

The Finest of the Wheat

*Selected Excerpts from the Published Works of
Watchman Nee*

I

WATCHMAN NEE

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THE FINEST OF THE WHEAT

(Vol. 1 of 2 vols.)

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PREFACE

As the psalmist Asaph sang one day about the goodness of the Lord towards His people, he was wont to conclude his song by declaring that Jehovah “would feed them also with the finest of the wheat” (Ps. 81.16a). The apostle James reenforced this statement by noting that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning” (James 1.17). Whatever God gives is always the best. Ultimately, He gave us His only begotten Son, and with Him all things (see Rom. 8.32).

We are thankful to the Lord that because of His great love for the Church He has sent throughout the centuries many of His choice servants to help build up our holy faith. Their lives and teachings become the heritage of the Church which ought to be preserved. In our own time, Watchman Nee was one such choice servant given by God to his Church. He was called to serve the Lord in his youth; and from the time he was saved in 1920 to the time he was imprisoned in 1952, he faithfully and diligently served the Master he loved. Moreover, Watchman Nee was a man with deep spiritual insight, and was given great understanding of the word of God. He traveled far and wide and delivered many messages from the Lord to the Church. Because of his faith he was jailed. But though his voice was silenced during twenty long years of imprisonment, he nonetheless still speaks today. The messages and writings which he presented in the days of freedom have over the years been published in Chinese and also translated into many other languages. In the English version alone, there are some seventy volumes of varying size that have been published. Many are the testimonies of lives transformed and God glorified.

In order to preserve the best of Mr. Nee’s thoughts and teachings, we have taken excerpts from nearly all his published works and now

offer this first volume of a projected two-volume collection of *The Finest of the Wheat* to our readers. These extracts are grouped together under about fifty topics and are appropriately introduced by a sketch of the life of their author that has been provided by the Publishers' translator.

We want to express our thanks to Dr. Angus I. Kinnear of London for giving us permission to print extracts taken from his copyrighted materials of some of Mr. Nee's books, and to extend our thanks also to Sure Foundation in Indiana (USA) for allowing us to do the same with Mr. Nee's *The Release of the Spirit* which is copyrighted by that Foundation. The bulk of the excerpts appearing in this collection, however, have been culled from our own publications of Watchman Nee's works. A few remaining ones have been derived from fresh translations into English made by the Publishers' translator from particular portions of the Chinese originals. (See the Translator's Note for additional details about this and for a complete Code List of Nee Published Materials to which the reader can refer to learn the source of any given excerpt in the entire collection.)

May the blessed Lord take, as it were, this "five loaves and two fishes"; bless it, break it and give to His own—that it may multiply even further the glory to His name.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP PUBLISHERS

Translator's Note

As was intimated in the Preface, there are a few excerpts from Watchman Nee's works appearing in *The Finest of the Wheat* which—though previously translated and published in English—have for this present publication been derived from new translations made from the pertinent sections of the original or subsequent Chinese-language editions of his works. These several works, whose Chinese titles have been transliterated into English, are indicated by an asterisk (*) in the following Code List of Nee Published Materials that has been provided for the readers' use by Christian Fellowship Publishers. It will be noticed, too, that full bibliographical data have been given for each item listed in the Code (with the abbreviation, NY: CFP, standing for New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers).

It should be added here that the codes for these published items excerpted from which have been compiled and/or edited by Dr. Kinnear are marked with a dagger (†) for easy identification, while all other codes listed (except ROS) are for those titles of Mr. Nee's published material whose copyrights belong to Christian Fellowship Publishers.

