If we had a choice, we would of course choose the renewing and avoid the decaying. But if we could avoid the decaying of the outward man, there would not be any renewing of the inward man. We all would prefer to be like evergreen trees. In a sense, when springtime comes, an evergreen

tree is not very fresh. But those trees who drop their leaves and are dormant during the winter are fresh when spring arrives. In the same principle, when we experience the decaying of the outward man, we enjoy the renewing of the inward man.

In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul speaks of transformation. In the process of transformation a divine element is added into our being, and we are constituted of this element. This constitution produces transformation. As we have seen, in 2 Corinthians 4, transformation becomes renewing. This renewing does not merely involve the addition of the divine element into our being. Our old nature, the outward man, is actually taken away so that the life within us, that is, the Spirit of life, may have the opportunity to develop. This development of the life within is the renewing. Once again we may use trees as an illustration. During the winter they are dormant, but in the springtime we can see the development of the inner life. This is not only transformation; it is renewing.

Transformation is a matter of constitution; renewing involves replacement. To be renewed means that the outward man is being consumed. As a tree drops its leaves, so the old element of the outward man decays. The result is that the inner life develops in a fresh way. When spring arrives, the tree becomes lively, fresh, and vigorous. New leaves come out, and eventually the tree blossoms and brings forth fruit. This is a picture of the renewing of our inward man. By the experience of this renewing, we go on from glory to glory. The glory is uplifted from one level to another, from the present glory to the eternal glory.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-THREE

THE PUTTING TO DEATH OF JESUS AND THE RENEWING OF THE INWARD MAN

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 4:10-18

We have seen that, as the continuation of 2 Corinthians 3, chapter four presents a picture of a life that enables the ministers of the new covenant to be one with their ministry. How could the apostles prove that they were ministers of the new covenant? They could prove it by living the kind of life described in chapter four. It is by this life that they are one with their ministry.

In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul does not speak of his work. He does not refer to what he has done or accomplished. Instead, he speaks of a life, the kind of life lived by him and his co-workers. According to this chapter, Paul and his co-workers lived in such a way that their life became their ministry.

THE NAME OF JESUS

In presenting the life he lived as a minister of the new covenant, Paul uses the name Jesus in a very particular way. In no other place in his writings does Paul use the name Jesus the way he does in 2 Corinthians 4. In verse 10 Paul says, "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our body." Here Paul refers to the death of Jesus and to the life of Jesus. In verse 11 he goes on to say, "For we who live are always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh." Paul also uses the name Jesus in verse 14: "Knowing that He Who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will present us

with you." In these verses Paul again and again uses the name Jesus.

It is important to find out why in this chapter Paul uses the name of Jesus in such a particular way. It is not easy to explain the reason. Actually, there may be more than one reason. In this message we shall begin to consider why Paul uses the name Jesus the way he does in 2 Corinthians 4.

A RECORD OF LIFE

We have pointed out that in chapter four Paul portrays the life lived by himself and his co-workers. This is the life which made them one with their ministry. This life is in contrast to the works emphasized among Christians today.

Christianity has become a religion. Every religion is dependent on certain works, for without works a religion cannot survive. A religion cannot exist unless its adherents carry on certain works. As a result, in religion we have works of many kinds. But although it is easy to point out the works in religion, it is very difficult to find anything of life. Thus, a basic principle of religion is that it is full of works but lacking in life. This is true not only of the Christian religion; it is true of any religion. Every religion is full of work, activity, and doings. But in religion there is no life.

Having this understanding of religion, let us once again look at the history of Jesus. When we consider the record of the Lord's life on earth, we see that the emphasis is not on works. The four Gospels do not stress what the Lord did, what works He accomplished. The record concerning the Lord Jesus in the Gospels is mainly a record of life. In the Gospels the emphasis is on life, not on works or activities. The Gospels are biographies presenting a person living in a particular way. Therefore, the Gospels are not primarily an account of the Lord's marvelous works; they are a description of the life the Lord Jesus lived on earth. This is one reason Paul in 2 Corinthians 4 uses the name Jesus so often. The use of this name in chapter four brings us back to the Lord as a man whose life was one with His ministry. The Lord lived in such a way that His person

was one with His ministry. Strictly speaking, the Lord did not accomplish a work. Instead, He simply lived a certain kind of life.

When some hear that the Gospels emphasize the Lord's life and not His works, they may want to argue, "Brother Lee, don't the Gospels also give us an account of the works of the Lord Jesus?" Yes, they certainly do. I do not deny that the Gospels describe the Lord's work. However, if you read the Gospels carefully, you will see that the picture in them was not painted as an account of the Lord's works. On the contrary, the portrait in the Gospels was painted in such a way as to show forth the Lord's life. At least, in this portrait the life of the Lord Jesus is presented in a more emphatic way than His works. The Gospels show us more of the Lord's life than of His work. Yes, the Gospels do describe the Lord's works, but much more they present the life Jesus lived and show us by what way He lived.

There are a number of indications in the Gospels that the Lord Jesus did not care for the accomplishing of a great work. We know that during His ministry the Lord performed many miracles. One of these miracles was that of feeding a crowd of more than five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. Was it not a wonderful miracle for the Lord Jesus to feed such a multitude with five loaves and two fishes? It certainly was a great miracle. John 6:14 describes the response of the people to this miracle: "The people therefore, seeing the sign which He did, said, This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world." The next verse describes the response of the Lord Jesus: "Then Jesus, knowing that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain, Himself alone." This indicates that the Lord Jesus did not care to have a large following. Instead of caring for the crowd, He went away. But if we had been there with the Lord, we probably would have been excited to see the multitude following Him. We might have praised God for His blessing on this work, thanking Him for this great following. The Lord Jesus, however, was not excited.

He would not allow the people to make Him their king. The Lord left the crowd and went to the mountain to pray.

Another example of the Lord's caring for life and not for a work is found in John 12. In Jerusalem a great crowd gave a warm welcome to the Lord Jesus. They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, crying, "Hosanna, blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" (John 12:13). Even the Pharisees admitted that the world had gone after Him (v. 19). Furthermore, when Andrew and Philip told the Lord that the Greeks were seeking Him, He answered, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (vv. 23-24). This indicates clearly that what the Lord Jesus cared for was life, not work. In the four Gospels there are many illustrations of this. Whenever people, according to their concept, thought that the opportunity was right for the Lord to accomplish a great work, He never took advantage of that opportunity. Instead, He departed. He had not come to do a great work. His concern was life.

QUALIFIED BY LIFE

The One who went to the cross to accomplish redemption for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose was not a great worker. It was not an outstanding work that qualified the Lord Jesus to be the Redeemer. What qualified Him was the life He lived. We know from the Gospels that Jesus was not a famous person living in a mansion in a large city. No, He was a man raised in the home of a carpenter from Nazareth, a despised town from the despised district of Galilee. But the life He lived qualified Him to be the Redeemer for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose.

It is crucial for us to see that the Lord Jesus was qualified by life, not by work. This matter of the priority of life over work is a very important aspect of the Lord's recovery today. The Lord wants to recover a life; He is not seeking to accomplish a work of revival.

A JESUS OF LIFE

Since the Reformation Christians have often prayed for revival. Some have prayed for a great revival to stir up all the believers. But according to history, there has never been such a revival. Of course, about eighty years ago, there was a revival in Wales. Some Christian leaders were excited and expected that revival to spread to every continent. But it did not spread worldwide. In fact, after some years, it eventually died out, even in Wales.

In 1958 I was invited to a certain place in London. One day my host drove me through the countryside of England and Scotland. As he was driving, he pointed out the window and said of the people in the Scottish countryside that many of them had never heard of Jesus. He went on to tell me that Scotland was much like a heathen country. Nevertheless, Scotland is not far from Wales, where a great revival had taken place. This indicates that the way of revival does not work. Only one thing works, and that is life. This was the reason the Lord Jesus did not come to accomplish a great work. Rather, He came to live a life. Now His life has been spread to every corner of the earth. He is not a Jesus of work; He is a Jesus of life.

I need to point out to the saints in the Lord's recovery that even many of us, young and old alike, still care for a work. Subconsciously or unconsciously our interest is related to a work for the Lord. Some, for example, may aspire to be great evangelists. The thought of carrying out a great work may still be in your heart, in your subconsciousness. I would encourage you to lay aside this thought. God does not respect any work. Much of the damage among Christians has been the result of human works. The more we try to work for the Lord, the more trouble we shall create and the more damage we shall cause. I believe this is the reason that Paul, when presenting the confirmation of his ministry, uses the name Jesus. He does not say, "The Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords." Instead, he speaks simply of Jesus: the putting to death of Jesus, the life of Jesus, and Jesus' sake. The life that was manifested in Paul's body

was not the life of a great man. It was the life of Jesus, a little-known man from a despised region.

LIFE MANIFESTED IN MORTAL FLESH

In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul does not boast of his work. He does not say, "Corinthians, you must realize that I am the foremost apostle. I have established churches all the way from Cyprus to Corinth. I am ready to go further: to Rome, to Spain, and then to the uttermost part of the earth. This is the confirmation of the ministry which the Lord has committed to me."

Instead of talking about his work and accomplishments, Paul speaks of affliction. In verse 8 he says, "We are afflicted in every way." If we had been Paul, we probably would have said, "Corinthians, we are blessed in every way. Don't you realize that our work has been blessed by the Lord? This blessing on our work proves that our ministry is of the Lord and that our work is of Him."

Paul told the Corinthians that he and his co-workers were afflicted in every way. Worldly people would regard this as a sign of being cursed, not of being blessed. They would ask, "How could you be blessed by God if you are afflicted? Why are you being afflicted from every side?" But Paul went on to speak about being perplexed, persecuted, and cast down. Some would give Paul credit for being persecuted, for that may indicate that he was doing a good work. But they would not give him credit for afflictions, perplexity, and being cast down.

Paul does not stop with the description recorded in verses 8 and 9. In verse 10 he continues, "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our body." In this verse Paul does not say, "Always bearing about in the body the great blessing of the mighty God." Instead, he speaks of bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus. Seemingly Paul was a pitiful apostle in a pitiful situation.

In verse 11 Paul goes on to say, "For we who live are always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the

life also of Jesus might be manifested in our mortal flesh." Perhaps we would expect Paul to say, "being rescued from death," instead of being delivered unto death. Paul, however, was always being delivered unto death so that the life of Jesus might be manifested in his mortal flesh.

Notice that here Paul does not speak of mortal body, but of mortal flesh. The word body is positive, but the word flesh is negative. Mortal implies that the flesh is dying. I do not think we would be happy if someone referred to our body as mortal flesh. Nevertheless, Paul adopted such an expression in speaking of himself.

Paul did not like to boast. He preferred to be small and to remain in a lowly state. In fact, the name Paul means little. In these verses Paul seems to be saying, "I prefer to stay in my smallness. The life manifested in me is the life of a Nazarene, not the life of a great man in the world. Moreover, the life of Jesus is manifested in my mortal flesh. I am not a great person manifesting something marvelous in a splendid body. No, I am a small person manifesting the life of Jesus, a man from Nazareth, in my mortal flesh."

MINISTERING LIFE BY DYING

In verse 12 Paul says, "So then death operates in us, but life in you." In this verse Paul does refer to his work. His work was a work of death operating in him. What is the work of the apostles? The work of the apostles is the work of death operating in them so that life may operate in the believers.

It may not sound pleasant to us to hear of death operating in the apostles. But the issue, the result, of this operation of death is wonderful--it is life in others. This is the real work of the new covenant ministry. It is not a matter of working; it is a matter of dying. In the Lord's recovery we need to die so that life may work in others. Hence, our dying is our working. The Lord does not need you to accomplish a work for Him. He needs you to die. If you die, life will work in others. You will minister life to others by dying. Therefore, our work is to be put to death.

The verses we have considered in this message are a window through which we can see into Paul's experience. Now we can understand that the apostles were not followers of a great person, but of a small man, Jesus of Nazareth. Furthermore, instead of being exalted, they were always being put to death so that the life of Jesus could be manifested in their mortal flesh. Death operated in them so that life might operate in the believers.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FOUR

THE PUTTING TO DEATH OF JESUS AND THE RENEWING OF THE INWARD MAN

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 4:10-18

In 4:10 Paul says, "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our body." In this verse Paul speaks of "the putting to death of Jesus." Why does he use this expression here? To answer this question, we need to consider once again who Jesus is.

The origin, the source, of the man Jesus is God. Jesus is God incarnate, God conceived in a virgin's womb. Outwardly, Jesus is a man, but inwardly He is God. Thus, Jesus is not simple. This Nazarene is a wonderful person. When He was on earth, outwardly He was lowly in every respect. He was born in a manger, and He grew up in the home of a poor carpenter in the despised town of Nazareth. Nevertheless, inwardly Jesus was glorious, for the most high God was in Him. Outwardly Jesus was a lowly man; inwardly He was the most high God. Truly Jesus is wonderful.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Now we must go on to see something concerning the death of Jesus. When many Christians mention the death of Christ, their understanding is limited to redemption. According to their concept, the death of Jesus was only for redemption. Often they quote the verse which says, "Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). It is absolutely true that the death of

Christ was for redemption. We believe this just as much as other Christians do, if not more. However, redemption is just one aspect of Christ's death. His death also has many other aspects.

In 2 Corinthians 4 we see the aspect not of redemption and not of the imparting of life, but of destroying, consuming. According to this chapter, the death of Jesus is for the consuming, the wearing out, of our outward man. For this reason, Paul says in 4:16 that "our outward man is decaying."

Although the man Jesus was God incarnate, God becoming a man, it was necessary even for His outward man to be consumed. According to the outward condition, the Lord Jesus was lowly. But in a spiritual sense, the Lord Jesus was not an insignificant man. On the contrary, Jesus equaled the entire old creation. When He was crucified, it was not only a man from Nazareth who died on the cross. When Jesus was crucified, the entire old creation, including all of us, was crucified also. The Lord Jesus died for the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, not merely for the accomplishment of redemption.

The first goal in God's eternal purpose is to terminate the old creation. The Lord Jesus, as God becoming man, was part of the old creation. It was not through incarnation that He became a man in the new creation. Rather, through incarnation He became a man in the old creation, a man who needed to be consumed.

At the age of thirty the Lord Jesus came forth to minister. During the three and a half years of His ministry, He was constantly being put to death. As a mature man of thirty, He was continually under the process of killing. Do not think that Jesus was crucified only for the six hours He was on a material cross. No, for at least three and a half years He was crucified daily. Every day He lived a crucified life.

The Lord Jesus was nailed to the cross daily. Sometimes He was crucified by His mother. Other times He was crucified by Peter or some other disciple. Jesus was nailed to the cross even by His disciples' love. For example,

the more Peter loved the Lord Jesus, the more he crucified Him. Thus, before He was literally crucified by the Romans, Jesus had been repeatedly crucified by His mother, His brothers, and His disciples. In John 7 we have an example of the Lord's being crucified by His brothers.

Actually, during the three and a half years of His ministry the Lord Jesus was not mainly living--He was dying. He was living a crucified life. This is what Paul means by the putting to death of Jesus. It is a slow, gradual, and continual crucifixion.

Now we can understand that the Lord Jesus was crucified not only during the six hours He was on a literal cross. For at least three and a half years, He was crucified continually, gradually, and slowly. In the words of Paul, this gradual crucifixion is the putting to death of Jesus.

DYING DAILY

The apostles were appointed by the Lord to be His followers. They were appointed by Him not to do a great work, but to live a certain kind of life. Therefore, they were not to accomplish a work by following a Christ who was great outwardly. They were to follow the man Jesus to live the life of this small man. This is not a life that is welcomed; it is a life that is rejected, a life that is always crucified, always put to death. Jesus lived this kind of life, and His followers, the apostles, did also. This is the reason Paul says that they were always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus.

To follow Jesus of Nazareth is to be killed; it is not to accomplish a great work. Moreover, to be martyred in an instant is rather easy. But to be killed gradually, slowly, and constantly is extremely difficult. To die gradually involves more suffering than being martyred instantly. For at least three and a half years the Lord Jesus was gradually put to death. This was also Paul's experience for an extended period of time. Wherever he went, he experienced in his body the putting to death of Jesus. Referring to this in 1 Corinthians 15:31 he says, "Daily I

die." Here Paul seems to be saying, "Instead of living, I am actually dying day by day. I am undergoing a slow, gradual, and continual killing." This continual killing is what Paul means by the putting to death of Jesus.

THE CONSUMING OF THE OUTWARD MAN

The putting to death of Jesus is for consuming the old creation in us. When Jesus, the Son of God, became a man, He had both an outward part signifying the old creation and an inward part signifying the everlasting God. The outward part was consumed, put to death, but the inward part was raised up, resurrected. This was true of the Lord Jesus, it was true of the apostles, and it is also true of all the believers.

Through our natural birth we became persons of the old creation, and through regeneration we have become persons of the new creation. As regenerated ones, we still have an outward part signifying the old creation. This part needs to be consumed, done away, worn out. But at the same time we have an inward part signifying the everlasting God. This part should be developed, resurrected, and renewed.

The putting to death of Jesus is related to the outward man, which needs to be consumed. As genuine believers, we all have a part of our being which Paul describes as the outward man. This outward man is decaying; it is being consumed, being wasted away, being worn out. This wearing out of the outward man is the putting to death of Jesus. Hence, the putting to death of Jesus is actually a synonym for the consuming of the outward man. In the Lord's recovery we are experiencing the putting to death of Jesus for the consuming of the outward man. We are undergoing a process of killing, a process of putting to death the outward man.

Suppose a certain young brother is very intelligent. In many Christian groups such an intelligent young man might be admired and even exalted. However, in the church life in the Lord's recovery, instead of being enthroned, he will experience the putting to death of

Jesus. In the recovery it seems that the smarter a person is, the more he is nailed to the cross.

This crucifying work is often accomplished by the Lord through those around us, particularly those in our family life. For example, before a young sister came into the church life, it may have been seldom that her husband gave her a difficult time. Now that she is in the recovery, it seems that her husband is quite difficult. This sister should not blame her husband. The almighty Lord on the throne is using this sister's husband to consume her old creation, her outward man. It seems that the Lord has given him the assignment of carrying out the work of nailing his wife to the cross. The sister may weep and cry out to the Lord, telling Him that she cannot bear this. However, there will be much more of this crucifying work to come, and the sister needs to be ready for it. The Lord may use her husband to drive in one nail, but He may use the brothers and sisters, even the elders, in the church, to drive in many more nails. Then the sister may say, "I cannot tolerate the situation with my husband or with the church. Why are the elders giving me such a difficult time?" The reason is that the Lord is using different persons to nail this sister to the cross, that is, to consume her outward man.

When some saints are not happy with the church in their locality, they may want to move elsewhere. Because the saints are nailing them to the cross, putting them to death, they would like to go to a church where they think the situation would be different. Actually, if they move for the purpose of avoiding the putting to death of Jesus, they may experience even more of this in a different locality.

If you are not able to get through with the church in one locality, this indicates that you cannot get through in any local church. Instead of moving from one place to another, simply stay where you are and allow the saints to put you to death.

Furthermore, weeping over your situation is an indication that you have not yet been crucified. A dead person sheds no tears. If you are still crying about the experience of being consumed, this indicates that you need

more of the putting to death of Jesus. Remain where you are until you have been fully crucified.

OUR DESTINATION--RESURRECTION

When some hear this word concerning the putting to death of Jesus, they may say, "Oh, what a terrible destiny is ours in the Lord's recovery! We are being crucified, consumed, put to death." The putting to death of Jesus may be our destiny, but it is not our destination. Our destination is resurrection. Those who are not willing to be crucified may suffer. But those who are willing to be crucified will experience joy. They will rejoice in resurrection.

In 4:14 Paul makes it clear that our destination is resurrection: "Knowing that He Who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will present us with you." Here Paul does not speak of being buried with Jesus or crucified with Jesus, but of being raised, resurrected, with Jesus. This is a victorious declaration. It indicates that our destination is resurrection.

The church life in the Lord's recovery may seem to be an altar, a place of slaughter. Actually the church life is an enjoyment in resurrection. From the very moment you become willing to be crucified, you may have this rejoicing in resurrection. Then you may regret the fact that in the past you refused to be nailed to the cross. You may say to yourself, "If I had been willing to receive more nails, how much more joy I would have today!" Since our destination is resurrection, we should not weep because we are being put to death. Instead, with a strong spirit we should rejoice in resurrection.

THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

Second Corinthians 4:13 says, "And having the same spirit of faith, according to that which is written, I believed, therefore I spoke; we also believe, therefore also we speak." The spirit here is the mingled spirit, the divine Spirit mingled with the regenerated human spirit.

In their comments on this verse, both Alford and

Vincent spoke concerning the mingled spirit, but their speaking was somewhat vague. Alford said, "Not distinctly the Holy Spirit,--but still not merely a human disposition: the indwelling Holy Spirit penetrates and characterizes the whole renewed man." On the one hand, Alford speaks of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, he indicates that something human, signified by the word disposition, is also involved. Actually, what Alford was referring to was the human spirit. Vincent says, "Spirit of faith: not distinctly the Holy Spirit, nor, on the other hand, a human faculty or disposition, but blending both." Vincent's remarks are an improvement upon those of Alford. The word faculty is certainly an improvement over disposition. Furthermore, Vincent speaks of a blending of the Spirit with a particular human faculty. This blending is actually the mingling of the Holy Spirit with our human spirit.

Today we have a more clear and definite utterance. We do not need to use the word disposition or faculty to describe the spirit of faith in 4:13, for we know that this spirit is our spirit mingled with the Holy Spirit. We must exercise such a spirit to believe and speak, as the psalmist did (Psa. 116:10), the things we have experienced of the Lord, especially His death and resurrection. Faith is in our spirit, which is mingled with the Holy Spirit, not in our mind. Doubts are in our mind. The spirit here indicates that it is by the mingled spirit that the apostles lived a crucified life in resurrection for carrying out their ministry.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FIVE

THE PUTTING TO DEATH OF JESUS AND THE RENEWING OF THE INWARD MAN

(3)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 4:10-18

In 4:10 Paul says, "Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be manifested in our body." In verse 16 Paul goes on to say, "Wherefore we do not lose heart, but if indeed our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day." The experience of the putting to death of Jesus results in the renewing of the inward man.

THE OUTWARD MAN AND THE INWARD MAN

What is the inward man? It is difficult to explain what the inward man is. For more than forty years I have been considering and studying the meaning of the outward man and the inward man in 4:16. Some writings have said that the outward man denotes our natural man and that the inward man denotes our spiritual man. I do not say that this understanding is wrong; however, it is somewhat vague.

If you consider the context of this chapter, the outward man primarily means the physical body. In verse 10 Paul speaks of "bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus," and in verse 11 he mentions the mortal flesh. Bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus is equal to the consuming, the wasting away, of the outward man. Therefore, the outward man in verse 16 must mainly refer to the body.

Likewise, the inward man in this verse must refer to our regenerated spirit, as indicated in verse 13, where Paul uses the expression "the same spirit of faith." As we

have pointed out, the spirit here is the mingled spirit, the regenerated human spirit mingled with the Holy Spirit. The body is to be consumed, but the regenerated spirit is to be renewed day by day. According to the context, the outward man is mainly the body, and the inward man is mainly the regenerated spirit.

The outward man includes our body and our soul, with the body as its organ and the soul as its life and person. The inward man includes our regenerated spirit and our renewed soul with the regenerated spirit as its life and person and the renewed soul as its organ. The life of the soul must be denied (Matt. 16:24-25), but the functions of the soul, the mind, will, and emotion, must be renewed and uplifted by being subdued (2 Cor. 10:4-5) to be used by the spirit, which is the person of the inward man.

According to Paul's word in verse 16, the outward man is being consumed, being wasted away, being worn out. By the continued killing, the working of death, our outward man, that is, our material body with its animating soul (1 Cor. 15:44), is being consumed and worn out. The outward man, with the body as its organ and the soulish life as its life and person, must be consumed.

We all have an outward man. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He too had an outward man. His outward man needed to be consumed.

In verse 16 Paul also says that our inward man is being renewed day by day. This renewing of the inward man takes place as the inward man is nourished with the fresh supply of resurrection life. As our mortal body, our outward man, is being consumed by the killing work of death, our inward man, that is, our regenerated spirit with the inward parts of our being (Jer. 31:33; Heb. 8:10; Rom. 7:22, 25), is being metabolically renewed day by day with the supply of resurrection life. As the inward man is renewed, the functions of the soul--the mind, the emotion, and the will--are also renewed.

THE WEARING OUT OF THE OUTWARD MAN

Let us now apply this matter to our daily living,

especially to our family life and church life. Suppose a young brother and sister in the church life get married. The brother is strong, healthy, intelligent, and energetic. It will not take very long for the sister to discover that her husband is a strong person with a strong natural life. His outward man is composed of his energetic body and his strong soul. This outward man must experience the putting to death of Jesus. The Lord will use this brother's wife to consume his outward man. At the same time, He will use the brother to consume the sister's outward man.

The outward man does not deserve to be edified, strengthened, exalted, or enthroned. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He did not need to have His outward man enthroned. On the contrary, what He needed was for the outward man to be put to death. Because we all have a strong outward man, we need to experience the putting to death of Jesus.

In the church life I have discovered that the outward man of the sisters is even stronger than that of the brothers. For this reason, it is usually much more difficult for a sister to be put on the cross than it is for a brother. It seems that more nails are required in the case of sisters. The outward man of the brothers can be compared to glass, but the outward man of the sisters can be compared to rubber. It is much easier to break glass than it is to break rubber. But whether our outward man is like glass or rubber, none of us is easily broken. It seems that certain saints need a crucifixion that is everlasting, since their outward man is so enduring. Some brothers and sisters have been in the church life for twenty years, and still their outward man has not been broken. They do not have any intention of being broken. It seems that they are always able to avoid being put on the cross.

The more we experience the consuming, the putting to death, of the outward man, the more our inward man is renewed. Our regenerated spirit with our renewed mind, emotion, and will needs to be resurrected, developed, enlarged, and refreshed. Therefore, as the outward man is being consumed, the inward man is being resurrected, renewed, and developed.

The life that can carry out the ministry of the new covenant is a life of having the outward man put to death and the inward man renewed and resurrected. Actually this kind of life is the new covenant ministry. This life and this ministry are needed for the Lord's recovery today. Only this kind of ministry can impart life to others, can minister Christ to others as the life-giving Spirit and as righteousness. Gifts, ability, energetic activity, diligent works--none of this avails. The only thing needed is a crucified life, the life with the outward man continually experiencing the putting to death of Jesus so that the inward parts of our being may rise up, be refreshed, and be developed.

I hope that we all shall be impressed with the fact that the new covenant ministry is not a matter of talent or ability. This ministry is altogether a matter of life. In this kind of life the natural being is put to death so that the spiritual being may be resurrected, renewed, and developed. This life is needed in a crucial way for the Lord's recovery today.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUFFERING

In the foregoing messages and in this message we have had much to say concerning the putting to death of Jesus. I am deeply concerned that some of the saints may have a mistaken understanding regarding this matter. They may think that every kind of suffering is an experiencing of the putting to death of Jesus. When they sing a hymn such as "Each Blow I Suffer" (Hymns, #626), they may not have the proper understanding either of this hymn or of what Paul means by the putting to death of Jesus. Therefore, in order to avoid misunderstanding, I wish to point out that not all of the sufferings experienced by Christians are of the same category. Actually there are at least three kinds of sufferings Christians may experience. Let us now consider these categories.

Suffering in the Old Creation

The first kind of suffering is that which is common to

all human beings. Christians, of course, are not the only ones who suffer. Everyone suffers. Suffering is universal because of the fall of man. Due to the fall, creation has become old. This is a very negative condition, for oldness in creation indicates that creation is fallen, corrupt, and decaying. With the old creation and fallen man, there are a great many calamities and illnesses. Because we live in the fallen, old creation, we are subject to disease. Someone may contract tuberculosis. Someone else may develop cancer. We should not think that a person becomes a victim of diseases such as these because he is evil. No, sickness is one of the calamities common in this fallen universe. Believers and unbelievers are human beings, and as human beings we cannot avoid calamities.

When some hear this word about illness and calamity, they may say, "Doesn't God protect us?" Yes, God does protect us. Nevertheless, when a calamity strikes, everyone, believer and unbeliever alike, may suffer.

This first kind of suffering is surely not what Paul means by the putting to death of Jesus. Do not apply the suffering caused by calamities in the old creation to the putting to death of Jesus in 2 Corinthians 4. If you apply the putting to death of Jesus in this way, then all unbelievers experience the putting to death of Jesus, for they also suffer from illness and calamity. It is a serious mistake to understand the putting to death of Jesus to mean the sufferings common to everyone because of calamities in the old creation.

Suffering from Sins and Mistakes

The second kind of suffering Christians experience is suffering that comes from sins and mistakes. If we are careless or foolish in the exercise of our responsibilities, we may suffer a certain kind of loss. For example, a brother may have a job that requires him to be at work at a certain time. However, he may consistently come to work quite late. As a result, he is fired from his job. This may be regarded as a kind of suffering. But it is a suffering that results from carelessness. Should a brother lose his job for

such a reason, he should not say that this suffering is the putting to death of Jesus. This suffering has nothing at all to do with the putting to death of Jesus. It comes from the failure to fulfill one's responsibility.

In 4:10 Paul speaks of the putting to death of Jesus. Then in verse 11 he says, "For we who live are always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake." I would call your attention to the words "for Jesus' sake." The putting to death of Jesus in verse 10 is used interchangeably with being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake in verse 11. This means that the putting to death of Jesus involves suffering that is for Jesus' sake. A brother who loses his job because of carelessness and irresponsibility does not get fired for Jesus' sake. He should not ascribe this to Jesus. He was fired for the sake of his carelessness. It would absolutely not be fair to regard that kind of suffering as the putting to death of Jesus, as suffering for Jesus' sake. Suffering because of sins or mistakes is not the experience of the putting to death of Jesus.

To make this matter even more clear, let us use another illustration. Suppose you do not lock the door of your house when you leave home for the church meeting. In fact, you even forget to close the door. While you are in the meeting, someone enters your home, steals many things, and causes a great deal of damage. When you survey the damage and the loss, you should not say, "Praise the Lord, this is an experience of the putting to death of Jesus." Once again, that kind of suffering and loss is not the putting to death of Jesus. You should not ascribe that kind of loss to Jesus, or think that you are experiencing the putting to death of Jesus. When you suffer purely for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the church, the Body, that is the putting to death of Jesus.

When we sing a hymn such as "Each Blow I Suffer," we need to be careful not to unconsciously bring in asceticism. Asceticism involves gradual suicide, a slow, steady self-killing like that described in the book The Imitation of Christ. That book contains a strong element of asceticism. When those who practice asceticism talk about bearing the

cross, they are actually talking about self-killing. We should not have an ascetic concept when we sing the hymn "Each Blow I Suffer." Actually, to sing this hymn in relation to the putting to death of Jesus may indicate that our understanding of the putting to death of Jesus is not accurate. The putting to death of Jesus is not a matter of common suffering. In fact, to cause us to suffer is not the purpose of the putting to death of Jesus; it is to consume our outward man.

The Putting to Death of Jesus

The third category of suffering experienced by Christians is the putting to death of Jesus. Paul did not experience this because he was wrong. On the contrary, he was right in every way. Nevertheless, he was afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and cast down. But all this was for the sake of Jesus, for the sake of the Body, and for the sake of the new covenant ministry.

Paul and the other apostles were not wrong, and these particular sufferings were not related to any mistakes of theirs. But they still had the outward man, and this outward man needed to be consumed.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He did not make any mistakes, and He was not wrong in anything. But He had an outward man that needed to be consumed. Therefore, the putting to death of Jesus is not punishment, correction, or discipline. These are related to the second category of Christian suffering. To correct us, punish us, or discipline us is not the goal of the putting to death of Jesus. Neither is it a matter of natural calamities. Instead, it is a kind of persecution, operation, or dealing that comes upon us to consume our natural man, our outward man, our flesh, so that our inward man may have the opportunity to develop and be renewed.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SIX

A NEW CREATION IN CHRIST BECOMING GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH THE SECOND STEP OF RECONCILIATION

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 5:1-21

In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul covers a number of important points. Let us briefly enumerate these points and then go on to consider them.

SIX IMPORTANT MATTERS

First in this chapter Paul covers the longing to be clothed upon with a transfigured body (5:1-8). This is related to the redemption of the body. Paul desired to be clothed upon with a transfigured body, with a body in resurrection. In verses 1 and 2 he says, "For we know that if our earthly tabernacle house is taken down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. For indeed in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our dwelling place from heaven."

The second matter covered by Paul in this chapter is the ambition to please the Lord: "Wherefore also we are ambitious, whether at home or away from home, to be well-pleasing to Him" (v. 9). Here to be ambitious is to be zealous with a strong aim, to strive earnestly to be well-pleasing to the Lord. We all should have the ambition to please the Lord. We should not be ambitious to have some kind of position in the church life, but we should be ambitious to be well-pleasing to the Lord.

The third point is being constrained to live to the Lord. In verses 14 and 15 Paul says, "For the love of Christ

constrains us, having judged this, that One died on behalf of all; therefore all died; and He died on behalf of all, that those who live may no longer live to themselves, but to Him Who died for them and has been raised." In these verses Paul speaks of being constrained to live not for the Lord, but to live to the Lord.

In verses 16 and 17 Paul goes on to mention a fourth matter, the new creation: "So that we, from now on, know no one according to flesh; even if we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer. So that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, they have become new."

Fifth, in verses 18 through 20 Paul speaks regarding the ministry of reconciliation. In verse 18 he says, "But all things are of God, Who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation." In verse 19 he speaks of "the word of reconciliation," and in verse 20 he entreats the saints on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God.

Finally, in verse 21 we have the crucial matter of God's righteousness: "Him Who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf, that we might become God's righteousness in Him."

Apparently these six matters are of different categories and are not related to one another. Thus, it is possible to read this chapter without seeing any continuation between one point and another. Actually, there is a continuation, and it is not difficult to see it.

Not only do the important points in chapter five continue one another, but chapter five is itself a continuation of chapter four. This is indicated by the fact that 5:1 begins with the word "for." "For" indicates that what is to be covered in this chapter is an explanation of what is spoken in 4:13-18.

LONGING FOR TRANSFIGURATION

In 5:1 Paul speaks of our earthly tabernacle house being taken down. For our body as our earthly tabernacle house to be taken down is for our outward man to be consumed,

wasted away. Toward the end of 2 Corinthians 4, Paul says that our outward man is decaying, that our inward man is being renewed, and that we are not considering the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen. This means that we live and walk by faith. Then in 5:1 he gives a word of explanation, saying that we know that if our outward man, our earthly tabernacle house, is taken away, we have a better one in the heavens. Therefore, in chapter five there is clearly a continuation of Paul's word in chapter four.

This continuation indicates that at the end of chapter four Paul had become truly mature. He had been regenerated in his spirit and transformed in his soul. His entire being had been renewed. The only thing yet to be completed was the full redemption of his physical body. Paul's body was still in the old creation; it had not yet been changed, transfigured. Hence, in 5:1-8 he expresses his longing, his aspiration, for the transfiguration of his body.

It was Paul's desire that he not be unclothed, that is, that he not have his body taken away from him. His desire was to be clothed, that is, to put on a transfigured body. Death involves the separation of a person from his body. Sometimes during a funeral service a minister may say that the deceased has gone away, that he has departed and is no longer with us. Often Christians use the expression "going to the Lord." It was not Paul's longing to be without a body. He did not desire to be unclothed, to have his body taken away. His longing was to be clothed with a resurrected body. This means that his longing was to be redeemed in his body. He knew that his spirit had been regenerated and that his soul had been transformed, but he also realized that his body had not yet been transfigured. Therefore, he was longing and waiting for the redemption of his body. This longing is covered in the first eight verses of chapter five.

SHAPED BY GOD

In verse 5 Paul says, "Now He Who has wrought us for this very thing is God, Who has given to us the pledge of

the Spirit." The Greek word translated wrought also means fashioned, shaped, prepared, made fit. God has wrought us, fashioned, shaped, prepared us, made us fit, for the purpose that our mortal body may be swallowed up by His resurrection life. Thus, our entire being will be saturated with Christ. God has given us the Spirit as the pledge, the earnest, the foretaste, the guarantee, of this wonderful and marvelous part of His complete salvation for us in Christ.

God intends to clothe us with a body of resurrection. But if we would be clothed with a transfigured body, we need certain qualifications. A sinner is not qualified to be clothed with a transfigured body. He is not fit for such a body. However, God has wrought, shaped, custom-made, us for this. Just as a tailor shapes a jacket to fit our body, so God is shaping us to put on a body of resurrection. God is not shaping a body--He is shaping us. When you buy a new pair of shoes, you select shoes to fit the shape of your foot. God's way is the opposite: He shapes our feet to match the shoes. He shapes us, prepares us, to fit into a resurrected body.

How does God shape a sinner so that he can put on a resurrected body? He shapes him by forgiving his sins, putting the divine life into him to regenerate his spirit, and then transforming his soul. This is what it means for God to shape us.

Have you been shaped by God? The best answer is to say that we have been shaped to some degree. Although I have been somewhat shaped by God, I know that I have not been absolutely shaped by Him. Therefore, I need further shaping.

THE PLEDGE OF THE SPIRIT

In relation to God's shaping, Paul says that God has given to us the pledge of the Spirit. This indicates that the main factor of God's shaping us is His putting Himself into us as the life-giving Spirit to be a pledge. This means that God has pledged Himself to us to accomplish this for us. He has placed Himself as the life-giving Spirit into our spirit to guarantee that one day He will clothe us with a

body of

resurrection. We have a pledge that we have been made and qualified for this purpose. This also is included in the ministry of the new covenant. Through the new covenant ministry we are shaped, qualified, and prepared to be clothed upon with a body of resurrection. We all are waiting for this to take place.

AMBITIOUS TO PLEASE THE LORD

What should we do while we are waiting to be clothed upon with a transfigured body? Verse 9 gives the answer: "Wherefore also we are ambitious, whether at home or away from home, to be well-pleasing to Him." The word "wherefore" at the beginning of verse 9 establishes the connection of verse 9 with verse 8. Because we are waiting to be clothed with a transfigured body, we are ambitious to please the Lord. Likewise, as we are waiting for the redemption of our body, we are ambitious to be well-pleasing to Him. What Paul says in verses 10 through 13 is related to his ambition to please the Lord.

CONSTRAINED TO LIVE TO THE LORD

In verse 14 Paul goes on to say, "For the love of Christ constrains us." Once again the word "for" indicates a connection, a continuation. We are ambitious to please the Lord, for His love is constraining us. The love of Christ in verse 14 is the love which was manifested on the cross through His death for us.

The Greek word rendered constrains literally means presses on from all sides, holding to one end, forcibly limiting, confining to one object within certain bounds, shutting up to one line and purpose, as in a narrow, walled road. The same Greek word is used in Luke 4:38; 12:50; Acts 18:5; and Philippians 1:23. In such a way the apostles were constrained by the love of Christ to live to Him and to be well-pleasing to Him.

We have seen that to be constrained means to be pressed from all sides and held to one end. When we are constrained, we are limited, as if walking on a narrow,

walled road, and forced to go in a certain direction. Although we love the Lord, we are not always willing to take His way. Without being walled in by Him, we probably would have escaped from Christ and the church. But the love of Christ constrains us; it presses us from every side and holds us to one goal. We have no other way. There is no other way for us to take. Actually, this is not our choice. If the choice had truly been ours, we all would probably be somewhere else today. No, it is not up to us to make the choice; it is the love of Christ that constrains us.

According to 5:14 and 15, the love of Christ constrains us to live to Him. Verse 15 says, "And He died on behalf of all, that those who live may no longer live to themselves, but to Him Who died for them and has been raised." It is difficult to explain what it means to live to Christ, although it is easy to understand what it means to live for Him. Today both in Catholicism and in the denominations, people are doing many things for Christ. However, we may do something for the Lord without doing that thing unto the Lord.

If we consider the context, we shall see that to live to the Lord means to live the kind of life the Lord Jesus lived. In chapter four we see that the apostles experienced the putting to death of Jesus. When we experience the putting to death of Jesus, we can live the kind of life Jesus lived. This is to live to the Lord.

To live to the Lord is to live a crucified life. It is to live in such a way that the outward man is always put to death. The Lord Jesus lived this kind of life, and those who live such a life today are living to the Lord. This understanding of living to the Lord is according to the concept conveyed in chapter four.