CODE LIST OF ALL NEE PUBLISHED MATERIALS CITED IN THE COLLECTION OF EXCERPTS

- ALS** A LIVING SACRIFICE (v. 1 of Basic Lesson Series). (NY: CFP, 1972)
- AT** ASSEMBLING TOGETHER (v. 3 of BLS). (NY: CFP, 1973)
- ATR** AIDS TO "REVELATION" (NY: CFP, 1983)
- BC** THE BETTER COVENANT (NY: CFP, 1982)
- BCL** A BALANCED CHRISTIAN LIFE (NY: CFP, 1981)
- BOC** THE BODY OF CHRIST: A REALITY (NY: CFP, 1978)
- BTC** BACK TO THE CROSS (NY: CFP, 1988)

- CGW** THE CHARACTER OF GOD'S WORKMAN (NY: CFP, 1988)
- †**CHL** CHANGED INTO HIS LIKENESS (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1980). Originally published 1967.
- CLJ** "COME, LORD JESUS" (NY: CFP, 1976)
- CS** CHRIST THE SUM OF ALL SPIRITUAL THINGS (NY: CFP, 1973)
- CW** THE CHURCH AND THE WORK. 3 VOLS. [I: Assembly Life; II: Rethinking the Work (known also as The Normal Christian Church Life); III: Church Affairs]. (NY: CFP, 1982)
- DA** DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD (v. 5 of BLS). (NY: CFP, 1974)
- FF** FROM FAITH TO FAITH (NY: CFP, 1984)
- FGG** FROM GLORY TO GLORY (NY: CFP, 1985)
- GC** THE GOOD CONFESSION (v. 2 of BLS). (NY: CFP, 1973)
- GD** GOSPEL DIALOGUE (NY: CFP, 1975)
- GFB** GLEANINGS IN THE FIELDS OF BOAZ (NY: CFP, 1987)
- GG** GRACE FOR GRACE (NY: CFP, 1983)
- GL** THE GLORY OF HIS LIFE (NY: CFP, 1976)
- ***GOC** "The Ground of The Church," *The Open Door* (a Chinese-language magazine published at Shanghai), Issue No. 20 dated 30 June 1950. This article is the Chinese text of a talk given by the author to the brethren in Shanghai on 1 April 1950. A new translation of excerpted selections.
- GP** GOD'S PLAN AND THE OVERCOMERS (NY: CFP, 1977)
- GW** GOD'S WORK (NY: CFP, 1974)
- ***HWB** HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH (Shanghai: Gospel Book Room, 1953). A series of messages given in Chinese by the author at Shanghai between the autumn of 1937 and the autumn of 1942. A new translation of excerpted selections.
- IM** INTERPRETING MATTHEW (NY: CFP, 1989)
- KKH** THE KING AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (NY: CFP, 1978)

- †**LNW** LOVE NOT THE WORLD (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1984). Originally published 1968.
- LOA** LOVE ONE ANOTHER (v. 6 of BLS). (NY: CFP, 1975)
- LPS** THE LATENT POWER OF THE SOUL (NY: CFP, 1972)
- LUP** LET US PRAY (NY: CFP, 1977)
- LW** THE LIFE THAT WINS (NY: CFP, 1986)
- MC** THE MESSENGER OF THE CROSS (NY: CFP, 1980)
- MGW** THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S WORD (NY: CFP, 1971)
- ***MHMG** MINISTRY UNTO THE HOUSE OR MINISTRY UNTO GOD (Taipei: Gospel Book Room, 1953). A booklet-length publication in Chinese. A new translation of excerpted selections.
- †**NCL** THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1985). Originally published 1957.
- NI** NOT I BUT CHRIST (v. 4 of BLS). (NY: CFP, 1974)
- ***OC** THE ORTHODOXY OF THE CHURCH (Shanghai: Gospel Book Room, 1951). A series of messages given by the author in 1945 among the gathered saints at Chungking and published there in Chinese the same year. Reprinted in subsequent years in Chinese. A new translation of excerpted selections.
- PI** PRACTICAL ISSUES OF THIS LIFE (NY: CFP, 1975)
- PM** THE PRAYER MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH (NY: CFP, 1973)
- ROS** THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT (Indianapolis: Sure Foundation, 1965)
- SA** SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY (NY: CFP, 1972)
- SG** THE SPIRIT OF THE GOSPEL (NY: CFP, 1986)
- SJ** THE SPIRIT OF JUDGMENT (NY: CFP, 1984)
- SK** SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE (NY: CFP, 1973)
- ***SOS** SONG OF SONGS (First published at Chungking in Chinese in 1945; reprinted., Tsingtao: Church Book Department, 1948). Notes from a Bible reading on Solomon's Song of Songs conducted by the author with about ten

fellow-workers at Hangchow in 1935. A new translation of excerpted selections.