Christians often try to live for the Lord according to their own concepts. In a previous message I illustrated this by telling how some southern Chinese forced me to eat the bread they had prepared for me, even though it was not thoroughly cooked and extremely difficult to digest. Although I preferred to eat rice, they insisted that I eat that bread. They prepared that bread for me, but they did

not prepare it to me. Likewise, we may do many things for the Lord instead of to the Lord.

What the Lord wants is not that we be so active for Him. He wants us to experience the putting to death of Jesus so that our natural man and our active being may be terminated. Many are active or aggressive for the Lord in a natural way. They do things for Him by their natural aggressiveness. This offends the Lord, and it distracts us from enjoying Him. Therefore, what we need is to be constrained by the Lord's love simply to live to Him.

If we would live to the Lord, we must deny our outward man. The outward man is the flesh. When we live to Christ, we do not live by our outward man, by our flesh. This means that living to Christ requires that we live by our inward man, by our regenerated spirit.

KNOWING OTHERS ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT

In verse 16, a continuation of verses 14 and 15, Paul says, "So that we, from now on, know no one according to flesh; even if we have known Christ according to flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer." Not to know others according to the flesh means that we do not know them according to the outward man. In the proper church life, the leading ones and the serving ones do not know others according to the outward man. However, among Christians today it is common to know the believers according to the outward man. For example, people may be known according to their profession, position, talents, and capabilities. In the church, on the contrary, we should know others according to the inward man, according to the spirit.

As the continuation of verse 16, verse 17 says, "So that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, they have become new." What is the new creation? The new creation is a person regenerated with the life of God and living in the inward man, not in the outward man. A person living in the outward man is in the flesh, in the old creation. Therefore,

he is old. But the one who lives to the Lord in the inward man is in the new creation.

Now we can see how four important matters are connected. The ambition to please the Lord is connected to the aspiration to have a resurrected body. Living to the Lord is related to being ambitious to please the Lord. If we do not live to the Lord, we cannot please Him. If we would make the Lord happy, we must live to Him. In order to live to the Lord, we must put our natural being to death. Then we shall be able to please Him. If we have such a living, we shall certainly be a new creation, a person living in the spirit, in the inward man. Therefore, the aspiration to have a transfigured body is connected to the ambition to please the Lord, the ambition to please the Lord is connected to living to the Lord, and living to the Lord is connected to being a new creation.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-SEVEN

A NEW CREATION IN CHRIST BECOMING GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH THE SECOND STEP OF RECONCILIATION

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 5:1-21

In the foregoing message we covered a number of important points in 2 Corinthians 5: the aspiration to have a transfigured body, the ambition to please the Lord, living to the Lord, and being a new creation. In verse 17 Paul speaks of the new creation: "So that if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, they have become new." The old creation does not have the divine life and nature, but the new creation, the believers born again of God, does have the divine life and nature (John 1:13; 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:4). Hence, they are a new creation (Gal. 6:15), not according to the old nature of flesh, but according to the new nature of the divine life. The word behold in verse 17 is a call to watch the marvelous change of the new creation.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

In verses 18 through 20 Paul goes on to speak of the ministry of reconciliation: "But all things are of God, Who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; how that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them, and putting in us the word of reconciliation. On behalf of Christ, then, we are ambassadors, as God entreating through us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God." We need to

read these verses very carefully. The word "then" in verse 20 is a connecting word joining verse 20 with the preceding verses. According to verse 20, the ambassadors of Christ are one with God; they are like God, and they entreat as God. Their word is God's word, and what they do is God's doing. Furthermore, the words "on behalf of Christ" mean representing Christ. As those who represent Christ, the apostles were ambassadors of Christ. Today an ambassador is a person authorized to represent his government. In like manner, the apostles were authorized by Christ to represent Him to do the work of reconciliation.

Paul's composition in 5:20 is unusual. After saying "we are ambassadors," he says, "as God entreating through us. Paul seems to be saying, "We are ambassadors of Christ, and we are doing a reconciling work. This is like God entreating you through us. We are one with Christ and one with God. Christ is one with us, and God also is one with us. Therefore, God, Christ, and we, the apostles, are all one." The ministry of the new covenant is a ministry in which God, Christ, and the ministers are one.

Paul's word in verse 20 is strong and emphatic. He says, "We are ambassadors, as God entreating through us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God." God, Christ, and the apostles were one in carrying out the ministry of reconciliation.

TWO STEPS OF RECONCILIATION

Paul's word in verse 20 about being reconciled to God is not directed to sinners; it is directed to the believers in Corinth. These believers had already been reconciled to God partially. However, they had not been fully reconciled to Him. It would not be true to say that the Corinthian believers had not been reconciled to God at all. In 1 Corinthians chapter one Paul refers to them as saints, as those who had been called by God into the fellowship of His Son. Therefore, they surely had been reconciled to God to some degree. Perhaps they had been halfway reconciled to Him.

The books of 1 and 2 Corinthians show that the

believers at Corinth, after being reconciled to God partially, still lived in the flesh, in the outward man. Between them and God there was the separating veil of the flesh, of the natural man. This veil corresponds to the veil inside the tabernacle, the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, not to the veil at the entrance to the Holy Place. The Corinthian believers may have been in the Holy Place, but they were not in the Holy of Holies. This means they were still separated from the place where God is. Therefore, they had not been reconciled to God in full.

In verse 19 it is the world that is to be reconciled to God. In verse 20 it is the believers, those who have already been reconciled to God, who are to be reconciled to Him further. This clearly indicates that there are two steps for people to be fully reconciled to God. The first step is as sinners to be reconciled to God from sin. For this purpose Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3) that they may be forgiven by God. This is the objective aspect of Christ's death. In this aspect He bore our sins on the cross that God might judge them upon Him for us. The second step is as believers living in the natural life to be reconciled to God from the flesh. For this purpose Christ died for us--the persons--that we may live to Him in resurrection life (2 Cor. 5:14-15). This is the subjective aspect of Christ's death. In this aspect for us He was made sin to be judged and done away with by God that we may become the righteousness of God in Him. By the two aspects of His death He has fully reconciled God's chosen people to God.

These two steps of reconciliation are clearly portrayed by the two veils of the tabernacle. The first veil is called the screen (Exo. 26:36, lit.). A sinner was brought to God through the reconciliation of the atoning blood to enter into the Holy Place by passing this screen. This typifies the first step of reconciliation. The second veil (Exo. 26:31-35; Heb. 9:3) still separated him from God Who is in the Holy of Holies. This veil needed to be rent that he might be brought to God in the Holy of Holies. This is the second step of reconciliation. The Corinthian believers had been

reconciled to God, for they had passed through the first veil and had entered into the Holy Place. But they still lived in the flesh. They needed to pass the second veil, which has already been rent (Matt. 27:51; Heb. 10:20), to enter into the Holy of Holies to live with God in their spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). The goal of this Epistle is to bring them here that they may be persons in the spirit (1 Cor. 2:14), in the Holy of Holies. This is what the apostle means by saying, "Be reconciled to God."

In the Old Testament, when a sinner came to God, he first had to come to the altar to have his sins forgiven through the blood of the sin offering. After experiencing the forgiveness of sins, he could enter the Holy Place. This is the first step of reconciliation, the step by which a sinner begins to be reconciled to God. This was the situation of the believers at Corinth, and it is also the situation of most genuine Christians today. They have been reconciled to God in part through the cross upon which Christ died as our sin offering, where He shed His blood to wash away our sins. When we believed in Him, we were forgiven by God, reconciled to Him, and brought back to Him. Formerly, we went astray from God. But through repentance we returned to Him and have been reconciled to Him. However, we have been reconciled to God only partly, halfway.

FULL RECONCILIATION

Although the Corinthians had been saved and reconciled to God halfway, they still lived in the flesh; that is, they lived in the soul, the outward man, the natural being. The veil of the flesh, of the natural man, still separated them from God. This means that their natural being was a separating veil. Therefore, they needed the second step of reconciliation. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul was working to accomplish this second step. He was working on the Corinthians to cut the veil of the flesh asunder, to crucify their natural life, to consume their outward man. What the Apostle Paul was doing in 1 and 2 Corinthians was to cleave the separating veil of the flesh so that the believers at Corinth could enter into the Holy of Holies.

The blessings of God can be found in the Holy Place, but God Himself is in the Holy of Holies. In the Holy Place are the blessings of the Spirit, the lampstand, and the incense altar. But in the Holy Place there is not the direct presence of God. In order to have God Himself, we must be reconciled further and come into the Holy of Holies. We must take the second step of reconciliation to be brought into the presence of God. This is full reconciliation. This reconciliation brings us not only out of sin, but also out of the flesh, the natural man, the natural being. Then we are brought to God and become one with Him.

THE ULTIMATE CONSUMMATION OF GOD'S SALVATION

Verse 21, the last verse of chapter five, says, "Him Who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf, that we might become God's righteousness in Him." Here we have the ultimate consummation of God's salvation--the righteousness of God.

We must remember that the new covenant ministry is a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness. This ministry imparts the Spirit of life into the believers. This issues in a state, a condition, that is called righteousness. Before we were saved, we were in a condition that was altogether condemned by God. Nothing was right, and God could by no means justify the condition we were in. But after we were saved, we were brought into a state where we could be justified by God. This is righteousness. However, if we are honest, we shall admit that, on the one hand, we are in a righteous condition, but, on the other hand, certain things related to our living still are not right. These things may not be comparable to the gross sin that may have been in our living before we were saved. Nevertheless, there are matters which are not right. In particular, there is still the separation between us and God caused by our natural man, our self. This is sin.

Suppose a certain man and his wife are not saved. They have difficulty getting along with each other and often fight. Sometimes they argue in a very crude manner. But

suppose one day the husband gets saved and comes into the church life. He begins to change, and this change affects his wife. Eventually, she also gets saved and comes into the church life. Like her husband, she too begins to change. Now this man and wife are in a state which the Bible calls righteousness. However, the man, now a brother in the Lord, has a very strong disposition. (Disposition is different from character, for disposition is absolutely part of our being, our constitution.) Moreover, the wife is very peculiar and seldom agrees with others. Often she contradicts others. How could she and her husband live peacefully together, since he has a strong disposition and she is very peculiar? Although they may no longer fight with each other in their old way, they do not agree with each other. As a result, they do not talk to each other very much. Since conversation invariably leads to disagreement, the husband may tell his wife that it is better for them not to talk. What this man and wife have is a halfway reconciliation and a halfway righteousness.

However, suppose this brother and sister hear a message on the need for further reconciliation. The husband begins to condemn his disposition, the wife condemns her peculiarity, and they both condemn their natural life. As a result, there is the possibility that they may be brought into the Holy of Holies to enjoy the Lord. Then the husband may say, "Praise the Lord!" and the wife may respond, "Amen!" If this is the situation of this couple, they will be in a condition that may be called the righteousness of God.

In 5:17-21 we see three matters: the new creation, full reconciliation, and God's righteousness. Why do we say that this righteousness is the ultimate consummation of God's salvation? This claim is based on 2 Peter 3:13, which speaks of righteousness dwelling in the new heaven and new earth. The fact that righteousness will dwell in the new heaven and new earth indicates that everything will be brought back to God in full. Everything will be headed up and set in good order. Nothing will be wrong, and nothing will be out of order. Everything in the new heaven

and the new earth will be right and satisfactory to God. God will be able to look at the entire universe and justify everything.

Have you been saved and brought into Christ? Are you now in Christ? If you can meet these conditions, you are a new creation. But even though you may have the assurance to say that you are a new creation in Christ, you may not have the boldness to declare that you are the righteousness of God. The reason you lack this boldness is that you are like a butterfly that has not fully emerged from its cocoon. Only when our "cocoon" has been fully done away can we say that we are God's righteousness. Until then, we can say that we are only partially the righteousness of God. We need the cross to do a further work on us so that the remainder of our cocoon may be consumed. Eventually, at the latest in the New Jerusalem, we shall fully be God's righteousness. Then God will be able to boast to His enemy, Satan, that everything in the New Jerusalem is righteousness, that nothing is wrong or defective, that everything is satisfactory to God. Therefore, God will be able to justify everything in the New Jerusalem. This is the righteousness which is the consummation of the ministry of the new covenant.

BECOMING THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

The ministry of the new covenant, a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness, will work out a condition of righteousness first in individuals, second in the church, and third in the millennial kingdom. When the kingdom comes, there will be righteousness on earth. Then everything will be satisfactory to God, and God will justify everything. Although the age of the kingdom has not yet come, we can have a foretaste of the righteousness of the kingdom today in the church life and in our family life. Sometimes in a certain local church the condition may be such that everything, everyone, and every matter is justified by God. Such a church is God's righteousness. This kind of condition may also be present in our family life. In a few cases I have seen that in a family whose

members have been thoroughly saved there is a condition where nothing is wrong, but everything is satisfactory to God and justified by Him. Such a family is a family of righteousness. The fruit of the new covenant ministry is to produce this kind of righteousness.

Chapters three, four, and five are all on the new covenant ministry and its ministers. But this section consummates with Paul's word concerning the righteousness of God.

Many of today's Christians know only that Christ died for their sins. They do not realize that Christ died for them as the flesh, as the old creation. But in 2 Corinthians Paul does not speak of Christ dying for our sins. Instead, in 5:14 he says, "One died on behalf of all." This means that Christ died for us. In 1 Corinthians 15:3 Paul tells us that Christ died for our sins. In order that our sins might be forgiven by God, Christ died for our sins. This, however, is simply the initial stage of reconciliation. Christ died on the cross not only for our sins, but He died also for us, for our flesh, our natural being, our outward man. Christ died on the cross so that our outward man, our natural being, may be terminated in order that we may become God's righteousness. Therefore, Christ died for our sins so that we may be forgiven and justified by God. But Christ died for us so that we may become God's righteousness.

Becoming the righteousness of God is much deeper than being justified by God. The new covenant ministry brings us back to God to such an extent that we actually become God's righteousness. Not only are we justified by God, but we even become the righteousness of God.

SIN, FLESH, AND THE OUTWARD MAN

In verse 21 Paul says that Christ was made sin on our behalf so that we might become God's righteousness in Him. Sin here is actually synonymous with the flesh. John 1:14 says that Christ as the Word became flesh. Second Corinthians 5:21 says that He was made sin. According to Romans 8:3, God sent His Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin. Thus, sin and the flesh are synonyms. Furthermore,

since the flesh is our outward man, the outward man is totally sin. We ourselves, our natural being, are nothing but sin. For Christ to be made flesh was equal to His being made sin. When He went to the cross, He brought this flesh with Him. This means that He brought us, our natural being, our outward man, to the cross.

In chapter four Paul speaks of the outward man, and in chapter five he speaks of sin. The outward man is the flesh, and the flesh is sin. Therefore, the outward man, the flesh, and sin are synonymous.

Christ in His incarnation was made flesh; that is, He was made sin. This also means that He was made us. When He was crucified, He brought our natural man, the outward man, the flesh, sin, to the cross and nailed it there. That was the time God condemned sin, the flesh, the outward man. When Christ died on the cross, God condemned our natural man. He condemned you and me. God's goal in doing this was that we may become in Christ the righteousness of God. The resurrected Christ is righteousness, resurrection, and the life-giving Spirit. In such a One we may become the righteousness of God. This is the issue, the result, the ultimate consummation, of God's salvation, and this is what the new covenant ministry will produce.

The conclusion of these chapters on the new covenant ministry and its ministers is simply the righteousness of God. Is your family life God's righteousness? Are you the righteousness of God? Is the church in your locality God's righteousness? We believe that the new covenant ministry is working toward the goal of making us, our family life, and our church life the righteousness of God. Then when the kingdom age arrives, God's righteousness will be on earth. The kingdom will bring in the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem. In this new heaven and new earth righteousness will dwell. This is the result and the consummation of the ministry of the new covenant.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-EIGHT

THE MINGLING OF DIVINITY WITH HUMANITY

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:7-15

MAJOR STEPS IN GOD'S FULL SALVATION

In God's full salvation there are a number of major steps. These steps include redemption, regeneration, transformation, and glorification. As God's creatures, we were created by Him to fulfill His purpose. However, we have become fallen. To be fallen is to be lost. We became lost because of our fall into sin. But God came to be a man in the Person of the Son that He might be our Redeemer. As our Redeemer, Christ died on the cross for our sins. Although we were fallen and lost, God came as a man to accomplish redemption and to bring us back to Himself.

Redemption, however, is simply the initial stage of God's full salvation. When we believed in the Lord Jesus, we were redeemed to God. But at the same time the Spirit of God, with Christ's redemption as the basis, entered into our being. In particular, the Spirit came into our spirit to regenerate us, to bring God's life into our deadened spirit and to make our spirit alive. In this way we were regenerated of God. To be regenerated is not the same as being born of our parents to receive physical life; it is to be born of God to receive spiritual life. This means that the very God who is life came into our spirit to be our life, our nature, and our person.

In our experience redemption and regeneration occur at the same time. We were redeemed, and our sins were forgiven. As a result, we have been justified by God and reconciled to Him. Now that Christ has redeemed us to God, there is no longer a problem between us and God. At

the same time, we were regenerated, born again of God. Through regeneration we have become children of God.

TRANSFORMATION, CONSTITUTION, REORGANIZATION

Regeneration, like redemption, is just the beginning, the initial stage, of God's salvation. Just as birth is the beginning of human life, so regeneration is the beginning of spiritual life. Following regeneration, we need transformation.

If we would understand the meaning of transformation, we need to use terms such as constitution and reorganization. Used with respect to transformation, the word constitution means that a certain new element is added into our being and constituted into us. Of course, the element that is added into us is the divine element. Before we were regenerated, we did not have the divine element. Whether we were good or bad, we all possessed only the human element. Those who are fallen and those who are redeemed are the same in that both have the human element.

We can compare ourselves to a glass of water. Whether the glass is clean or dirty, it contains nothing other than plain water. It has no other contents, no other elements. Therefore, what is in the glass does not have the flavor or color of anything except water. However, if tea is added to this glass of water, another element is put into the water. Then two substances, the water and the tea, the tea and the water, are mingled together. This mingling is what we mean by constitution. The water is constituted into the tea, and the tea, into the water.

Continuing to use the illustration of water and tea, we would point out that it is impossible for water to become tea without the element of tea added to the water. There is only one way for water to become tea, and that is to put tea into water. When the element of tea is added to water, this element will constitute the water into tea. Once water has become tea, it has two elements: tea and water. Anyone who drinks this tea will receive these two elements. He

takes only one kind of drink into him, but he receives two kinds of elements. He enjoys the water to quench his thirst and the tea to give him a certain taste.

NO THIRD SUBSTANCE PRODUCED

We need to be very clear, however, that the mingling of tea and water does not produce a third substance, a substance which is neither tea nor water. To say that the element of tea is mingled with water does not mean that the two original substances, the tea and the water, are nullified and no longer exist. On the contrary, the water is still water, and the tea is still tea. The difference is that once the tea and the water have been mingled, they are no longer separate. They are distinct, but they are not separate, for they have been mingled together and constituted into one entity, one drink. In the same principle, when divinity is mingled with humanity, both divinity and humanity continue to exist. It would not be true to say that this mingling produces a third substance, something which is neither divine nor human.

THE BEGINNING OF THE MINGLING

When we were regenerated, the divine tea was added to us. Prior to that time, whether our behavior was good or bad, we had only the element of humanity. Both a bank robber and a highly ethical person are the same in that neither of them has the divine element as long as they are not regenerated. We praise the Lord that at the time of our regeneration God came into our being. At that time the divine Person with the divine life, the divine nature, and the divine being were added to us. What a tremendous difference this makes! Now as saved and regenerated persons, we have two elements--the human element and the divine element. Furthermore, we have the divine life as well as the human life, and the divine nature as well as the human nature. The element of divinity has been added into the element of our humanity.

The addition of the divine element to our being at the time of regeneration marks the beginning of the mingling

of divinity and humanity within us. Regeneration, therefore, is simply the beginning of the mingling. When tea is added to water, both the tea and the water work to produce one entity, one drink. We may say that the tea and the water cooperate to produce this drink. In the same principle, once God has been added into our being, He begins to work within us. Now we need to cooperate with God's work, with His operation.

From the time we were regenerated, a process of constitution and transformation has been taking place within us. This process also involves reorganization. Through our birth as human beings we were organized in a certain way. But now that a new element, the divine element, has come into our being, there is the need for reorganization. Therefore, we need constitution, transformation, reorganization.

In the first few centuries of church history certain ancient teachers of the Bible saw the matter of mingling, experienced it, and taught it. Some teachers, however, went to an extreme and claimed that in the mingling of divinity and humanity in Christ, the original two natures produced a third nature. This is heretical, and it was condemned by the Council of Chalcedon. Afterward, Christian teachers were afraid to speak of the mingling of divinity with humanity. However, we have learned that some throughout the centuries continued to teach in a proper way concerning the mingling of divinity with humanity. Recently I read two books by Catholic writers which speak of this mingling in a correct way.

A TYPE OF THE MINGLING

The meal offering composed of fine flour mingled with oil is a type of the mingling of divinity with humanity. In some cases the oil was poured upon the fine flour; in other cases it was mixed, or mingled, with the flour. In the case of oil mingled with flour to make a cake to be used in the meal offering two substances--flour and oil--were mingled together. The oil was not simply added to the flour; it was mingled with it. But in this mingling neither of these elements ceased to exist. No, the oil was still oil, and the

fine flour was still flour. But through the process of mingling the flour and the oil became one entity. However, neither the oil nor the flour lost its particular nature because of the mingling. Furthermore, the mingling of the oil with the flour did not produce a third nature, a substance which was neither flour nor oil. The product of the mingling was a cake with two natures, two elements, two substances.

The meal offering is a type of Christ. Christ's humanity is typified by the fine flour, and His divinity is typified by the oil. The mingling of the oil with the fine flour indicates that in Christ divinity was not merely added to humanity but was mingled with it. Just as the oil was mingled with the flour, so in Christ divinity was mingled with humanity. Therefore, Christ has two natures, divinity and humanity, mingled together in His one Person. During His life on earth, it was apparent that He was a genuine man. But many times it was manifest that He truly was God. With the cake used in the meal offering both the oil and the flour could be tasted. In like manner, with Christ both divinity and humanity are manifested.

THE HEAD AND THE BODY

Christ today is the Head of the Body, and we, His followers, are His members. As the Head He has two natures, and as His members we also have the same two natures. Christ, the Head, has divinity and humanity, and we, His members, also have humanity and divinity. Consider your physical body: the head and the members of the body are of the same substance. It is not possible for the head to be of one substance and the members of the body to be of a different substance. No, the whole body is of the same substance, the same element. Throughout our entire body there are the same blood, the same life, and the same nature. This is also true concerning the relationship between Christ and the church. What Christ is and what Christ has we as His members also are and have. Christ has humanity as well as divinity, and we have divinity as well as humanity. This means that Christ and we who

believe in Him and who are His members have two natures. However, we would emphasize once again that the mingling of divinity with humanity in us does not produce a third nature. Our humanity does not cease to exist. Neither divinity nor humanity is nullified in the mingling.

DIVINITY AND HUMANITY WOVEN TOGETHER

In the Life-study of Exodus we pointed out that the ephod, a garment worn by the high priest, was composed of golden and linen thread woven together. These two kinds of thread were not merely put side by side or piled one on the other; they were woven together into one textile. In this fabric both the golden thread and the linen thread could be seen. This also typifies the mingling of divinity and humanity in Christ. The golden thread signifies Christ's divinity, and the linen thread, His humanity. This weaving together of golden and linen thread in the ephod indicates that in Christ the two natures of divinity and humanity are not merely added together but woven together, mingled together. Moreover, just as the weaving together of golden and linen thread did not produce a third substance, so the mingling of divinity and humanity in Christ does not nullify both divinity and humanity in order to produce a third nature.

THE PROCESS OF MINGLING

It is very important for us to realize that every genuine Christian, every bona fide believer in Christ, is a person undergoing the mingling of the divine life and nature with the human life and nature. The divine life is not only mingled with our human life, but it is mingling with it. As a result, we are divine human beings. We may also say that we are human divine beings. This is why we say that Christians are God-men. Our life is the life of a God-man, and our living, as indicated by the ephod composed of golden and linen thread, is a living of divinity mingled with humanity. Our spiritual clothing is not only linen; it is also golden. We have gold and linen woven into one garment.

This is our conduct, our behavior, our character, our living.

We praise the Lord that the process of mingling is still taking place within us. This continuing process is transformation. We may also speak of it as constitution and reorganization.

The Bible reveals that as believers in Christ we are being transformed, constituted, reorganized. However, this is not taught among most Christians today. Instead, believers are taught to improve their character and behavior. This kind of teaching, however, is not according to the Bible. Whatever the Bible says about our behavior or conduct involves transformation. It is vital for us to realize that transformation is the right way. In the process of transformation God's element, divinity, is working within us to transform our humanity from a natural humanity into a spiritual humanity. But this does not mean that our humanity will be lost. Neither does it mean that divinity will be changed or altered in some way. No, neither our humanity nor God's divinity will be changed; however, they are being mingled together in one entity, one being. This mingling produces genuine God-men. It also produces the heavenly tea-water for us to drink and enjoy day by day.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-NINE

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(8)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 6:1-13

WHAT WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

In 2:12--3:11 Paul covers the ministry of the new covenant, and in 3:12--7:16, the ministers of the new covenant. The section in this Epistle on the ministers of the new covenant is much longer than the section on the ministry of the new covenant. The reason for this is that God cares much more for the ministers than He does for the ministry. In other words, God cares more for what we are than for what we do. This means that what we are is much more important to Him than what we do.

Today both in the Christian world and the secular world more attention is given to what people do than to what they are. Christians mainly pay their attention to work or ministry, yet neglect the being of the person who does the work. They pay attention to the work and the ministry much more than to the worker and the minister. But according to the Bible, God pays more attention to what we are than to what we do or to what we can do. He cares for the kind of person we are and for the kind of life we live. Therefore, in 2 Corinthians Paul first presents the New Testament ministry. Then he goes on to show that this excellent, marvelous ministry needs excellent ministers with an excellent life.

We need to be deeply impressed by the fact that God cares much more for what we are than for what we do. What we do must be measured by what we are. Furthermore, our being must match our work; that is,

what we are must match what we do. Our being must match our doing. Thus, our being and our doing go together. If we care only for what we do and not for being the right kind of person, then what we do will not be very weighty. Our doing will be weighty only when it is matched by what we are in our being.

WORKING BY AN ALL-FITTING LIFE

In 6:1 Paul says, "And working together with Him, we also entreat you that you do not receive the grace of God in vain." "And" here indicates a continuation. In the last part of chapter five (vv. 16-21) the apostle told us that they, as the ministers of the new covenant, are commissioned with the ministry of reconciliation for the Lord's new creation. From this verse to the end of chapter seven, he continues by telling us how they work. They work together with God by a life (not by any gift) that is all-sufficient and all-matured, able to fit all situations, able to endure any kind of treatment, to accept any kind of environment, to work under any kind of condition, and to take any kind of opportunity, for the carrying out of their ministry.

Some who read this may say, "This is a good word for co-workers and ministers, but it does not apply to me. I am a layman, not a minister." But in the Lord's recovery there are no laymen. Everyone is a minister, a co-worker, and even has the potential and the capacity of becoming an apostle. Elsewhere we have pointed out that the apostles are examples and patterns of what all believers should be. In Ephesians 3 Paul says that he is less than the least of all saints. Moreover, the name Paul means "little." If Paul, who thought of himself as less than the least of all the saints, could be a minister and an apostle, how about you? We all have the capacity to be ministers of the new covenant. Concerning this, our emphasis should not be on what we do, but on what we are. Our capacity is not primarily a capacity for doing but for being.

I would say that in 6:1--7:16 we can see that the apostles work together with God by an all-fitting life. This

portion of 2 Corinthians does not indicate that they work together with God by an all-sufficient power or by an all-wonderful gift. Today's Christians, however, mainly devote their attention to power and gifts. Some may inquire, "Do you have power? Don't you know that Dr. So-and-so is a powerful preacher? What gifts do you have? Oh, Dr. So-and-so is very gifted." But among Christians today there is very little talk about life or about living. Those who do not have genuine power may pretend to be powerful. For example, in a presumptuous way they may pray, "In the mighty name of Jesus I bind all the demons!" But it is most interesting that in 2 Corinthians Paul does not talk like this. Actually he says very little about either gifts or power. As used in 2 Corinthians, gift does not refer to miraculous gifts, and power does not have the connotation commonly given by Christians today. If you read carefully through the entire book of 2 Corinthians, you will see that Paul's concentration is on life. Hence, in 6:1--7:16 we see that he worked together with God by an all-fitting life.

Being a minister of the New Testament does not depend on gifts or power; rather, it depends on having a life which is able to fit into any kind of situation. To be sure, in 6:1-13 the word all-fitting is not used. But if you consider what is contained in these verses, you will see that they describe a life which certainly is all-fitting. As we shall see in a later message, here Paul mentions eighteen qualifications, three groups of items, and seven kinds of persons. Paul, therefore, was qualified to be a minister of the new covenant in all these ways.

In 6:1-13 Paul does not list among the qualifications such things as philosophy or psychology. If we would be proper ministers of the new covenant, we must have the eighteen qualifications mentioned by Paul and three groups of items, and we need to be seven kinds of persons. Only in this way can we be qualified to be a co-worker with God for His New Testament ministry.

In 6:1 Paul does not say that the apostles work together with one another. No, he says that they were working together with God. The apostles were not only commissioned by God with their ministry, but they also

worked together with Him. They were God's co-workers (1 Cor. 3:9). Paul and his co-workers were working together with God.

RECONCILED INTO GOD

If we would have a proper understanding of what it means to work together with God, we need to recall what Paul said at the end of chapter five. Paul has already said that he has been commissioned by God with the ministry of reconciliation, that is, with the work of reconciling others to God.

Many years ago, I had a very limited understanding of reconciliation. My understanding was that before we were saved, we were enemies of God, and there was no peace between us and God. Instead of peace, we were at enmity with God. But when we repented and believed in the Lord Jesus, His blood washed away our sins, and we received God's forgiveness. As a result, we were justified by God and reconciled to Him. Having been reconciled to God in this way, there was no longer enmity between us and God. Instead, we had peace with Him. This understanding of reconciliation falls far short of the full meaning of reconciliation in the New Testament. It is not the full significance of reconciliation as ministered by the Apostle Paul.

What is the reconciliation ministered by Paul? I have read a number of books which refer to this subject, but none of them pointed out that the ministry of reconciliation is not merely to bring sinners back to God, but, even the more, to bring believers absolutely into God. Hence, it is not sufficient simply to be brought back to God; we must also be in Him.

The last verse of chapter five, verse 21, says, "Him Who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf, that we might become God's righteousness in Him." According to this verse, we become the righteousness of God not merely through Christ, with Christ, or by Christ; we become the righteousness of God in Christ. From this verse we also see that we become not only righteous before God; we become

the very righteousness of God. To be righteous is one thing, but to become righteousness is something else. For example, a certain thing may be golden, but it may not be pure gold. How wonderful that in Christ we may become the very righteousness of God!

Do you have the confidence to declare that you are in Christ? As genuine believers, we can testify that we are in Him. But are we in Christ in a practical way in our daily living? For example, are you in Christ when you are, joking? When you make a joke, do you have the assurance that you are in Him? You must admit that you are outside of Christ at such a time. There is no neutral ground: we are either in Christ or outside of Him. Because we are not always in Christ in a practical way, we need further reconciliation. We need to be reconciled back into Christ.

Suppose you are in a situation where you must wait in line for a long time. As you are waiting, you may feel not at all happy. In fact, you may be extremely bothered. Are you in Christ at that moment? No, you are outside of Christ. Where, then, are you? You are in yourself. At times your situation may be even worse, for you may be in the flesh, perhaps in your anger. Therefore, you need the ministry of reconciliation to bring you back into God once again.

I do not believe that many readers of 2 Corinthians 5 have the understanding that reconciliation is to be brought back into God. Was this your understanding of reconciliation in this chapter? Nevertheless, this is actually what Paul means by reconciliation.

For years I read chapters five and six of 2 Corinthians without realizing how chapter six is the continuation of chapter five. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul tells us that he was commissioned with the ministry of reconciling others to God. In chapter six Paul is carrying out this ministry in relation to the Corinthians.

ONE WITH GOD BY BEING MINGLED WITH HIM

The biblical understanding of reconciliation includes more than merely being brought back to God. It is to be

brought back into Him. Therefore, according to the Bible, to bring others to God means to bring them into God and to make them absolutely one with Him. However, in much Christian teaching the matter of oneness with God is wrongly understood. According to the concept held by many Christians, to be one with God can be compared to a wife being one with her husband. In the case of a husband and wife, there is a kind of corporate oneness. But in the Bible to be one with God means to be mingled with Him. It is to be in God and to allow God to come into us. Biblical oneness with God is a oneness in which we enter into God and God enters into us. Therefore, the Lord Jesus said, "Abide in Me and I in you" (John 15:4). He did not say, "Abide with Me and I with you." What a shame that some Christians oppose this wonderful biblical concept of being one with God by being mingled with Him!

BROUGHT BACK INTO GOD

Until we are wholly one with the Lord, being in Him and allowing Him to be in us absolutely, we shall continue to need the ministry of reconciliation, the ministry with which Paul was commissioned. Paul was commissioned with the work of bringing the believers into God in a way that was absolute and practical. Once we see this, we are qualified to understand the last part of chapter five and the first part of chapter six. As we have pointed out, the conjunction "and" at the beginning of 6:1 indicates that chapter six is a continuation of the last part of chapter five.

I urge you not to cling to your old, limited concept of reconciliation. You may have studied religious books or spiritual books and feel that you have the proper interpretation of reconciliation. But I would encourage you to take in this new, fuller understanding of reconciliation and see that to be reconciled is to be brought into God and that the ministry of reconciliation is the ministry of bringing others into God.

There were many problems among the believers at Corinth. All those problems were signs that those believers

were not absolutely in God. In many particular matters they were not in God. Although they had been saved and born of God, they were not living in Him. For this reason, concerning many items in their daily living, they were outside of God. Therefore, Paul was burdened to bring them into God. This is to reconcile them to God.

WORKING WITH GOD

Not only were the apostles commissioned with the work, the ministry, of reconciliation, but in bringing others into God they worked together with God. They knew that by themselves they could not bring anyone into God. They did not have this ability, this capacity. They needed to do this work with God.

In the past many of us said that we were working for the Lord. But when you are working for Him, did you have the sense that you were working with Him? There is an important difference between working for God and working with Him. Even in our human living, working with another person is different from simply working for that person. Let us take the example of a wife cooking a meal for her husband. A wife may enjoy cooking for her husband; however, she may not like to cook a meal with her husband. Instead, if her husband were to come into the kitchen and try to prepare the meal with her, she might say, "Please let me cook this meal for you. Don't come into the kitchen to bother me. Sit down and rest until your food is ready." This indicates that the wife prefers to cook for her husband, but not with him. The same may be true of working for the Lord. Often we like to work for the Lord, but we do not want to work with Him. Our attitude may even be that the Lord should stay in heaven while we work for Him on earth. If we work in this way, we shall not be able to reconcile others into the Lord. Because we are not in the Lord ourselves in a practical way in our work, we cannot reconcile anyone else into the Lord. Only by working with the Lord can we reconcile others into Him.

To work together with God means that we are in Him. When we are in Him, we can bring others into Him. Only a

person who is in God can bring others into God. If you are not in Him, you certainly cannot bring anyone else into Him. Our closeness to God is the measure of the result of our work. If we are far away from God, we cannot bring others close to Him. The extent to which we can bring others to God and into God is always measured by where we are with respect to God. If we are those who are one with God, then we can bring others to the very place where we are. Therefore, if we want to bring others into the Lord, we must first be in Him ourselves. The more we are in Him, the more we can reconcile others into Him. May this matter be deeply impressed upon us!

NOT RECEIVING THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN

In the latter part of 6:1 Paul says to the Corinthians, "We also entreat you that you do not receive the grace of God in vain." This entreating is the work of reconciliation, as mentioned in 5:20.

Paul entreated the believers at Corinth not to receive the grace of God in vain. 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 that we may live in resurrection. This means that grace is the Triune God becoming life and everything to us. By this grace Saul of Tarsus, the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15-16), became the foremost apostle, laboring more abundantly than all the apostles (1 Cor. 15:10). The grace of God always brings us back to Him. According to the context of 6:1, not to receive the grace of God in vain means not to remain in any distraction from God, but to be brought back to Him.

FULL SALVATION

In 6:2 Paul goes on to say, "For He says, In an acceptable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I helped you; behold, now is a well-acceptable time; behold, now is a day of salvation." The phrase "well-acceptable time" refers to the time of our being reconciled to God, in which He well-accepts us. Salvation in this verse, according to the context, refers to reconciliation. Reconciliation actually is full salvation.

In chapter five Paul speaks of reconciliation, and in chapter six, of salvation. Hence, the salvation mentioned in 6:2 actually refers to reconciliation. Only when we the believers, the saved ones in Christ, have been fully reconciled to God are we fully saved. Until then, we are only partially saved; we have not yet been saved in full.

In 6:1-13 we see a picture of a person who has been fully saved. We prove our full salvation by having an all-fitting life. In these verses Paul is a pattern of a believer who has been fully saved, a pattern of one who lives an all-fitting life. In the next message we shall consider the details of this life.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(9)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 6:3-13

In 6:1 and 2 we see the work of the reconciling ministry and in 6:3-13, the adequate life for the ministry. From 6:3 to the end of chapter seven, the apostle depicts a life that is all-fitting for carrying out the new covenant ministry. In verse 3 Paul says, "We are giving no occasion of stumbling in anything, that the ministry may not be blamed." The ministry here is the ministry of the new covenant (3:8-9; 4:1). In this message we shall consider the life that is adequate for such a ministry. This life is an all-fitting life.

THE FIRST CATEGORY OF QUALIFICATIONS

In Much Endurance

In verse 4 Paul says, "But in everything commending ourselves as ministers of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses." In verses 4 through 7 Paul gives us the first category of qualifications of the ministers of God, the ministers of the new covenant (3:6). When I read these verses many years ago, I was bothered by the fact that the first qualification given by Paul is endurance. I thought that in speaking of the qualifications of New Testament ministers, Paul should have begun with something great. Instead, he begins with the words "in much endurance." If a believer today were to apply to be a medical missionary, surely he would mention his education. Would he instead claim that he possesses the qualification of endurance? Nevertheless, the first qualification listed by Paul is endurance.

Many translators agree that the Greek word rendered endurance in 6:4 implies patience. Some versions use the word patience instead of endurance. However, to render the Greek word as patience is not sufficient. There is a difference between patience and endurance. Of course, both patience and endurance are positive virtues. But patience falls short of endurance. Patience does not imply suffering, whereas endurance does imply suffering. If you talk to me for a long period of time, I shall need patience in order to listen to you. But if it is necessary to undergo some kind of suffering, I would need endurance in addition to patience.

The first qualification of a New Testament minister is the capacity to endure tribulation. Such a minister must be able to endure pressure, oppression, persecution, poverty, and any kind of trial. Brother Watchman Nee once said that the most powerful person is a person who can endure. Endurance requires strength. If we would endure tribulation, we need to be strengthened and become powerful.

Endurance was manifested in brother Nee during the twenty years of his imprisonment. It is one thing to be an instant martyr; it is something very different to be in prison for many years. An instant martyr may be arrested, tried, and executed, all within a short period of time. For this, endurance is not necessary. But if one is cast into prison and then made subject to trial over a period of years, endurance is absolutely necessary.

Every minister of the New Testament must learn how to endure. The apostles, the elders, and the deacons all need endurance. Certain saints are very good at exhausting the elders. At this point let me say a word to those brothers who aspire to be elders: You must be ready for continual grinding. If you are put into the eldership, you will be placed between the grinding stones. Some brothers and sisters will grind you constantly. They seem to have a "commission" to test the spirituality of the elders. Through them you will be put on the test to see how long you can endure. But when we endure, we

minister life to others. Those who have endurance are those who minister life.

In Afflictions

Paul refers to his afflictions in 1:8: "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, as to our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were excessively burdened, beyond our power, so that we despaired even of living." This is another qualification for him to be a minister of the new covenant.

In Necessities

It is difficult to grasp the real meaning of the word rendered necessities. Darby in his translation also uses the word necessities. The Chinese version uses the word poverty. Whenever we are in want, short of food, lodging, or clothing, we are in necessities. In 12:10, where the same Greek word is used, the Chinese version uses a word meaning straits. The Greek word means constraints, urgent needs that press heavily. It refers to sufferings that result from calamities and straits. An example of calamity would be the eruption of Mount Saint Helens some time ago. That was a calamity to those in the vicinity of the volcano. The result of such a calamity is want, shortage of daily necessities. Paul passed through many calamities and straits and, as a result, was in necessities.

Today Christians evaluate one who is a servant of God not by his experience in necessities but by his riches. If someone possesses great riches, he is considered blessed by the Lord. But if a believer becomes poor, lacking in food, housing, clothing, or other necessities for daily living, many would say of him, "This brother is not approved by God. Because God is not happy with him or pleased with him, He does not bless him." What, then, about Paul, who was in necessities? Surely he was approved by God. We should not think that riches are a sign that we are blessed by the Lord or approved by Him. On the contrary, it may be that want, necessity, and poverty are the true qualifications of a minister of the new covenant.

In Distresses

In verse 4 Paul also speaks of distresses. Literally the

Greek word rendered distresses means narrowness of room; hence, straits, difficulties, distresses. It is not easy to explain the difference between afflictions and distresses. Some translators even reverse the order of these words in verse 4, using distresses for afflictions, and afflictions for distresses. We may say that distresses are the inward sufferings which come as a reaction to the outward afflictions.

From the various words Paul uses in verse 4 we know that he was in different kinds of troubles. This verse clearly indicates that Paul's life was a life of affliction, calamity, straits, necessities, and distresses. Do you like to hear about this? Do you still want to be a minister of the new covenant when you hear about Paul's difficulties and troubles? Today many young men are encouraged to be ministerial students. After graduating from a seminary, they may find a good job as a pastor or minister. They may be provided housing and an adequate salary. Paul, however, was not that kind of minister, and he did not live that kind of life. Instead, his life, the life that qualified him to be a new covenant minister, was a life of endurance, affliction, necessities, and distresses.

In Stripes

Verse 5 says, "In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings." The stripes refer to the beatings Paul received. In 11:23 he refers to "stripes excessively," where the word excessively literally means above measure. In 11:24 Paul says, "From the Jews five times I received forty stripes less one." Furthermore, according to Acts 16:23, in Philippi Paul and Silas had many stripes laid upon them and then were cast into prison (Acts 16:23).

In Imprisonments

In 11:23 Paul speaks of "imprisonments more abundantly." Several times Paul was cast into prison. We have already referred to the occasion at Philippi. In Ephesians 3:1 Paul refers to himself as "the prisoner of

Christ Jesus," and in Ephesians 4:1, as "the prisoner in the Lord." Again, in 2 Timothy 1:8 and Philemon 9 and 23 Paul refers to imprisonment.

In Tumults

Tumults refer to rebellions, revolts, and great disturbances. Acts 17:5 describes one such tumult. Acts 19 describes a great tumult which occurred in Ephesus. Verse 23 of that chapter says, "There arose no small stir about that way."

In Labors

In 2 Corinthians 11:23 Paul says that he was "in labors more abundantly," and in verse 27, speaks of "in labor and hardship." Paul mentions this in 1 Thessalonians 2:9: "For you remember, brothers, our labor and hardship: working night and day so as not to be burdensome to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God." He refers to this again in 2 Thessalonians 3:8, where he says, "Nor did we eat bread as a gift from anyone, but in labor and hardship we worked night and day that we might not be burdensome to any of you."

In Watchings

Watchings refer to sleeplessness, such as those experienced by the apostles in Acts 16:25; 20:7-11, 31; and 2 Thessalonians 3:8. Paul refers to this in 2 Corinthians 11:27, speaking of "in watchings often." This refers to a situation where there is either no way to get sleep or no time to sleep. This was an aspect of Paul's living.

In Fastings

The fastings in verse 5 do not refer to fasting for prayer. These are the fastings due to the lack of food. In 11:27 fastings are mentioned along with labor and hardship, watchings, and hunger and thirst. Since fastings are listed with hardships, they must refer to involuntary fasting due to lack of food. Hence, they differ from hunger. Hunger may refer to a situation in which there is no way to obtain food;

involuntary fasting may refer to a situation of poverty.

In Pureness

Verse 6 continues, "In pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love." Pureness here is related to motive. In his motive Paul was pure.

The word pureness in this verse implies a great deal. If our intention is not single, it is not pure. If in our motive we are for something other than the Lord Himself, our motive is not pure. Likewise, if our goal is to gain something other than the glory of God, our goal is not pure. Pureness indicates that we care for nothing except God and His glory.

In Knowledge

Knowledge, of course, is a matter of the mind. Paul's inclusion of "in knowledge" indicates that no minister of the New Testament should be an unintelligent person. As new covenant ministers, we need to be quite knowledgeable. For this reason, I encourage the young people to get a proper education and to learn foreign languages. In particular, if you would be used by the Lord, you need to gain the knowledge of Greek or Hebrew. It is also helpful to study history. No doubt, we need to study the Bible and learn the proper biblical revelation. In order to be new covenant ministers, we need to be knowledgeable.

In Longsuffering

It is difficult to differentiate endurance from longsuffering. Endurance may emphasize the strength or capacity to bear suffering, and longsuffering may emphasize the duration of that suffering. In order to be a minister of the New Testament, we must realize that nothing can be accomplished for God's eternal purpose without suffering. From the time of man's fall, everything in human life is accomplished through suffering. According to Genesis 3, women suffer in childbearing. Suffering is

necessary in raising our children. Of course, we who are parents enjoy our children. When a mother embraces her little child or looks upon him while he is sleeping, she is very happy. Nevertheless, it is a fact that children cause trouble to their parents. It may be that in the raising of children there is more suffering than enjoyment. Moreover, also according to Genesis 3, man must labor to earn a living, for the ground brings forth thorns and thistles. It seems that in a field weeds always grow better than the things we plant. This is a sign of the troubles, the sufferings, of human living.

All people, the rich and the poor alike, have troubles. If as ministers of the new covenant we would help others in their suffering, how can we avoid suffering? We cannot be an exception. Instead, we must suffer and eventually experience longsuffering. Never think that as a minister you can avoid suffering. You will have some joy in your married life or family life, but you will also have suffering, probably more suffering than joy. Actually, a new covenant minister suffers more than others do. As a minister, he is one who should live a proper human life as the Lord Jesus did. The Lord suffered more than anyone else. To live a genuine human life is to suffer. Human life is a life not mainly of enjoyment but of suffering. The more we live a human life to minister Christ to others, the more we shall suffer. Hence, we need the qualification of longsuffering.

In Kindness

I believe that in Paul's thought there is a connection between longsuffering and kindness. Usually when we are suffering we do not have the capacity to care for others. But kindness implies that we are for others. I believe that Paul's concept is that while we are suffering, we also need to take care of others and be kind to them. We are in longsuffering and also in kindness. Even when we are suffering, we should still be kind to others.

In a Holy Spirit

Most versions understand the spirit in verse 6 to refer

to the Holy Spirit. Thus, they capitalize the words holy and spirit. But here, according to the context, Paul does not refer to God's Spirit, but to our spirit. This means that our spirit must be holy. The words "a holy spirit" refer to the apostles' regenerated spirit.

In Unfeigned Love

Love is a matter of the heart. In this verse we have the motive, the mind, the heart, and the spirit. With stripes on the body (v. 5) and knowledge of the mind and love of the heart, the entire being of the apostles, including body, soul, and spirit, is exercised in their life for carrying out their ministry. In order to be ministers of the new covenant, our whole being, our body, soul, and spirit, must be right.

In the Word of Truth

In verse 7 Paul says, "In the word of truth, in the power of God." Truth here refers to the reality of the new covenant. Truth means reality and denotes all the real things revealed in God's Word, which are mainly Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the Body of Christ. The word of truth is the utterance, the expression, of the divine reality as revealed in the New Testament.

In the Power of God

The power of God matches the word of truth. The word of truth without the power of God is merely knowledge in letters. In the power of God it becomes reality. The power is the Spirit of God, even God Himself.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-ONE

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(10)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 6:3-13

In 6:4-7a Paul lists eighteen qualifications of ministers of the new covenant: in much endurance, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings, in pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love, in the word of truth, and in the power of God. From the middle of verse 7 through 10 Paul speaks of three groups of things and seven kinds of persons. Let us now consider these groups and persons.

THREE GROUPS

Through the Weapons of Righteousness on the Right and on the Left

In verse 7 Paul says, "Through the weapons of righteousness on the right and on the left." This indicates that the apostles' life for their ministry is a life in the battle, fighting for God's kingdom. Weapons of righteousness are used to fight for being right with God and men according to the righteousness of God (Matt. 6:33; 5:6, 10, 20). Weapons on the right hand, like the sword, are offensive, and those on the left hand, such as the shield, are defensive.

Through Glory and Dishonor

In the first part of verse 8 Paul says, "Through glory and dishonor, through evil report and good report." The glory is from God and those who love Him. The dishonor comes from the Devil and those who follow him. If we

would be proper ministers of the new covenant, in our experience we shall always receive two kinds of appraisals. Some will give us glory and say we are excellent; others will accuse us of being miserable and pitiful and will heap dishonor upon us.

Through Evil Report and Good Report

The evil report comes from the opposers and the persecutors (Matt. 5:11). The good report comes from the believers and those who receive the truth preached and taught by the apostles. Through the years this has been our situation. We have received both evil reports and good reports. If you always receive only a good report, probably you are not honest and faithful to the Lord. If you are faithful to the Lord and honest with the church and the saints, you will receive evil reports as well as good reports.

SEVEN KINDS OF PERSONS

As Deceivers, Yet True

Toward the end of verse 8 Paul says, "As deceivers and yet true." It was as if the apostles were deceivers in the eyes of the Judaizers and those of other religions and philosophies, but they were true in the eyes of those who loved the truth of God.

In Matthew 10:16 the Lord Jesus says, "Become therefore prudent as serpents and guileless as doves." Others may accuse us of being serpents, deceivers; yet we should be as guileless, honest, as doves. We all need to learn to be as prudent as serpents. Otherwise, we shall not be "as deceivers." This is to have the form of a serpent without the poisonous nature of a serpent. We should learn to be prudent as serpents, that is, as serpents in appearance but not in actuality. Let others say of us that we are deceivers, that we are serpents. Nevertheless, we are actually true, for there is no serpentine poison in us.

As Unknown and Well Known

In verse 9 Paul says, "As unknown and well known." The apostles were as unknown in that they did not display

themselves. But they were well known in the way of bearing witness to the truth of God. We also should be unknown in the sense that we do not advertise ourselves or make a display of ourselves. As a result, others do not know us. However, at the same time we may be well known because we testify the truth of God. First we should be unknown and then well known. Do not get a name by advertising yourself, but be faithful always to testify God's truth to others.

As Dying, and Behold, We Live

The apostles were as dying in suffering persecutions (1:8-10; 4:11; 1 Cor. 15:31). But they were living in the Lord's resurrection (2 Cor. 4:10-11). We also should be those who are put to death, those who are as dying, and also those who are living in resurrection.

As Being Disciplined, and Not Being Put to Death

In verse 9 Paul also says, "As being disciplined and not being put to death." In the superficial realization of the opposers, it was as if the apostles were disciplined. But in the sovereign care of the Lord, they were not being put to death. As we are suffering, those with a very superficial view of things may say, "These people are under God's punishment. If they are not being punished by God, why would they suffer so much?" Nevertheless, at the very time we are suffering, we are still under the Lord's sovereign care and are not put to death. Thus, we are suffering, and yet we live.

As Made Sorrowful, Yet Always Rejoicing

The apostles were as made sorrowful by the negative conditions of the churches (11:28). Yet they were always rejoicing in the sufficient grace and resurrection life of Christ (12:9-10).

As Poor, Yet Enriching Many

In verse 10 Paul also speaks of the apostles "as poor yet

enriching many." They were as poor in material things, yet enriching many in spiritual riches (Eph. 3:8).

As Having Nothing, and Possessing All Things

Finally, in verse 10, Paul says, "As having nothing and possessing all things." They were as having nothing in a human way, but possessing all things in the divine economy.

We need to ask ourselves if we are the seven kinds of persons described in these verses. We should also check with ourselves concerning the first eighteen qualifications and concerning the three groups of things. What we have in these verses is eighteen "ins," three "throughs," and seven "as's." Regarding the seven kinds of persons, we should be as deceivers and yet true, as unknown and well known, as dying and yet living, as disciplined and yet not being put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet enriching others, and as having nothing and possessing all things. On the one hand, we should seem to be as deceivers, as unknown, as dying, as disciplined, as made sorrowful, as poor, and as having nothing. On the other hand, we should be true, well known, living, not put to death, always rejoicing, enriching many, and possessing all things. Not only should we be rich in spiritual things, but we should also make others rich. Furthermore, we should be well known at least to the angels.

WITH AN OPENED MOUTH AND AN ENLARGED HEART TOWARD THE BELIEVERS

In verse 11 Paul goes on to say, "Our mouth is opened to you, Corinthians, our heart has been enlarged." The apostles, so all-matured and all-fitting, as depicted in verses 3 through 10, are opened in their mouth and enlarged in their heart to the believers. With an enlarged heart they are able to embrace all believers regardless of their condition, and with an opened mouth they are free to speak to all believers frankly concerning the real situation into which they have been misled. This kind of openness

and enlargement is needed to reconcile, to bring back, to God the misled or distracted believers.

In verse 12 Paul continues, "You are not straitened in us, but you are straitened in your inward parts." The Corinthian believers, being childish (v. 13), were straitened, contracted, in their inward parts toward the apostles. Children are very narrow in their inward affection and easily offended by those who correct them. Literally, the Greek word rendered "inward parts" here is bowels. It is the same word as affections in 7:15. The same word is used in Philippians 1:8: "For God is my witness, how I long after you all in the inward parts of Christ Jesus." This Greek word signifies inward affection, then tender mercy and sympathy.

In 2 Corinthians 6:13 Paul issues an appeal to the Corinthians: "Now for a recompense in kind, I speak as to children, you also be enlarged." The apostle wanted the Corinthian believers to return him a recompense of the same kind of enlarged heart, that they may take him in their inward affection.

Paul's use of the word children in verse 13 indicates that the Corinthian believers were childish, in the apostle's consideration. Furthermore, it indicates that the apostle in dealing with them spoke as a father to his children.

In this verse Paul urges the Corinthians to be enlarged. To be enlarged requires growth and maturity in life. This is what the Corinthian believers lacked (1 Cor. 3:1, 6; 14:20). The apostle was laboring upon them to make up the shortage. To be enlarged by growing and maturing in life is equivalent to being fully reconciled to God, according to the context continuing from the end of chapter five. Writing in this way, the apostle was carrying out his ministry of reconciling the believers, who were but halfway in being reconciled to God.

Second Corinthians 6:3-13 shows us what it means to be fully saved. In these verses we have a pattern of one who has experienced full salvation. We prove that we have been fully saved by having an all-fitting life. Thus, the pattern of full salvation is the pattern of an all-fitting life.

We should not think that the all-fitting life described in 6:3-13 is only for someone like Paul. No, every believer has the possibility of becoming a minister of the New Testament. Everyone who has been fully saved is surely a minister of the new covenant with an all-fitting life. This means that if, as a New Testament believer, you are not an adequate minister of the new covenant, you have not yet been fully saved. If we have been fully saved and have an all-fitting life, then any situation or circumstance is right for us to minister life to others. It is by being fully saved that we become qualified to be ministers of the New Testament.

We should never think that all the qualifications in these verses are only for Paul or for certain other new covenant ministers, and not for us. Paul is a pattern of what all believers should be. What Paul had is also what we need today. We all should be those with an all-fitting life.

If we would have an all-fitting life, we need an enlarged heart, a heart to embrace all of God's people. Not only the apostles and the elders should have such a heart, but every believer in Christ should have a large heart. If we cannot be properly enlarged in this age, the Lord will enlarge us in the next age. Certainly by the time we enter into the New Jerusalem we shall have an enlarged heart. At least by then we shall be able to say, "Brother Paul, I am now the same as you are. You have an enlarged heart, and I also have such a heart." However, I hope that we shall not wait until the next age to be enlarged. It is much better to be enlarged today.

The goal of these messages is to enlarge us. The goal is not that we become great persons. I have seen a number of well-known men whose hearts were very narrow. They were considered great men, but their hearts were small. I prefer to be a small person with a big heart, with an enlarged heart to embrace every believer in Christ.

As long as we have the eighteen qualifications with "in," the three with "through," and the seven with "as," we have truly been enlarged. The eighteen with "in" can be

arranged in nine pairs: in much endurance and in affliction, in necessities and in distresses, in stripes and in imprisonments, in tumults and in labors, in watchings and in fastings, in pureness and in knowledge, in longsuffering and in kindness, in a holy spirit and in unfeigned love, in the word of truth and in the power of God. We have pointed out that longsuffering and kindness go together. As we are suffering, we need to be kind to others. Likewise, tumults and labors go together. Apparently these are not a pair; actually they form a pair. From experience we know that our labor for the Lord will stir up opposition, and this opposition results in tumults. A holy spirit and unfeigned love are also a pair. When we have a holy spirit, we also have unfeigned love. Finally, the word of truth and the power of God go together.

It is significant that in Paul's listing endurance and affliction come first, and the word of truth and the power of God come last. Probably we would make these the first, the head, but Paul makes them last, the tail. Here Paul is emphasizing an all-fitting life, a life that fits into every situation and does not cause others to stumble. He does not have much to say here concerning the word of truth and the power of God.

As a minister of the new covenant, Paul had a life that helped others instead of causing them to stumble. It was a life that could fit into any situation. To be this kind of person, we need to be greatly enlarged, to the extent that we have the eighteen qualifications in nine pairs and those with "through" and "as" in addition.

The qualifications with "through" and "as" are also arranged in pairs. There are three pairs with "through": through glory and dishonor, through evil report and good report, through weapons of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. There are seven pairs with "as": as deceivers and yet true, as unknown and well known, as dying and yet living, as being disciplined and not being put to death, as made sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet enriching many, and as having nothing and possessing all things. Those who have all these qualifications with

"in," "through," and "as" have been enlarged and have an all-fitting life to be proper ministers of the new covenant.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-TWO

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(11)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 6:1-13

Many teachers of the Bible treat 2 Corinthians 6 as if it were separate from chapter five. They do not point out how chapters five and six are connected. Actually, chapter six is an explanation of chapter five.

BECOMING THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

We have seen that in chapter five the apostles have received the ministry of reconciliation to bring God's people, not only sinners, back into God Himself so that they may become the righteousness of God in Christ. The apostles had been commissioned with this ministry to bring God's people into Him and to make them one with Him organically. When we are brought back into God in this way, we become the righteousness of God.

Since righteousness is an attribute of God, to become God's righteousness in Christ is to become this divine attribute. In this sense, we become what God is. God is righteousness, and in Christ we become this righteousness of God, an attribute of what God Himself is. How marvelous! This is the purpose of God's salvation and the goal of His economy. God's economy in saving us is to make us the expression of God, even one of His attributes. This is revealed in chapter five of 2 Corinthians.

THE NEED FOR FURTHER RECONCILIATION

Paul realized that his description of reconciliation in chapter five involved something very deep. Thus, in chapter six he explains further that the reconciliation in

chapter five is equal to full salvation. For this reason, in 6:2 he refers to reconciliation as salvation. The salvation here is not the salvation of sinners; it is the salvation of God's half-reconciled people. Those who have been only partly reconciled to God need further reconciliation, further salvation.

We all can confidently declare that we have been saved. However, we may not yet be saved in full. Therefore, we need to humble ourselves before the Lord and pray, "O Lord, I thank You that by Your mercy and grace You have saved me. But, Lord, I still have not been fully saved. I need more of Your salvation."

Some believers have been saved to a large degree. Others, however, have been saved only to a very small extent. In these messages I am burdened that we all would have a greater degree of salvation. I am concerned about the percentage of your salvation. To what degree, to what extent, have you been saved? Some who have been under this ministry for years still only have a very limited salvation. Furthermore, the percentage of their salvation is increasing slowly. My point here is that reconciliation and salvation are matters of degree. This is especially true of reconciliation. I am hoping that the degree of our reconciliation into God will increase rapidly.

What we have in chapter six is progress related to salvation. According to the context, to be saved (6:2) is simply to be reconciled to God.

As long as certain parts of us are not saved, in those parts of our being there is a discrepancy between us and God. A more accurate word to describe this condition is enmity. In Romans 8 Paul says the mind set on the flesh is enmity against God. But the mind set on the spirit is life and peace (Rom. 8:6). When we are in spirit, we have life and also peace. Peace is an indication of being reconciled to God. As long as there is something within us that is lacking in peace, some part of us is at enmity with God. This indicates that, at least in certain matters, we have not been reconciled to God, for in these matters there is no peace between us and God. To be sure, whenever there is

no peace, there is enmity. But when peace comes, enmity disappears. We may also say that when enmity goes, peace comes. Whether or not we are at peace depends on our being reconciled to God.

NOT RECEIVING THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN

In 6:1 Paul says to the Corinthians, "And working together with Him, we also entreat you that you do not receive the grace of God in vain." Here Paul seems to be saying, "Believers at Corinth, don't receive God's grace in vain. God has graced you very much. He has bestowed grace upon grace on you. Since you have received so much of God's grace, I beg you not to receive it in vain." To receive the grace of God in vain means to receive grace without making any progress in the matter of being saved.

If we would be those who do not receive the grace of God in vain, we need more salvation. This is the reason Paul goes on to say in verse 2, "For He says, In an acceptable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I helped you; behold, now is a well-acceptable time; behold, now is a day of salvation." Preachers often use this verse for the preaching of the gospel. In their gospel preaching they say something like this: "Now is the time, the day, of salvation. Don't miss the opportunity to receive God's grace." In verse 1, however, Paul does not speak about receiving God's grace; he warns about receiving God's grace in vain. The Corinthians had already received the grace of God. Their need was to allow this grace to work in them. If they allowed the grace of God to work in them, they would not receive God's grace in vain. This is to be reconciled to God in full and in every respect. Furthermore, this is to experience a present salvation. Today should be a day of further salvation, a day of progress in being reconciled to God through His grace.

THE NEED TO BE ENLARGED IN HEART

If we would be fully reconciled to God, fully saved, we need to be enlarged in our heart. Paul appealed to the Corinthians to be enlarged: "You are not straitened in us,

but you are straitened in your inward parts; now for a recompense in kind, I speak as to children, you also be enlarged" (6:12-13). As we have pointed out, to be enlarged requires the aspects of the all-fitting life covered in 6:3-10. It requires the eighteen items beginning with "in": in endurance, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings, in pureness, in knowledge, in longsuffering, in kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love, in the word of truth, in the power of God. It also requires the three pairs starting with "through": through the weapons of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, through glory and dishonor, through evil report and good report. Finally, it requires all the seven pairs beginning with "as": as deceivers and yet true, as unknown and well known, as dying and behold we live, as being disciplined and not being put to death, as made sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet enriching many, as having nothing and possessing all things. If we have all these characteristics of the all-fitting life, all the items with "in," "through," and "as," we have truly been enlarged.

In the past fifty years I have known many dear and precious brothers who were elders and co-workers. A good number of these brothers were very strict and straight. Regarding the Lord's word in Matthew 10:16 to be "prudent as serpents," these straight ones could not at all be "as serpents." Neither could they be "as deceivers, yet true." To be true here means to be straight. The brothers to whom I am referring were not only strict; they were extremely straight. For example, one such brother might say, "Oh, that person shouldn't be in the church. Cast him out! How can we possibly accept him? Oh, that sister is awful. She should be condemned." Many times we tried our best to convince these straight brothers to be more flexible. We might say, "This one is a real brother in the Lord. No doubt, he is wrong in certain things. But we still must embrace him by forgiving him and by giving him an opportunity to improve." Nevertheless, sometimes a straight brother would respond by saying, "No! That is not

the biblical way!" This attitude is a clear indication that those who are strict and straight in this way need to be enlarged.

We need to be straight and strict. However, we should be strict with ourselves, not with others. In order to be strict with ourselves and not with others, we need to be enlarged. Those who are very straight are usually narrow as well. They need to have their hearts enlarged.

When we become enlarged in our heart, we should not become loose. Rather, we should continue to be strict and straight concerning ourselves, but we should not apply this principle to others. If the Lord has done such a work in us, we have been enlarged.

I would ask you to consider once again all the matters covered by Paul in 6:3-10. If we have all these characteristics and qualifications, we shall have a large heart. We may be outwardly very small, but our heart will be like an ocean. But if we do not have these qualifications, we shall have a very small heart. We may be great in our own eyes, yet our heart may be extremely narrow. For example, our attitude may be that if a certain one makes a mistake, we should have nothing to do with him unless he repents. This is a sign of narrowness. It is also an indication that we are not able to reconcile others to God, for we ourselves have not been fully reconciled to Him. Our narrowness is a strong indication that we have been reconciled to God only partially and that the percentage of our salvation is quite low. How large our heart is depends on the degree of our reconciliation to God.

FORGIVING AND FORGETTING

Often when I attend a wedding meeting, I am urged to give a word. However, I am reluctant to speak at weddings. The problem is not that I do not have anything to say. It is that what I really desire to say may be too frank and honest for the occasion. I strongly dislike the kind of nice, pleasant talk common at weddings, because it usually is far from the truth. If I were to speak at a wedding meeting, I would like to tell the truth, especially concerning the

difficulty husbands and wives have in forgiving each other.

Once a certain brother has been offended by his wife, he may never forget that offense and never forgive his wife for causing it. Of course, many wives are the same way. What I would like to say to a newly married brother and sister is this: "Sister, try your best to avoid offending your husband. If you offend him, it may take him many years to forgive you. Brother, don't think that your wife is an angel. She certainly is not an angel. Furthermore, you must love her always. If you fail to express your love for her, she may be offended and remember your failure for a long time." I use this as another illustration of narrowness of heart.

All married brothers and sisters need to be enlarged in heart. Brothers, has your wife offended you? I urge you to forget it. If you are able to forgive an offense and forget it, that is a sign that you have become an enlarged person, a person with a large heart.

When you are offended by someone, are you willing to forgive that person? To forgive actually is to forget. Perhaps instead of talking about forgiving, we should speak of forgetting. Then a husband would say to his wife, "Dear, let us both forget that offense." Forgetting is true forgiving.

Both in your family life and in the church life you probably have been offended many times. Have you kept a record of all the offenses? Do you remember how your husband or wife offended you, or how you were offended by a certain elder? Do you remember all the offenses caused by the saints? We need to forgive and forget all offenses. We may forgive, but it may be harder for us to forget. This difficulty with forgiving and forgetting is caused by a heart that has not been adequately enlarged. Thus, we see once again that we need our hearts to be enlarged. To be fully reconciled and saved will cause us truly to be enlarged in our hearts.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-THREE

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(12)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 6:14--7:1

We have seen that to be fully reconciled to God is to have the full experience of God's salvation. We have also seen that to be fully reconciled and saved is to have our hearts enlarged. Now let us go on to consider 6:14--7:1, a frank exhortation of the reconciling ministry.

NOT TO BE UNEQUALLY YOKED

Verse 14 says, "Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" This word about not being unequally yoked was spoken by the apostle based upon his mouth being opened and his heart being enlarged to the believers in verse 11. Having established the fact that full reconciliation is full salvation resulting in the enlargement of the heart, Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers not to become unequally yoked with unbelievers.

The word unequally in verse 14 means diversely; it denotes a difference in kind. This refers to Deuteronomy 22:10, which forbids yoking two different animals together. Believers and unbelievers are diverse peoples. They should not be yoked together, because of the believers' divine nature and holy standing. This should be applied to all manner of intimate relationships between believers and unbelievers, not only to their marriages and businesses.

This word indicates that the Corinthian believers were unequally yoked with unbelievers. They were not separated unto God from worldly people. This indicates that they

were not fully reconciled to God. Hence, the apostle exhorted them not to be diversely yoked with unbelievers, but to be separated that they might be fully reconciled, brought back, to God.

According to the Old Testament, cattle were of two categories: the clean and the unclean. Those that were clean chewed the cud and had cloven hooves. Sheep and oxen were clean animals, but donkeys, horses, mules, and pigs were not clean. Thus, Deuteronomy 22:10 says, "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together." Here we see that the law commanded the children of Israel not to yoke together a clean animal with an unclean one, not to put the clean and the unclean under the same yoke. A clean animal, such as an ox, could be offered to God, but an unclean animal could not be offered to Him. Therefore, the clean and the unclean were unequal.

In 6:14 Paul does not care for the teaching of the law; he cares for the spiritual significance of this requirement. Today we, the believers, are the clean ones. We are the oxen and the lambs to be offered to God. Unbelievers, however, are unclean, and we should not be yoked together with them.

To be yoked together with unbelievers is to be distracted from God. To rid ourselves of such an unequal yoke is to come back to God and to be reconciled into Him. For example, a brother should not marry an unbeliever. For him to marry an unbeliever is to be unequally yoked. That kind of unequal yoke would distract him from God. Likewise, to form a partnership in business with an unbeliever is also to be unequally yoked. Suppose a believer and an unbeliever are partners together in a business and have the same interest and goal. They are actually an unequally yoked pair. This kind of pairing, yoking, needs to be terminated. Anyone who engages in a business partnership in this way will be distracted by his business from God. His business will take him farther and farther away from God. Any brother in that situation needs to cast off that unequal yoke in business and be reconciled, brought back, into God.

Furthermore, friendships with unbelievers can cause us to be unequally yoked. The young people especially like to make friends. Young brothers and sisters, if you have close friendships with unbelievers, that will cause you to become an unequally yoked pair. That kind of yoking will distract you from God. Your unbelieving friend will not help you to come closer to God; rather, an unbelieving friend will take you away from Him. As long as you maintain such an unequal friendship, you will be distracted from God more and more and taken gradually farther away from Him. Therefore, Paul charges us not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers for the purpose that we may be kept in God and may be brought back fully into Him.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS

In 6:14-16 the apostle uses five illustrations to depict the difference between believers and unbelievers: no partnership, no share, between righteousness and lawlessness; no fellowship, no communion, between light and darkness; no harmony, no concord, between Christ and Belial; no part, no portion, held by a believer with an unbeliever; and no agreement, no consent, between the temple of God and idols. These illustrations also unveil the fact that the believers are righteousness, light, Christ, and the temple of God, and the unbelievers are lawlessness, darkness, Belial (Satan the Devil), and idols.

In verse 14 Paul says, "What partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?" There should not be any sort of contact between righteousness and lawlessness. There should be no relationship, no partnership, between them. Likewise, light and darkness have nothing to do with each other. They cannot have any fellowship. As believers, we are in the light. If we have fellowship, or intimate friendship, with unbelievers, that kind of friendship is fellowship between light and darkness. For a believer to marry an unbeliever is for that believer to have fellowship of light with darkness.

In verse 15 Paul continues, "And what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" Belial is another name for Satan, the Devil. There can be no harmony between Christ and the Devil. We believers are of Christ, and the unbelievers are of Satan. If we have friendship with unbelievers, that means we are making harmony between Christ and Satan. A believer does not have any part with an unbeliever.

In verse 16 Paul goes on to say, "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Here we see that there can be no agreement between the temple of God and idols. Unbelievers have idols, but we are the temple of God. How then can there be any close relationship between believers and unbelievers?

THE TEMPLE OF THE LIVING GOD

In verse 16 Paul says that we are the temple of the living God. As the living God, God dwells in us and walks in us to be our God in a subjective way that we may partake of Him and be His people, experiencing Him in a living way.

In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul says that we are the church of the living God. The living God who lives in the church must be subjective to the church and not merely objective. An idol in a heathen temple is lifeless. The God who not only lives but also acts, moves, and works in His living temple, the church, is living. Because He is living, the church is also living in Him, by Him, and with Him. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together. The living church is the house and the household of the living God. Hence, it becomes the manifestation of God in the flesh.

God has said, "I will dwell in them and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (2 Cor. 6:16). This is our situation today. God is living in us, dwelling in us, and walking among us. He is our God, and we are His people.

SEPARATED AND RECONCILED

In verse 17 Paul exhorts the Corinthians, saying, "Wherefore come out from their midst and be separated, says the Lord, and do not touch what is unclean, and I will welcome you." To be separated is to be reconciled, to be brought back, to God (5:20) in a practical way. The words "what is unclean" denote that which belongs to lawlessness, darkness, Belial, and idols, as listed in verses 14 through 16. By not touching such unclean things we are separated to God and reconciled to Him. Therefore, to come out from their midst and be separated is to be brought back to God. When we are separated in this way, God welcomes us. The words, "I will welcome you," point to God's glad receiving of the believers who are fully reconciled, brought back, to Him.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Verse 18 continues, "And I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty." Literally the Greek word rendered by the indefinite article before Father means into, unto, for. To be a Father and to be sons and daughters are matters of life. This is deeper than for God to be our God and for us to be His people, as mentioned in verse 16. God is the Creator, and the Father is the generator. He has regenerated us and made us sons and daughters to Him.

Verse 18 is the only instance in which the New Testament indicates that God has daughters. For the most part it tells us that the believers are sons of God. The reason this verse speaks of both sons and daughters is deeply personal. To many parents, sons are precious. I have learned that in the Orient and in the Western world as well, parents who have only daughters long to have at least one son. Although sons are precious, daughters are dear. Suppose a father has three sons and no daughters. Surely he would like to have a daughter, and she would be very dear to him. Many parents who have both sons and daughters will tell you that the daughters are dear and the sons are precious.

I believe that in verse 18 Paul wants us to see that we are not only precious to God as sons, but we are also dear to Him as daughters. Do you want to be a son of God or a daughter of God? I am a son of God, but I am also happy to be a daughter of God. I like to be precious and dear to Him. Realizing that we can be precious and dear to the Father, Paul indicates that we are both sons and daughters to Him.

According to the Bible, God does not place a great deal of emphasis on whether we are male or female. In a very real and positive sense, we all are females in the sight of God. In 11:2 Paul declares, "For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ." Does this not indicate that all believers are females to God? If we were not females in His sight, how could we be part of a pure virgin presented to Christ? Christ is to be our Husband, and we are to become His wife. In this sense, we all are females. We may even use a very unusual term and say that, to God, we are female sons. In bearing responsibility and carrying out spiritual warfare, we are sons. We should be strong sons for responsibility and for warfare. But at the same time we should be daughters very dear and precious to the Father. Therefore, on the one hand, we are precious sons; on the other hand, we are dear daughters.

PERFECTING HOLINESS

In 7:1 Paul says, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Paul's use of "therefore" at the beginning of this verse indicates that it is a conclusion to the last part of chapter six, in particular to verses 14 through 18. The promises are those mentioned in 6:16-18. The defilement of flesh refers to material things; defilement of spirit, to things in the spiritual world such as idols. To cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit means to turn away from all distractions in order to be fully reconciled into God.

In 7:1 Paul speaks of perfecting holiness in the fear of

God. Holiness is separation unto God from all things other than Him. Perfecting holiness is to make this separation full and perfect, to have our entire being--spirit, soul, and body--fully and perfectly separated, sanctified, unto God (1 Thes. 5:23). This is to be fully reconciled to God.

Holy means not only sanctified, separated, unto God; it also means different, distinct, from everything that is common. Only God is different, distinct, from all other things. Hence, He is holy; holiness is His nature. According to Ephesians 1:4, He chose us so that we should be holy. The way He makes us holy is to impart Himself, the holy One, into us so that our whole being may be permeated and saturated with His holy nature. For us, God's chosen ones, to be holy is to partake of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and to have our entire being permeated with God Himself. This is different from mere sinless perfection or sinless purity. True holiness makes our being holy, like God Himself, in His nature and character.

In 7:1 Paul mentions the fear of God. This fear is related to not daring to touch things not belonging to God or related to Him (6:17).

We have pointed out that the believers are righteousness, light, Christ, and the temple. When we are unequally yoked with unbelievers, this means we bring the righteousness of God into lawlessness, the light of God into darkness, and Christ to the Devil, and that we associate the temple of God with idols. Idols defile our spirit. Hence, both in the spiritual world and the physical world there is defilement. To be separated from defilement, from unclean things, is actually to be reconciled to God.

In chapter six Paul truly is carrying out the ministry of reconciliation. He urges the Corinthians to be separated from unclean things. To be separated from what is unclean is to be reconciled to God and sanctified unto Him; it is also to be fully saved. Thus, being fully saved includes separation from what is unclean, sanctification unto God, and reconciliation into God. This is the reason that toward the beginning of this chapter Paul speaks about salvation and at the end of the chapter, about separation. Salvation

is separation, separation is sanctification, and sanctification is reconciliation.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-FOUR

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(13)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 7:2-7

Chapter seven is also part of the section in 2 Corinthians concerning the ministers of the new covenant. In this section Paul portrays the kind of life lived by the ministers of the new covenant. In this message we shall seek to touch the feeling in Paul's spirit as expressed in 7:2-7. In reading 7:2-16, the crucial matter is to touch Paul's feeling and also his spirit. However, it is not easy to do this.

THE INTIMATE CONCERN OF THE MINISTERING LIFE

What we have in 7:2-16 is the intimate concern of the ministering life. Every believer who loves the Lord and who wants to come up to God's standard should become a minister of the new covenant. As long as we are believers in Christ, we should be New Testament ministers, no matter whether we happen to be apostles, evangelists, elders, or deacons. Such a minister is a person who supplies Christ to others for the building up of the church, His Body. When I was young I heard that every believer should be a preacher of the gospel. Now we see that we should be not merely gospel preachers, but ministers of the new covenant, those who minister Christ as life so that the church may be built up as the Body of Christ. This ministry should be carried out not only by apostles and elders; it should be carried out by everyone in the church.

The goal of the Lord's recovery today is to recover this ministering of Christ by all the believers so that the church

may be built up. This understanding is based on Paul's word in Ephesians 4, where he says that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers perfect the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ. For us all to be church builders, to minister Christ for the building up of the church, we need a ministering life. In order to be new covenant ministers we need such a ministering life. We need to live a life of ministering Christ to others for the church.

Many years ago I read various books that encouraged believers to be spiritual, holy, and victorious. But I never read one book charging us to live a ministering life. Many of us have read books on how to be spiritual, how to live a holy life, or how to be victorious. But have you ever read a book telling you how to live a ministering life? I do not believe any of us has read such a book.

In my travels over a period of about fifty years, I have met many different kinds of Christians. In particular I have met some who had a reputation for being spiritual. But to my registration even these so-called spiritual ones did not have a proper ministering life. They lived in a very careful manner in order to be "spiritual," "holy," and "victorious." But they did not live in such a way as to be ministering ones. By the Lord's grace, not by our own efforts, we all should endeavor to live a ministering life.

A FRUITFUL LIFE

The ministering life we see in 2 Corinthians is a fruitful life. We may be "spiritual," "holy," and "victorious" and yet not be fruitful. There are problems with that kind of spirituality, holiness, and victory. It is questionable whether those qualities are true and genuine. Is it not unusual that one could be "spiritual" without being fruitful? According to the Bible, being spiritual is for the purpose of being fruitful. In the Gospel of John the Lord does not tell us to be spiritual, holy, and victorious. Rather, in John 15 He charges us to bear fruit, even to bear much fruit, abiding fruit. This is to live a ministering life.

Around my home there are a number of fruit trees--

peach, lemon, and orange. For quite a long period of time, certain trees did not bear any fruit. Because of the lack of fruit, we were considering whether we should remove them. Although these trees did not bear fruit, they continued to grow quite well. In fact, they were green and flourishing, full of leaves. Nevertheless, the more they grew in that way, the more bothered I was concerning them. Sometimes when I looked at those trees I said, "What are you trees doing here? You are full of green leaves, and your branches are spreading forth, but you are not bearing any fruit." We may take this as an illustration of believers who may be "spiritual," "holy," and "victorious," but are fruitless. They do not bear fruit because they do not have a ministering life. It is very important to see that we all must have a ministering life.

In my early days, I heard several messages on 2 Corinthians 7. The emphasis of those messages was on sorrowing according to God. Those messages pointed out that if we sorrow according to God, we shall not regret being sorrowful. But although I heard some messages on this point, I was not told anything about Paul's feeling and spirit in this chapter. Here we see his intimate concern.