- SRO** SPIRITUAL REALITY OR OBSESSION (NY: CFP, 1970)
SS THE SALVATION OF THE SOUL (NY: CFP, 1978)
SWR THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION (NY: CFP, 1980)
†**SWS** SIT, WALK, STAND (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1987). Originally published 1957.
***TEV** “The Treasure and the Earthen Vessel,” *The Present Testimony* (a Chinese-language magazine published at Shanghai), Issue No. 38 dated 1 March 1951. Excerpts selected have been derived from the Combined Edition of Issue Nos. 37, 38 and 39 of the magazine and published at Taichong (Taiwan) by Readers Information Supplies in 1977. A new translation of excerpted selections.
TG THE TESTIMONY OF GOD (NY: CFP, 1979)
***TPL** TWO PRINCIPLES OF LIVING (Taipei: Gospel Book Room, 1952). A booklet-length publication in Chinese. A new translation of excerpted selections.
TSM THE SPIRITUAL MAN. 3 vols. (NY: CFP, 1968)
WG WORSHIP GOD (NY: CFP, 1990)
†**WSM** WHAT SHALL THIS MAN DO? (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975). Originally published 1961.
WSS WHOM SHALL I SEND? (NY: CFP, 1979)
YS YE SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES (NY: CFP, 1974)[#]

[#] Those works of Watchman Nee’s listed above *which have been published by Christian Fellowship Publishers* are still available and can be ordered from the Publishers at the address indicated on the Copyright Page of the present volume. Four other works of Mr. Nee’s published by CFP but not cited above are also still available from the Publishers: *Full of Grace and Truth* (2 vols.), *The Mystery of Creation*, *Take Heed*, and *The Lord My Portion* (a Daily Devotional).

Sources for the Scripture Quotations

For those works excerpted from whose Codes are CHL, CW v. II, LNW, NCL, SWS and WSM, the English Revised Version of the Bible (1885) has been used.

For all other works excerpted from, the American Standard Version of the Bible (1901) has been used, unless otherwise indicated.

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A SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE

*Let me love and not be respected;
Let me serve and not be rewarded;
Let me labor and not be remembered;
Let me suffer and not be regarded*

*'Tis the pouring not the drinking;
Tis the breaking, not the keeping —*

*A life suffering to seek others' blessing,
A life loving and true comfort giving*

*Not expecting pity and concern,
Not accepting solace and applause;*

*Even lonely, even forgotten,
Even wordless, even forsaken.*

*Tears and blood my price for the righteous crown shall be;
Losing all, my cost for a faithful pilgrim's life.*

*'Tis the life, O Lord, that You chose to live
In those days when on earth You walked,*

*Gladly suffering all injuries and loss
So that all might draw near and repose.*

*I cannot see how much farther I shall go;
Still I press on knowing there is no return.*

*Let me follow Your pattern so perfect and true,
Bearing ingratitude without complaint.*

*In this time of trial, O Lord, I pray
That You'll wipe all my hidden tears away;*

*Let me learn, O Lord, You are my reward,
Let me be others' blessing all my days.*

This maxim, which was composed by Watchman Nee around the year 1930, could very well sum up his life and ministry.

Watchman Nee was born on 4 November 1903, in Swatow, China.

His birth was an answer to prayer. His mother, Ho-Ping, was afraid that she might bear only daughters like her sister-in-law who gave birth to six daughters. Ho-Ping already had two girls. Though she was at that time only a nominal Christian, she nonetheless prayed for a son and vowed to give him back to God. In the following year she gave birth to a boy and, following the family tradition, named him Shu-Tsu, which means, To continue glorifying the ancestors. It was not till 1925 that Shu-Tsu changed his name to Watchman (which in Chinese is To-Sheng).