THE NEED FOR GENUINE CONCERN

It is possible to become knowledgeable in spiritual matters and powerful in preaching and yet still be unfruitful. In fact, instead of being fruitful and ministering life, such a person may cause others to suffer death. A brother may even visit another locality and hold a conference, but the results of that conference may be that many are killed. They are killed not by wrong words, but by right words. Furthermore, in the shepherding of the saints, it is also possible that we may kill others. The reason for this killing, this fruitlessness, is the lack of intimate concern. A brother who has a conference with a particular church may be concerned only for the giving of messages; he may not have any genuine concern for the church in that locality. Likewise, we may visit a family to shepherd them, but we may not have any loving concern.

Rather, our motive may be to display our knowledge, spirituality, gift, or capability. The result is a killing.

Some mothers seem to be short of wisdom. Yet even though they are not clever, they raise their children in a very good way because they have a loving concern for them. Such mothers have a tender, intimate concern for their children. On the contrary, some step-mothers may be knowledgeable, gifted, and clever; however, they lack the necessary concern for the children. In taking care of children, what is most important is not knowledge or ability--it is an intimate concern. The same is true in taking care of churches or in shepherding the saints. What is needed is the intimate concern of a ministering life. The brothers who hold conferences with churches must have a genuine concern for the churches. They should not merely be interested in giving excellent messages as a display of their knowledge, talent, or capability.

When I was young, I was somewhat troubled by chapter seven of 2 Corinthians. I regarded the Bible as a sacred, classical book, and it seemed to me that 2 Corinthians 7 was not a classical writing. I could understand why chapters like Romans 5 and Romans 8 were in the Bible, but I did not know why a chapter like 2 Corinthians 7 was included. In verse 6 Paul says that he was encouraged by the coming of Titus, and in verse 7 he goes on to say, "And not only by his coming, but also by the encouragement with which he was encouraged over you, informing us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal on my behalf, so that I rejoiced the more." It seemed to me that such a verse should not be in the Bible. Have you ever checked why 2 Corinthians 7 is in the New Testament? If you have never thought about it, this may indicate that you are somewhat careless in reading the Word. I can testify that the more attention I pay to this chapter, the more I love it, and the more I learn from it and am affected by it.

This chapter reveals that we need an intimate concern. If we have ability to carry on a work but lack an intimate concern, our work will be fruitless. What is needed to establish a good family life and church life is intimate

concern. How fruitful we are, how much fruit we bear, does not depend on what we are able to do. It depends on whether or not we have an intimate concern.

Brother Nee told us that in preaching the gospel we need to have a genuine concern for others. As long as we have the proper concern for people, we are well on our way to be qualified to be used of God for their salvation. A very good testimony of this is in the book *Seen and Heard*. In that book, the writer, Dennis McKendrick, tells us of standing in front of a group of unbelievers and weeping, without saying a word. Nevertheless, a number were saved, for he had a deep concern. Eloquence, gift, and power can never touch people as deeply as your concern for them.

In 1 Corinthians Paul was like a father disciplining his children. But even this discipline came out of a deep, intimate concern. For example, a mother may spank one of her children. But while he is receiving that spanking, the child realizes that the mother is disciplining him with a loving spirit and attitude. Thus, even when she is spanking her child, she can love him. Children can tell whether or not their parents discipline them out of a spirit of love. It was with a loving, concerned spirit that Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians. To be sure, in 2 Corinthians as a whole, and especially in chapter seven, we see Paul's intimate concern for the believers.

WARMING OTHERS

In 2 Corinthians 7 Paul was very emotional. In verse 13 he says that he "rejoiced more abundantly over the joy of Titus." J. N. Darby points out that it is not possible to render exactly in English the Greek idiom for "more abundantly." Paul was very human and emotional in his ministering of life. Paul was so emotional because his concern was so deep and intimate. Without this kind of concern, we could never be abundantly rejoicing in the way Paul was. Instead, we may be as cold as a freezer, altogether lacking in concern for the saints. Instead of warming up others, we make them even colder. Nothing

can grow when it is in such a frozen condition. We need the weather of spring to come to thaw us out and warm up our life. Once again there is a need for a ministering life. Do you know what a ministering life is? It is a life that warms up others. Learn to warm others. This is to have an intimate concern for them.

Many have read 2 Corinthians 7 without touching the matter of Paul's intimate concern. If we do not have this kind of concern for others, we shall not be fruitful. If I would minister life to the saints, I must have a genuine concern for them, a concern that is emotional, deep, and intimate. I must be so concerned that, at times, I may appear to others to be foolish or beside myself.

PAUL'S ENTREATY

In 7:2 Paul says, "Make room for us; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one." The frank exhortation from 6:14 through 7:1 is given parenthetically to bring the distracted believers back to their holy God from being touched by something that has defiled them, so that they may be fully reconciled to Him. Hence, 7:2 is actually a continuation of 6:11-13, entreating the believers to have their heart enlarged toward the apostles, to make room for them. From this verse to the end of this chapter the apostle in his entreating expresses his intimate concern for the believers, that they may be consoled and encouraged to go on positively with the Lord after being fully reconciled to Him.

When Paul says, "Make room for us," he is actually saying to the Corinthians, "Brothers, I want to enter into you and dwell in you. But you are narrow and have shut yourselves up. You don't have an enlarged heart to receive us. I love you, and I am concerned for you. This is why I urge you to open up and make room for us so that we may come into you and dwell in you."

If you visit the church in another locality without the kind of spirit Paul has in verse 2, you may have the unconscious feeling that you are more knowledgeable concerning spiritual things than others and have

something to minister to them. This is not the kind of attitude we need. But suppose you appeal to the saints the same way Paul does in verse 2, urging them to make room for you in their hearts so that you may dwell in them. Surely this will touch others very deeply.

In verse 2 Paul says that they wronged no one, corrupted no one, and took advantage of no one. It seems that Paul is vindicating himself, but his vindication is in a way that is intimate and lovely.

In verse 3 Paul continues, "I do not say this to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together." Here we have an expression of an intimate relationship, not polite, courteous talk. Paul is frank in the way he speaks, but also very intimate and touching. For Paul to speak to the Corinthians in this way shows that between him and them there was an intimate relationship. Only to those with whom we are intimate can we speak in this way.

In verse 3 Paul even says that the Corinthians were in the apostles' hearts to die together and live together. Here Paul seems to be saying, "I do not say this to condemn you, for I have already said that you are in our hearts. Since we have you in our hearts and our hearts are enlarged, we appeal to you to enlarge your hearts and make room for us. Corinthians, you are in our hearts to die together and live together." What deep, tender, intimate words! How deeply touching!

ENCOURAGED AND JOYFUL BECAUSE OF A DEEP CONCERN

Verse 4 continues, "Great is my boldness toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf; I am filled with encouragement, I overflow with joy in all our affliction." The Greek here literally means the encouragement and the joy, pointing to the particular encouragement and the particular joy. Here also Paul's words are intimate and touching.

In verse 5 Paul says, "For also when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no relief, but we were afflicted in

every way; without were fightings, within were fears." The flesh here refers to the outward man, including the body and the soul. The fightings were without and the fears were within. These fightings and fears involved the body outwardly and the soul inwardly. To have no relief in the flesh differs from having no relief in the spirit.

Verse 6 says, "But He Who encourages those who are cast down--God--encouraged us by the coming of Titus." Because of his deep concern for the Corinthian believers' response to his first Epistle, Paul, having no relief in his spirit (2:13), even very much weighed down by his concern, was anxious to see Titus for information concerning their response. Now Titus not only comes, but brings glad news of their positive response. This is a great encouragement to the apostle.

In verse 7 Paul continues, "And not only by his coming, but also by the encouragement with which he was encouraged over you, informing us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal on my behalf, so that I rejoiced the more." Here again Paul is very emotional because of his concern.

We all need to be enlarged in our hearts, reconciled fully to God. Then we shall have a life that is a ministering life, a life that can bear much fruit. Only the ministering life enables us to bear fruit. Fruit-bearing is the issue of a ministering life.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-FIVE

THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT

(14)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 7:2-16

In 7:2 and 3 Paul says, "Make room for us; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together." Paul's word here reveals his deep, intimate concern for the Corinthians. This utterance is not merely something ethical, religious, spiritual, or even loving. It is possible to say a word of love and feel love for others, but still not have much concern for them. Our love for others must become our concern for them. Paul had such a concern for the believers at Corinth.

A mother has not only love for her child; she also has a deep concern. Only a woman with such a concern is qualified to be a proper mother. A woman may be lacking in education, but if she has a deep concern for her children, she is qualified to be a good mother. Of course, knowledge and ability are helpful, but they are not prerequisites. The unique prerequisite for being a good mother is concern. The same principle is true regarding caring for the church. It is not adequate for the elders simply to love the church. This love must become a deep concern, a concern for all the young ones and weaker ones. This concern causes our labor to be fruitful. We all need this kind of intimate concern for others.

Not long ago, when I was working on this chapter, I was wondering what word I could use to describe Paul's feeling. I realized that Paul's word here is not something that is merely ethical, moral, religious, or spiritual. What he says here is a matter of intimate concern, of deep,

tender, affectionate concern for the believers. In verse 2 Paul says, "Make room for us," and in verse 3 he declares, "You are in our hearts to die together and to live together." These are not ordinary human words. Rather, they are words from the heavens, words from the heart of God. Paul's longing was that just as he had the Corinthians in his heart, so he would be in their heart. The believers at Corinth were in Paul's heart both to live together and to die together. This surely is a word expressing an intimate concern.

In verse 8 Paul goes on to say, "Because even if I caused you sorrow by the letter, I do not regret it, even if I did regret it; because I see that that letter, even if for an hour, caused you sorrow." By the word "letter" Paul refers to his first Epistle to the Corinthians. His word concerning regret indicates that he was not only bold and frank in rebuking the believers in his first Epistle, but also tender and soft toward them. The words "caused you sorrow" in verse 8 show that the apostle's first Epistle to the believers at Corinth was effective in regard to them.

A SOFT, TENDER WORD

In verse 8 Paul uses the expression "even if" three times. He says "even if I caused you sorrow," "even if I did regret it," and "even if for an hour." Why does Paul keep saying "even if"? According to my understanding, if the words "even if" were removed, Paul's word in this verse would be too hard. Adding in the phrase "even if" has the effect of softening his word. Furthermore, without the use of this phrase Paul in verse 8 would be strongly vindicating himself and arguing on his own behalf. By adding "even if" three times, he reduces the impression that he is vindicating himself.

Married brothers may wish to learn of Paul in order to avoid arguments with their wives. As a brother is talking to his wife, he may find that by inserting the words "even if" he may soften his word to her and thereby keep from offending her.

Moreover, by the phrase "even if" Paul gives a sweet taste to his words. Paul's use of "even if" in verse 8 may be compared to adding honey to a cup of tea. Just as the taste of tea may be too strong without honey, so Paul's words may have been too strong to receive without the repeated use of "even if." By using this phrase three times, Paul softens his word and sweetens it.

As Paul was writing to the Corinthians, all the facts and the arguments were on his side. The Corinthians had no case whatever. Because Paul had won the case, he could easily have written something that would have been very hard for the Corinthians to accept. Therefore, in writing to them he was both wise and tender.

If we have an intimate concern, we shall be tender with others. A crude, insensitive person does not have an intimate concern. If a husband does not have a proper concern for his wife, he may be very strict and demanding of her. But having an intimate concern will cause him to be tender. Once we become tender, our way of speaking will be soft and sweet.

Verse 8 definitely has the element of softness. Paul says, "Even if I caused you sorrow by the letter, I do not regret it, even if I did regret it." There is softness here. But suppose Paul had said, "In writing you the first Epistle I did not do anything wrong and I had no regrets about it." Surely that way of speaking would have been offensive. Paul, however, did not express himself in such a manner. He softened his words by adding the phrase "even if." In this way Paul expressed his tender feeling for the believers.

We need to be impressed by the fact that Paul's way of speaking in this verse is soft and sweet. Therefore, no matter what he says, he does not cause any offense. The kind of expression Paul uses in verse 8 does not offend others. Instead of being hard and bitter, it is soft and sweet.

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul did not speak in a hasty manner. Often when we speak in haste we express anger. For example, if a sister complains to her husband about something he has done, he may hastily reply,

"What's wrong with me? Prove to me that I am mistaken!" This kind of word provokes anger. It is better for a brother not to be hasty in speech in order to calm down the situation with his wife. He needs to speak in a soft, pleasant manner. This is the way Paul wrote to the Corinthians in chapter seven.

In this chapter we do not find theology, ethics, or religion. In a sense, we do not even find spirituality. Without adequate experience, we are not able to describe what is revealed in 2 Corinthians 7. I have begun to understand this chapter not only through study, but also through experience, even though my experience has been limited. From experience I have realized that what Paul is speaking here is not theology or doctrine, ethics or morality, religion or spirituality. He is conveying a deep, tender, and intimate concern for the Corinthians. His word is very touching.

Because Paul's expression is tender and filled with intimate concern, it has power and impact. It is able to touch the believers deeply. Proverbs 25:15 says, "A soft tongue breaketh the bone." Even a hard bone can be broken by a soft word of meekness. In speaking the truth to the Corinthians and presenting the facts, Paul knew it was difficult for him to avoid condemning the Corinthians. But his tender concern for them caused him to speak soft words and sweet phrases. May we all learn of him.

In verse 9 Paul says, "Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to God, that in nothing you might suffer loss from us." The repentance mentioned here was the result the apostle sought in writing his first Epistle. The apostle's first Epistle made them sorrowful according to God, not for anything else. This indicates that they have been brought back to God, reconciled to Him.

It seems that in verse 9 Paul has only a small point to make, yet he deliberately lengthens his expression. This also shows his tenderness, his intimate concern.

In this verse we see that Paul's spirit was soft and that

his entire being was filled with sweetness. You may wonder how we know this. By what Paul says in this verse we know that he is a tender person with a softened spirit and a sweet inner being. However, he is not political or even polite. To be tender, soft, and sweet is different from being polite. A person may be very polite, but may not be at all soft or sweet. That kind of politeness may be very uncomely. On the one hand, someone may be polite; on the other hand, at the same time he may be hard, haughty, and proud. Paul, on the contrary, was neither polite nor political, which is even worse. He was tender, soft, and sweet.

SORROWFUL ACCORDING TO GOD

Verse 10 says, "For the sorrow according to God works repentance unto salvation, a repentance without regret; but the sorrow of the world works death." Salvation here refers to being reconciled to God (5:20). This results in more life, which is versus death. By this the apostle sees the fruit of his first Epistle to the Corinthian believers.

In verse 11 Paul continues, "For behold this very thing, your being made sorrowful according to God, what earnestness it wrought in you, moreover, what defense, moreover, what indignation, moreover, what fear, moreover, what longing, moreover, what zeal, moreover, what avenging! In everything you commended yourselves to be pure in the matter." Being made sorrowful according to God wrought, produced, earnestness in the Corinthians. The Greek word rendered earnestness may also be translated diligence. It refers to the earnest care of the repentant Corinthian believers toward the apostle because of his loving concern for their relationship with God and condition before God. Formerly they were careless with regard to the apostle's concern. Now in repentance they became careful and earnest concerning it. All seven results produced by the repentant sorrow of the Corinthian believers, as listed in this verse, are a rich reaping that came out of the apostle's first Epistle to them.

SEVEN CRUCIAL WORDS

Verse 11 contains seven crucial words: earnestness, defense, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, and avenging. The word "moreover" is used six times in this verse. Literally the Greek word means "but," in the sense of "not only that, but also." If we read this verse carefully, we shall see that earnestness stands by itself, whereas the last six results of the repentant sorrow according to God fall into three pairs: the first relating to the Corinthian believers' feelings of shame, the second to the apostle, and the third to the offender (Bengel). Wuest's translation also indicates this by the expression "Yes...in fact," three times as follows: "Yes, verbal defense of yourselves, in fact, indignation, yes, fear, in fact, longing, yes, zeal, in fact, the meting out of disciplinary punishment."

The word earnestness in verse 11 means earnest care. Here Paul seems to be saying, "Corinthians, you did not have any care for us apostles, especially for me. But in the first Epistle I wrote to you I rebuked you, and that caused you to be sorrowful according to God. Such a sorrow works repentance unto salvation. This produced in you an earnest care for us. Now your earnestness concerning us has been recovered. When I came to see you the first time, you did have an earnest care for me. But certain false teachers distracted you and misled you, causing you to forsake your earnest care for us. Now because of sorrow producing repentance unto salvation, you have an earnest care for us again."

Actually, Paul was pointing out to the Corinthians their shortage, but he did this in a way that was tender, soft, and sweet. His way of presenting the facts was very tender. If I had been one of the Corinthian believers reading this word, I would have been full of shame at having been distracted and misled and having lost my earnest care for the apostle, the very one through whom I had been saved.

The Greek word for defense in verse 11 also means vindication. It refers to the Corinthian believers' self-vindication, their clearing of themselves to Paul through

Titus, their declaration of their innocence in the offense. After experiencing repentance unto salvation, the Corinthians realized that the situation of the church in Corinth was wrong. In his first Epistle Paul had rebuked them and charged them to humble themselves. An extremely serious evil had been present among them, but they did not feel ashamed. Rather, even with the existence of such a gross sin as incest, they had been proud. As a result, the entire church was rebuked. Because the believers at Corinth repented, they were reconciled to God and wanted to vindicate themselves. They were zealous to make the situation clear to the Apostle Paul.

In verse 11 Paul also refers to the Corinthians' indignation. This was an indignation at the offense and against the offender. As they were endeavoring to vindicate themselves, the Corinthians were indignant. They were angered by the offense and with the one who had caused it. They knew that their situation was sinful, they repented of it, they wanted to vindicate themselves concerning it, and they were indignant because of it. Their feeling of indignation was present along with their defense, their vindication of themselves.

With respect to Paul, the Corinthians had both fear and longing. They had fear of the apostle, lest he come with a rod (1 Cor. 4:21). But they also had a longing for him. The repentant believers had a fear of the apostle, yet they also had a longing desire for him. They surely wanted to see him again.

In verse 11 Paul also speaks of zeal and avenging. The zeal was to mete out the punishment of justice to the offender, and the avenging was the meting out of justice, doing justice, to all parties, as disciplinary punishment (2:6).

Once again I would emphasize that Paul's word concerning the situation at Corinth is full of tenderness, softness, and sweetness. To be sure, the Corinthians were exposed. Paul, however, was not harsh in writing to them. Verse 8 is full of the softening element, and verse 11 is full of wisdom. Verse 11 demonstrates Paul's best writing. It is

difficult to translate into any language the Greek expressions used by Paul. This is true in particular of the word used for "moreover," or "yea" in the King James Version. As we have seen, this Greek word means "not only so, but also."

In verse 11 we have a wonderful presentation of the situation at Corinth. By the use of seven words--earnestness, defense, indignation, fear, longing, zeal, and avenging--Paul causes the believers at Corinth to know their actual situation. By speaking this way, he brings the situation to the surface and presents a full view of it. Here we see Paul's tender wisdom. There is no roughness or harshness; instead, there is fineness, tenderness, softness, and sweetness. Paul's word is full of intimate concern. Instead of offending the Corinthians, he mends them and heals their wounds. This is the ministering life.

It is not sufficient that we learn to preach the gospel or teach doctrine. Paul, of course, was an outstanding preacher of the gospel and a great theologian. He certainly knew all the doctrines of the Bible. But here he does not exercise his ability in preaching or display his knowledge of doctrine. Instead, he exercises in wisdom his tender and intimate concern for the church in Corinth.

THEIR EARNEST CARE MANIFESTED TO THEM

In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, "So then, even if I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of him who did the wrong, nor for the sake of him who was wronged, but for the sake of manifesting to you your earnestness on our behalf before God." Here Paul says that he wrote to the Corinthians not for the sake of the brother who had committed incest (1 Cor. 5:1), the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of that brother's father, the one who was wronged. Why then did Paul write? He wrote them for the purpose of manifesting to them their earnestness on the apostles' behalf. The Corinthian believers did love the apostles and had earnest care toward them, but they had been turned aside by false teachers. Hence, the apostle wrote the first Epistle to bring them back, that their love and earnest care

toward the apostles might be made manifest to them (2 Cor. 7:7). Who would have imagined that this was Paul's reason for writing to the Corinthians? He wrote for the purpose of manifesting to them their earnestness for the apostles. What wisdom Paul displays in his writing! Here Paul seems to be saying, "Corinthian believers, there was in you an earnestness for us. But it was buried and thus was not manifested. I wrote the first Epistle in order to manifest to you the earnest care which you have for us."

ENCOURAGED AND REJOICING ABUNDANTLY

Verse 13 continues, "Therefore we have been encouraged. And in our encouragement we rejoiced more abundantly over the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by all of you." Darby says that here it is impossible to render the Greek idiom exactly into English. Paul's saying that he rejoiced more abundantly over the joy of Titus indicates that he was very human and emotional in his ministering of life. This major section, from 2:12 through 7:16, concerning the apostles' ministry of the new covenant and themselves as the ministers of the new covenant, begins with the apostle's being anxious to meet Titus because of his loving concern for the Corinthian believers (2:13) and ends with his being encouraged by the coming of Titus with positive news concerning them.

In verse 13 Paul says that the spirit of Titus had been refreshed by all the Corinthians. This indicates that even though the apostles were human and emotional, they still remained in their spirit in their ministering of life.

In verse 14 Paul says, "Because if I have boasted anything to him on your behalf, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things in truth to you, so also our boasting before Titus turned out to be truth." It is certain that Paul had boasted to Titus concerning the Corinthians. Now Paul says that his boasting before Titus turned out to be truth.

Verse 15 says, "And his affections are abundantly toward you, remembering the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling." The Greek

word rendered "affections" here literally means bowels; it is the same word rendered "inward parts" in 6:12.

In verse 16 Paul concludes, "I rejoice that in everything I am of good courage concerning you." The Greek words translated "of good courage concerning you" can also be rendered "confident in you." The apostle was encouraged by the Corinthian believers and could now have confidence in them. What a deep, intimate concern Paul had for them!

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-SIX

THE APOSTLE'S FELLOWSHIP CONCERNING THE MINISTRY TO THE NEEDY SAINTS

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 8:1-15

Paul wrote the Epistles of 1 and 2 Corinthians as a loving father. In his first Epistle Paul disciplined the Corinthians. Parents know that in disciplining children we run the risk of alienating them. If a parent disciplines a child without limitation, the child may want to run away from home. After writing 1 Corinthians, Paul was concerned about how the believers at Corinth would react to his discipline. Paul was not at rest about the matter, and he even regretted somewhat writing that Epistle. He was concerned that the entire church in Corinth would be alienated from him. Because of his deep concern, he was eagerly awaiting Titus to bring him news of the response of the Corinthians to his first Epistle. In chapter two Paul did not have rest in his spirit, for he did not find Titus. But we see from chapter seven that Titus came with good news.

Paul's first Epistle had caused sorrow to the Corinthians, but this sorrow produced repentance unto salvation. That salvation was a full reconciliation. When Paul heard this good news, he was beside himself with joy. As he says in 7:13, "We rejoiced more abundantly over the joy of Titus." When he wrote his second Epistle, Paul was in such an atmosphere of encouragement and joy. Thus, as we read chapter seven, we can touch the feeling in Paul's spirit, a feeling of deep concern for the church in Corinth.

DEEP FELLOWSHIP

All those who would care for the churches or serve the

Lord need to be impressed with Paul's spirit in chapter seven. Here we see the proper attitude in serving the Lord. We also see that in ancient times the fellowship between the believers and the apostles was not as shallow as it is among believers today. In ancient times, the believers were in the hearts of the apostles, and the apostles were in the hearts of the believers. The fellowship among them all was very deep. They lived together in such a deep fellowship that they were even willing to die together.

The situation among many Christians today is very different. Christians may travel from group to group without having deep fellowship. For them, a Christian group is like a hotel where people come, stay for a while, and then go elsewhere. Our fellowship in the Lord's recovery should not be like this. The local churches should not be motels for those traveling from place to place. As members of our Father's family, our fellowship should be deep. We should be in one another's hearts, and nothing should be able to separate us from one another. Even if we are disciplined by others, we should still love the church family and never forsake it.

AN EXTRAORDINARY MINISTRY

Chapters eight and nine of 2 Corinthians are both on the matter of the apostle's fellowship concerning the ministry to the needy saints. Apparently this has nothing to do with what Paul has covered in chapters six and seven. In 2 Corinthians 6 and 7 we have Paul's work of reconciliation, and in chapters eight and nine, the ministry to the needy saints. Without the reconciliation described in chapters six and seven, it is not possible to have the ministry to the needy saints presented in chapters eight and nine. Hence, the ministry in these chapters is the issue of the work of reconciliation in the preceding chapters. This means that if we would carry on a proper ministry to the needy saints, we need to be reconciled to God, brought back to Him in full. We need to be those living in God, those who have no separation between them and God. The ministry to the needy saints recorded in chapters eight and nine is

extraordinary. In order to have this extraordinary ministry, a ministry to the needy saints in other parts of the world, we need a reconciled life, a life fully reconciled to God.

In his second Epistle, Paul first pointed out to the believers at Corinth that as ministers of the new covenant, the apostles had received the ministry to reconcile God's people fully back to Himself. Then in chapter six Paul carried on this ministry, doing a fine work to reconcile the distracted Corinthians back to God in full. After accomplishing such a work, he went on to fellowship with them that they should have a ministry to supply the needy saints.

The sequence in these chapters is important. If chapters eight and nine were at the beginning of this book, they would certainly be out of place. But one chapter follows another like steps in a staircase. I believe that as Paul was writing this Epistle he had the sense that he was taking one step after another. Only after he had done an excellent work to reconcile the distracted saints back to God did he present them with the ministry of caring for the needy saints. Thus, we should not regard these chapters as separated and isolated. Apparently chapters eight and nine are on a different subject from chapters six and seven. Actually in Paul's thought all these chapters are connected.

Through Paul's reconciling work, the saints in Corinth were brought back to God, repented, and received more salvation. Then in 8:1 Paul says, "Furthermore, we make known to you, brothers, the grace of God which has been given to the churches of Macedonia." The word "furthermore" indicates that certain preparations have been made and that a particular atmosphere and condition exist for the writer to present something further. Thus, Paul goes on to speak of the grace of God bestowed upon the churches of Macedonia. His aim was that the Corinthian believers would participate in supplying the needy saints.

A FOURFOLD GRACE

Today it is common for Christians to engage in fund

raising to meet the need for material supply. Often, fund-raising letters are sent out to encourage Christians to give. If you compare these fund-raising letters with what Paul has written in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, those letters will be exposed as being worthless. Compared to what Paul has written, they are altogether lacking in value, life, and spirit. For the most part, they do nothing more than urge others to give money. In a sense, in these chapters Paul is engaged in fund raising. But his way of handling material needs is absolutely in the Spirit and full of life, altogether different from the practice of today's Christian organizations. Paul does not merely talk about money; he speaks concerning the grace of God in a way that is full of life and the Spirit. Paul's writing in these chapters has considerable spiritual weight.

If we read 8:1-15 carefully, we shall see that grace here involves four parties: God, the giving ones, the apostles, and Christ. Thus, we may speak of a fourfold grace--the grace of God, the grace of the givers, the grace of the apostles, and the grace of Christ. Actually, Paul is not merely raising funds. Much more, he is seeking to stir up the saints to participate in the ministry to the needy ones. In order to participate in such a ministry to supply the needy saints, we need a fourfold grace.

THE GRACE OF GOD

In 8:1 Paul mentions the grace of God given in the churches of Macedonia. This grace is the resurrected Christ becoming the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45) to bring the processed God in resurrection into us to be our life and life supply. Grace is actually the Triune God becoming life and everything to us. By this grace the Macedonian believers overcame the usurpation of temporal and uncertain riches and became generous in ministering to the needy saints.

On the day of Pentecost the believers put all their possessions together and had all things common. Acts 2:44 and 45 say, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." They

practiced what may be called a communal life. This practice continued in Acts 4: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (v. 32). Throughout the centuries many believers have appreciated the communal life in Acts 2 and 4 and have also tried to have all things common. A certain group in north China practiced this kind of communal life. Anyone who joined that group had to agree to give up his material possessions and have everything in common. However, the communal life in Acts did not last very long. Even as early as chapter six, problems began to arise, and not too long afterward that communal life was discontinued. In the writings of Paul we can see that the communal life described in Acts 2 and 4 was no longer in practice. From Paul's Epistles we see that the proper Christian living is not a communal living, a living of having all things common; it is a living by grace. This grace comes from four directions; from God, from Christ, from the apostles, and from the saints.

THE APPROVEDNESS OF AFFLICTION

Continuing his word about the grace of God given in the churches of Macedonia, in verse 2 Paul says, "That in much approvedness of affliction the abundance of their joy and the depth of their poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." The Macedonians were in affliction, in suffering. That affliction was a test to them of how much they could be approved by God. This is what Paul means by approvedness in affliction. Whenever we are in affliction or suffering, we should realize that God is testing us to prove where we are and what we are. The result of that testing in affliction, in suffering, is approvedness. If we are able to withstand the test and are approved by God, the result will be the approvedness of affliction. The Macedonians were in that kind of situation.

JOY, POVERTY, AND THE RICHES OF LIBERALITY

In verse 2 Paul links "the abundance of their joy" and "the depth of their poverty." This seems to be a very

unusual combination. How could the Macedonians be in the depths of poverty and yet have abundance of joy? Nevertheless, the Macedonians had both poverty and joy.

With the Macedonians the abundance of their joy and the depth of their poverty "abounded unto the riches of their liberality." The Greek word rendered liberality is also used for singleness and simplicity (see 1:12 and Rom. 12:8). Liberality is generosity in giving. Though the Macedonians were very poor, they were generous. They had the riches of liberality.

In order to be generous, we need to be single and simple. A complicated person cannot be generous. Those who are single and simple will have the riches of liberality. When they hear about a need among the saints, they will immediately decide to give something. However, those who are complicated may consider the matter and then decide to give much less than they originally intended. This is not singleness, simplicity, generosity, or liberality. We all should be generous and liberal in our giving. For this, we need to be single and simple.

When I was young I wondered why the Lord Jesus allowed Judas to be responsible for the purse. He knew that Judas was a thief, but still let him be in charge of the money. I thought that the Lord should have let John or Peter take care of the purse. But the Lord Jesus, being generous and liberal, not a lover of money, let Judas keep the purse. The Lord certainly was simple, single, generous, and liberal.

In 8:3 and 4 Paul goes on to say, "Because according to their power, I testify, and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord, with much entreaty beseeching of us the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints." Although the Macedonians were poor and in affliction, they gave generously of their own accord, that is, voluntarily. They did this through the grace of God, through the resurrected Christ as the life-giving Spirit indwelling them. This Christ is the grace of God working within the believers and motivating them to overcome the hold of material possessions, in particular, to overcome mammon. The Macedonians were in deep poverty, but the

grace moving within them enabled them to overcome mammon and material possessions and to use them for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

We need grace to overcome the usurpation of material possessions. To give continually by grace is more difficult than to put all our possessions together and have everything in common. In 1 Corinthians 16 Paul tells us to set aside a certain amount on the first day of every week. This continual giving takes grace, for it is contrary to our fallen, human nature. If we would give continually, not just once for all, we need divine grace to motivate us from within. To have a ministry that overcomes mammon and material possessions and uses them for God's purpose requires grace.

THE APOSTLES' GRACE

Verse 4 says, "With much entreaty beseeching of us the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints." The Greek word for grace, *charis*, means grace, gift, and favor. Here the meaning is favor (Vincent). The Macedonian believers besought of the apostles the favor that they might participate, have fellowship, in the ministry to the needy saints. Instead of the apostles asking the saints to have a share in this matter, the Macedonian believers begged the apostles for such a share. They considered it a favor, a grace, that the apostles would allow them such a share.

The Macedonians wanted to give a supply of material things to the Jewish believers. However, in themselves they were not able to do this. Both materially and spiritually they needed the apostles. Therefore, they begged the apostles to let them share in this grace, to give them this grace that they might participate in such a spiritual ministry. Although this ministry was related to material things, Paul made it a spiritual ministry.

Actually, Paul was not a fund raiser. He was one who took a ministry of material things and made it a spiritual matter full of life, the Spirit, and building up. In order to participate in a ministry of material things in a way that was full of life, the Macedonians needed the apostle's

grace, the apostle's favor. Without this, the ministry of the Macedonians to the needy saints would have been only a material one. It could not have been a spiritual ministry full of life for the building up of the Body of Christ.

According to their feeling, the Macedonians regarded it as a grace to participate in the ministry to the needy saints. That participation was also a fellowship in the Body of Christ. This was the reason they begged the apostle to give them the grace to participate in it.

Under the ministry of the apostles, the giving of material supply became a spiritual matter full of life and edification. This is altogether different from today's fund raising, which is without life, without spirit, and without the building up of the Body of Christ. In order for our material giving to become a spiritual ministry of life and building, we need grace from God and also from the apostles.

Verse 5 says, "And not according as we hoped, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, and to us through the will of God." This verse indicates that the Lord wants the believers themselves much more than what they have. The Macedonians were given not only to the Lord, but also to the apostles to be one with the apostles in accomplishing their ministry. This was through the will of God. It was through the will of God, through the sovereign divine agent, that the believers gave themselves first to the Lord and to the apostles.

THE GRACE OF GIVING

In verse 6 Paul continues, "So that we entreated Titus that, even as he began before, so also he would complete in you this grace also." Grace here denotes the act of giving. The word "also" indicates that besides this grace, the grace

of giving, there were other graces completed by Titus among the Macedonian believers.

In verse 7 Paul says, "But just as you abound in everything, in faith, and in word, and in knowledge, and in all earnestness, and in the love which is in you from us, see that you may abound in this grace also." Here Paul speaks of "the love which is in you from us." This indicates that the love which was in the believers was infused into them from the apostles.

In verse 7 grace is the act of love shown in the giving of material things to the needy saints. This grace of the believers is the issue of the grace of God motivating them. In the fellowship concerning the ministry to the saints, the apostle refers to the grace of God given to the Macedonian believers to motivate and enable them to give with liberality, the grace of the apostles allowing the believers to participate in the ministry to the needy saints, and the grace of the believers to minister the material things to the needy ones. This indicates that the believers' offering of material possessions to the Lord for any purpose should be absolutely a matter of grace, not of maneuvering.

THE GRACE OF CHRIST

In verses 8 and 9 Paul goes on to say, "I am not speaking by way of command, but proving through the earnestness of others the genuineness also of your love; for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, being rich, for your sakes He became poor, in order that you by His poverty might become rich." It is a grace to us that the Lord Jesus, being rich, became poor for our sakes. In the same principle, it is a grace to others that we would sacrifice our material riches for their sakes.

Apparently the Lord Jesus becoming poor has nothing to do with the ministry of material supply to needy saints. Actually, if the Lord Jesus had not become poor, we could not have Him as our grace. Suppose the Lord Jesus had never come into humanity. How, then, could He be our life? How could He be the grace working within us, motivating, strengthening, and supplying us to carry on a ministry to

the needy saints? This would be impossible. It is crucial for us to realize that Christ can work in us today because He became poor. His becoming poor for our sakes should be an example. On the one hand, He is the life within us; on the other hand, He is the pattern, the example, outwardly. The life of the Lord within us is the life of the One who, being rich, became poor. As such a One who is both our life and our pattern, Christ is grace to us. We need to receive grace from the Lord Jesus. Then this grace will enable us to do what the Lord Jesus did: to become poor for others. Even though we may be in deep poverty, we still have something to share with needy saints. We have the life within to become poor for others, and we have the outward pattern to follow. Let us receive this grace.

A SUPPLY OF LIFE

If we give by such a grace, what we give will become grace to others. We give material things to help them, but these material things are accompanied by a spiritual grace. When we supply needy saints with material things in the proper way, in spirit and with life, life and spirit go with this supply. As a result, the needy ones are supplied not only with material things, but also with the riches of life.

In this message we have pointed out that to have a ministry to needy saints we need to receive grace from God, from the apostles, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Receiving this threefold grace, we can then supply others with a material gift in grace. Whatever we do in giving to others will not simply be a ministry of material things to take care of the needs of the saints, but will also be a supply of life to them. In this way, we communicate spiritual riches to those needy saints. This kind of giving is needed among us today.

Our material gifts should be spiritual, full of life, and able to edify the saints and build up the Body of Christ. This requires that when we give some material things to the Lord, we should have the assurance that we are doing it in spirit, with life, and for the building up of the church.

This kind of giving is the issue, the result, of being fully reconciled to God. Only those who have been reconciled to God in full can have a ministry of material things that brings to the needy saints a supply of life for spiritual edification and for the building up of the Body of Christ.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-SEVEN

THE APOSTLE'S FELLOWSHIP CONCERNING THE MINISTRY TO THE NEEDY SAINTS

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 8:16-24

In 8:16-24 we have a section of this Epistle showing us what kind of persons the apostles were. In the first half of this chapter, Paul had fellowship with the saints at Corinth concerning the ministry to the needy saints in Judea. As we read this chapter, it may seem to us that this fellowship is finished by verse 15, that it is perfect and complete. Paul not only had fellowship with the saints in Corinth concerning this matter, but he also presented to them the description of a situation that assured them that what he was doing was being carried out in a very proper way.

MATTERS RELATED TO THE HANDLING OF MONEY

Second Corinthians 8:16-24 can help us a great deal in our behavior with respect to money. A large proportion of the problems in society are related to money. Therefore, we all must learn to be careful in handling it.

It is beyond our ability to imagine the different kind of problems that can arise in relation to the handling of money. Money is a source of temptation. We should not consider ourselves so spiritual that we could never have a problem concerning the handling of money. Certainly none of us is more faithful or spiritual than the Apostle Paul. Nevertheless, he was cautious and careful regarding money. I believe that he was quite thoughtful concerning money matters. For this reason, after having fellowship with the saints in Corinth concerning the ministry to the

needy saints in Judea, he added verses 16 through 24 to point out some important matters related to the handling of money.

In these verses we see that Paul recommended certain brothers to the Corinthian believers with respect to the ministry to the needy saints. First he recommended Titus. Verses 16 and 17 say, "But thanks be to God Who is giving the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. Because he indeed received the entreaty, but being more earnest he went forth of his own accord to you." The Greek word rendered earnestness in verse 16 also means diligence. It refers to Paul's diligence, earnestness, for the believers. The entreaty mentioned in verse 17 is the entreaty of the apostle.

Verse 18 says, "And we sent together with him the brother, whose praise in the gospel is throughout all the churches." In verse 22, Paul refers to yet another brother: "And we sent with them our brother, whom we have proved to be diligent in many things many times, yet now much more diligent through the great confidence he has in you." These verses indicate that in addition to Titus, two other brothers were recommended to the Corinthians.

Money is very much used by the Devil to seduce man into dishonesty, but it is also involved in the ministry of material things to the saints. In order to avoid blame through man's suspicion in this matter, the apostles sent a reputable brother to go with Titus as a witness. In verse 22 we see that another faithful brother was sent with these two, that by the mouth of three witnesses a strong testimony might be established (Matt. 18:16). Of these three brothers, only the name of Titus is given. However, the other brothers were known in the churches, and Paul even spoke of them as apostles of the churches (v. 23).

HOW PAUL BEHAVED HIMSELF IN HIS MINISTRY

In this section of 2 Corinthians there is no doctrine or theology, no mention of spiritual gift or power. What, then, do we have here that is worthy of an entire message? We have a picture of the kind of life Paul lived. The book of 2

Corinthians is a book on Paul's life. However, most Christians today pay much more attention to work than to life. Second Corinthians portrays Paul's life; it does not emphasize his work. Here we have a picture of Paul's behavior in his ministry.

No doubt Paul was commissioned with the highest portion of this ministry. Therefore, in this book he spontaneously gives us a picture showing how he behaved himself in carrying out his ministry. This does not mean that in 2 Corinthians Paul is telling us how or by what way he carried out his ministry. Rather, he is revealing how he behaved himself. His emphasis is not on the way he ministered; it is on how he conducted himself.

The ministry of the New Testament is altogether a matter of life, not a matter merely of gifts or of working in a particular way. The crucial question is not how we are doing things or how we are working; it is how we are living and conducting ourselves. In the ministry of Christ for the church, the emphasis should be on how we live, not on how we work. I have a strong burden that we all would see that in the Lord's recovery what matters is not how we do things, but how we live. In these verses Paul's main emphasis is on how he behaved himself.

According to verse 20, an abundance of material gifts had been committed to Paul's care. He had received a large sum of money from saints in different localities for the needy ones in Judea. Realizing that having the responsibility for a large amount of money could cause problems, he behaved in a very careful way. First, he selected Titus to go with him. By reading this book we can see that Titus was a reputable brother, reputable among the co-workers and also among the churches. Therefore, Paul selected such a one to take the lead in ministering the material supply to the needy saints. Yet, according to verse 18, another brother was sent with Titus, one whose praise in the gospel was throughout all the churches and who had been appointed by the churches as a fellow-traveler in this grace (v. 19). This brother was sent by the churches and not only by Paul. By this we see that Paul must have asked

the churches purposely to select such a brother. Concerning that one, verses 19 and 20 say, "And not only this, but who has also been appointed by the churches as our fellow-traveler in this grace which is being ministered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness, avoiding this, that anyone should blame us in this abundance which is being ministered by us." Paul deliberately acted in a careful way to avoid blame concerning the abundance of material gifts.

TAKING FORETHOUGHT FOR WHAT IS HONORABLE BEFORE GOD AND MAN

In verse 21 Paul says, "For we provide for what is honorable, not only before the Lord, but also before men." The Greek word for "provide for" may also be rendered take forethought for, consider in advance. This is the meaning of the word in Romans 12:17. It must have been quoted from Proverbs 3:4, where the Septuagint reads, "Take thought for honorable things in the sight of the Lord, and of men."

Paul realized that a large sum of money was involved in the ministering to the needy saints. He knew that handling that amount of money was not an easy matter. Therefore, he took forethought for what was honorable both before the Lord and before men. We may think that the saints would not have any evil thoughts regarding that money. Perhaps the saints themselves would not have evil thoughts, but the Devil is full of evil thoughts, and he is in them. For this reason, Paul thought about the matter beforehand to avoid blame.

Here we see the principle of taking forethought. Whenever we are about to do something or behave in a certain way, we should take forethought for the way others may think about the matter. Yes, the saints are holy. But within them there is someone who is not holy, that is, the Devil. What evil thoughts may come from the Devil about a particular matter? We need to consider this. We need to consider it even in relation to our husband or wife. Our husband or wife may not have a problem with a certain matter, but what about the Devil? What kind of thoughts

about it will come from him? We need to realize that the Devil is crouching, waiting for an opportunity to destroy us. If we realize this, we shall be careful and take forethought concerning things.

Our motive regarding a particular matter may be pure, but we still need to be careful concerning our behavior. Even though our motive is pure, our behavior may cause others to be suspicious. Paul, for example, was responsible for a large sum of money. Therefore, he was careful and took some witnesses to remove any ground for suspicion. According to the law, two or three witnesses were necessary. In taking care to have the proper witnesses, Paul was taking forethought.

I appreciate this word forethought. It means to consider a matter beforehand. If we take forethought, we shall not do things in a way that gives an opening for the enemy to come in.

From experience we have learned that regarding money matters we need to take forethought. Whenever you come to the matter of money, you must take forethought in order to avoid blame. We should never deal with money in a careless way. If we are not careful in the handling of money, blame will come upon us.

In verse 20 Paul said, "Avoiding this, that anyone should blame us in this abundance which is being ministered by us." We also should take forethought whenever we are responsible for a large sum of money in order to avoid blame. Therefore, with respect to the finances of the church or of the work, or of gifts to the church or the work, we need two or three witnesses. If we take care of money matters without witnesses, we shall have problems, for money is a temptation.

We should not think that our situation is different from Paul's and that we do not need to take the same forethought concerning money. As long as we are on this earth, we cannot avoid matters related to money. You may try to stay away from money, but it will come to you. Money is very much used by the Devil, and the Bible speaks of it as the mammon of unrighteousness. Praise the

Lord that in the New Jerusalem there will be no more concern about money! But for the present we cannot live or work without it. Therefore, in handling money we must learn to avoid blame by taking forethought for what is honorable before God and man.

We also need to take forethought regarding relationships between males and females. Elsewhere I have pointed out that a brother should not have a long talk with a sister in private. Consider the example of the Lord Jesus. He spoke with Nicodemus alone at night in a house. But when it came to talking with the Samaritan woman, he spoke with her in the open air during the daytime. The Lord Jesus was still a rather young man, not much over thirty years of age. If He had spoken to that Samaritan woman in a room alone at night, the disciples probably would have wondered what was going on. The Lord Jesus could have explained the situation to them, but the explanation would have been too late, for the disciples would have already had thoughts regarding the matter. Therefore, the Lord Jesus took forethought in the way He had contact with the Samaritan woman.

In the church life we have contact with many people and are involved with many things. The principle regarding all this contact and involvement is to take forethought about what others may think of us. It is wise always to take forethought, for this will guard and protect us. In particular, we should take forethought to make things honorable in the sight of God and man. If a brother has a long talk with a sister alone in private, that is not honorable in the sight of man. Such behavior may not be sinful; however, it is not honorable. What we do should be honorable both before the Lord and before man. Because the Lord knows everything, it is more important to take forethought for what is honorable before man than for what is honorable before the Lord. Others, of course, do not know all that the Lord knows. It is not sufficient that others think that we have no problem. We need to do what is honorable before them. If we behave ourselves in a way that is not honorable, others will not honor us. The elders,

the deacons, and the deaconesses especially need to take forethought for what is honorable. In handling money, in our relationships with those of the opposite sex, and in all other things the principle is the same: take forethought for what is honorable in the sight of God and man.

We may know that in a particular matter we are right, innocent, and pure. Nevertheless, we may not be honorable in the sight of others. We need to behave in a way that will be regarded as honorable by others. Then there will be no ground for blame. This is a lesson we all need to learn.

The case in 8:16-24 may not seem important, but the principle here is of great importance. Otherwise, Paul would not have written anything about it. The very fact that he wrote concerning taking forethought for what is honorable indicates its importance. We all must pay attention to this matter. Regarding money, sex, and all other things we need to behave ourselves in a way to show that we take forethought for what is honorable before the Lord and before man. Please receive this word and act on it. If you do this, you will be preserved and protected. Otherwise, you will have troubles.

THE REASON FOR PAUL'S USEFULNESS

The Apostle Paul was not only gifted, knowledgeable, and powerful; he was also cautious, careful, and considerate. In no way was he careless. As we read 2 Corinthians, we see a number of virtues and excellent characteristics in the person and life of Paul. It is no wonder, then, that Paul was so greatly used by the Lord. Paul was used by Him mainly because of his living. He lived in a way that was not only holy, spiritual, and victorious, but also in a way that was careful, cautious, and considerate. When we see the virtues of Paul described in the various chapters of 2 Corinthians as a whole, we shall understand that his usefulness came from his virtues.

In this message my main burden is to impress you with the need to be cautious, careful, and considerate, always behaving in such a way as to take forethought for what is

honorable. You may be innocent and pure, but you still

need to take forethought for what is honorable. Instead of having confidence in yourself, do things in a manner that is careful, cautious, and considerate.

FIVE IMPORTANT MATTERS

In chapters six, seven, and eight of 2 Corinthians we have covered four major points: first, the work of reconciliation to bring others fully back to God; second, the all-fitting life; third, being enlarged; and fourth, having an intimate, tender concern for others. Now in the second half of chapter eight we see a fifth important matter--taking thought beforehand for things honorable in the sight of God and man. We all need to be fully reconciled to God, live an all-fitting life, be enlarged, have an intimate concern for others, and take forethought for what is honorable. These principles apply not only in the church life, but also in our family life and in our life at school, at work, or wherever we may be.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-EIGHT

THE APOSTLE'S FELLOWSHIP CONCERNING THE MINISTRY TO THE NEEDY SAINTS

(3)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 8:15; 9:1-15

In chapter nine of 2 Corinthians Paul gives an additional word concerning the ministry to the needy saints. It may seem to us that this chapter is not necessary, for we may think that what Paul says in chapter eight is sufficient. According to your understanding, why does Paul give an additional word in chapter nine? If you read these two chapters again, you may consider that regarding the ministry to the needy saints, the first part alone of chapter eight is adequate and that the last part of chapter eight and all of chapter nine are not actually necessary. We need to ask why Paul devoted so much space to this matter. As we shall see, his reason for doing so is related to certain profound thoughts.

GATHERING AND SOWING

Paul's thought in chapters eight and nine is profound. The key to understanding Paul's profound thought is found in two matters. First, in 8:15 Paul concludes, "As it is written, He who gathered much had no excess, and he who gathered little had no lack." This is a quotation from Exodus 16:18 concerning the gathering of manna for the daily supply. Why does the Apostle Paul connect ministering the supply of material things to the saints to the gathering of manna? If we consider this matter thoughtfully, we shall realize that ministering material things to the needy saints certainly is for their daily

supply. Manna was gathered for the daily supply of the children of Israel, and material things were ministered to the needy saints also for their daily supply. Paul's quotation of Exodus 16:18 is a crucial factor in our grasping his profound thought.

The second matter related to Paul's profound thought in chapters eight and nine concerns his word in 9:6 about sowing: "But this: he who sows sparingly, sparingly also shall reap; and he who sows with blessings, with blessings also shall reap." Here Paul likens the ministering of material things to the needy saints to the sowing of seed. The sowing of seed, like the gathering of manna, is for daily supply. Therefore, both the gathering and the sowing are for the same purpose, for both are for our living.

TWO WAYS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TO LIVE

In the Bible there are two ways for God's people to live. The first way is according to the natural law ordained by God. This is to sow seed and reap a harvest. In Genesis 3 God ordained that man would till the ground in order to have something to live on. The sowing of the seed is for man's living. This is the way according to the natural law ordained by God. No race or nationality can survive without sowing, without farming. To farm is to sow the seed and reap a harvest.

The second way for God's people to live is the way of miracles from the hand of God. When the children of Israel were in Egypt, they lived according to the natural way. But when they came out of Egypt and were wandering in the wilderness, they lived by another way, by the way of God's miracles. The people did not sow any seed, but they gathered manna. We could say that they reaped without sowing, for their gathering was a reaping. In the wilderness the children of Israel continually reaped without sowing. The raining down of manna from heaven was a substitute for sowing. Human beings can sow seed, but only God can cause manna to rain down. In the wilderness the children of Israel gathered the manna sent by God.

According to Exodus 16, the children of Israel gathered manna every morning, except for the Sabbath day. On the sixth day they gathered a double portion in order to have a sufficient supply for the Sabbath. Exodus 16:17 and 18 say, "And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating."

GOD BALANCING THE SUPPLY AMONG HIS PEOPLE

In the wilderness the children of Israel did not do any farming, sowing, or reaping. Instead, they gathered manna. Some may have been greedy and tried to gather a large amount of manna, much more than they needed. However, by the end of the day, what was left was no longer useful. Exodus 16:19 and 20 say, "And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them." In the case of those who gathered an excess of manna, perhaps wanting to store it up for days and weeks to come, God caused the excess to be taken away.

Those who were rather feeble and not able to gather much manna did not have any lack. The divine way is that those who gathered little had no lack and those who gathered much had nothing over. This is God's heavenly way of balancing the supply among His people. God exercised His miraculous ability to balance the supply of manna among the people. God balances the daily supply among His children by His sovereign and miraculous hand.

In Paul's writing of 2 Corinthians, he combines the gathering of manna with the believers' giving of the material supply to the needy saints. In Exodus 16 it was a matter of gathering, but in 2 Corinthians 8 it is a matter of giving. Concerning the gathering of manna, the result was the same whether the children of Israel gathered more or gathered less. This indicates that in their gathering they

should not have been greedy. Gathering manna was their duty. They were to do their duty without being greedy.

Suppose some of the children of Israel had said, "God is merciful, sovereign, and miraculous. He controls everything. Since I will have no excess if I gather a lot and no lack if I gather a little, then actually I don't need to go out and gather anything." If one of God's people had practiced this, he would not have had anything for that day. God would not fulfill that one's duty for him. God would neither work for him nor feed him. The children of Israel had to fulfill their duty. As long as they fulfilled their responsibility according to God's ordination, they had a sufficient supply, no matter how much or how little manna they gathered.

In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul likens our giving to the needy ones to the gathering of manna. To our realization, we are giving, not gathering. But what Paul says indicates that our giving is a gathering. Paul's word at least implies that as children of God we should not be greedy. We should not think that if we earn a large sum of money, we shall be able to preserve it all for ourselves. We need to see that whether we give or not, eventually the outcome will be the same.

Suppose a brother earns $40,000 a year, but what he actually needs for his living is much less than that amount. Being rather greedy, he wants to reserve a large amount for himself. He tithes ten percent, or $4,000, with the intention of keeping the other $36,000. This tithing is a good practice. However, it is possible for this brother to follow an even better way. According to this better way, the brother should keep what he needs for his living, perhaps $20,000, and give away the remainder. No doubt, humanly speaking, almost everyone would follow the first way, the way of tithing, instead of the second way, the way of giving all that he can. If the brother decides to tithe and keep the extra $16,000 for himself, eventually he will learn that, in His sovereignty, God has many ways to cause this excess money to disappear. There may be illness, accident, or calamity. If the money does not disappear in this

generation, it will disappear in the following generation or certainly in the third generation. God's mighty, sovereign hand will be active to practice a heavenly balancing of the wealth among His people.

For approximately seventy years I have been observing the situation among Christians. I can testify that I do not know of one Christian family who has been able to maintain wealth continually for three generations. The first generation in a Christian family may become very rich and save vast riches for the second generation. But either in the second generation or in the third the money mysteriously disappears. It seems to sprout wings and fly away. I know of cases where the wealthy third generation had all their riches taken away by others. Although the ones in this generation inherited vast wealth, it was taken away from them. Thus, eventually it proves true that he who gathers much has no excess. I have seen that those who gather little have no lack and those who gather much have no excess. I have truly witnessed the miraculous and sovereign hand of God balancing the wealth among His people.

You may consider yourself quite wise in money matters. You know how to make money, how to save it, and how to preserve it for your children and grandchildren. But no matter how wise you may be in the handling of money, God is wiser. As the heavenly pilot, he knows how to cause your money to fly away. He did this with the manna in the Old Testament, and does it with money today. The question that faces you is this: do you want to balance the material supply willingly, or will you force God to balance it in a miraculous, sovereign way? I can assure you that sooner or later you will be balanced in financial matters. Concerning this, we need to understand God's heart. Deep in His heart God desires that His people be balanced in the daily supply. Therefore, we should say to Him, "Lord, thank You for enabling me to gather manna. But, Lord, instead of saving this for myself, I want to share it with others." You should remember that whether or not you willingly share with others, eventually the outcome will be the same. The

result will be that he who gathers little has no lack and that he who gathers much has nothing over. It is foolish, then, not to share what we have with others.

SOWING WITH BLESSINGS

What about the sowing of seed? According to chapter nine, our giving equals not only our gathering, as in chapter eight, but also equals sowing. Our giving is both a gathering and a sowing. The gathering of manna is miraculous. We have emphasized that the manna gathered by the children of Israel was balanced in a miraculous way so that no one had any lack and no one had anything over. Now from chapter nine we must see that our giving is also likened to sowing.

According to 9:6, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he who sows with blessings shall also reap with blessings. In verse 6 we have the thought of sowing for the benefit of others. But what farmer, when he sows seed in his field, has the thought of sowing for others? Surely, most farmers have the concept of sowing for themselves. This kind of sowing, however, is not with blessings. To sow with blessings is to give to others. This is to sow with blessings to others. When we give of our money, we are sowing, and this sowing is not for ourselves, but is for others. If we sow with blessings to others, we shall reap with blessings from God.

LEARNING TO GIVE

As children of God, we all must learn to give. To give is to gather. How much manna we can gather depends on how much we give. In Luke 6:38 the Lord Jesus says, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." This verse indicates that if we want to receive, to gather, we first need to give. Our giving is our gathering, our receiving. We all need to gather manna every day. Because our gathering is our giving, we all need to give in order to gather. We gather little because we give little. May we all be impressed that our giving is our gathering.

In the matter of giving and gathering, divine miracles are involved. We should not believe in a superstitious way that the more we give, the more we shall receive. If this is the way we understand this matter, our motive in giving will be to gain riches for ourselves. The point here is related to God's balancing hand. He would distribute the supply so that we would be neither poor nor rich. He certainly does practice a divine and heavenly balancing. He knows how to balance the wealth among His people.

For more than fifty years, I have been living by faith in the Lord. Often I have been very poor. Nevertheless, I can testify that even though I have been in extreme poverty, I never had any lack. I gathered little, but I had no lack. At other times I had an abundant supply, even large sums of money. However, I must testify that I did not have any excess. Therefore, I can testify from my experience that whenever I have gathered much, I have had no excess and that whenever I have gathered little, I have had no lack. Who balances the supply in this way? It is done by God with His heavenly balance.

If we try to gather more than what is needed, we shall eventually see the excess money fly away. If you keep too much in excess, your money will seem to sprout wings and fly away from you. The reason this happens is that God in the heavens balances the social wealth of His children.

We have seen that giving is both a matter of gathering and of sowing. Sowing brings in reaping. It is a natural law that first we sow and then we have a harvest. When we sow, we should sow generously, not sparingly. If we sow sparingly, we shall reap sparingly. But if we sow generously, we shall also reap generously. In our sowing, we are the ones who are generous and liberal. But when we reap, we find that God is the One who is generous.

Why did Paul add chapter nine? He added this chapter in order to provide us a further illustration of giving. We have pointed out that in 2 Corinthians 9 Paul uses sowing to illustrate giving. Therefore, from chapters eight and

nine we see that giving is gathering and also sowing. These two concepts deep within Paul governed his writing of these two chapters.

GIVING AND GATHERING

Paul was not a superficial writer. On the contrary, he was deep, and his thoughts were profound. In his reading of the Old Testament he realized that Exodus 16 speaks of God's people gathering what they need for their daily supply. According to Paul's concept, we today are in the wilderness. Daily we work; however, actually we are gathering manna. But our gathering must turn to giving. If we do not give, we shall not continue to gather. We work to earn money, but this earning of money must become our giving. Then whatever we give will become our gathering, as pictured by the gathering of manna by the children of Israel in the wilderness. Now we can see that Paul likens our giving to this gathering of manna. This thought is deep, profound.

GIVING AND SOWING

In chapter nine Paul goes on to liken our giving to the sowing of seed. Because his deep thought was not fully expressed in chapter eight, Paul went on to write another chapter related to giving. This chapter reveals another aspect of giving, the aspect of sowing. Paul's thought here is that we must sow and then we shall reap. Furthermore, when we sow, we should sow not merely for ourselves, but sow with blessings for others.

Many translations of the Bible do not render verse 6 literally. Instead of saying "with blessings," some versions speak of bounty or of sowing bountifully. According to these translations, if we sow bountifully, or with bounty, we shall reap bountifully, or with bounty. This, however, is a natural understanding of this word. What Paul speaks of here is literally sowing with blessings. Our giving must be with blessings to others.

Other Scriptures help us to understand the word blessings in 9:6. In the Old Testament we can see that

giving was a blessing. When Jacob met his brother Esau, Jacob gave him something. That gift was a blessing. Regarding this, Genesis 33:11 says, "Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough." Other verses that indicate that giving is blessing are 2 Kings 5:15; Judges 1:15; and Ezekiel 34:26. Our giving to others is a blessing to them.

When we sow with blessings to others, we shall reap with blessings from God. Furthermore, the harvest will always far surpass the amount of seed sown. It may be multiplied thirty or even one hundred times. This does not happen miraculously; it takes place according to natural law. God controls the life supply among His children by miracles. Because of this, no Christian family can maintain its wealth for generations. But sowing is according to natural law, not according to miracle. Regarding this, there is no need for God to do anything miraculous. We all need to sow, to give. The more we give, the more we shall reap. However, we should not do this in a superstitious way for the purpose of gaining riches for ourselves.

The two illustrations of gathering and sowing are related to Paul's profound thoughts in these chapters. In chapter nine the deep thought is that as Christians we give in the sense of sowing. If we do not give, we are not farming, not sowing. Moreover, we should not sow sparingly. If we sow sparingly, then according to natural law we shall reap sparingly. We need to sow with blessings to others. If we sow with blessings to others, then, also according to natural law, we shall reap with blessings from God to us. This blessing will be many times more than what we have sown. I can testify that, in my Christian life, I have never seen a believer who has given to God who has not been greatly blessed by Him. The Lord will always honor the natural law He has ordained.

BECOMING FACTORS OF THANKSGIVING TO GOD

We need to recognize the Lord's miraculous hand and also care for His natural law. According to both aspects,

we

need to give. Perhaps at present you do not see God's balancing hand. But over the long run, perhaps over a period of many years, you will see it. Then you will be able to testify of how God balances the daily supply among His children. We also must realize that giving is a matter of sowing. Therefore, if we would reap, we must sow with blessings to others. Then we shall reap with blessings from God.

We should sow more and in turn reap more. The goal is not to make ourselves rich. The result is the abounding of thanksgivings to God. I hope that in the time to come many of the saints will become a factor of thanksgiving to God. This means that your giving will abound in much thanksgiving to God. I have the full confidence that if the saints in the Lord's recovery are willing to give, the recovery will never be lacking in material supply. Instead of lack, there will be abounding in thanksgiving to the Lord through many saints. Therefore, let us all practice our giving, a giving which is carried out by gathering and by sowing.

VARIOUS MATTERS RELATED TO GIVING

In 9:5 Paul says, "Therefore I thought it necessary to entreat the brothers, that they would go before you and make ready beforehand your previously promised blessing, that this might be ready thus as a blessing, and not as covetousness." This blessing is a bounty, a willing gift of generosity as a blessing to others. Willing and generous giving makes the gift a blessing to the receiver. Unwilling and grudging giving, from a withholding and covetous heart, makes the gift a matter of covetousness to the giver.

In verse 7 Paul says, "Each one as he has purposed in his heart, not out of sorrow or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver." This comes from Proverbs 22:9, where the Septuagint reads, "God loves a cheerful and liberal man." The Greek word rendered cheerful also means hilarious, gleeful.

In verses 8 and 9 Paul continues, "And God is able to make all grace abound unto you, that, in everything always having all sufficiency, you may abound unto every

good work; even as it is written, He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, his righteousness abides forever." The words "all grace" in verse 8 refer to every kind of grace. The scattering in verse 9 is the scattering in sowing. The word poor in this verse denotes one who is obliged to do menial work to eke out a living. It is not the common word for poor.

In verse 9 Paul speaks of righteousness abiding forever. Generous giving is, on the one hand, a blessing to the receivers, and, on the other hand, righteousness in the eyes of both God and man.

In verse 13 Paul speaks of the approvedness of this ministry of giving material supply to the needy saints. It refers to the approval by the needy saints in Judea of the Gentile believers' ministry to them. The Greek word, *dokime*, means test, trial, experiment; hence, approvedness, proof. It indicates that the ministry to the saints will be tested, tried, and approved by the saints to become a proof of the generous character of the ministry.

The Greek word for fellowship in verse 13 also means communication (see "communicating" in Romans 12:13, and "shared" in Philippians 4:15). It refers to the ministry of supply, which is a fellowship between the Gentile believers and those in Judea.

In verses 14 and 15 Paul concludes, "And in their petition on your behalf, longing after you on account of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" This indescribable gift is God's grace given to the believers.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FORTY-NINE

THE APOSTLE'S FELLOWSHIP CONCERNING THE MINISTRY TO THE NEEDY SAINTS

(4)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 8:1-5, 15; 9:6-15

In 9:6 Paul says, "But this: he who sows sparingly, sparingly also shall reap; and he who sows with blessings, with blessings also shall reap." Literally, the Greek word rendered "with" means upon. The blessings here are first bountiful givings as blessings to others, and then bountiful harvests as blessings from God. It is a natural law ordained by God that if we sow sparingly, we shall also reap sparingly, but if we sow with blessings, we shall also reap with blessings.

In verse 7 Paul continues, "Each one as he has purposed in his heart, not out of sorrow or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver." We should not be sorrowful in giving. Instead, we should be joyful. If we are sorrowful in giving, it may be better not to give anything. Furthermore, our giving should not be of necessity. The Greek word rendered necessity here is the same as that used in chapter six. It means that we are pressed into something, forced into it. To give out of necessity indicates that giving is a calamity to us. We should not give because we are forced; neither should we give if we feel that giving is a calamity. In the thought of some, giving material possessions is like suffering a calamity. Giving should certainly not be like this with us. As Paul says in this verse, God loves a cheerful giver. The Greek word translated cheerful may also be rendered hilarious or gleeful. In our giving we should be cheerful, gleeful, hilarious.

Verses 8 and 9 say, "And God is able to make all grace

abound unto you, that, in everything always having all sufficiency, you may abound unto every good work; even as it is written, He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, his righteousness abides forever." There are different kinds of grace. Titus was among the Corinthians to bring them the different graces. We today also need to have the various kinds of grace, one of which is the grace of giving.

In verses 8 and 9 there are a number of dear and precious thoughts. One such thought is that generous giving is righteousness in the eyes of both God and man. This thought is confirmed by the Lord's word spoken on the mountain and recorded in Matthew 6. The Lord regards generous giving not only as a grace, but also as righteousness.

In verse 10 Paul goes on to say, "Now He Who bountifully supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed and cause the fruits of righteousness to grow." Here we see the source of seed: it comes from God who bountifully supplies seed to the sower and bread for food. We should not think that the wheat used to make bread comes automatically from reaping a harvest. No, it comes from God. Even though we must sow, we should not trust in our sowing. It is our duty to sow, and we should sow for this reason. However, we should not trust in what we sow. If we trust in our sowing, God may withhold the rain or allow a storm to damage the harvest. Therefore, we must see that God is the One who provides the bread. He gives us the seed for sowing and also bread from the harvest for food. Furthermore, it is He who multiplies our seed and causes the fruits of righteousness to grow.

PAUL'S FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SAINTS

I would like to say a further word concerning the two illustrations used by Paul in chapters eight and nine: the illustration of gathering manna and the illustration of sowing seed and reaping a harvest. Paul was not a superficial person. He knew that fellowshipping with the churches concerning the ministry to take care of the needy

saints far away in Judea was a very important matter. He realized that the saints in Macedonia and Achaia were in poverty. This is indicated by his word in 8:1 and 2: "Furthermore, we make known to you, brothers, the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in much approvedness of affliction the abundance of their joy and the depth of their poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." Here Paul speaks of the depth of poverty. This expression indicates that the economic situation in Macedonia, and no doubt in Achaia as well, was not good. The saints in Macedonia and Achaia were poor. Since this was their economic situation, how could Paul encourage them, even entreat them, to supply material things to others? This kind of giving would certainly cause them to be even more poor. Moreover, what about the saints' future? Paul knew some of the poor saints might say, "What about my future? I have very little. If I give away part of what I have, how shall I take care of my living in the future?" Because Paul understood the situation and because he was thoughtful, he handled the matter in a very considerate way. When he fellowshipped with the believers about the material supply for the needy saints, Paul was very considerate.

It was risky for Paul to fellowship with the saints about giving and even more risky to entreat them to give. However, Paul had an assurance and a confidence within him that caused him to take the risk. In our opinion, it is rather easy to ask wealthy people to give to those in need. But it is another matter to entreat the poor, those who do not have a sufficient supply for their own living, to give of their possessions. As we have pointed out, they may wonder about their future, especially about how they will earn a living if they give of what they have. Nevertheless, because Paul knew God's economy and understood God's way, he had the confidence to risk encouraging the poor saints in Achaia to give to the needy ones in Judea.

CARED FOR BY GOD IN A MIRACULOUS WAY

From his study of the Old Testament, Paul realized

that God takes care of His people's needs. God is able to feed His people in a miraculous way. There were more than two million children of Israel in a barren wilderness, in a wasteland where nothing grows. The wilderness was not a place suitable for farming or ranching. But throughout a period of forty years, God fed His people by miraculously raining down manna from heaven. I do not believe that anyone can explain what manna was or where it came from. But it is a fact of history that God fed His people with manna in the wilderness for forty years. It certainly was a miracle that more than two million people could survive in the wilderness for such a long time.

Both the raining down of the manna and the application of the manna were miraculous. Paul refers to this in 2 Corinthians 8:15 where, quoting Exodus 16:18, he says, "He who gathered much had no excess, and he who gathered little had no lack." According to Exodus 16:18, an omer was used to measure the manna. Both those who gathered much and those who gathered little eventually had an omer. This is God's heavenly balancing of the manna gathered by His people. No matter how many omers certain ones may have gathered, after the manna was measured, the result was that miraculously there was an omer for every person (Exo. 16:16).

On the sixth day of the week, the children of Israel were allowed to gather a double portion of manna to provide a supply for the Sabbath. But on other days of the week, they were not allowed to gather more than what they needed for one day. Those who tried to save manna for the next day found that it bred worms. This indicates that it is not God's principle for His people to save up something for themselves. To save in that way is to be motivated by greed.

No doubt, as Paul studied the Scriptures, the thoughts and concepts of the Scriptures entered into him, inspired him, and governed him. Eventually these thoughts motivated him to write chapters eight and nine of 2 Corinthians. In chapter eight he was encouraging even the poor saints to give to the needy ones in Judea. Because he

had a deep knowledge of God's economy, he had the courage to ask the saints to do this. In this chapter Paul seems to be saying, "You don't need to consider your poverty. Simply give to take care of the needy ones. Actually, you do not take care of your own needs. Your heavenly Father is the One who supplies your needs. He supplies the manna, and in this way He takes care of you. I can assure you that you don't need to worry about the future. Because your future is under the care of the Father, I encourage you to give to the needy ones. In a miraculous way, the Father will send manna."

From the children of Israel's experience of gathering manna in the wilderness, we learn that our income is actually a kind of manna. The supply of manna did not depend on the gathering by the children of Israel. On the contrary, it depended on God's raining. If God had not sent down the manna, how could the children of Israel have gathered anything? Their gathering of manna was altogether dependent upon God's raining of the manna. The principle is the same with your income. You may think that your income depends on your working or on your job. But who gave you that job? The job was provided by God. But if you think that you obtained that job through your ability or education, God may cause something to happen in your company so that you lose your job. Then you may realize that your income does not depend on your ability, but depends on God's sovereignty. It is very important for us all to understand this. If we think that our income depends upon our education, ability, or skill, we are superficial and shortsighted.

SOWING AND REAPING

By using the illustration of sowing and reaping in chapter nine, Paul shows that God also uses natural law to feed His people. Sowing and reaping are matters of natural law. To give is actually to sow. But where do we get the seed used in sowing? The seed is supplied by God. The source of seed is God Himself. According to 9:10, He bountifully supplies seed to the sower.

We should not think that just because we sow seed, we are sure to have a rich harvest. Rather, we need to pray, "Lord, I have sown the seed. But whether or not I have a good harvest depends on Your mercy." The growth of the seed sown depends on God. If He changes the weather, what we have sown may not yield anything. As a result, we would not have any food. Therefore, we need to worship the Lord and say, "Lord, even if my supply seems to come from reaping, the food is actually given by You."

GOD AS THE UNIQUE SOURCE

We as God's children are under His care. God cares for us and feeds us in two ways: the way of miracle and the way of natural law. We need to thank the Lord for taking care of us in a miraculous way. Do you not realize that God has miraculously taken care of you and that you live by His miracles? The fact that you have a good job is a miracle. Furthermore, having a suitable dwelling place and being protected and preserved until now are also miracles. All these things come from God's miraculous sending of manna. What we do each day is simply to fulfill our responsibility to gather manna. When you go to work each day, you gather manna. But the manna itself came from God's miracles. If you cannot believe this now, someday you will believe it. You will see that even your physical life is dependent on God's miracles. The first way God feeds His people is by miracles. May we all be impressed with this and worship Him for it! We need to realize that we are living not by our education or ability, but by God's raining of manna.

The second way God takes care of us is by the natural law of sowing and reaping. Yes, we need to sow, but it is God who gives us seed for sowing. Furthermore, God causes the seed to grow so that we may have a harvest. We can sow the seed, but we cannot make anything grow. God supplies the seed, He causes the seed to grow, and He also gives us bread for food.

Concerning the supply both by miracles and by natural law, God is the source. On the one hand, He sends the

manna. On the other hand, He supplies the seed for sowing and the bread for food. If we have a deep realization of this, we shall not worry about our future. The Lord Jesus said, "Do not be anxious for tomorrow" (Matt. 6:34). Knowing that the believers need not worry about the future because we have God as our source of supply, Paul had the boldness to encourage the poor saints to give to the needy ones. We should take care of God's need and His purpose. He then will take care of our future. Our future is not under our own care; it is under the care of our Father. It is not according to our gathering, but according to God's raining of manna. Furthermore, it is not according to our sowing, but according to His supplying. If God does not supply seed, what shall we sow? Our future also does not depend on our reaping; it depends on God's causing the seed to grow until there is a harvest. Having a deep realization concerning this and possessing a thorough knowledge of God's economy, Paul had the assurance and the peace to encourage the poor saints to give what they had to meet the needs of others.

PAUL'S ASSURANCE

Now we can understand Paul's thought in chapters eight and nine. In chapter eight Paul used the gathering of manna as a basis for fellowship with the saints about giving the supply of material things to needy ones. In chapter nine Paul used the matter of sowing and reaping as a basis for this fellowship. Paul, therefore, had a twofold basis on which to fellowship with the saints about the ministry of material things. This gave him the assurance and the confidence to tell the saints that if they gave as much as possible, they need not worry about the future. Here Paul seems to be saying, "Saints, give as much as you can. There is no need to worry about tomorrow. Your future is altogether under God's care. Because I have the confidence concerning this, I encourage you to give. I do not run any risk in asking you to give to the needy ones. If you take my word and act on it, there will be a multiplication of thanksgivings to God. Also, if you are willing to sow by giving, God will send an increase

in your harvest. He will increase your fruit of righteousness."

Why did Paul have the boldness to encourage poor saints to give? He had boldness because he knew the Word of God. Furthermore, he knew God's economy and His divine way. He realized that it was a serious matter to ask churches in a poor economic situation to help others in need. He was not asking one individual to help another. He was encouraging the churches in Europe to help the churches in Judea. It may seem that Paul was taking a risk, for the saints could have suffered in the future. Paul knew, however, that he was not taking a risk, because he had the assurance that God would come in to rain down the manna, to supply seed for sowing, and to give bread for food. This is the proper way to understand Paul's word in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 10:1-6

As we read the book of 2 Corinthians, we may think that by the end of chapter nine Paul has covered all the necessary points and that there is no need for him to write further. However, in the last four chapters of this Epistle Paul covers another crucial matter which is in his heart. This is the matter of his apostolic authority. He said a little about this in 1 Corinthians, but because the time was not right, he did not cover it adequately. When 1 Corinthians was written, the situation was not ready for Paul to come to the matter of his apostolic authority. But by the time of 2 Corinthians 10, the storms have ceased, and everything is calm. Thus, with everyone quiet and at peace, there is a tranquil atmosphere. In such an atmosphere and condition, Paul comes to the question of his apostolic authority. In chapters ten, eleven, twelve, and part of thirteen, Paul places this matter before the Corinthians and deals with it from different angles.

Because he is an excellent writer, Paul always deals with any matter thoroughly, not leaving ground for any argument. As we shall see, this principle is true of Paul's vindication of his apostolic authority. The Corinthian believers needed to be clear about this, and we also need to be clear about it.

A CONTRAST

In 10:1 Paul says, "But I myself, Paul, entreat you through the meekness and forbearance of Christ, who as to

appearance am indeed lowly among you, but absent am of good courage toward you." Notice that this verse begins with the word "but." "But" here indicates a contrast. In chapters eight and nine the apostle spoke pleasantly with the dear saints in Corinth, encouraging them to have fellowship in the ministry to the needy saints in Judea. Immediately after that, he desires to make himself more clear to them by vindicating, with a severe and unpleasant word, his apostleship, even his apostolic authority. This was due to the vague and clouded situation caused by the false, Judaistic apostles (11:11-15), whose teaching and assertion of what they were had distracted the Corinthian believers from the fundamental teachings of the authentic apostles, especially from the proper realization of Paul's standing as an apostle.

We need to be impressed with the fact that this section of 2 Corinthians stands in sharp contrast to the preceding section. Paul's word in chapters six through nine is pleasant, but at times his word in chapters ten through thirteen is severe and even unpleasant. As we read the last four chapters of this book, we may wonder if Paul has lost his tender, intimate concern. Some may even criticize him for his severity. Actually, it was because Paul was so spiritual that he could write these chapters in the way he did.

PAUL'S WAY OF ENTREATING

In 10:1 Paul tells us that he entreated the Corinthians through the meekness and forbearance of Christ. But he does not tell us the purpose of his entreaty. He tells us how he entreated, but he does not say why he entreated. If you read through the rest of this chapter, trying to find the purpose of Paul's entreaty, you will not be able to find it. Paul simply does not state the purpose of his entreaty. Did he, then, make a mistake in writing? No, Paul's concern is with how he entreats the saints rather than for what purpose he entreats them. This indicates that Paul's way of entreating is more important than the purpose of his entreaty. For this reason, Paul points out that he

entreated the believers through the meekness and forbearance of Christ.

Suppose a brother who is giving a message cares only for his purpose in giving that message and not for the way he gives it. That would be a serious mistake. We should learn of Paul to pay even more attention to the way we do something than for our purpose in doing that thing. Actually God cares more for the way we do things than for our purpose, our goal, in doing them. However, many Christians today care hardly at all for the way of doing things; they care primarily for the purpose, the goal, the result. There is a saying that the end justifies the means. Those who heed this saying do not care about the way of doing things; they care only for their purpose. This concept is deplorable and needs to be condemned.

Christians may think that as long as their intention is to do a work for the Lord, they need not care about the means used to accomplish it. For example, in preaching the gospel they may use worldly methods or entertainment. Therefore, I want to emphasize that in the Bible God shows that He cares more for our way than He cares for our purpose. As a heavenly ambassador, Paul also cared more for the way of doing things than he cared for the purpose. This is the reason he describes the way he entreated the Corinthians, but does not mention the purpose. May we all learn of him in this matter.

THE MEEKNESS AND FORBEARANCE OF CHRIST

In 10:1 Paul says that he entreats through the meekness and forbearance of Christ. This indicates that the apostle, being firmly attached to Christ (1:21) and one with Him, lives by Him, behaving in His virtues. All the virtues of Christ were becoming Paul's virtues. Meekness was a virtue in the humanity of Christ by the divine life. Christ's meekness is not a simple matter, for it is in His humanity and by the divine life. When He was on earth, He lived a human life by the divine life. Through this mingling of divinity and humanity the virtue of meekness was manifested.

The principle is the same with Christ's virtue of forbearance. Forbearance is another virtue of Christ lived in His humanity by the divine life. Do you know the difference between meekness and forbearance? To have the virtue of meekness means that you do not invade others or fight with them. Instead, you are willing to give in. The meek give in to others. But those who are strong in a natural way fight and refuse to give in. At the least, they want to stand their ground. The meek, however, give in, do not fight, and do not invade others' territory. To have forbearance means that you are willing to allow others to invade you. This means that to have forbearance is to suffer affliction and injury. To have meekness is not to invade others, but to give in to them; to have forbearance means that you are willing to be invaded by others. These are two of the virtues Christ lived in His humanity by the divine life.

Because Paul lived Christ, the virtues of Christ became his. The phrase "through the meekness and forbearance of Christ" indicates that Paul was one with Christ and took Christ as his life. Therefore, he entreated the believers not by himself, but entreated them through the virtues of Christ, in particular through Christ's meekness and forbearance. Paul entreated others by Christ, in Christ, and with Christ.

PAUL'S PERSON

After telling us the way he entreats, Paul goes on to speak of the kind of person he was. He says in verse 1, "I myself, Paul,...who as to appearance am indeed lowly among you, but absent am of good courage toward you." This description of Paul's person fits in with the subject of 2 Corinthians. The subject of this Epistle is the kind of person Paul was and the kind of life he lived. Paul did not care that much for the work he did; he cared much more for his person and living. As we have pointed out, in chapter ten he does not even mention the purpose of his entreaty. He was so concerned about the way he entreated that he did not mention why he entreated.

Regarding his person, Paul says that he was lowly when among the Corinthians, but was of good courage when absent from them. The apostle was bold, having courage to speak out in his Epistle the real situation among the Corinthians. We can learn from Paul to be meek when in the presence of others, but to be bold when we are absent from them. When you are with a particular person, you should not be too bold. However, you may be bold in writing a letter to that person. Some may say, "I can be bold when I am present with a person; however, when I am absent from that one, my boldness seems to evaporate." This indicates that your boldness in that person's presence is not proper. If your boldness does not evaporate after you have left a person's presence, then it may be a proper kind of boldness. Paul was very bold in writing to the Corinthians. But if we could be in Paul's presence, we would find him meek and lowly.