When Watchman was six years old the family moved back to Foochow, their native place. He received his early education through private tutoring in Chinese calligraphy and the study of the Four Books and Five Classics which had been the foundation of Chinese culture for two thousand years. Early on he showed his adroitness in learning. As a boy Watchman was lively and active, and thus he received more chastenings than did his elder sisters. In order to protect him, however, his sisters would sometimes take upon themselves the blame for mischiefs perpetrated so as to relieve their brother of punishment.

In 1916, at the age of thirteen, Watchman entered the vernacular Middle School in Foochow, sponsored by the Church Missionary Society (Anglican), to receive a Western-style education. This was a step towards Trinity College, which was staffed mainly by Irish missionaries from Trinity College, Dublin. Being brilliant, he did not need to study hard to rank at the top of his class. Though he observed Christian traditions such as baptism, communion, Sunday School and so forth, he had nonetheless failed to accept Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour. He loved the world and sought for earthly glory. He liked to read novels and to attend movies. He wrote articles for newspapers, and with the money he received he bought lottery tickets. He was at one time the chairman of his school's student body.

During this period China was experiencing great national unrest. Naturally, as a young man Watchman was affected by the political movements all around him. At the same time he developed a strong aversion towards the Church and to preachers. He despised preachers, considering them as dogs to the missionaries. When he was told by his father that he had been promised to God to be a preacher, he could not have disagreed more. Not so, was his firm response, making it clear he had planned his own future in a far different direction. He would never be a preacher, vowed Watchman.

In the latter part of February 1920, Miss Dora Yu, one of the first Chinese evangelists, came to Foochow to conduct revival meetings in the Methodist Tien An Chapel. Mother Nee, being an old acquaintance of Dora Yu, attended the meetings and was saved. The high school boys were free to attend these meetings, and a number of them did. Yet Watchman had till then absented himself. Though his mother had invited him to attend, he declined. In fact, at this time he hated his mother because one day, a month earlier in January, at the end of the winter holiday, a valuable vase in the house had been found smashed. His mother was certain that it was the work of her son, Watchman; so she subjected him to the indignity of a thrashing. Though she discovered later it was a mistake, she had never apologized.

Now, however, mother Nee was saved. She began to have family devotions. When she commenced to play on the piano the very first hymn, she was deeply convicted by the Spirit of God that she must make an open confession to her son before she could worship publicly. To the utter surprise of the entire family she suddenly stood up, walked over to her son, wrapped her arms around Watchman, and cried out, "For the sake of the Lord Jesus, please forgive me for beating you unjustly and in anger." This touched Watchman deeply. Never had he heard of a Chinese parent accepting such loss of face. If his own mother could be so transformed, there must be something

powerful in the preaching of this visiting evangelist. Christianity, he thought, must be more than a creed. This lady preacher was therefore worth a hearing. And hence, next morning he told his mother that he was ready to go and hear Dora Yu.

Young Watchman went as he had promised. He was touched in heart by the gospel on the very first evening. He knew that the gospel of Jesus Christ was true. Indeed, he had no problem in accepting it, but he had a serious apprehension. On 18 October 1936, at a Workers' Conference at Kulongsu, he offered the story of his own salvation. Here is what he himself testified:

“In 1920, after I had attended the Revival Meetings led by Dora Yu, I experienced a great struggle in my heart. On the one hand, I must settle the issue of whether or not I would accept Jesus Christ as Saviour; but on the other hand, I must settle the issue of whether or not I would decide to be His servant. For I felt that if I should accept Jesus to be my Saviour, I must at the same time receive Him as my Lord: I would have to serve Him throughout my life. At that time I was only seventeen years old. I had dreamed many wonderful dreams, and I had spent much effort in laying out a great plan for the future. May I humbly say here—and my fellow-students, several of whom are here, could bear witness to the truth of it—that had I diligently pursued my plan I could have well succeeded. Accordingly, my receiving the Lord's salvation must be two-fold: I must not only be saved from sins, I must also be saved from the world. I was convinced that I could not set aside the Lord's calling, merely becoming a saved person and not a serving one as well. I wanted these two things to happen together.