There is much for us to learn from the way Paul conducted himself. Whenever we want to treat a person in a bold way, we should wait until we are no longer in that person's presence and see if our boldness remains. This was Paul's way of dealing with the Corinthians. He entreated them through the meekness and forbearance of Christ, and he was lowly among them, but he was bold in writing to them. In these verses we see Paul's meekness, forbearance, lowliness, and proper boldness.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

In verse 3 Paul goes on to speak of spiritual warfare: "For walking in flesh, we do not war according to flesh." Being human, the apostles are still in the flesh. Hence, they walk in flesh. But they do not walk, especially in the spiritual warfare, according to flesh. Rather, they walk according to spirit (Rom. 8:4).

In verse 3 Paul seems to be saying, "Because we are still in the old creation, we are still in flesh. But we do not walk according to flesh. In particular, we do not war according to flesh. I do not deny that I am still in the flesh,

but I am not a person who lives, speaks, and acts according to the flesh. On the contrary, I walk according to spirit. Therefore, in the matter of spiritual warfare, I fight according to spirit. Corinthians, you have been altogether mistaken in thinking that we apostles fight according to flesh. No, our warfare is according to spirit."

In verses 4 and 5 Paul continues, "For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but powerful to God to the overthrow of strongholds, overthrowing reasonings and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God, and taking captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ." Since spiritual warfare is not against flesh, but against spiritual forces (Eph. 6:12), the weapons should not be fleshly but spiritual. These are powerful to overthrow the strongholds of the enemy.

Reasonings and thoughts are in the mind and of the mind. These are the strongholds of Satan, God's adversary, within the mind of those who are disobedient to God. Through spiritual warfare, the reasonings must be overthrown and every thought taken captive to obey Christ.

The high things in verse 5 refer to haughty things within the reprobate mentality against the knowledge of God. These must also be overthrown by spiritual weapons.

The goal of this spiritual fighting is to tear down Satan's strongholds in the reprobate human mind. These strongholds are the proud thoughts, the high thoughts and imaginations in man's mind. The haughty imaginations and proud thoughts are strongholds built up by Satan in the human mind. These stand against the knowledge of God. The goal of our fighting is to tear down these strongholds. People are rebellious against God because of these strongholds, these high reasonings and haughty thoughts. Therefore, we must fight against these things so that every thought may be taken captive unto the obedience of Christ.

In verse 6 Paul says, "And being ready to avenge all disobedience, whenever your obedience is fulfilled." The word avenge here is a bold and severe word in the way of blame. Paul's reference to obedience indicates that our

obedience affords a base for the Lord to deal with others' disobedience.

In Paul's time a number of Jews believed in Christ and then assumed the position of teachers. In their teaching they gave a prominent place to the law. As a result, in their teaching there was a mixture of the New Testament gospel with the Old Testament law. This caused trouble, especially when the gospel came to the Gentile world under the apostleship of Paul.

The Judaizers, those who confused the New Testament with the Old Testament, did not agree with Paul. In fact, there was a great discrepancy between Paul's teaching and theirs. Some of them went to the Gentiles deliberately to visit the churches in order to propagate their Judaistic teachings. As a result, they caused a great deal of damage to the churches. According to the books of Galatians and 1 and 2 Corinthians, we see that these Judaizers went to Galatia and Achaia, stirring up the believers and causing trouble. In 1 and 2 Corinthians we see that the believers at Corinth had been infused with Judaistic teachings and stirred up by them.

Paul's word in 10:5 concerning reasonings and high things rising up against the knowledge of God was spoken with reference to the teachings of the Judaizers. This was the background of what Paul wrote in this verse. We have seen that Paul says that the warfare of the apostles was to overthrow strongholds, reasonings, and high things that rise up against the genuine and proper New Testament knowledge of God. Furthermore, Paul says that the goal of his warfare was to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. In particular Paul has in mind those thoughts which have their source in Judaistic teachings.

On the one hand, the Judaistic teachers claimed to be of Christ. On the other hand, they taught many things concerning the law that actually were against Christ. They believed in Christ and yet taught matters that were contrary to Him. They did not have a full surrender to Christ or an absolute obedience to Him. In their thinking there was something that needed to be subdued. Therefore,

Paul's teaching in 2 Corinthians is a fighting against Judaistic thoughts, reasonings, and imaginations. It is a fighting to take captive to the obedience of Christ those thoughts which were influenced by Judaistic teachings.

Verse 6 indicates that among the saints in Corinth there were some who, under the influence of Judaistic reasonings and thoughts, were rebellious. For this reason, Paul said that he was ready to avenge all disobedience when the obedience of the Corinthians had been fulfilled. The disobedience in this verse refers to that of the Judaistic teachings. Paul's readiness to avenge this disobedience had a condition, and this condition was the obedience of the Corinthians. It was first necessary for them to become absolutely obedient to the gospel of Christ. They could not be partly for the New Testament gospel and partly for the Old Testament law. To be even partially for the law was rebellion and disobedience. When the Corinthians became utterly obedient to the New Testament gospel, the situation would be right for Paul to avenge all disobedience. The situation in Corinth would afford him a base to deal with the disobedience of the Judaizers. This is the proper interpretation of this portion of the Word.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-ONE

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 10:7-18

In 10:7-18 Paul speaks concerning the measure of God's rule. Let us cover this portion verse by verse.

ASPECTS OF APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

Verse 7 says, "You look at things according to appearance. If anyone has confidence in himself to be of Christ, let him account this again as to himself, that even as he is of Christ, so also are we." This is a frank word, quite different from the words in chapters six and seven. No doubt, the Judaizers were those who had confidence in themselves that they were of Christ. Although these Judaizers were Christians, they were not willing to be one with Paul in his ministry. They claimed to be of Christ. Therefore, Paul sought to make it clear that the apostles were surely of Christ also. This indicates that to be of Christ is an important matter. It is vital to the Christian life and ministry.

In verses 8 and 9 Paul says, "For if ever I should boast somewhat more abundantly concerning our authority, which the Lord gave for building up and not for your overthrow, I shall not be put to shame; that I may not seem as if to terrify you through the letters." Verse 8 indicates that in the past Paul did say something to the Corinthians concerning his apostolic authority. Apostolic authority is not for ruling over the believers, as in the natural sense, but for building them up.

In verse 9 Paul speaks of the believers being terrified

through letters. This may refer to Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians. In that Epistle Paul did refer to his apostolic authority. Some of the Corinthians may have regarded that word as terrifying. But here Paul indicates that it should not be terrifying to them.

In verse 10 Paul goes on to say, "Because his letters indeed, he says, are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible." This confirms what we said in a previous message about Paul being lowly when present with the Corinthians. He was meek and not at all strong physically. Furthermore, his speech, his utterance, was contemptible, or of no account. The Greek word rendered contemptible means literally "made nothing of."

In verse 11 Paul continues, "Let such a one account this, that such as we are in word by letters when absent, such also we are when present in deed." Although Paul seemed different in presence from what he was in his letters, actually he was the same. We should learn from him not to be political or naturally polite, but to be flexible. When we are present with others, we should not be that bold or strong. This, however, does not mean that we really are weak or unknowing. Rather, we may want to keep from offending others unnecessarily. Nevertheless, at times we may need to utter something which seems bold or strong. Sometimes we need to be strong in writing, but we are not willing to be strong. At other times we should not be so bold in someone's presence, yet we are bold. This indicates that we are not wise, flexible, or forbearing. Let us all learn to be real, not political. At the same time, we must learn to be flexible. On the one hand, we should try not to hurt others' feelings; on the other hand, we may need at times to speak frankly in truth with some degree of boldness.

In verse 12 Paul says, "For we do not dare to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves with themselves, do not understand." Those who are entangled or ensnared in themselves do not have a proper understanding.

NOT BOASTING WITHOUT MEASURE

Verse 13 says, "But we will not boast without measure, but according to the measure of the rule which the God of measure has apportioned to us, to reach even as far as you." The apostle is bold, but he is not bold without limit. This shows that he is under the restriction of the Lord. His boasting is according to the measure of the rule which the God of measure, the ruling God, has apportioned to him. Paul's ministry to the Gentile world, including Corinth, was according to the measure of God (Eph. 3:1-2, 8; Gal. 2:8). Hence, his boast is also within this limit, not without measure, as that of the Judaistic teachers. The word rule in verse 13 literally means a measuring rod, as a rule used by a carpenter.

We should never boast without measure. In giving a testimony of what we have learned of the Lord, we should have a limit, a measure. The word measure in verse 13 indicates being ruled by God. God has allotted us just so much for our work and experience. Furthermore, He has given us just so much to enjoy. Therefore, when we give a testimony about our work, experience, or enjoyment of the Lord, we must testify within measure, that is, within a certain limit.

In giving a testimony or a report we should never exaggerate. However, the reports in certain Christian publications are exaggerations; those reports go beyond measure, beyond limit, without restriction. Thus, in testifying of our experience, we must stay within the measure God has given us. We should not boast without measure, beyond measure, but according to the rule which the God of measure has apportioned to us. There is One who is ruling and measuring. This One is the God of measure, the God who rules. Therefore, we must stay within the limits of God's ruling, of God's measuring. Paul's words "reach even as far as you" indicate that his coming to the Corinthians was under God's ruling and measuring.

Verse 14 continues, "For we do not, as not reaching to you, overstretch ourselves, for we were the first to come even as far as unto you in the gospel of Christ." In contrast

to the Judaistic teachers, Paul and the other apostles did not overstretch themselves. They were the first to go to Europe, and hence to the Corinthians, with the gospel. If the Judaizers had gone there first, probably the apostles would not have gone, and that would have been the sign that Europe had not been measured to them under God's ruling. This is related to Paul's point in arguing with the Judaizers.

In verses 15 and 16 Paul says, "Not boasting without measure in others' labors, but having hope, your faith growing, to be magnified among you according to our rule unto abundance, to preach the gospel unto the parts beyond you, not to boast in another's rule in things made ready." Here we see that the apostles have hope that through the growth of the faith of the Corinthian believers, their ministry will be magnified (in the sense of praise), by being enlarged and increased abundantly, yet still according to the rule, the measure, that God has apportioned to them. Paul hoped to be magnified among the Corinthians according to the limit of God's measuring.

GOD'S RESTRICTION

From verses 13, 14, and 15 we see that although we expect the Lord's work to spread, we must learn how to be under God's restriction. Do not expect a spread that is without measure. That kind of spread would certainly not be within the limit of a walk according to Spirit. From experience we can testify that if we spread the work according to the Spirit, there will always be a certain limit. Inwardly we shall have the consciousness that the Lord intends to spread the work only to a certain extent. Furthermore, outwardly, in the environment, the Lord may cause matters to restrict the spread of the work. Therefore, inwardly we do not have the peace to spread the work beyond a certain point, and outwardly the environment does not allow us to go beyond a particular boundary line.

The young people are not yet very much into the Lord's work. Nevertheless, I would encourage them to keep this

word within them, for one day they will experience it. We all need to learn that in serving the Lord and in working with God, there is always a limit. This is also true in the service of the church.

The Lord is especially interested in restricting the young people. If the young ones do not have a heart to serve the Lord, He will stir them up to serve Him. But once they have been stirred up, He will limit them. Human nature does not like this kind of limitation. For example, both in our sleeping and in our activity we may not like limitations. When, spiritually speaking, we are asleep, God will stir us up. But when we become too active, He will restrict us. I know some young people who have been offended because God has done this to them. A young brother may want to be a leader among the young people. If he becomes a leader, he may then want to be a deacon or an elder in the church. In these matters he may expect to make swift progress. God's way, however, is first to speed us up and then to slow us down, first to raise us up and then to lower us down. When we are down, He will lift us up. But when we get too far up, He will lower us down. Hence, God's way of dealing with us is up and down, down and up. If we can take God's ups and downs, we shall eventually become useful in His work.

Many young people cannot tolerate God's ups and downs. After a few of these ups and downs, they want to quit. Their attitude may be, "If God wants me up, then let me go up to the heavens and stay there until the Lord Jesus comes back. But if God wants me down, let me stay down. But I don't like going up and down, down and up." This unhappiness with God's ups and downs is an expression of the disposition of many young people.

God does not want us to be always up or to be always down. Even in nature the alternating of day and night testifies of this. There is no such thing as an unending day or night. Rather, there is the alternating of day and night, night and day. God did not create us so that we would have a day or night that would last for many years. This may be according to our way, but it is not according to God's way.

LEARNING TO TAKE THE LORD'S RESTRICTION

God has many ways to bring us down. Some young people have been brought down by their married life. Before a particular brother was married, he may have been like an eagle soaring in the air. He could easily talk about the wonderful, glorious church life. But not long after his wedding, it seems that the church life is no longer glorious. God is using his marriage to calm down such an excited brother. In some cases, such a brother may stay down for a long period of time after his marriage. But eventually he is up again, although not in the same excited way as before. This is a sign of improvement.

Sometimes God may use one of the elders to bring you down. If such a thing happens to you, you should realize that God is the one who is putting you down, not the elder. He does it by means of the elder. Without having any intention, that elder may speak a certain word to you, and that word lowers you down. God deals with us in this way because He is a God of measure, apportioning to us a certain measure.

I realize that it is a serious matter to be down. Some brothers may be down for such a long time that it seems that they will never rise up again. But perhaps after another period of time, they will once again be up. None of us should presume to say what another brother's situation will be. It seems that this being up and down is beyond our control or management. Yes, we do not control this or manage it. Therefore, we all must realize that God is in control and that this is His way to keep us within our measure.

In this country the Lord's recovery has spread to a certain degree. Yet it seems that there has been a limit to this spread. However, this does not mean that the Lord will permanently stop the spread of the recovery. The point here is that, in our concept, once the Lord's recovery begins to spread, it should spread farther and farther without restriction. However, this is not God's concept.

We should not think that Paul was so spiritual that he was altogether different from us. Even he had to learn to take the Lord's restriction. For example, Paul wanted to go

to Rome, but he did not expect to go there in bonds. Furthermore, he told the believers at Rome that he expected to go to Spain by way of them (Rom. 15:24). Paul never went to Spain, and he arrived in Rome in bonds. Those bonds were the Lord's measure, His limitation. God did not measure out Rome to Paul in a free way. Instead, God led him there as a prisoner. Yes, Paul was in Rome, but he was there in prison. That imprisonment was a restriction. Rome was not Paul's territory in a way without restriction. God is sovereign, and whatever happened to Paul was under God's sovereignty. This means that Paul's bonds and imprisonment were God's sovereign restriction. Paul was willing to be subject to God's measuring. He neither transgressed this restriction nor rebelled against it. In this matter, he did not kick against the pricks.

ACTING WITHIN HIS JURISDICTION

Based on this principle of God's measuring, Paul told the Corinthians that whatever he did and spoke was not beyond his measure. Paul always acted and behaved within his measure. Using today's terminology, he acted within his jurisdiction. In contrast to the Judaizers, he never reached beyond his jurisdiction.

In verses 13 through 15 Paul seems to be saying, "Corinthians, as a church you have suffered a great deal because of the coming of the Judaistic preachers. These preachers, although Christians, are not willing to give up Judaism. On the one hand, they preach Christ; on the other hand, they still teach the Mosaic law. Therefore, they cause trouble and damage the church life. You Corinthians have been influenced by them. Therefore, you must realize that these Judaizers should never have come to Corinth. God did not measure the city of Corinth to them; Corinth is not in their jurisdiction. To be honest about it, Corinth is my jurisdiction, my territory." This is Paul's concept in these verses. However, it was difficult for him to speak about this in a direct, frank manner. But there is the implication here that Paul condemned the Judaizers for

coming to Corinth. Thus, Paul seems to be saying, "We do not overreach ourselves, as the Judaizers do. We were the first to come to you with the gospel of Christ. That was a sign that Corinth has been measured to us. We came according to God's ruling. God has apportioned Corinth to us, not to the Judaizers. Actually, God has not apportioned anything to the Judaizers. They should not go anywhere. Their movements are altogether illegal before God and without the proper jurisdiction." This is the basic thought in these verses, and this was the feeling in Paul's spirit as he was writing.

The apostles always moved according to God's ruling. Whatever God measured out to them became their jurisdiction, and others should not interfere with it. If God had apportioned a certain territory to the Judaizers, the apostles would not have gone to that territory, for in so doing they would have overreached themselves. This is what Paul is saying here.

Today many preachers and teachers overreach themselves and interfere with the jurisdiction of others. This overreaching and interference always causes trouble.

STAYING WITHIN THE MEASURE APPORTIONED BY GOD

In the church service we need to realize that God has only measured out so much to us, and we should not overstretch ourselves. We need to know our limitation, our jurisdiction, and not go beyond it into others' territory. Like Paul, we should move and act according to our rule, that is, according to how much God has measured to us.

Paul knew from the Macedonian call he received that Corinth was under his rule, his measure. We know from Acts 16 that Paul became clear that God had called him to Europe. He came to Achaia with the gospel of Christ according to God's ruling. Both Macedonia and Achaia were under Paul's rule. Thus, the Judaizers should not have come into this territory to cause trouble. This was the feeling deep within Paul as he was writing these verses.

In this section of 2 Corinthians Paul is vindicating his

apostolic authority. This authority is related to jurisdiction. If Paul did not have any jurisdiction, what would be his authority? In his vindication of his apostolic authority, Paul conducted himself so as not to overstep the boundary of his measure. He is a good example of a person fully under God's restriction.

I encourage the young people especially to study this portion of the Word and learn from it how to conduct themselves in the church service and how to move in the Lord's recovery. Young people, you must know your rule, your limit. This means that you must know how much God has measured to you, how much He has apportioned to you. This restriction, this limitation, is a very practical dealing with our flesh. Our natural man wants to be without limitation. However, God knows our problem. Therefore, He sets up boundaries and restrictions so that we may stay within the measure He has apportioned to us.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-TWO

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

(3)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 11:1-15

As the book of 1 Corinthians indicates, there were many problems among the Corinthians. But through Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, many of them were brought back to the Lord. They experienced a further reconciliation to God. Some may have even been brought back to God in a full way. But although many problems had been solved, one problem still remained--the matter of Paul's apostleship. The most subtle thing in a local church is having questions concerning the apostles, concerning those who minister Christ to the churches.

Paul kept this point until the last because the dealing with other matters was a condition necessary for dealing with this matter. If the saints still had many problems and if the situation among them had not been calmed down, it would not have been appropriate for Paul to speak about his apostleship. It would not have been the right time for him to vindicate his apostolic authority. However, since at least most of the Corinthians had become calm and the problems among them had been solved, Paul realized that the time was now right to deal with the last problem, the problem the believers had with respect to his apostleship. The last problem in any local church is always the problem with the ministering ones, with the apostles.

Because it is difficult for anyone to vindicate himself, Paul found it difficult to vindicate his apostolic authority. If he had been vindicating the apostolic authority of Peter, the matter would have been much easier. It is always

easier to speak on behalf of someone else than it is to speak directly concerning ourselves.

In chapters ten through thirteen Paul is performing the difficult task of vindicating his apostleship and thereby solving the last problem that existed in the church in Corinth. If this problem were not solved, the church in Corinth would still be sick. Any church that has a problem concerning the apostles is unhealthy. Because the church in Corinth had a problem with Paul, the ministering one, that church was sick. Therefore, the last four chapters of 2 Corinthians were written for the purpose of solving this problem. It would have been much better if someone else, such as Timothy or Peter, could have done this for Paul. However, no one could replace Paul in writing these chapters.

INFLUENCED BY JUDAISTIC TEACHINGS

In chapters ten through thirteen Paul is actually dealing with the problem caused by the Judaizers. This means that here he is dealing with the Judaizers themselves, who were a serious problem. In dealing with the Judaizers, Paul first says in chapter ten that the weapons of the apostles' warfare are not fleshly, but powerful to God to the overthrow of strongholds. Elsewhere in chapter ten Paul goes on to say that whereas he remained within his limit, the Judaizers went beyond their limit.

In chapter ten Paul first indicates to the Corinthians that they had been indoctrinated, that at least they had been influenced by Judaistic teachings. According to Paul's word in 10:5, those teachings were reasonings and high things rising up against the knowledge of God. Such rebellious thoughts had been injected into the Corinthians and had caused them to be rebellious. Therefore, there was the need of spiritual warfare to tear down the strongholds of the high reasonings and to make every thought captive unto the obedience of Christ.

The source of this rebellion was the Judaizers. The Judaizers had clearly overstepped themselves. God, according to His sovereignty, had not apportioned the

territory of Achaia to the Judaizers. Actually, God had apportioned nothing to them. Nevertheless, overstretching themselves, they went out on their own and as a result interfered with the apostle's jurisdiction.

In vindicating himself against the Judaizers, Paul realized that it was not becoming to mention them openly in writing. This is the reason many Christians have a difficult time understanding chapter ten. When I was young, I read this chapter again and again without understanding what Paul was talking about. At that time, I had no idea of the background of this chapter. One day I came to know the history and the background, and this enabled me to know Paul's feeling and touch his spirit in this chapter. Then I began to understand 2 Corinthians 10 in the way explained above. Now we can see that Paul wrote this chapter in order to deal with the Judaizers, who had stirred up rebellion among the believers at Corinth. Verses 4 through 6 of 2 Corinthians 10 do not refer to unbelievers, but refer to the believers at Corinth.

The apostles went out to preach the gospel and to teach the truth within God's measure and according to His rule. Their activity truly was of God. Then the Judaizers overstepped themselves and violated the apostles' jurisdiction. That kind of overstepping always brings in rebellion. This was the cause of the rebellion within the believers at Corinth, and made it necessary for Paul to fight against the high thoughts and rebellious reasonings. In chapter ten Paul is actually engaging in warfare against this kind of rebellion. In this chapter we see rebellion and also the overstepping of the proper measure.

SOME STRONG WORDS

Although Paul is strong in chapter ten, he is even stronger in chapter eleven. In 11:13-15 he says concerning the Judaizers, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transfiguring themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself transfigures himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if also his ministers transfigure themselves as ministers of

righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." The Greek word rendered "transfiguring" in verse 13 also means fashioning. The false apostles, being deceitful, fashioned themselves into the appearance of the real apostles, who are true in every way.

Verse 14 indicates that Satan is the source of the false apostles. They follow him in his deceitfulness to frustrate God's economy. God is light, and His angels are of light. On the contrary, Satan is darkness, and all his followers are in darkness. There is no fellowship between light and darkness (6:14).

The ministers of righteousness in verse 15 are the true apostles, those who carry out the ministry of righteousness (3:9). Whatever the ministers of Satan do is altogether unrighteous. Righteousness has no partnership with lawlessness (6:14).

In 11:5 Paul refers to the Judaizers as super-apostles: "For I account that I am inferior in nothing to the super-apostles." By using the term super-apostles, that is, apostles in surpassing degree, Paul is referring ironically to the false apostles, as mentioned in verse 13 and 12:11. These false apostles surpass the degree of the genuineness of the apostles. These are the Judaizers who came to Corinth to preach another Jesus with a different spirit and a different gospel (v. 4).

The Corinthians thought that the Judaizers were wonderful and that they did an excellent work in helping the Corinthians. Actually, the Judaizers did exactly the same work as Satan. They transfigured themselves as ministers of righteousness, into apostles of Christ. Therefore, Paul uses four terms to describe them: false apostles, deceitful workers, super-apostles, and ministers of Satan.

Paul also refers to the Judaizers in verse 4: "For if indeed he who comes preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different gospel, which you did not accept, you bear well with him." Another Jesus means another person; a different spirit means a spirit of a

different nature; and a different gospel means a gospel of a different kind.

The Judaizers used many of the same terms the apostles used: Jesus, spirit, and gospel. Claiming that they were apostles of Christ, they preached Jesus and ministered a certain kind of spirit. Furthermore, they claimed that what they taught was the gospel. However, they had another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel.

No doubt, these Judaizers were eloquent and very appealing. They had much knowledge of the Old Testament, and they also knew the New Testament gospel. But in speaking of them Paul was bold, calling them false apostles, deceitful workers, ministers of Satan. He even gave them the nickname "super-apostles."

In verse 4 Paul tells the Corinthians that they were bearing well with the Judaizers. The Greek word for "well" also means beautifully, ideally. It is used here ironically. In verse 1 the apostle expresses his desire that the Corinthian believers, who were bearing with him, would bear more with him. Now in this verse he refers them to their bearing beautifully with the false apostles. Paul's idea is this: "Since you bear with the false apostles so well, so beautifully, so ideally, please bear more with me." This is why he uses the word "for" at the beginning of this verse.

TODAY'S JUDAIZERS

Do you think that the situation we face today is different from that faced by Paul? Our situation is quite similar. In principle, there are Judaizers today, just as there were at the apostles' time.

When I was young, I thought that the apostolic age must have been excellent, marvelous, and wonderful. Eventually I learned that the situation at that time was the same in principle as the situation today. If we understand this, we shall not be disappointed when we encounter opposition. Some praise the Lord for the recovery. However, when they consider the opposition, they may be deeply bothered. I would encourage you not to

be bothered, for the situation we face today is the same in principle as the one faced by Paul during the apostolic age.

FIGHTING TO SUBDUE REBELLIOUS THOUGHTS

In chapter eleven of 2 Corinthians, Paul had to deal with the situation in a church that had been directly raised up by him. Certain false apostles, deceitful workers, ministers of Satan, visited the church in Corinth and stirred up rebellion against Paul and his teaching. Even though Paul had come to Corinth first and had brought many Corinthians to the Lord through his preaching, the Corinthian believers still accepted the false apostles.

Acts 16 records how Paul came to Macedonia. He was preaching in Asia Minor, in a region God had measured out to him. At a certain time, Paul felt deep within that he should continue his preaching elsewhere. However, he did not know what to do or where to go. He may have thought that he should not go into Europe, but should remain in Asia. Then he had a dream of a Macedonian saying, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us" (Acts 16:9). After considering that dream, Paul concluded that God was calling him to minister in Europe. Thus, he preached the gospel in Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, and Corinth. As a result of this preaching, a church was raised up in Corinth. Sometime afterward, the Judaizers came to Corinth and caused trouble.

It is hard to believe that the saints at Corinth would accept the teaching of the Judaizers. Nevertheless, it is a fact that at least a number of the Corinthians accepted these teachings and were either stirred up or at least influenced by them. Those teachings caused some to doubt Paul's apostleship and to oppose him and his ministry.

We have seen that Paul had helped the Corinthians to solve a number of problems. But the problem concerning the relationship between the believers at Corinth and the Apostle Paul still needed to be solved. Of course, not all the Corinthians had a problem with Paul. Only some of them had a problem. But even this made it necessary for Paul to devote four chapters to dealing with this problem.

We have seen that Paul is strong in chapter ten and even stronger in chapter eleven, where he speaks of false apostles, deceitful workers, ministers of Satan, and super-apostles. If you were a believer at Corinth who had accepted the teaching of the Judaizers, would you have taken Paul's word concerning false apostles? It is not very likely. This was the reason Paul was fighting to subdue the rebellious thoughts among the Corinthians.

PAUL'S WAY OF FIGHTING

Let us now go on to see Paul's way of fighting the battle against Judaistic teachings. In 11:1 he says, "I would that you bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed, you do bear with me." The use of the word "foolishness" is an ironic reference to the apostle's enforced self-vindication and boasting. Here Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians, "Please bear with me in a little foolishness. In all the foregoing, I have been wise. Now I intend to speak in a foolish way. Before I do this, I ask that you bear with me in a little foolishness. I shall not boast or speak foolishly without measure. There will be a limit to what I intend to say."

In verse 2 Paul continues, "For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ." This jealousy can be compared to the jealousy of a husband over his wife. The word "virgin" in this verse means to be the bride for the Bridegroom (John 3:29), the wife of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7).

By the sounding out of the word recorded in verse 2, Satan is defeated, and all the Judaizers are put down. Whether in Paul's time or in ours, the Judaizers never minister anything to us that causes us to treasure the Lord Jesus as the One who is dear and precious. On the contrary, what is ministered by the Judaizers stirs up our zeal for religion. The Judaizers today may say something like this, "This teaching is heretical and destroys our religion. It is contrary to the tradition we inherited from our fathers." The Judaizers throughout the generations and the centuries have sought to protect their religion and to hold on to traditional doctrine.

The Judaizers who came to Corinth may have said, "Yes, we should believe in Jesus Christ. But how can we forsake the law given through Moses by God? This man Paul is heretical. He has destroyed the law, and he is against circumcision. This means the end of our religion. Was God wrong in giving the law? Were Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Elijah, and all the other prophets wrong? Is Paul the only one who is right? Paul, who came to you as an apostle, must be condemned." This is the way the Judaizers spoke in Paul's time, and this is the way they talk today. Those who oppose the Lord's recovery often say something like this: "Do you think that everyone and everything is wrong except you? Are your teachings the only teachings that are correct? We shall rise up against the local church and defeat it. This thing must be terminated."

STIRRED TO LOVE THE LORD JESUS

Because Paul was wise, he did not argue with the Judaizers concerning doctrine. Instead, he told the Corinthians that he was jealous over them with a jealousy of God. He went on to say that he had betrothed them to one husband in order to present a pure virgin to Christ. What a wonderful way of speaking! Paul's word in verse 2 is very touching. It touches our heart in a deep way and stirs up our love for the Lord Jesus. Very often the life-study messages touch our hearts in the same way. After reading a few pages of a message, the tender feeling within you for the Lord Jesus is stirred up, and you realize afresh how dear and precious He is. However, sometimes your theological and doctrinal mind may be troubled and raise questions about the Trinity or about Christ being the Spirit. You may wonder about modalism. You may question whether the ministry in the Lord's recovery is trustworthy. But after reading a portion of a life-study message, you once again begin to feel that as the Bridegroom the Lord Jesus is lovely and precious. Spontaneously you say, "O Lord Jesus, dear Bridegroom, I love You. Lord, thank You for Your word, for Your ministry, and for Your recovery." But after a while you

may begin to wonder about the denominations and ask, "Are all the denominations wrong? Is it really true that there should only be one church in one city? What, then, about all the other Christians?" The Judaizers stir up questions, but the genuine ministry stirs up our love for the Lord Jesus as our Bridegroom.

Today's Judaizers seek to shake the believers away from simply loving the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, we should turn from the Mosaic law and from the prophets and focus our attention on the Lord. We need to see from 11:2 that we have been betrothed to one husband in order to be presented as a pure virgin to Christ. Therefore, we should say, "Our dear Lord Jesus is our unique Husband, and I am part of His virgin. I don't care for doctrine or theology. I care only for the ministry that ministers Christ to me. He is the pleasant and dear One whom I love."

My burden in this message is to plant deeply into the saints Paul's word in verse 2: "I betrothed you to one husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ." We have seen that in chapter eleven Paul has some strong things to say concerning the Judaizers, the false apostles. But before he utters such words, he reminds the believers at Corinth that he has engaged them to one Husband, not to present them as students of theology, but to present them as a pure virgin to Christ.

SINGLENESS AND PURITY TOWARD CHRIST

In verse 3 Paul goes on to say, "But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts should be corrupted from the singleness and the purity which is toward Christ." The Greek word rendered "singleness" can also be translated simplicity. It refers here to the believers' single-hearted loyalty, single-minded faithfulness, toward Christ. Paul's concern was that the thoughts of the believers at Corinth would be corrupted. They were a pure virgin to Christ, but as the serpent deceived Eve, so their thoughts might be corrupted from the singleness and purity toward Christ. In fact, some of the Corinthians had already been corrupted in this way. Thus, here Paul seems to be saying, "Dear

Corinthians, my concern is that you would keep your singleness and purity toward Christ. You should forget about Judaistic teachings and religion and be single toward Christ. Christ is your dear Bridegroom, and you simply need to love Him."

It is not the goal of the Lord's recovery to recover doctrine or theology. It is to recover Christ Himself as the unique Husband for us to love. We should belong only to Him. As long as we have been brought as a pure virgin to this Husband and love Him, appreciate Him, and belong to Him, we shall be preserved. This will keep us, sanctify us saturate us, and transform us. As we shall see, in the last four chapters of this Epistle, there is nothing doctrinal or theological. What we have here is a lovely Person, the unique, universal Husband. We all have been presented as a pure virgin to Him. We are for Him, and we should be attracted to Him, loving Him, appreciating Him, and treasuring Him. This will preserve us and help us to be sanctified and transformed.

The Lord's recovery is not a matter of theology, tradition, religion, or practices. Rather, it is a matter of a living Person, the Lord Jesus Christ as our Bridegroom. He has attracted us, and we have been presented as a pure virgin to Him. Now we should care only for Him, love Him, and allow no one to replace Him in our hearts. Furthermore, our love for Him should be pure, our mind should be single, and our entire being should be focused on Him. This will preserve, sanctify, saturate, and transform us. Praise the Lord, this is His recovery!

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-THREE

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

(4)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 11:1-15

In 11:3 Paul says, "But I fear lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your thoughts should be corrupted from the singleness and the purity which is toward Christ." Here the Apostle Paul indicates that the teachings of the Judaizers can be compared to the deceitful word spoken by the serpent to Eve in Genesis 3. In other words, Paul likens the activities of the Judaizers to the serpent's work on Eve. From reading Genesis 3 we know that the serpent distracted Eve from the enjoyment of the tree of life. The way he turned her away from the enjoyment of the tree of life was to point her to another tree, to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which issues in death.

TWO TREES

We have pointed out a number of times that the tree of life is simple. With this tree, there is just one element, and that element is life. The tree of life issues in life. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on the contrary, is complicated and also complicating. With this tree, we have good, evil, knowledge, and death.

The Bible as a whole is a development of these two trees. The tree of life signifies God in Christ as the Spirit to be life to us. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil signifies Satan as death. Satan is the power of death. The tree of knowledge of good and evil signifying Satan as death includes knowledge, good, and evil. The serpent

distracted Eve from the tree of life by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with its complications. Because Eve was distracted and caught, she lost her singleness and purity toward God. The result was that Eve fell, and death came in through the fall. This is the story of how the serpent distracted Eve from God's economy.

SATAN AND THE JUDAIZERS

In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul applies to the Judaizers and the church in Corinth what the serpent did to Eve. I believe that, deep in his spirit, Paul realized that these two matters were actually one and that what was happening in Corinth was a repetition of what took place in the garden of Eden. Eve was a wife, and the church in Corinth was a pure virgin, betrothed to one husband, Christ. For this reason, in 11:2 Paul says, "For I am jealous over you with a jealousy of God; for I betrothed you to one husband, to present a pure virgin to Christ." Furthermore, the wife in the garden of Eden was distracted by the subtle serpent. In Corinth the virgin was being distracted by Satan through the Judaizers. Elsewhere in this chapter, Paul associates the Judaizers with Satan. "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transfiguring themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself transfigures himself into an angel of light" (vv. 13-14). Here Paul indicates that the Judaizers, the false apostles, are ministers of Satan. Verse 15 says, "Therefore it is no great thing if also his ministers transfigure themselves as ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." For the Judaizers to be ministers of Satan means that they do not minister Christ to others. Instead, what they minister is actually Satan.

Paul could discern that the Judaizers had another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel. In verse 4 Paul says to the Corinthians, "For if indeed he who comes preaches another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different gospel, which you did not accept, you bear well with him." The Judaizers claimed to preach concerning

Jesus. However, Paul discerned that they preached another Jesus, not the Lord Jesus preached by Paul. Moreover, they claimed that they had a spirit. Maybe they claimed that this spirit was the Holy Spirit. Paul also discerned that their spirit was not the Holy Spirit; the Judaizers had a different spirit. Furthermore, the Judaizers claimed that what they preached was the gospel. But Paul declared that their gospel was another gospel.

When the serpent came to Eve, he did not openly deny God's word. Rather, the serpent said to the woman, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1). Here we see that the serpent asked, "Hath God said?" This kind of question seems, on the one hand, to recognize what God has said. On the other hand, it undermines God's word. By asking this question, the serpent injected poison into Eve to undermine God's speaking.

It was difficult for the Corinthian believers to discern the difference between the Jesus preached by Paul and the one preached by the Judaizers. The name was the same. But there was still the need of discernment. The same was true concerning the gospel. Paul came to the Corinthians with the gospel. The Judaizers also claimed to preach the gospel. But Paul could discern that the gospel preached by the Judaizers was different from that preached by the apostles. It was not the same gospel preached by Paul.

In principle, our situation today is the same as that of the Corinthians. The terminology, the definitions, and the titles of various matters may be the same. But if we exercise the proper discernment, we shall realize that actually they are not the same.

SEPARATED FROM THE ENJOYMENT OF GOD

I would like to point out something important related to the genuine gospel, the sincere spirit, and the real Jesus. Whenever there is the preaching of the genuine gospel and the real Jesus with a sincere spirit, the Lord Jesus will be ministered to others so that they may appreciate Him, love Him, follow Him, and take Him as everything. Throughout

the centuries, many have preached from the Bible and taught the Bible, but their preaching and teaching nevertheless distracted the believers from the precious Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In principle, such ones distract the believers in the same way as that taken by the serpent in Genesis 3.

God's goal is life. This life, signified by the tree of life, is God Himself in Christ as the Spirit. The way of the enemy, Satan, the serpent, is to distract people from this life. He seeks to turn them to knowledge, good, and evil, the issue of which is death. Death is separation from the enjoyment of God.

The proper understanding of death is that it denotes separation from the enjoyment of God. This means that if we do not have the enjoyment of God, we are in death. Likewise, if we are separated from the enjoyment of God, we shall die. This is revealed in a full way in Romans 8. Romans 8:6 says, "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace." In this verse death is separation from the enjoyment of God. Life is the opposite, for it is the enjoyment of God. When we have the enjoyment of God, there is no separation between us and God, we are in life, and life operates in us.

In distracting the believers from the tree of life, Satan seeks to separate us from the enjoyment of God as our life. For centuries the subtle serpent has been using teachings to keep God's chosen people from enjoying Him as their life. For the most part, these teachings are related to knowledge, good, and evil. But such teachings result in separation from God.

From the time of the apostles until today, there have been many teachings related to doctrine, theology, religion, practices, rituals, and the worship of God. Teachings like this are all on the line of the tree of knowledge. They do not bring us into the enjoyment of God. Instead, they separate us from this enjoyment.

When the Judaizers came to the churches in ancient times, these Judaizers made a pretense of being genuine. They could say that they were Hebrews, Israelites, the

seed of Abraham. They also claimed to preach Christ and to be ministers of Christ. Furthermore, they had a spirit and said that what they preached was the gospel. If you had been in Corinth when the Judaizers were there, could you have differentiated the genuine Jesus, the pure spirit, and the true gospel from the false ones? If you had been there, as one of the Corinthian believers, you may have been deceived. You should not have the confidence that you can discern what Paul could discern.

In chapter eleven of 2 Corinthians, Paul was strong and bold, saying that the Judaizers were false apostles, deceitful workers, ministers of Satan. Because they were not genuine apostles, Paul called them super-apostles, those that went beyond their measure and placed themselves on a superior level.

Today, by the Lord's mercy, we can realize that Paul certainly was the foremost apostle and was on the highest level of ministry. Nevertheless, the Judaizers claimed that they were superior to Paul. Their attitude was that Paul was nothing compared to them, that he was far less knowledgeable than they were. There is the suggestion, the hint, in 2 Corinthians that the Judaizers thought that they knew more than Paul. No wonder Paul called them super-apostles. This is, of course, an ironic term. Paul does not use this expression in a positive way. Actually, the Judaizers were not super-apostles, for they were not genuine apostles at all.

Do you not realize that our situation today is the same in principle as that in which Paul, the Judaizers, and the Corinthians were involved? Since our situation is the same, it is important to discern the genuine from the false.

THE SECRET OF DISCERNMENT

The best way to discern a matter is to discern according to life or death. We need to ask questions like this: Does this teaching help me to enjoy the Lord more and bring me into life, or does it cause the poison of death to be injected into me? You may find that if you accept a certain kind of teaching or preaching, taking it into you, immediately your

inward enjoyment of the Lord is cut off. Some things function like insulation that stops the flowing of the divine electricity. Therefore, we must learn to discern, to differentiate, matters by life and death.

Suppose today's Judaizers come to you preaching another Jesus. Do you have the assurance that you can discern between their Jesus and the real Jesus, the Jesus preached by Paul? I do not have the assurance that you would have the proper discernment. But thank the Lord for the secret of real discernment. This secret is to discern a preaching or teaching by whether or not it helps us to enjoy the Lord and gain more life supply. If anyone's preaching cuts us off from the enjoyment of the Lord, that preaching must be of the serpent, of Satan. But if someone's preaching helps us to enjoy the Lord, that preaching is of God. Therefore, according to the way revealed in Romans 8, we need to discern according to death or life. Many of those who have left the Lord's recovery have neither the life supply nor the enjoyment. This is an indication that they have taken in something that is not of the Lord.

The secret of discernment is to discern according to life or death. Any kind of teaching that causes your enjoyment of the Lord to cease is something of death, no matter how good that teaching seems to be. As long as someone's teaching or preaching deprives us of the enjoyment of the Lord as our life supply, that teaching is of the serpent. However, the genuine ministry of the Lord always strengthens us in the enjoyment of Him as our life supply.

We should not expect the number of Judaizers to be reduced. On the contrary, their number will probably increase. Whenever you hear them speak or read their books, keep in mind this principle of discerning according to life and death. Anything that cuts you off from the enjoyment of the Lord is of the serpent. But anything that causes your enjoyment of the Lord to increase is of the Spirit and of the New Testament ministry.

SATAN'S STRATEGY

Verses 2 and 3 of 2 Corinthians 11 are extremely

important. These verses indicate that Paul was clear concerning Satan's strategy. He realized that Satan's strategy is to spread a snare of doctrine in order to trap the saints. Paul, therefore, stayed away from this snare. Furthermore, he endeavored to keep the saints away from it by reminding them that he was jealous over them with the jealousy of God, and that he had betrothed them to one Husband to present them a pure virgin to Christ. He told the saints that the Lord does not want them to love anything or anyone in place of Him, but that He wants them to love Him uniquely, singly, wholly. In verse 3 Paul reveals his concern lest the Corinthian believers be deceived and lose their singleness and purity toward the Lord. From this verse we see that we need to be single and pure. Do not be complicated in your mind, in your understanding, by so many teachings and isms. Instead, keep yourself single and pure to enjoy the Lord as your life supply.

In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul speaks of another Jesus, a different spirit, a different gospel, false apostles, deceitful workers, Satan transfiguring himself into an angel of light, and Satan's ministers transfiguring themselves into ministers of righteousness. If we pray-read all these verses and have fellowship concerning them, we shall receive more light and gain more life supply.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FOUR

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

(5)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 11:16-33

Thus far we have covered three aspects of Paul's vindication of his apostolic authority: his warring according to the Spirit, the measure of God's rule, and his jealousy for Christ over the believers against the false apostles. In this message we shall consider a fourth aspect, Paul's compelled boasting. In a rather long section of 2 Corinthians (11:16--12:18) Paul vindicates his authority by a compelled boasting. Although he did not want to boast, it was necessary for him to do so.

APPEARING TO BE FOOLISH

In 11:16-33 Paul was not wise in a natural way, and he did not play politics. If he had been wise or political, he would not have boasted. However, Paul was willing to appear foolish by boasting.

We need to learn from Paul that there are times when we should not be so wise or political. Our natural politeness may be a kind of subtle wisdom. Instead, we need to be faithful, honest, and frank. But in so doing, we may appear foolish in the eyes of others.

In these verses Paul begs the Corinthians to bear with him in his foolishness. He asks them for permission to exercise foolishness in boasting. In verse 16 he says, "Again I say, let no one think me to be foolish; but if otherwise, accept me even as foolish, that I also may boast a little." Here Paul seems to be saying, "Bear with me in my foolishness. Up to this point I have been wise, but now I

must speak in a strong way. Before I do this, I ask you to bear with me in my foolishness. I am about to tell you something in a very frank way." Then Paul proceeds to use certain frank expressions and severe utterances.

A person exercising wisdom would never speak in this way. Instead, he would be polite and try to cause others to appreciate him. In the foregoing chapters Paul was wise, but here he appears to be foolish, boasting and using ironic expressions.

At times, in order to speak the truth, we may need to appear foolish to others. Martin Luther did this when he declared to degraded Christianity that justification is altogether by faith. When he did this, he exercised foolishness. Anyone who wants to maintain a high position in the religious hierarchy will never do this.

As we have indicated, in chapter eleven we see Paul's foolishness. He has already used terms such as false apostles, deceitful workers, and ministers of Satan. When we read such expressions, we all take sides with Paul. However, when he wrote this Epistle, it was not easy for him to use these terms. If you had been Paul, would you have had the boldness to write such an Epistle? Probably most of us would never write in this way. We may have spoken kindly about the Judaizers. We would not have had the boldness to use terms like false apostles, deceitful workers, or ministers of Satan. But because Paul was willing to appear foolish, he had the boldness to speak in this way.

Would you not say that verse 16 is the writing of a foolish person? First Paul says, "Let no one think me to be foolish." Then he goes on to say, "If otherwise, accept me even as foolish, that I also may boast a little." What would you think if a person came to your locality and spoke in this way? Would you not regard him as a very foolish person? A wise man would certainly speak differently.

In verses 17 and 18 Paul continues, "What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. Since many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast." Would you not say that Paul

seems to be beside himself when he declares that he will speak something not according to the Lord? We may think that if Paul is not speaking according to the Lord, he should be silent. How could an apostle speak something that is not according to the Lord? Nevertheless, Paul uttered such a word. If we had been present at the time, we may have advised him not to write in that way.

What does Paul mean by "this confidence" in verse 17? This confidence seems related to Paul's being foolish, to his being beside himself. If he did not have such a confidence, he certainly could not boast. Otherwise, he would have conducted himself like a very cultured person and would not have boasted at all. A person who has the confidence that he is not beside himself will never boast in the way Paul did in 2 Corinthians 11.

After speaking an ironic word to the Corinthians about bearing gladly with fools (v. 19), Paul says in verse 20, "For you bear it if anyone enslaves you, if anyone devours you, if anyone takes you, if anyone lifts himself up, if anyone beats you in the face." Here Paul seems to be saying, "If you gladly bear all this, can you not bear with me, one who is foolish and beside himself?"

A COMPARISON BETWEEN PAUL AND THE JUDAIZERS

In verse 21 Paul says, also ironically, "I speak by way of dishonor, as though we have been weak; but in whatever anyone is daring, I speak in foolishness, I also am daring." Here Paul seems to be saying, "I forget about my standing, my honor, and my glory. I speak by way of dishonor. I don't care what you think about me. I speak as though I have been weak." Paul then goes on to compare himself with the Judaizers, saying that he is also a Hebrew, an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, and a minister of Christ.

In these verses we have a comparison between Paul and the Judaizers. In verse 23 Paul speaks of being in labors more abundantly, in imprisonments more abundantly, in stripes excessively, and in deaths often. In verses 24 and 25 Paul says, "From the Jews five times I received forty

stripes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked; a night and day I have spent in the deep." The stripes in verse 24 were from the Jews, and the rods in verse 25 were used by the Romans (Acts 16:22-23; 22:25). Not including the shipwreck at Melita (universally recognized as Malta), Paul was shipwrecked three times, none of which is related in the Acts. The Judaizers, of course, did not suffer any of these things. There is no comparison between them and Paul in matters such as these.

Verse 26 says, "In journeys often, in dangers of rivers, in dangers of robbers, in dangers from my race, in dangers from the nations, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the desert, in dangers in the sea, in dangers among false brothers." The rivers here are those which were liable to violent and sudden changes from the sudden swelling of mountain streams or flooding of dry watercourses. The robbers mentioned in this verse were of tribes inhabiting the mountains between the tableland of Asia Minor and the coast, tribes notorious for robbery. The false brothers spoken of in verse 26 refer mainly to the Judaizing Christians.

Verse 27 continues: "In labor and hardship, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Since fastings are listed here with hardships, they must refer to involuntary fasting due to lack of food. Hence, they differ from hunger. Hunger may refer to a situation in which there is no way to obtain food; involuntary fasting may refer to a situation of poverty. The cold was due to the weather and insufficient clothing; the nakedness refers to insufficient clothing or nakedness due to scourging or shipwreck.

In verse 28 Paul says, "Apart from the things which are not mentioned, the pressure upon me daily, the anxiety for all the churches." In this verse the Greek word rendered pressure literally means a crowd. It denotes a crowd of cares pressing on Paul. This refers to the anxious care for all the churches. The things which are not mentioned are things not mentioned in verses 23 through 27.

In verses 23 through 28 nearly thirty matters are covered. In only two is there actually a comparison between Paul and the Judaizers: labors and imprisonments. The Judaizers labored and were sometimes imprisoned. But Paul was in labors more abundantly and in imprisonments more abundantly. Furthermore, the Judaizers did not have any of the other items. It is certain that they did not have any anxiety for the churches. But the apostles, especially Paul, daily had an anxious care for all the churches.

In verse 29 Paul goes on to say, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is stumbled, and I do not burn?" The word "burn" means to burn in sorrow and indignation over the cause of stumbling.

In verse 30 Paul continues, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things of my weakness." Here Paul refers to his sufferings and hardships, which made him appear weak, mean, and contemptible in the eyes of his adversaries. He was attested as a true apostle by these things, not by the strength of which his adversaries boasted.

Paul's sufferings made him appear weak in the eyes of others. A strong man can do many things to eliminate suffering or reduce it. Paul, however, could not do anything about his sufferings. The fact that he could not reduce his sufferings indicates that he was weak. Therefore, in the eyes of the opposers, he was a weak and pitiful person.

In ancient times as well as today, there was the concept that a person who is blessed of God should not have suffering. Paul's adversaries thought that if Paul were truly of God, God would bless him and he would not suffer. They regarded Paul's suffering as a sign that he was not of God or was not under God's blessing. Paul's concept was different. Here Paul seems to be saying to the Judaizers, "If you were truly of God, God would allow you to suffer a great deal. A genuine minister of Christ is one who suffers." Many Christians today have the concept that if a person is rich, prosperous, and flourishing, he is a faithful servant of God and is blessed by Him. They also have the concept that those who must endure suffering and

hardship are not under the blessing of God.

In verses 31 through 33 Paul concludes, "The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus, the governor under Aretas the king guarded the city of the Damascenes to seize me, and I was lowered in a basket through a window, through the wall, and escaped his hands." If you had been Paul, would you not have felt ashamed to escape in this way? Some may ask, "Why was it necessary for an ambassador of Christ to escape in a basket? Why did he not claim the victory of Jesus and the headship of the King of kings over this ethnarch? There is no need for you to escape in a basket through a window. This man cannot be God's chosen one, for God does not bless him."

GOD'S WAY

We need to understand why Paul wrote these verses in the way he did. Humanly speaking, Paul had no glory or honor. Moreover, his way of speaking in this chapter seems to be foolish. Paul was in a very difficult environment. He suffered a great deal, and he was even short of food. It seems that God was not with him and did not honor him. Where are the miracles promised in Mark 16? It seems that the Lord did not supply Paul. He even allowed him to be shipwrecked and to spend a day and a night afloat at sea. Why did Paul emphasize things that are neither honorable nor glorious? Paul's way is the divine way. In contrast, the concept of many Christians is versus God's way. What Paul writes in this chapter certainly corresponds to the life of the Lord Jesus. When He was on earth, the Lord suffered affliction. Even though He was the Son of God, His life was not a life of prosperity or outward blessing. Apparently, the Lord Jesus was not blessed by God. When He was crucified, the Jews mocked Him and said that if He were of God, God would deliver Him from the cross. But instead of sending angels to rescue the Lord Jesus, God allowed Him to die on the cross. In principle, Paul's experience was the same.

By writing this chapter in the way he did, Paul made it

clear not only to the believers at Corinth, but to all believers in Christ throughout the centuries, what God's way is. God's way is seen in the genuine apostles, in the genuine ministers of the new covenant, not in the so-called super-apostles. Those false apostles may be prosperous and flourishing, and they may have no need to escape in a basket. But the real apostles experience adversity and suffering because the entire earth is opposed to God's economy. Moreover, this present age is not the time for us to prosper and flourish. Rather, it is a time for us to suffer for the sake of the Body of Christ. In the words of Colossians 1:24, we are filling up what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ for the sake of His Body, the church.

On the cross the Lord Jesus suffered for our redemption. But during His life on earth, He suffered for the building up of the Body. We cannot participate in the sufferings of Christ for redemption. It would be blasphemy to say that we can participate in such sufferings. However, we must share in Christ's sufferings for His Body. This means that we must follow His way, the narrow way. We must walk in His footsteps and bear the cross. The Lord Jesus lived a life of suffering, and we must do the same. This is to fill up what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ for the building up of the church, His Body.

The Judaizers did not suffer for the Body of Christ. Therefore, Paul wrote this chapter in such a way as to make clear who are the genuine ministers of the New Testament and who are not. This matter is not determined by the prosperity of any minister; it is determined by his suffering.

TWO SECRETS

In chapter eleven we have two secrets of discerning the genuine from the false: enjoying the Lord as our life supply and suffering in following the Lord. On the one hand, we enjoy the Lord Jesus; on the other hand, we follow Him to live a life of suffering. This enjoyment and suffering are determining factors by which we may discern what is genuine and what is false. Anything that helps us to enjoy

the Lord and that strengthens us to follow Him in His suffering is genuine. What does not encourage us in these two matters is false.

At the beginning of chapter eleven Paul speaks of the Lord as our dear Husband. Toward the end of this chapter he refers to the churches. The first secret of discernment is related to the enjoyment of Christ as our Husband; the second is related to the proper concern and care for all the churches, a concern that involves filling up the lack of the sufferings of Christ for the Body. These matters are somewhat hidden in this lengthy chapter. Therefore, we need to read this chapter carefully. Otherwise, these crucial points may be concealed from our understanding. Thank the Lord for showing us that we need to enjoy Him as our Husband, loving Him with a pure and single heart and having a mind that is not corrupted by the deceiver. We also thank Him for showing us that we need to follow in His footsteps and be willing to suffer what He suffered for the building up of the church, His Body.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-FIVE

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

(6)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 12:1-10

Second Corinthians 12:1-10 is an excellent portion of the Word. These verses show that Paul was deep and also profoundly wise. The Judaizers boasted of how much they knew, claiming to be more knowledgeable than the Apostle Paul. Instead of arguing with them, Paul first boasted of his weaknesses. Now in 12:1-10 he comes to visions and revelations. Paul's wise strategy is to defeat the arrogant Judaizers by showing that actually they do not have any vision or revelation. What the Judaizers know is vanity.

PAUL'S PURPOSE

I believe that Paul's purpose in writing these ten verses is to show to the believers at Corinth that he was much more knowledgeable than the Judaizers. He had the knowledge not only of human life on earth, but also of the things in Paradise and even in the third heaven. Paul not only knew these things; he also had a vision of them. Paul referred to this so that the follies of the Judaizers would be exposed.

If the Corinthians compared what Paul knew and what he had seen with the knowledge possessed by the Judaizers, they would say, "The Judaizers are superficial. They have only a little knowledge of the Old Testament concerning the Mosaic law and the traditional rituals. But here is a man with a full knowledge of the new covenant. He has a knowledge of human life and of things in Paradise and in the third heaven."

PAUL'S BOAST

I would say that in 12:1-10 we have Paul's chief boast. Apart from the Lord Jesus, has there ever been a person besides Paul who has seen the things in the third heaven and in Paradise? As God, the Lord Jesus was in the heavens. Then He became a man on earth, died on the cross, and went to Hades. Thus, He traveled through the heavens, the earth, and the region under the earth. Paul, a man born on earth, went to the third heaven and saw what was there. He also went to Paradise and beheld the things there under the earth. To be sure, no one in human history can compare with the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul. What could the Judaizers possibly say about this?

In 12:1 Paul says, "To boast is necessary, though indeed not expedient; yet I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord." The apostle was forced to boast because of the Corinthians' follies. Though it was not expedient to himself, it was necessary for their profit. He must boast so that they might be brought back, for their building up, to a sober and proper understanding concerning their relationship with the apostle. The word "come" in this verse means that Paul would now come to boast of the visions and revelations he has received of the Lord.

In verse 1 Paul speaks of both vision and revelation. Revelation is the putting aside of the veil, the unveiling of hidden things. Vision is the sight, the view, seen at the unveiling. So many things concerning God's economy and administration in the universe were hidden. The Lord has revealed, unveiled, these things to the apostle, and he has received visions of these hidden things.

A MAN IN CHRIST

According to verses 2 through 5, Paul regards himself as two persons. In verse 2 he says, "I know a man in Christ." Referring to this man in Christ, he says in verse 5, "On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on behalf of myself I will not boast, except in my weaknesses." The man in Christ in verse 2 is the apostle (v. 7), not as the old creation but as the new creation (5:17). In this section the

apostle desires to boast of the new creation in Christ by boasting of his weaknesses in the flesh, the old creation (vv. 5, 9).

The man in Christ mentioned in verse 2 was not Saul; it was Paul. Saul was the natural man, and Paul is the new man in Christ. It would be good if we all had two names: a name to denote the person before we were saved, what we were in Adam, and a name of the person who is now in Christ. Formerly we were a Saul; now we are a Paul.

Some time ago I heard that one writer said that there were two William Laws. The first William Law was a man of doctrine, knowledge, theology, letter, and tradition. The second William Law was a person of the Spirit and in the Spirit. The first William Law did not know anything concerning the Spirit, although he had much knowledge of theology and tradition. But one day he had a new beginning, and he became a person of the Spirit. This was the one who improved upon the teachings of certain mystical writers and made those teachings practical. We may say that eventually William Law became a man in Christ. Later Andrew Murray was helped by the writings of William Law.

When Paul speaks of a man in Christ, he is referring to his second man, to his second person. He would boast of this man, but he would not boast of the old self. In verse 5 the word "myself" refers to Paul's old self, not to his new self. It refers to Saul, not to Paul. Paul's new self was altogether in Christ. This man in Christ was a new creation.

If we would pay attention to ourselves as believers, we shall see that we also are two persons. On the one hand, we are a person with an old self; on the other hand we are a person with a new self. This person is in Christ and is a new creation. We should no longer care for the first person. Instead, we should follow the second.

What happened to Paul, a man in Christ, as recorded in these verses, is mysterious. Not even Paul was able to tell whether he was in the body or outside the body. In verse 3 he says, "Whether in the body or outside the body,

I do not

know--God knows." It is certain that Paul did not go into a trance. We should not think that what is described here is the experience of someone in a trance. What happened to Paul was beyond his ability to express, for not even he himself was altogether clear about it.

PARADISE AND THE THIRD HEAVEN

According to verses 2 and 4, two things happened to Paul. First, he was caught away to the third heaven; second, he was caught away into Paradise. In verse 2 Paul says, "I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body I do not know, or outside the body I do not know--God knows), such a one was caught away to the third heaven." The Greek word rendered "caught away" here is the same word as in Acts 8:39 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Literally the Greek word translated "to" means till within, that is, as far as. The visible clouds may be considered the first heaven, and the sky, the second heaven. The third heaven must refer to the heaven of the heavens, the highest heaven (Deut. 10:14; Psa. 148:4), where the Lord Jesus and God are today (Eph. 4:10; Heb. 4:14; 1:3).

Notice that verse 2 does not speak of Paul being caught up; it says that he was caught away to the third heaven. There is an important difference between being caught up and being caught away. In Acts 8:39 Philip was caught away by the Spirit. He knew that he was in the body when he was thus caught away. However, Paul did not know whether he was in the body or outside the body when he was caught away to the third heaven.

The third heaven is a Hebrew expression denoting the highest heaven. As we have pointed out, the clouds may be regarded as the first heaven and the sky beyond the clouds as the second. The third heaven, therefore, must be the heaven above the sky, in biblical terms, the heaven above the heavens. Today the Father and the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, are in this highest heaven. Paul was caught away to this highest heaven.

In verses 3 and 4 Paul continues, "And I know such a

man (whether in the body or outside the body, I do not know--God knows), that he was caught away into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not allowed a man to speak." The conjunction "and" is an important word here. It indicates that what is mentioned in verses 3 and 4 is another matter in addition to what is mentioned in the preceding verse. Verse 2 tells us that the apostle was caught away to the third heaven. Now verses 3 and 4 tell us something further, that the apostle was also caught away to another place, into Paradise. This indicates strongly that Paradise is not synonymous with the third heaven in verse 2. It refers to a place other than the third heaven.

Many interpreters or expositors of the Bible regard the third heaven and Paradise as the same place. According to their understanding, when Paul was caught away to the third heaven, he was also caught away to Paradise. However, Paradise is not synonymous with the third heaven. The conjunction at the beginning of verse 3 indicates that here Paul is describing two different experiences. First, he was caught away to the third heaven. Then he was caught away to Paradise.

Paradise is the pleasant section in Hades, where the spirits of Abraham and all the just are, awaiting the resurrection (Luke 16:22-23, 25-26), and where the Lord Jesus went after His death and stayed until His resurrection (Luke 23:43; Acts 2:24, 27, 31; Eph. 4:9; Matt. 12:40). This Paradise differs from the Paradise in Revelation 2:7, which will be the New Jerusalem in the millennium. In this section the apostle tells of the transcendence of the revelations he has received. In the universe there are mainly three sections: the heavens, the earth, and Hades under the earth (Eph. 4:9). As a man living on earth, the apostle knows the things of the earth. But men do not know the things either in the heavens or in Hades. However, the apostle was brought away to both of these unknown places. Hence, he received visions and revelations of these hidden regions. For this reason he mentions these two uttermost parts of the universe. When

the Lord Jesus died, He did not go immediately to the third heaven. Rather, He went to a place called Paradise. One of the thieves said to Him, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42). The Lord Jesus answered, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (v. 43). Furthermore, according to Acts chapter two, the Lord Jesus went to Hades after He died (v. 31). If we put together these two portions of the Word, we see that Paradise must be in Hades.

In Luke 16 we have a picture of the two sections of Hades, the section of comfort and the section of torment. When Lazarus died, he went to the section of comfort, where Abraham was. When the rich man died, he went to the section of torment. Paradise, therefore, is the comfortable, restful section of Hades.

A FULL VIEW OF THE UNIVERSE

Paul, the new man in Christ, was on the one hand caught away to the third heaven. On the other hand, he was caught away to Paradise, the comfortable section of Hades. Because Paul came to know the things in heaven and the things under the earth as well as the things on earth, he had a complete view of the universe. Anyone who would have a full view of the universe must know these three sections: the third heaven, the earth, and the region under the earth.

Paul was an educated person concerning the things on the earth. One day the Lord took him away to the third heaven and let him see what was there. He also took him away to Paradise to show him what was there. Regarding Paradise, Paul said that he heard things "which it is not allowed a man to speak" (2 Cor. 12:4). Thus, he was not at liberty to tell the Corinthians about them. Paul, a new man in Christ, certainly had a complete knowledge and a full view of the entire universe.

Compared to Paul, the Judaizers were like frogs in a well. They could not see beyond the circle of the well of the Old Testament and of Judaism with its rituals. But Paul could boast of visions and revelations of the Lord. He could

say, "Corinthians, the Lord has given me a wonderful view of the whole universe. He brought me away to the third heaven, and he brought me to Paradise. In Paradise I heard utterances which I am not allowed to speak of." No wonder Paul refers to the transcendence of the revelations given to him (v. 7). Only two people, Jesus and Paul, have received such a full view of the universe.

REVELATION FOLLOWED BY SUFFERING

In verses 6 and 7 Paul goes on to say, "For if I should desire to boast, I shall not be foolish, for I will speak the truth; but I refrain, lest anyone should account of me above what he sees of me or hears from me. Wherefore also, that I should not be exceedingly lifted up by the transcendence of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, that he might buffet me, that I should not be exceedingly lifted up." The Greek word rendered "transcendence" also means superabundance, exceeding greatness, excess. The word for thorn is often used in classical Greek in the sense of a stake or of a sharp-pointed staff. Here it may refer to a kind of physical suffering, like the trouble Paul had with his eyes. The Greek word for "buffet" means to beat with a clenched fist. This is different from the word rendered buffet in 1 Corinthians 9:27, a word that means to beat under the eye.

Verse 7 indicates that revelation is always followed by suffering. For a human being to see a view like that beheld by Paul is very dangerous. Even for Paul there was a risk in seeing such a view. The danger is that after receiving this kind of transcendent revelation, Paul would be lifted up and become proud. In His sovereignty, the Lord, in order to enlarge Paul and to broaden his view to a universal extent, brought him to the third heaven and also to Paradise. But the Lord also knew that there was the danger that Paul would be spoiled or damaged by this. Therefore, He sent Paul a thorn, a messenger of Satan, to buffet him and cause him pain. The purpose of this thorn was to bring Paul down and keep him low.

Here we see that it is not a simple matter to be in the Lord's hand. Sometimes the hand of the Lord will lift us up. But after the Lord has lifted us up, He will bring us down. Because the Judaizers were not in the Lord's hand, with them there was neither lifting up nor putting down. Rather, they were like a plain. But Paul's experience was full of mountains and valleys. This means that the Lord lifted him up and then brought him down.

EXPERIENCING CHRIST AS GRACE AND POWER

Verses 8 and 9 say, "Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ might tabernacle over me." Sufferings and trials are often the Lord's ordination for us, that we may experience Christ as grace and power. For this reason, the Lord would not remove the thorn from the apostle as he entreated.

Paul might have prayed like this: "O Lord, take away the thorn. Get rid of this messenger of Satan. I am suffering, and I cannot bear this thorn any longer." The Lord answered Paul's prayer, but not according to Paul's way. Likewise, the Lord will answer our prayer, but He may not answer it according to our way. The Lord seemed to say to Paul, "No, I shall not remove the thorn. This thorn is being used by Me to keep you down. I realize that you are suffering, and I shall give you the grace you need. Paul, My grace is sufficient for you. Don't ask Me to take away the thorn. If I were to take it away, I would have to take away the visions and the revelations, and I would have no way to do that except by taking you away. Paul, if you do not have this thorn, you may be too proud and lifted up too high. I cannot allow that to happen. The best way to keep you down is to leave this thorn with you. But I shall grace you and support you so that you may be able to bear this suffering. Also, in your experience, My grace will become power made perfect in weakness. The thorn exposes your weakness. Without it, you would not realize

how weak you are. Now you need Me to be your grace. In your experience, your enjoyment, My grace will become power tabernacling over you."

The grace experienced by Paul was actually the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. I believe that in his experience Paul realized that the Lord's grace became power spread over him like a tent. Hence, this grace-power became a dwelling place for Paul in his sufferings. As he was suffering, Paul could dwell in the tabernacle spread over him. This tabernacle, this tent, sustained him, supported him, maintained him, and kept him.

To magnify the sufficiency of the Lord's grace, our sufferings are required. To show forth the perfectness of the Lord's power, our weakness is needed. Hence, the apostle would most gladly boast in his weaknesses, that the power of Christ might tabernacle over him. Grace is the supply, and the power is the strength, the ability, of grace. Both are the resurrected Christ, who is now the life-giving Spirit dwelling in us (1 Cor. 15:45; Gal. 2:20) for our enjoyment.

The Greek word translated "tabernacle" in verse 9 is *episkenoo*, a compound verb composed of *epi* and *skenoo*. Skenoo, meaning to dwell in a tent, is used in John 1:14 and Revelation 21:3. *Episkenoo* here means to fix a tent or a habitation upon. It portrays how the power of Christ, even Christ Himself, dwells upon us as a tent spread over us, overshadowing us in our weakness.

In verse 10 Paul concludes, "Wherefore I am well pleased in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions, and distresses, on behalf of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am powerful." The Greek word rendered "well pleased" also means well content, as in Matthew 3:17. Insults are mistreatments, and necessities are constraints, urgent needs that press much. Literally, the Greek word for "distresses" means narrowness of room; hence straits, difficulties, distresses. At the end of this verse Paul speaks of being weak and also of being powerful. He was weak in his old being, but he was powerful in the overshadowing Christ.

THE LORD'S COOKING

What we have in these verses is the Lord's "cooking" of Paul. The Lord "cooked" Paul and made him a delicious "dish" for us all to enjoy. For more than fifty years, I have been enjoying the Apostle Paul. But I must testify that I have never enjoyed Paul as much as I have recently. He certainly is a delicious feast cooked by the Lord Jesus.

Sometimes in preparing Chinese food, the food is first put into the fire and then in cold water. It seems that this process of cooking results in the best taste. This illustrates how the Lord dealt with Paul, how the Lord cooked him. First the Lord uplifted Paul to the third heaven, then He carried him away to Hades, and following that He allowed a thorn to come to him. If I had been Paul, I probably would have wondered what was happening to me. I surely would have told the Lord that I was not able to bear the thorn. But as we have pointed out, the Lord's sufficient grace was supplied to Paul, and this grace became power tabernacling over him.

BECOMING RICH IN THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

As Paul considered the high visions and marvelous revelations, the thorn worked on him to keep him from being proud and lifted up. But as the thorn worked to keep Paul low, grace supplied and sustained him, and power overshadowed him. This was the Lord's wonderful way of cooking Paul to cause him to experience the all-extensive Christ. As a result, Paul was rich in the experience of Christ.

The Judaizers certainly could not compare with Paul. How foolish the Corinthians had been to be distracted by them! The Judaizers had no revelation or vision. Likewise, they did not have the thorn, the grace, or the power tabernacling over them. They were utterly devoid of the experience of Christ. Paul, on the contrary, had seen visions and received revelations. Furthermore, he had been dealt with by the Lord through the thorn in order to experience Him as grace and as power in a very practical way. Therefore, Paul was a man full of vision, suffering,

experience, and enjoyment of the Lord. The Lord became grace to him and also the power spreading over him like a tent.

What the Apostle Paul experienced is very much lacking among today's Christians. Many believers are natural and traditional. Like the Judaizers, they have an old, traditional religion, a Bible in dead letters, and many rituals and regulations. In principle, they are the same as the Judaizers, even in the matter of preaching a Jesus who is not altogether genuine. With them there is no vision, no revelation, no thorn, and no grace. They interpret the Bible in a natural way, and they follow traditions and regulations. With them there is no power tabernacling over them. What a contrast between the experience of Paul and today's Judaizers!

Do not be disappointed if a thorn comes to you after you receive a revelation from the Lord. Visions and revelations are always followed by sufferings. It is not necessary for you to pray much concerning the thorn. The thorn will not be removed. Instead, the Lord will allow it to remain for the purpose of bringing in grace for your enjoyment. This grace will then become your daily strength and even your dwelling place, a tabernacle overshadowing you. This will enrich your spiritual experience. When we enjoy the Lord's grace and dwell under the overshadowing of His power, we shall always have something to say regarding Christ and the church.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SIX

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

(7)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 12:11-18

A WORD FOR ALL BELIEVERS

What Paul covers in 12:11-18 is neglected by many Christian workers today. All the saints in the Lord's recovery need to understand what these verses reveal, for they apply to all of us, not only to those who are elders or co-workers. We should not think that what Paul speaks of here has nothing to do with us. What Paul was, what he did, and how he conducted himself are a pattern for all believers, not only a pattern for the leading ones. The New Testament reveals that all believers in Christ should, like Paul, live a life for the building up of the Body of Christ. This is revealed emphatically, strongly, and definitely in the book of Ephesians. According to Ephesians, every part of the Body must live a life for the building up of the Body.

Unconsciously and subconsciously, we are still very much under the influence of our religious background. We are under the control, direction, and manipulation of traditional concepts. In particular, because of this influence, we may think that what Paul speaks of in chapter twelve is limited to leading ones, elders, co-workers, deacons, and deaconesses. We may think that, as common members of the Body, this chapter has nothing to do with us. Actually, Paul's word is for us all. For this reason, it is rather difficult for me to say how many co-workers I have. The understanding within me is that all of those who meet with us in the Lord's recovery are co-

workers. Nevertheless, because of the influence of our religious background, we may think that if we are not apostles, elders, or deacons, Paul's word in 12:11-18 does not apply to us. We need to read these verses with the realization that they are meant for us all. Even the young ones among us should realize that these verses are for them. We are not able to predict how far along the Lord will take our young people and how much He will use them in the future. I say this as an introductory word to our considering what is revealed in these verses.

SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF OTHERS

In verse 11 Paul says, "I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing I am inferior to the super-apostles, even if I am nothing." Here Paul says that the Corinthians compelled Paul to become foolish. They bore the responsibility for this. They should have commended Paul, but they were distracted and withheld their commendation. Their silence was wrong. They should have done something to commend Paul, for it was not fitting for him to be compelled to speak concerning himself. This, no doubt, was the feeling in Paul's spirit as he wrote verse 11.

We should learn from this verse that there are occasions when we need to say something on behalf of the elders or those in the ministry. If a certain brother is the target of attack or opposition, he may not be able to say anything to defend himself. In such a situation we need to speak up and commend him. For example, years ago when Brother Nee was the target, I did something to vindicate him. The young ones especially need to learn to commend someone in such a situation. They should be bold to speak out. They should not be silent, and they should not be held back.

In verse 11 Paul was compelled to point out to the Corinthians that in nothing was he inferior to the super-apostles. It certainly was not pleasant for Paul to say this on his own behalf. It should not have been necessary for such a word to be uttered by him, since he was the target

of the opposition. A number of those in Corinth should have said this for Paul. They should have declared, "You Judaizers must realize that Paul is not inferior to you in any way." As we have pointed out, Paul had received transcendent visions and revelations. He surely was not inferior to those arrogant, boastful, self-commending Judaizers. But because of the silence of the Corinthians, Paul was compelled to say something on his own behalf. He said forthrightly that in nothing was he inferior to the boastful Judaizers.

In verse 11 Paul says that he was not inferior to the super-apostles, even if he were nothing. Of course, it is not true that Paul was nothing. He really was something. However, he could not say this about himself. Hence, he was compelled to point out that, even if he were nothing, he was not inferior to the Judaizers.

THE SIGNS OF THE APOSTLE

In verse 12 Paul goes on to say, "Indeed, the signs of the apostle were wrought among you in all endurance, by signs and wonders and works of power." The signs are attesting miracles that furnish credentials of apostleship, the wonders are startling and awakening miracles, and the works of power are miracles that demonstrate God's power.

I believe that the expression "the signs of the apostle" was used first by the Corinthians, not by Paul. Perhaps the believers at Corinth were discussing the matter of the signs of an apostle. They may have asked themselves what were the signs of Paul's being an apostle. If they had not raised this question, Paul would not have mentioned it here.

The expression "the signs of the apostle" may sound strange to us, but it did not seem strange to the Corinthians. On the contrary, this expression was familiar to them, since they were probably the ones who invented it. Some of them may have thought that the Judaizers had more of these signs than Paul did. This was the reason in verse 12 Paul speaks of the signs of his apostleship.

Regarding the signs of the apostle, the first thing Paul mentions is "all endurance." This indicates that endurance is the leading sign of an apostle. With respect to the Corinthians, Paul endured defamation. Some of them went so far as to say that Paul was crafty and with guile took advantage of them. Paul uses the word "guile" in verse 16. In a note on this verse in his New Translation, Darby points out, "The apostle is not saying that he did this, but is answering a charge that he had kept up appearances by taking nothing himself, but knew how to indemnify himself by using Titus in order to receive from them. The charge was false, as he proceeds to show." The Corinthians were saying that Paul would not come to Corinth to collect money himself. Therefore, he sent Titus to do this for him and thereby used Titus to cover himself. It is hard to believe that certain of the Corinthians would defame Paul to such an extent. Now we can understand why Paul emphasizes the matter of endurance.

In 12:12 Paul seems to be saying to the Corinthians, "You ask me to tell you the signs of my apostleship. The first sign is my endurance. You have criticized me and defamed me, but I have been able to endure it." Then Paul goes on to mention signs, wonders, and works of power. These are miraculous things. But according to the context, although Paul speaks of these things, he does not emphasize them. Rather, Paul seems to say, "You talk about miracles as signs of apostleship. When I was with you, there were many signs, wonders, and works of power. But instead of emphasizing such things, I would first speak of my endurance."

NOT TREATED AS INFERIOR

In verse 13 Paul continues, "For what is it in which you were treated in an inferior manner to the rest of the churches, except that I myself was not an encumbrance to you? Forgive me this injustice." The church at Corinth was not treated as inferior to the other churches or weaker than they. After pointing this out, Paul says, ironically, "Forgive me this injustice," referring to not being an encumbrance to the believers.

In verse 13 Paul seems to be saying, "In the matter of

receiving gifts, grace, and God's blessing, you Corinthians are not inferior to other churches. I begot you in Christ, and I did my best to raise you as a church that was not short of anything. I did not treat you in a manner inferior to the rest of the churches. I did my best to beget you in Christ, to raise you up as a church, and to build you up. Regarding God's salvation and blessing, divine grace, and spiritual gifts, you are not inferior to any other church. In what way, then, were you treated in an inferior way? Only in that I was not an encumbrance to you. I did not burden you. Forgive me this injustice!" It was a shame to the Corinthians that Paul had to speak this way. The only thing he failed to do for them was to make himself a burden to them. Elsewhere Paul even says that he took wages from other churches in order to work among the Corinthians. Although Paul worked for the Corinthians, they did not give him anything. Thus, his only injustice toward them was not placing any burden on them. Verse 13 is not a pleasant word, but Paul was nonetheless bold in saying it.

NOT SEEKING WHAT IS THEIRS

Verse 14 says, "Behold, this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be an encumbrance; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for the children ought not to store up for the parents, but the parents for the children." In this verse we have a very important word: "I do not seek what is yours, but you." We all need to be deeply impressed with this word and remember it. Whenever we work for the Lord, we should not seek what belongs to others--we should seek them. This means that we should not seek others' money or want their money. Paul could say boldly to the Corinthians, "I seek after you and I want you. I do not seek what is yours--your wealth, your possessions, your material things. I seek you."

At least a few times Brother Nee pointed out to us that if one who works for the Lord cannot be faithful in the matter of money, he cannot be faithful or strong in the Lord's work. Many Christian workers, when they come to

the matter of money, immediately become weak. Because they are afraid that their financial supply would be cut off, they dare not preach certain things, teach certain truths, or rebuke certain sins. Furthermore, they will not deal with certain matters, also because they are afraid that if they do so, the supply of money will be cut off. Those who have this problem are subdued by money.

Do not think that we are the only ones who know the truth concerning the church revealed in the Word. At least some others know this truth; however, they dare not practice it. They know that in every locality there should be just one church. But, fearing that their supply of funds will be cut off, they are not willing to teach this or practice it.

I am concerned that when you enter into the genuine ministry for the Lord and are faced with the matter of money, you may not be bold for the truth. It is indeed a failure to be influenced by money. This is a shame and a defeat before the enemy. We all must receive grace to forget considerations about money and have the boldness to say to the believers, "I do not seek what is yours--I seek you."

In these verses we do not have doctrines, but we do have a number of very practical matters. In verse 14 Paul says that the children should not store up for the parents, but the parents for the children. Here we see once again that Paul was frank and honest. He would not give up his standing with regard to the Corinthians. In this verse Paul seems to be telling them, "Corinthians, you cannot deny that I am your spiritual father. I begot you in Christ through the gospel, and I have raised you as my children. As your parent, I do not seek what is yours. It is a shame for parents to seek their children's money. The children ought not to store up for the parents, but the parents for the children. Corinthians, I do not want to receive anything from you--I want to give to you."

UTTERLY SPENT

In verse 15 Paul goes on to say, "But I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent on behalf of your souls, even if

loving you more abundantly, I am loved less." In this verse "spend" means to spend what he has, referring to his possessions. To be utterly spent means to spend what he is, referring to his being. Paul was willing to sacrifice himself--his soul, his life, his entire being--for the believers. He was also willing to give all his money and material possessions. The Lord Jesus gave His soul for us; He was utterly spent for us. In like manner, Paul's desire was to be utterly spent for the Corinthians. All the saints in the Lord's recovery need to learn this crucial lesson: to receive grace to spend what we have and to be utterly spent for the saints and for the churches.

In verse 15 Paul says that he was willing to be spent, even if loving the believers more abundantly, he was loved the less. Paul was still willing to be spent for the Corinthians even if he loved them more and they loved him less. Paul did not care about their condition. Their condition could not change his attitude toward them. Here Paul seems to be saying, "No matter what your attitude is toward me, I still love you, and I am glad to spend what I have and what I am for you."

PAUL ACCUSED OF CRAFTINESS

Verse 16 says, "But let it be so, I did not burden you, but being crafty I took you with guile." As we have pointed out, this is what some Corinthians charged against the apostle. They said he was crafty in making gain, indemnifying himself by sending Titus to receive the collection for the poor saints. The words "let it be so" mean to let the former matter go. This is to forget about the past, to let the past go.