“That night (29 April 1920), in the very deep of the night, I was alone in my room to settle these two questions. I knelt down to pray. At first I had nothing to say. After a while, and without premeditation, I began to see many sins appearing before my eyes. I

saw myself a sinner. Never in my life had I seen my sins in such a way. Yes, I indeed saw my sins, but at the same time I saw the Lord Jesus. On the one hand I saw the blackness of my sins, but on the other hand I saw the redness of the blood of the Lord Jesus. I witnessed the Lord Jesus hanging on the cross, bearing in His own body my sins. It was as though the Lord were calling to me: 'I have borne your sins. I am waiting for you to come.' How could I any longer resist when under the impact of such love? Formerly I had mocked believers in Jesus Christ, but that night I could not mock them anymore. I asked the Lord to forgive my sins. As I confessed them, the burden of them rolled away from me.

"During that time, many new things happened to me. For the first time I realized I was a sinner. For the first time I prayed and asked the Lord to forgive me of my sins. For the first time I received into my heart true joy and peace and knew as well that my former joy and peace had been false. After prayer I rose up and sensed great freedom. It seemed as if my entire room were flooded with light. I did not know where I was.

"All the things I had planned in the past years were now finished. It might have been easy for others to lay down their dreams and plans, but for me this had proven to be most difficult. And yet that night I received a new life. Both my salvation and my call were simultaneously resolved. And since that night I have never doubted my call: Within that very hour I knew the Lord had saved me. I knew He had died and that He now lives for me; therefore, I too must die and live for Him. I must serve Him in all my life.

"After I was saved I continued my study in school. While other students brought novels to class to read, I brought the Bible. Not long afterwards I went to Shanghai to stay with Miss Dora Yu in order to

learn how to serve the Lord.* However, I was sent back by her after only a short stay. She did not explain to me why she was sending me back; she simply said that it was not convenient for me to stay there. I understood later on that the problem was in me—that it was because as a youth I liked to eat well, dress well, and sleep till eight o'clock in the morning.

“After I returned to Foochow I continued my schooling. I did not faint in heart, since I knew God had called me. I knew I had many weaknesses, but God would never forsake me. Although I occasionally lost my temper and exhibited other bad habits, my schoolmates realized that I was different from before.

“Now when I was newly saved I did not know how to lead people to Christ. I thought that the more words I spoke to them the better, that if I said more, then people would be saved. But I was a total failure, for no one got saved. I felt I was powerless.

Later on, I met a lady missionary, Miss Groves. She asked me how many souls I had won since I had been saved. I replied that I had preached the gospel to my fellow-students but that they would not listen; and therefore, the fault lay in them. She suggested, however, that the fault probably lay in me. She probed further and asked me if there was anything standing between me and God—if there was any hidden, unconfessed sin. I had to acknowledge that there were such things. She asked me if I was willing to deal with them immediately; to which inquiry I responded positively.

“She further inquired about how I witnessed to people. I said I had no plan. I simply said what I felt like saying, without any regard to

* At that time there was some student unrest, and sensing the need of adjusting himself to a whole new direction in life Watchman quietly disappeared and went off to Shanghai to join Dora Yu's Bible School for a one-year training in the Scriptures.—*Translator*

their listening or not. She told me that I was wrong in doing so. 'You should first speak to God and then speak to men. You should first bring people *to* God before you speak to them *for* God. You should pray to God, seeking to know for whom He wants you to pray. Write these names in a notebook and pray for them daily. Then when opportunities arise, preach the gospel to them.' I accepted her advice.

"That very day, in fact, I dealt with many sins and unrighteous things. I asked the Lord to cleanse me with His blood and forgive my sins. From that day onward, I prayed for those whose names were written in my notebook. At the beginning I prayed for them hourly. I found it was rather difficult, for I did not have much to say. Even in class I prayed secretly for them. After a few months, my schoolmates considered me a laughingstock. Whenever they saw me approaching them, they would say that the preacher was coming, and they did not really listen to what I had to say to them.

"Later on I asked Miss Groves why I was still ineffective after having used all the methods she had taught me. She encouraged me to keep on praying till some would get saved. Thank the Lord, I can testify that all of those except one whose names were written in that notebook got saved. There were sixty to seventy names written down in it. Thus did I learn the lesson of never giving up but always praying."

Watchman carried a Bible with him everywhere. He was constantly reading it. He once testified that he read nineteen chapters of the Bible consecutively each day. He also used various approaches by which to search the Scriptures. He went through the whole Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—several times within a short period. Having a photographic mind, he was able to remember much of what he had read. Moreover, his knowledge of Biblical truth greatly increased.

In searching the Scriptures he realized that he must obey the Lord

by being baptized by immersion. So, on 27 March 1921, he was baptized in the water at White Teeth Rapids outside of Foochow. Declared Watchman on this momentous occasion: “Lord, I leave my world behind! Your cross separates me from it forever; and I have entered into another. I stand where You have placed me in Christ!”

In his heart Watchman wanted to follow everything that was to be found in the Bible but nothing that was not there. So as he continued studying God’s word, he felt the need to remember in simplicity Jesus’ death at the Lord’s Table. He talked to his friend Leland Wang, who happened to have the same conviction. And thus, one Lord’s Day evening in 1922, in the early part of the year, three of them—Leland and his wife, and Watchman—broke the bread of communion in a small house where the Wangs lived. They found much joy and release in thus worshiping the Lord. Later they were joined by others.

For much of his spiritual growth, Watchman turned to Miss Margaret E. Barber for help. Miss Barber had first come to Foochow in 1899 with the Church Missionary Society, but then in 1920 she had returned to Foochow independent of any mission board, depending on the Lord alone. She lived in a bungalow at White Teeth Rock. She and her fellow-worker, Miss L. S. Ballard, gave themselves to pray that God would raise up young men and women to win rural China for Christ. Naturally, these young believers turned to her for help.

“During that time,” continued Watchman in telling the story of his salvation, “I felt I would not be effective in work without the power of the Holy Spirit. I must carefully deal with this problem before God. I needed to seek the power of the Holy Spirit. So I went again to my spiritual sister, Miss Barber, for counsel. I told her that there were few people getting saved in my community. Did I need to receive the power of the Holy Spirit or to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order

to win more souls? Her answer was yes. At that time I was very young and ignorant concerning spiritual things. I knew God had already saved me and had also called me. Though I had not yet gained complete victory, I had laid aside many improper things in my life. I further inquired of her if she had any way or method by which to be filled with the Holy Spirit. She replied that I must consecrate myself to God. I said to her that I had already consecrated myself to Him, but that I still saw my own self. How could I consecrate more? Her answer was that I must ask God to accept my consecration just as I would have asked people to accept my gift. As I continued to ask how, she told me a story:

“Mr. Prigin was a brilliant young man. While he was pastoring a church he was at the same time studying for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Two months before the final oral examination, having already been assured by his professors that he would have no trouble passing it, he was challenged by God to lay aside his ambition. For some time he had been asking God to fill him with the Holy Spirit because he was conscious of his unsatisfactory spiritual life as well as of his lack of power. He attempted to argue with the Lord by suggesting how much more glorious for Him to be served by a Doctor of Philosophy; the Lord showed him, however, that He had no such need. If he really wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit he must not take the examination. He was perplexed. He agonized over this issue for two months, till the very Saturday before his examination was to occur on the following Monday, and while he as usual was once more waiting before the Lord for the message he was to give on the Lord's Day. He was still troubled by this inner struggle. In desperation he finally yielded to the Lord and notified the school authorities that he would not come for the final examination. Yet he had been left so exhausted that he could not prepare for the message for the next day. Upon mounting the pulpit the next day to preach he simply told the congregation the story of what had just happened to him. There was not a dry eye in the whole congregation. He became

a man greatly used by God.”