Although Paul did not burden the Corinthians, some of them were saying that he was crafty and took them with guile. They said that Paul would not come himself, but used Titus as a cover to indemnify himself while he hid behind the scene. They were accusing Paul of being the one who actually collected the money through Titus. In their judgment, that was Paul's craftiness. Having been inwardly warned concerning the matter, Paul sent more

than one person with Titus to collect the money. He did this in order to silence the defaming tongues. However, even though Paul acted carefully and with forethought, some of the Corinthians still defamed him.

We learn from Paul's experience that even though the saints may be honest, Satan is nonetheless crouching among them. Satan uses money to damage the situation between the ministering ones and the saints. Among the distracted Corinthians, some were criticizing Paul for being crafty in money matters.

WALKING IN THE SAME SPIRIT

In verses 17 and 18 Paul asks, "Did I take advantage of you through anyone whom I have sent to you? I entreated Titus and sent with him the brother. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Not in the same steps?" The spirit in verse 18 denotes our regenerated spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This spirit should govern, rule, direct, regulate, and lead us in our Christian walk (Rom. 8:4). The apostles walk in such a spirit.

Paul's word in verses 16, 17, and 18 helps us to understand what some of the Corinthians had been saying concerning Paul and Titus. They were accusing Paul of deceiving them, cheating them, and taking advantage of them by sending Titus to collect money. It surely was not a pleasant matter for Paul to write about such things. It may seem to us that words such as these should not be found in the writings of a holy apostle, one who had received from the Lord the commission of a high ministry.

In this portion of 2 Corinthians Paul is performing surgery on the church at Corinth. He cut them open and removed the parts that were corrupt. The church in Corinth was so seriously ill that medicine could not cure them. They could only be helped by surgery. Therefore, Paul, a spiritual surgeon, performed surgery in order to heal the church and restore it, recover it. As long as the relationship between the believers and the apostle had not

been adjusted, the church would continue to be sick. Therefore, an operation was necessary.

In this chapter we see how honest Paul was as a servant of God. According to the title of this message, here we have Paul's vindication of his apostolic authority. Actually, I do not like to use the word vindication. Probably Paul did not have the feeling that he was vindicating himself. On the contrary, he was seeking to heal the Corinthians by operating on them, by cutting out anything corrupt from the Body.

I believe that this message can be helpful to all those, especially the young, who have a heart for the Lord's recovery. Eventually, the young ones will be in the hand of the Lord. It certainly will be necessary for them to have a proper understanding concerning money. We all must learn not to be greedy, but instead, to spend what we have for others, even to spend ourselves, our very being. We should be willing to pour out our whole being--spirit, soul, and body--for the Body of Christ. Then what we do and what we are will be a benefit to the Body. Whenever we touch the work of the Lord for His Body, we must have a pure motive and a proper attitude. Instead of seeking what others have, we should seek only them and desire to gain them for the Lord's Body and to spend utterly what we are and have for the Body. Then the Body will be healed, and we shall be preserved.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-SEVEN

PAUL'S VINDICATION OF HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

(8)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 12:19--13:10

SPEAKING BEFORE GOD IN CHRIST

In 12:19 Paul says, "All this time you are thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Before God, in Christ we speak; but all things, beloved, are for your building up." Along with the Corinthians, we may think that in these chapters Paul is defending himself. The title of this group of messages even speaks of Paul's vindication of his apostolic authority. Apparently in these chapters Paul is vindicating himself; actually, he is neither vindicating himself nor defending himself.

In this verse Paul says that he speaks before God and in Christ. "In Christ" denotes the life by which the apostles speak; it refers to the means and substance of their speaking. "Before God" denotes the atmosphere in which the apostles speak; it refers to the sphere of their speaking.

It may seem that Paul is not consistent. In 11:17 he says that he speaks not according to the Lord, but as in foolishness. Now he says that he speaks before God in Christ. I do not think Paul would defend himself against the charge of being inconsistent. Either we understand him or we do not. Paul knew what he was doing and what he was saying. Today we also are accused of being inconsistent and contradictory.

Consider Paul's situation in 2 Corinthians. When he was speaking as it were in foolishness, he said that he did not speak according to the Lord. In other words, Paul was

saying that his foolishness, and not the Lord, was the motivation of his speaking. But in 12:19 he says that he speaks in Christ, by Christ as his life. He also says that he speaks before God, that is, in God as the sphere of his speaking. Here Paul seems to be saying, "I am not defending myself. Rather, I am speaking by Christ as my life and before God as my atmosphere. Furthermore, I speak for the sake of your building up. All things, beloved, are not for our vindication, but are for your building up. I would like to spend and be spent utterly for you. I don't care to defend myself. I care for you and for your building up. This is the focus of my concern. I am not trying to convince you to receive me as an apostle. My concern is that you be built up. As long as you are built up, I will be satisfied. I am willing to give anything for this."

A LIST OF NEGATIVE THINGS

Verse 20 says, "For I fear, that perhaps when I come, I may find you not such as I wish, and I may be found by you not such as you wish: that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angers, rivalries, backbitings, whisperings, puffings up, disorders." Paul's desire for the Corinthians was that they would be in Christ, live Christ, and be built up as the Body. However, Paul was concerned that when he came to them, he would find them not such as he wished. Moreover, he realized that the Corinthians might find him not such as they wished, for it might be necessary for Paul to be bold toward them and to discipline them. Hence, it would seem that he was not tender or loving.

In verse 20 Paul mentions strife, jealousy, angers, rivalries, backbitings, whisperings, puffings up, disorders. All these are characteristics of people living in the flesh for their own interests. The Greek word rendered strife also means debate, contention, quarrel. Likewise, the word for backbitings means detractions or evil speakings, and that for whisperings means secret slanders. By "puffings up" Paul means inflated arrogance. In Greek the word is a

kindred word to "puffed up" in 1 Corinthians 4:6. The word for disorders may also be rendered disturbances.

In this verse Paul is saying to the Corinthians, "If you are such persons, I will be put to shame when I come to you again. I have been serving you and ministering to you. I have already written one epistle to you. If I find that you are full of strife, jealousy, angers, rivalries, backbitings, whisperings, puffings up, and disorders, I will be put to shame. God would humble me, and I would have to ask Him for mercy because of the pitiful result of my ministry. It would surely be a shame to me if these things are still among you when I come."

In verse 21 Paul continues, "Lest when I come again my God should humble me in regard to you, and I shall mourn over many who have sinned before and are not repenting of the uncleanness and fornication and debauchery which they practiced." In this verse there is no doctrine or theology. What we have in this portion of 2 Corinthians is something related to the practice of the church life. Many of today's Christians do not pay attention to these chapters, because they do not feel the need for them. The reason they do not sense a need is that they do not have the church life. But these chapters are needed by those in the practical church life. We thank the Lord that, under His mercy, we do know our need for these chapters. To be conscious of our need is a sign that we are under the Lord's mercy.

In verses 20 and 21 Paul mentions eleven negative things: strife, jealousy, angers, rivalries, backbitings, whisperings, puffings up, disorders, uncleanness, fornication, and debauchery. Some may wonder how it is possible for such things to be found in the church life. Oh, we need to wake up and not have a dream concerning these matters. Furthermore, we need to consider our own situation. With you is there ever any backbiting or criticizing? Perhaps when a certain person stands up in the meeting, you may say quietly to yourself, "There he is again." Is this not a kind of whispering? Do you have any strife or jealousy, any anger or rivalry? Can you say that in

the church life you have not been in rivalry with others? The items mentioned in verse 20 may be somewhat polite sins rather than gross sins. Those who are more cultured will criticize others behind their backs. Those who are cultured and refined do not criticize others in a crude way. Instead, they may whisper about them and backbite. Furthermore, we need to check whether or not we are puffed up. Inwardly we may have a puffed-up spirit, and we may display this outwardly in our attitude. Even though you may be educated, refined, and cultured, you cannot hide your arrogant attitude. Along with the more refined sins in verse 20, Paul names three gross sins in verse 21. It is possible for all these sinful things to creep into the church life. This was the reason Paul said that he feared coming to Corinth and seeing such things still present among the believers. That would have been a shame to him and to his ministry.

Chapter twelve of 2 Corinthians has no ending. With the kind of practical speaking we have here, it is difficult to have a conclusion. The matter is left open for further consideration. Hence, in chapter twelve Paul does not give a concluding word.

NO LONGER SPARING

In 13:1 Paul goes on to say, "This third time I am coming to you. At the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." According to my knowledge, Paul never went to Corinth the third time. He was in Corinth in Acts 18 and again in Acts 20. Not long after that, he went to Jerusalem, where he was arrested, and then to Rome. Therefore, he did not have the opportunity to come the third time to Corinth.

In verse 2 Paul says, "I have previously said as present the second time, and I say beforehand, being absent now, to those who have sinned before and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare." This indicates that Paul has been tolerating the situation. But should he come back the third time, he will not tolerate it any longer. He will not spare.

A PROOF OF CHRIST SPEAKING IN PAUL

In verse 3 Paul continues, "Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak unto you, but is powerful in you." Christ is powerful in the believers while He is speaking in the apostle. This is indeed a strong and subjective proof to the believers that Christ speaks in the apostle.

Verse 3 indicates strongly how much some of the Corinthians were questioning concerning Paul. They were asking for proof of Christ's speaking in Paul. No doubt, this kind of questioning opened the way for the Judaizers to come in.

It is rather difficult to understand Paul's answer in verse 3. Here Paul says that Christ is not weak unto the Corinthians, but is powerful in them. What Paul seems to be saying is this: "Corinthians, you are questioning the proof of Christ speaking in me. While I am speaking, is Christ not in you? Who ministered Christ to you? Was it the Judaizers? You must admit that I am the one who ministered Christ to you. If Christ does not speak in me, how could you have Christ in you through my ministry? Before the Judaizers came to you, you already had Christ in you. When I came to Corinth, I ministered Christ to you. I imparted Christ to you. It is a fact that Christ has been imparted into you through me, in particular, by my speaking. Furthermore, the Christ who is in you is not weak unto you. On the contrary, He is powerful in you. Surely you would not say that you have a weak Christ. You know that Christ is powerful in you. Through whom did you receive this powerful Christ? You did not receive Him through the Judaizers. You must confess that it was through me that this powerful Christ came into you. Isn't this a strong proof that Christ speaks in me?" Here we see Paul's wisdom in catching the Corinthians. Being proud, they would never admit that they had a weak Christ. Paul knew they would say that the Christ in them was powerful. This would give him the ground to point out that they received this powerful Christ through his speaking. This was a proof of Christ's speaking in Paul

WEAK IN CHRIST

In verse 4 Paul says, "For indeed He was crucified out of weakness, but He lives by the power of God. For indeed we are weak in Him, but we shall live together with Him by the power of God toward you." The weakness in this verse is that of the body, the same as in 10:10. For Himself Christ did not need to be weak in any way, but for accomplishing redemption on our behalf He was willing to be weak in His body that He might be crucified. However, now He lives, after being resurrected, by the power of God. In verse 4 Paul says that the apostles are weak in Christ, but live together with Him by the power of God toward the believers. The apostles followed the pattern of Christ, willing to be weak in the organic union with Him, that they might live with Him a crucified life. Thus, they would live together with Him by the power of God toward the believers. Apparently they are weak toward them; actually they are powerful.

If Christ had not been weak, He could not have been arrested, much less nailed to the cross. Only one who is weak can be crucified. For the accomplishment of redemption, Christ purposely became weak, so weak that He could be arrested and crucified. But now that redemption has been accomplished and Christ has been resurrected, He is no longer weak.

In verse 4 Paul points out to the Corinthians that the apostles are weak in Christ. Through the organic union, they are one with Christ to be weak. The purpose for their being weak in this way is for the sake of the building up of the church. When the apostles came to Corinth, they did not come in a way of strength, but in a way of weakness, for the purpose of imparting Christ into the Corinthians and of edifying them, perfecting them, so that they may be built up as the Body of Christ. Actually, the apostles were not weak. But they voluntarily became weak and, according to verse 4, continued to be weak in Christ.

The phrase "in Him" in verse 4 is very important. Probably you have never heard that we can be weak in Christ. Our concept is that to be in Christ is to be strong, not to be weak. Nevertheless, in this verse Paul says that

we are weak in Him. Why are we weak in Christ? We are weak in Him in order to live a crucified life.

In these verses Paul seems to be saying, "Dear believers at Corinth, don't you know how much you have caused me to be crucified? Many of you are still crucifying me. You put me on the cross when you accuse me of cheating you or of acting with guile. I have never done anything to cheat you. I have been weak in Christ and I continue to be weak in Him so that I may live a crucified life."

In verse 4 Paul says not only that the apostles are weak in Christ; he also says that they will live together with Christ by the power of God toward the believers. We cannot understand fully what Paul means. My understanding is that in coming to the Corinthians a third time, Paul is telling them that he would no longer be weak toward them. On the contrary, he would be powerful to avenge.

PROVING OURSELVES

In verse 5 Paul says to the Corinthians, "Test yourselves whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves; or do you not recognize yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are disapproved?" To test is to determine our condition; to prove is to qualify our status. Here Paul tells the Corinthians to test themselves whether they are in the faith. This is the objective faith (Acts 6:7; 1 Tim. 1:19). If anyone is in the objective faith, he surely has the subjective faith, and believes in Christ and the entire content of God's New Testament economy. This is what the apostle asks the Corinthians to test.

Paul specifically asked the Corinthians whether they recognized that Jesus Christ is in them. As long as a believer realizes that Jesus Christ is in him, he is qualified, approved, as a genuine member of Christ. In verse 5 the word disapproved means disqualified. Here Paul is saying, "Is Jesus Christ in you or not? If He is not in you, you are disapproved, and you cannot pass the test. But if He is in you, you are qualified."

Based upon the facts implied in verse 5, Paul could prove to the Corinthians how far they had gone astray. On the one hand, they realized that Christ was in them. On the other hand, they doubted or questioned Paul's ministry. Actually, they were the ones who were contradictory.

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, "But I hope that you will know that we are not disapproved." By this word the apostle turns to himself and the apostles, indicating that they, having Christ living and speaking in them, are fully qualified and not disapproved, especially among the troublesome Corinthians. The apostle earnestly hopes that they might recognize this and that they may have no further questions about him.

In verses 5 and 6 Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians, "You need to know that we are not disapproved. Some of you may be disapproved, but I am certain that we are not disapproved. We have Christ in us, and we have Him speaking in us. Now I am asking you to test yourselves whether you have Christ in you. This will determine whether you are qualified. I have proved myself, and I am assured that I have Christ in me and speaking in me. Hence, I can pass the test and have the approvedness of Christ truly speaking in me."

Verse 7 says, "Now we pray to God that you do no evil, not that we may appear approved, but that you may do what is good, and we may be as disapproved." This indicates that the believers' doing good proves the qualification and teaching of the apostles. However, the apostle does not care for this as a standing to exercise his apostolic authority to discipline them. He cares for their doing good that they may be established and built up.

The word "evil" in verse 7 refers to the matters covered in 12:20 and 21. For the Corinthians to do no evil is for them not to be involved with the eleven sinful things listed in these verses. It was not for the purpose that the apostles would be approved that Paul prayed for the Corinthians to do no evil. Rather, he would have the believers do what is good and the apostles appear as if they were disapproved.

In verse 7 Paul is speaking ironically, not in a straightforward way. The fact that he must speak the way he does is rather shameful to the Corinthians. Suppose someone would say to you, "I pray to God that you would not do evil." That would not be a pleasant word, would it? Such a word implies that what you are doing now is not good. Furthermore, suppose the same person also said, "My reason for praying that you not do evil is not that I may appear approved by God or that I may have a positive result from my work, but that you may do what is good." To be sure, this way of speaking is not pleasant. But this is the way Paul addressed the Corinthians in this verse. He was encouraging the believers to be concerned about themselves, not about Paul's situation.

FOR THE TRUTH

In verse 8 Paul continues, "For we are not able to do anything against the truth, but for the truth." The word "for" at the beginning of this verse indicates that verse 8 is an explanation of what is mentioned in the preceding verse. What the apostle expects is that the Corinthian believers may do good, not that the apostles may appear approved. To edify the believers to do good is for the truth, but for the apostles to cause themselves to appear approved and to defend themselves to the believers (12:19) is against the truth. The Lord would not enable the apostles to do this. Hence, they are not able to do it.

In saying that the apostles were not able to do anything against the truth, but for the truth, Paul was telling the Corinthians that to be for the truth is to edify the believers to do good, and to be against the truth is to do something for ourselves to be approved. To defend ourselves is to be against the truth. The truth in verse 8 refers to the reality of the content of the faith. Self-vindication is contrary to the truth; it is not for the truth. For this reason, we must forget about defending ourselves and vindicating ourselves and care for the edification of the believers. This is for the truth.

THE SAINTS' PERFECTING

Verse 9 says, "For we rejoice whenever we are weak and you are powerful; this also we pray for, your perfecting." Weak here is the same as appearing disapproved. When the apostles appear disapproved, they are weak in administering discipline to the believers. When the believers do good, they are powerful and make the apostles powerless to discipline them. The apostles rejoice over this and pray for this, that is, for the believers' perfecting.

Literally, the word rendered "perfecting" is restoring. It implies repairing, adjusting, putting in order again, and mending, perfectly joining together, thoroughly equipping, well furnishing, thus perfecting, completing, educating. The apostles pray for the Corinthians that they may be restored, put in order again, and thoroughly equipped and edified to grow in life for the building up of the Body of Christ.

NOT ASSUMING AUTHORITY

In verse 10 Paul concludes this section by saying, "Therefore I write these things being absent, in order that being present I may not use severity, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for overthrowing." This verse indicates that Paul did not assume authority. He would not even admit that he was defending himself or vindicating himself. Of course, there is the implication in these chapters that Paul was an apostle. However, he did not assume his apostleship with respect to the Corinthians. What, then, has he been doing in chapters ten through thirteen? He has been seeking to perfect the believers and build them up. In these chapters Paul is not defending himself; he is perfecting the saints. He is not vindicating his standing as an apostle or his apostolic authority; he is perfecting the saints. In other words, according to Paul's actual ministry, here he is working to reconcile the distracted Corinthian believers back to God in full. As long as their relationship with those who ministered Christ into them had not been rectified or adjusted, the Corinthians would still be away from God.

They would remain in a condition of being separated from the full enjoyment of God. What Paul is doing here is trying to remove the last separation between the believers and God and to bring them wholly back into God so that they may have the full enjoyment of Him.

We have seen that the Apostle Paul is a pattern for all believers. In chapter twelve he tells us how he enjoys Christ to the uttermost as his sufficient grace, as his power, and as his overshadowing tabernacle. When Paul wrote this Epistle to the Corinthians, most of them had not come into such an enjoyment of Christ. Thus, in the last part of chapter twelve and the first part of chapter thirteen, Paul is trying to bring the believers into such an enjoyment of Christ as their sufficient grace, their daily strength, and their overshadowing dwelling place. Paul has no intention of assuming his apostleship, exercising his apostolic authority, or vindicating his apostolic standing.

WHAT AN APOSTLE IS

When Paul uses the word apostle, he means one thing, but when Christians use this word today, they mean something else. The vocabulary is the same, but the dictionaries or lexicons are different. When Paul refers to himself as an apostle, he means one sent by God to minister Christ into sinners so that they may become sons of God and members of Christ, and then be edified to grow and become the Body of Christ. This is Paul's understanding of what an apostle is. Paul does not use this word with a connotation that an apostle is a powerful person authorized by Christ to control and overrule. No, in Paul there is no such concept of apostleship. This concept is altogether despicable. However, when many use the word apostle today, they have in mind someone like a pope or at least an archbishop. Some even have this concept about the word elder. Hence, they give the words apostle and elder a very unpleasant and distasteful connotation. Our understanding of these terms must be biblical, that is,

according to the pure Word of God, not according to religious tradition.

I wish to testify that I have never assumed to be an "apostle." I definitely am not an apostle in the sense of being one who assumes authority and position to rule. But I would surely agree if you would say that I am an apostle in the sense of being sent by God to minister Christ to others and impart Christ into them, so that they may become sons of God and members of Christ and be caused to grow in life and built up as the Body of Christ. We need to use the word apostle with the proper understanding and definition. As we have pointed out before, we all can be apostles in the sense of being those who are sent to minister Christ to others and to help them grow that they may be built up as the Body of Christ. But none of us should be an apostle in the sense of taking the position to exercise authority over others. Instead of referring to me (or to any of the Lord's servants) as being an apostle, it is better to speak of me as a slave of Christ. May we all be apostles not in the sense of being popes, but in the sense of being slaves who minister Christ to others. We all are qualified to be this kind of apostles.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-EIGHT

FINAL EXHORTATIONS, GREETING, AND BLESSING

(1)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 13:11-14

In this message we shall consider the last four verses of 2 Corinthians, 13:11-14.

A LIFE OF REJOICING

In 13:11 Paul says, "For the rest, brothers, rejoice! Be perfected, be encouraged, think the same thing, be at peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you." Since the apostles are rejoicing (v. 9), they are able to exhort the believers to rejoice too. This is not to be done in their natural life, but in the Lord (Phil. 3:1; 4:4; 1 Thes. 5:16).

According to the New Testament, the Christian life should be a life of rejoicing. If your life is not a rejoicing life, your Christian life is not normal. To rejoice includes more than just being joyful. It is possible to be joyful without rejoicing. Joyfulness is something inward, but rejoicing means that our inward joy is expressed outwardly. I believe that Paul would say that in order to rejoice we must use our voice; that is, we need to sound out our joy, to give it voice. Thus, to voice out our joy is to rejoice. We should rejoice either by singing, praising, shouting, or calling on the Lord. Therefore, to rejoice is to voice out our inner joy, to sound it out. This rejoicing is an important characteristic of our Christian life. If our Christian life is normal, it will be a life of rejoicing.

BEING PERFECTED

In verse 11 Paul also appeals to the Corinthians to be perfected. Literally the Greek word rendered "perfected" means completed thoroughly, that is, repaired or adjusted, put in order again, mended, perfectly joined together, thus restored. In Greek it is the root of the word for perfecting in verse 9 and also the root for perfecting in Ephesians 4:12.

To be perfected is to be restored, mended, repaired, and adjusted. It is to be brought back to the right position and restored to the right track so that we may be built up together with others in the Body. The books of 1 and 2 Corinthians are books of perfecting. The unique goal of these two Epistles is to perfect the damaged, distracted, and divided saints at Corinth. The believers there had been damaged, and the situation among them was unhealthy. Therefore, these two books were written to perform the necessary task of perfecting the believers, of bringing them back to a healthy condition full of life, of edifying them, and of equipping them for the building up of the Body. All this is included in Paul's charge, "Be perfected."

We may regard the exhortation "be perfected" as active-passive in voice. Strictly speaking, this is passive. Nevertheless, it also contains an active element. This is the reason we speak of it as being active-passive. God is waiting to perfect us; however, we must take the initiative to be perfected. Moreover, the apostle was used to perfect the Corinthians. This means that a perfecting work was being done. But the Corinthians still had to be perfected. We may liken Paul to a physician and say that he was ready to dispense medicine into the believers, but it was still necessary for them to take the initiative to receive the medicine. The doctor was at hand and the medicine was ready, but the crucial question was this: Were the Corinthians willing to take the medicine and be healed? This was the reason Paul urged them to be perfected.

ENCOURAGED

In verse 11 Paul also tells the Corinthians to be encouraged. The apostles are encouraged by the God of all encouragement (1:3-6). The Corinthians were much discouraged by the apostle's first Epistle to them. Now, in the second Epistle, he encourages them with the encouragement of God (7:8-13).

If we study the whole book of 2 Corinthians, we shall understand that in this Epistle encouragement is an important matter. For this reason, Paul's words "be encouraged" in 13:11 are very meaningful. Being encouraged means that we are first comforted, then made calm, and then satisfied, strengthened, and enabled. Then as a result of all this we are encouraged. We do not lose heart, and we are not discouraged. Here Paul seems to be saying, "Believers at Corinth, the work of perfecting I have been doing on you should not cause you to be sad. Instead, you should be glad and joyful. You should even voice out your joy. Furthermore, you need to be encouraged. Corinthians, do not lose heart."

The book of 2 Corinthians is a book of encouragement. Chapters one and seven are both full of encouragement. As a book of encouragement, this Epistle brings comfort, satisfaction, strength, enablement, and joy. It brings us whatever we need. If we have been satisfied, strengthened, and thereby encouraged, we shall be energized to go on in the Christian life and in the church life without losing heart.

THINKING THE SAME THING

In verse 11 Paul also charges the Corinthians to think the same thing. Thinking the same thing should be the main factor for the distracted and confused Corinthians to be perfected, adjusted, put in order, and restored. In his first Epistle (1 Cor. 1:10), Paul had already exhorted them to think the same thing: "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." The Greek word translated "attuned"

in 1 Corinthians 1:10 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. As a whole, the Corinthian believers were divided, broken. They needed mending to join them perfectly together that they may be in harmony, having the same mind and the same opinion.

We may take as an illustration the keyboard of a piano. Each key needs to be properly in tune in order to be in harmony with all the other keys. Likewise, Paul exhorted the Corinthians to be attuned in the same mind, that is, to think the same thing and not to have peculiar thoughts. We all need to learn by grace to think the same thing.

TO BE AT PEACE

In 13:11 Paul also exhorts the Corinthians to be at peace. This means to be at peace with one another and probably with God as well. Paul knew that there had been strife and rivalry among the Corinthians. First Corinthians 1:11 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." This clearly indicates that among the believers at Corinth there was not any peace. Here in 13:11 Paul urges them to be at peace.

The Christian life is a life of rejoicing and also a life of peace. Thus, to strive against others or to have rivalry with them is contrary to a basic principle of the Christian life. Strife and rivalry are characteristics of the life of fallen mankind. Today the world is full of strife and rivalry. In every aspect of human society, rivalry, and fighting are common. The Christian life is absolutely different from this. As a heavenly people, we should always be at peace with one another.

THE GOD OF LOVE AND PEACE

According to Paul's word in verse 11, if we rejoice, are perfected, are encouraged, think the same thing, and are at peace, then the God of love and peace will be with us. The Corinthians were lacking in love (1 Cor. 8:1; 13:1-3, 13; 14:1) and short of peace through being disturbed by the

distracting teachings and confusing concepts. Hence, the apostle wishes that the God of love and peace shall be with

them for their adjusting and perfecting. They need the love and peace of God to fill them that they may walk according to love (Rom. 14:15; Eph. 5:2) and have peace with one another (Rom. 14:19; Heb. 12:14).

Because the believers at Corinth had strife and rivalry, they certainly were short of love. The book of 1 Corinthians has an entire chapter, chapter thirteen, devoted to the subject of love. Now in his conclusion of 2 Corinthians Paul emphasizes the God of love. He does not emphasize the God of power or the God of miracles. Here Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians, "You are lacking in love, and therefore you need the God of love. Because of your situation, you do not need the God of power or the mighty God. The One you need is the God of love and peace."

When many Christians think of God, they think of Him as the powerful One, the mighty One, the One who performs miracles. But here Paul's emphasis is on the God of love and peace. He indicates to the Corinthians that they need the God of love and peace. They emphasized the gifts, in particular, tongue-speaking. For this reason, they may be regarded as ancient Pentecostals. From experience I know that Pentecostal people especially need the God of love and peace. They may embrace each other one day and be divided the next. They have much difficulty knowing what is genuine, for they are lacking in the God of love and peace.

We need to rejoice, be perfected, be encouraged, and be at peace. We also need to think the same thing. If we have all this in our experience, we shall enjoy the God of love and peace.

Actually, love is the motivating factor of rejoicing. If we are lacking in love, we shall not have any joy, and we shall not be able to rejoice. You may try to rejoice if you have hatred in your heart, but it will not work. Likewise, we cannot rejoice if we are full of jealousy. A rejoicing one is one who is filled with love, kindness, and peace.

It certainly would be worthwhile to put 2 Corinthians 13:11 on our wall at home. But more important, we should keep these words within us.

A HOLY KISS

In verse 12 Paul says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss." This is a kiss of pure love, without any contaminating mixture. Paul's word in verse 12 implies that in our Christian life there should be balance. It is not sufficient simply to have love and peace. Our love needs to be balanced with holiness. Realizing the need for this balance, Paul charges the Corinthians to greet one another with a holy kiss. Then in verse 13 he says, "All the saints greet you."

GRACE, LOVE, AND FELLOWSHIP

Among the sixty-six books of the Bible, 2 Corinthians is unique in that it concludes with a blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." This blessing is composed of attributes of the Triune God: grace, love, and fellowship. The love of God the Father is the source, the fount, and grace is the flow, the expression, of love. With love as the source, we may do something for others or give something to them. This is grace as the outflow and expression of love. For example, I may desire to give a watch to a brother. The giving of the watch is an expression of my love for him. The love within me is expressed by my giving him a watch. We may use this to illustrate the love of God and the grace of Christ. Love is with the Father as the source, and grace is with the Son as the course, the flow, the expression.

The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is a matter of communication, transportation, transmission. Therefore, love is the source, grace is the flow, and fellowship is the transmission of the flow with the source. In this way we have love, grace, and fellowship as our enjoyment, and we participate in them.

Second Corinthians 13:14 clearly says that grace is of Christ, love is of God, and fellowship is of the Holy Spirit. Because the book of 2 Corinthians emphasizes grace, grace is mentioned first in 13:14. Elsewhere in this book Paul speaks strongly of grace. For example, in 1:12 he says, "For

our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God, we conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you." Then in 8:1-15 we see grace from four parties, in particular, the grace of Christ. In 8:9 Paul says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, being rich, for your sakes He became poor, in order that you by His poverty might become rich." Then in 12:9 we have perhaps the most famous verse on grace in the whole Bible: "And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness."

Grace as presented in 2 Corinthians is actually the Triune God embodied in the Son and transmitted into our being through the Spirit for our enjoyment. Hence, grace is the Triune God as our life, life supply, and enjoyment. This grace issues out from the Father's love and is transmitted into our being by the Spirit. Therefore, we have the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit--the full enjoyment of the Triune God.

LIFE-STUDY OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

MESSAGE FIFTY-NINE

FINAL EXHORTATIONS, GREETING, AND BLESSING

(2)

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 13:11-14

A THREEFOLD BLESSING

In 13:14 we have a threefold blessing: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." This threefold blessing involves the Triune God, for here we have the grace of Christ the Son, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament we also have a threefold blessing, the blessing pronounced by the Levitical priesthood at the end of Numbers chapter six. In this threefold blessing the Triune God is implied. Numbers 6:24-26 says, "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." First we have the blessing related to the Father: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee." Second, we have the blessing related to the Son: "The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee." Third we have the blessing related to the Spirit: "The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace." The Levitical priests surely treasured this blessing. However, it cannot be compared with the blessing in 2 Corinthians 13:14. What we have in Numbers 6:24-26 is a mere blessing, that is, a blessing without enjoyment. But in 13:14 what we have is not only a blessing; we have God in His Triune Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

THE TRIUNE GOD AS OUR UNIQUE BLESSING

To speak of the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is actually to say that the love is God, that the grace is Christ, and that the fellowship is the Holy Spirit. Thus, we have God the Father as love, we have God the Son as grace, and we have God the Spirit as fellowship. This means that we have the Triune God in a direct way as our enjoyment. What we have is not merely a blessing from Him or by Him.

In the New Testament the real blessing is the Triune God Himself. As we have pointed out, this blessing is threefold, a blessing of grace, love, and fellowship. With love as the source, grace as the course, and fellowship as the transmission, the Triune God reaches us to be our life, our life supply, and our enjoyment. Now in a practical way we can enjoy the Triune God all day long. This is our unique New Testament blessing.

THREE ASPECTS OF ONE THING

The grace of the Lord is the Lord Himself as life to us for our enjoyment (John 1:17; 1 Cor. 15:10), the love of God is God Himself (1 John 4:8, 16) as the source of the grace of the Lord, and the fellowship of the Spirit is the Spirit Himself as the transmission of the grace of the Lord with the love of God for our participation. These are not three separate matters, but three aspects of one thing, just as the Lord, God, and the Holy Spirit are not three separate Gods, but three "hypostases...of the one same undivided and indivisible" God (Philip Schaff). The love of God is the source, since God is the origin; the grace of the Lord is the course of the love of God, since the Lord is the expression of God; and the fellowship of the Spirit is the impartation of the grace of the Lord with the love of God, since the Spirit is the transmission of the Lord with God, for our experience and enjoyment of the Triune God--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, with Their divine virtues. Here the grace of the Lord is mentioned first, because this book is on the grace of Christ (2 Cor. 1:12; 4:15; 6:1; 8:1, 9; 9:8, 14; 12:9). Such a divine attribute of three virtues--love,

grace, and fellowship--and such a Triune God of the three divine hypostases--the Father, the Son, and the Spirit--were needed by the distracted and confused, yet encouraged and restored, Corinthian believers. Hence, the apostle used all these divine and precious things in one sentence to conclude his lovely and dear Epistle.

THREE HYPOSTASES

In the preceding paragraph we twice used the word hypostases. This word requires further explanation. The singular form of the word is hypostasis. It is anglicized from the Greek. It is composed of two Greek words: *hupo*, a preposition that means under, and *stasis*, a word that means supports or stands forth. Hence, this word refers to a support under, a support beneath, that is, something underneath that supports. The Greek word *hupostasis* is used in 9:4 and 11:17. This word means the groundwork on which some superstructure is founded; hence, foundation, ground; thence, as in 9:4 and 11:17, confidence. If we have the proper groundwork or support underneath, we then can have confidence.

Some dictionaries associate the word hypostasis with the three Persons of the Trinity. This meaning of the word, given in certain dictionaries, is an interpretation. The word hypostasis does not mean person. But theologians have used it to refer to the three Persons of the Godhead, to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Actually, the Father, Son, and Spirit are three hypostases, that is, supporting substances of the Godhead. In other words, the Godhead is composed of the supporting substances of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. This means that if these three hypostases were taken away, the Godhead would lose its substance.

Certain ancient teachers of the Bible used the word hypostases to refer to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Other theologians spoke of the three hypostases as denoting the three Persons of the Godhead. This use of the word person has led some into the error of tritheism, the doctrine that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are three

Gods. As we have pointed out a number of times, W. H. Griffith Thomas has said that we should not press the word person too far, lest we have the doctrine of tritheism. Thus, it is not entirely safe to use the word person in this way. Nevertheless, we may need to use it temporarily. For instance, we use it in one of our hymns (*Hymns* #608): "What mystery, the Father, Son, and Spirit, in Person three, in substance all are one." But even if we use this term temporarily, we wish to make it emphatically clear that we have only one God, the unique God. Nevertheless, God is triune: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The term hypostases is an attempt to convey the truth of the three-one God.

THE TRIUNE GOD DISPENSING HIMSELF INTO MAN

Second Corinthians 13:14 is a strong proof that the trinity of the Godhead is not for the doctrinal understanding of systematic theology, but for the dispensing of God Himself in His trinity into His chosen and redeemed people. In the Bible the Trinity is never revealed merely as a doctrine. It is always revealed or mentioned in regard to the relationship of God with His creatures, especially with men created by Him, and even more with His chosen and redeemed people. The first divine title used in His divine revelation concerning His creation, *Elohim* in Hebrew, is plural in number (Gen. 1:1). This implies that He, as the Creator of the heavens and the earth for man, is triune. Concerning the creation of man in His own image, after His own likeness, He used the plural pronouns, "us" and "our," referring to His trinity (Gen. 1:26) and implying that He would be one with man and express Himself through man in His trinity. Later, in Genesis 3:22 and 11:7 and Isaiah 6:8, He referred to Himself again and again as "us" concerning His relationship with man and His chosen people.

ONE IN THE TRIUNE GOD

In order to redeem fallen man, that He might still have the position to be one with man, He became incarnated

(John 1:1, 14) in the Son and through the Spirit (Luke 1:31-35) to be a man, and lived a human life on earth, also in the Son (Luke 2:49) and by the Spirit (Luke 4:1; Matt. 12:28). At the beginning of His ministry on earth, the Father anointed the Son with the Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17; Luke 4:18) for reaching men and bringing them back to Him. Just before He was crucified in the flesh and resurrected to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), He unveiled His mysterious trinity to His disciples in plain words (John 14--17) stating that the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son (14:9-11), that the Spirit is the transfiguration of the Son (14:16-20), that the Three, coexisting and coinhering simultaneously, are abiding with the believers for their enjoyment (14:23; 16:7-10; 17:21-23), and that all the Father has is the Son's, and all the Son possesses is received by the Spirit to be revealed to the believers (16:13-15). Such a Trinity is altogether related to the dispensing of the processed God into His believers (14:17, 20; 15:4-5), that they may be one in and with the Triune God (17:21-23).

ORGANIC UNION WITH THE PROCESSED GOD

After His resurrection, Christ charged His disciples to disciple the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19), that is, to bring the believing ones into the Triune God, into an organic union with the processed God, who has passed through incarnation, human living, and crucifixion and has entered into resurrection. It is based upon such an organic union that at the conclusion of his second Epistle to the Corinthians the apostle blesses the believers with the blessed Trinity in the participation of the Son's grace with the Father's love through the Spirit's fellowship. In this Trinity, God the Father operates all things in all the members in the church, which is the Body of Christ, through the ministries of the Lord, God the Son, by the gifts of God the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

THE TRIUNE GOD PRODUCING THE CHURCH

The entire divine revelation in the book of Ephesians concerning the producing, existing, growing, building up,

and fighting of the church as the Body of Christ is composed of this divine economy, the dispensing of the Triune God into the members of the Body of Christ. Chapter one unveils how God the Father chose and predestinated these members in eternity (vv. 4-5), God the Son redeemed them (vv. 6-12), and God the Spirit sealed them as a pledge (vv. 13-14), thus imparting Himself into His believers for the formation of the church, which is the Body of Christ, the fullness of the One who fills all in all (vv. 18-23). Chapter two shows us that in the divine Trinity all the believers, both Jewish and Gentile, have access unto God the Father, through God the Son, in God the Spirit (v. 18). This also indicates that the Three coexist and coinhere simultaneously, even after all the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, and resurrection. In chapter three the apostle prays that God the Father would grant the believers to be strengthened through God the Spirit in their inner man, that Christ, God the Son, may make His home in their heart, that is, may occupy their entire being, that they might be filled unto all the fullness of God (vv. 14-19). This is the climax of God in His Trinity to be experienced and participated in by the believers in Christ. Chapter four portrays how the processed God as the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father is mingled with the Body of Christ (vv. 4-6) for the experience of the divine Trinity by all its members. Chapter five exhorts the believers to praise the Lord, God the Son, with the songs of God the Spirit, and give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, to God the Father (vv. 19-20). This is to praise and thank the processed God in His divine trinity for our enjoyment of Him as the Triune God. Chapter six instructs us to fight the spiritual warfare by being empowered in the Lord, God the Son, putting on the whole armor of God the Father, and wielding the sword of God the Spirit (vv. 10, 11, 17). This is the experience and enjoyment of the Triune God by the believers even in the spiritual warfare.

THE TRIUNE GOD FOR OUR ENJOYMENT AND PARTICIPATION

The Apostle Peter, in his writings, confirms this trinity of God for the believers' enjoyment by referring them to the election of God the Father, the sanctification of God the Spirit, and the redemption of Jesus Christ, God the Son, by His blood (1 Pet. 1:2). And John the Apostle also strengthens the revelation of the divine Trinity for the believers' participation in the processed Triune God. In the book of Revelation he blesses the churches in different localities with grace and peace from God the Father, Him who is, and who was, and who is coming, and from God the Spirit, the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from God the Son, Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth (1:4-5). This blessing of John to the churches also indicates that the processed Triune God in all He is as the eternal Father, in all He is able to do as the sevenfold intensified Spirit, and in all He has attained and obtained as the anointed Son is for the believers' enjoyment, that they may be His corporate testimony as the golden lampstands (1:9, 11, 20).

Thus, it is evident that the divine revelation of the trinity of the Godhead in the Holy Word, from Genesis through Revelation, is not for the study of theology, but for the apprehension of how God in His mysterious and marvelous trinity dispenses Himself into His chosen people, that we as His chosen and redeemed people may, as indicated in the apostle's blessing to the Corinthian believers, participate in, experience, enjoy, and possess the processed Triune God now and for eternity.