“After I heard this story,” continued Watchman at the 1936 Kulongsu Conference, “I told the Lord that I was willing to set aside all hindrances to my receiving the power of the Holy Spirit. Between the years 1920 and 1922 I had confessed my sins and had apologized to at least two to three hundred people. I reckoned that each single sin was an obstacle. If I could get rid of all these sins, I would surely receive power. Nevertheless, having done all this I still did not receive power.

“By January of 1922 there was already a small gathering of the Lord’s people at ‘Tze Yuan’ [‘Tze Garden’]. I remembered one day that I was going to have to preach that very day. So I opened my Bible, trying to find a suitable subject. I happened to read Psalm 73, verse 25, which states: ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.’ Upon reading it, I confessed that I could not say these words as the psalmist had said. At the time I knew that there was something hindering the relationship between me and God. For over ten years I had had deep affections for Charity.* She was not saved at that time. I tried to preach the gospel to her, but she always laughed at me. We truly loved each other. I let her laugh at the Lord Jesus whom I preached. In my heart she always occupied a very large place. I had frequently asked myself if I should continue to let her occupy such a place in my heart. We all know that when a young man is in love, it is most difficult for him to lay it aside. Although with my lips I said to God that I was willing to lay her aside, in my heart I was unwilling to do so. I now read that verse in the Psalms again. I could honestly confess that I could not lay her aside. During that entire week I could not say, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon

* Charity Chang was Watchman’s schooldays sweetheart.—*Translator*

earth that I desire besides thee' The Spirit of God had put His finger on this very issue as the hindrance to my being filled with the Holy Spirit. On that particular day I still went to preach, though I did not know what I was preaching about.

“Later on, I began to reason with God. I asked Him to give me power first, and then I would lay her aside. But God never reasons with men. In my youthfulness I promised God many things: I would go to Tibet to preach the gospel; I promised Him I would do this and that; but God would not listen. His finger persistently pointed at this girl friend as my obstacle. No matter how I prayed, I could not get through. My heart was really heavy. I even begged God to change His heart. But no, He insisted on my dealing with this matter. It was as though there was a piercing of my heart with a sharp sword. God wanted me to learn a deeper lesson; otherwise I would be of no use in His hand.

“On yet another day I preached in the morning. In the afternoon I was in my room under great heaviness of heart. I told God that since I would be going back to school the next Monday I wanted Him to fill me with the love of Christ. I was now ready to lay aside my lover. The love of Christ had so constrained me that I was determined to put her aside. With this decision made I could say from my heart the words of Psalm 73.25. My inside was filled with unspeakable joy. Even though I had not ascended to the *third* heaven, I could say I had been to the *second* heaven, so happy and full of joy was I. The world now became insignificant to me. I felt as though I were floating on a cloud. On the night when I was saved, the burden of my sins had been rolled away. On this day (13 February 1922), all obstacles in my heart had been removed. Not long afterwards many people were saved.”

It has been told that after this surrender of heart to God Watchman changed his clothes, put on coarser dress, took a roll of gospel

posters, went out to the streets, and affixed these posters to the walls. Such was the nature of his farewell to the world. He also composed a hymn on this occasion:

*What length, breadth, height and depth!
 What greatness is His love!
 How else could I, a sinner vile,
 Be in such grace and bliss?*

*My Lord has paid the price
 To buy me for Himself.
 So, willingly I'll bear the cross
 To follow Him steadfast.*

*I've now abandoned all
 That I may thus gain Christ.
 No thought or care of life or death,
 Nothing can hold me back.*

*Friends, pleasures, gain and fame . . .
 No longer useful be.
 My Lord became so poor for me,
 His poverty I'd share.*

*I love my Saviour dear;
 His praise is my desire.
 For Him, let ease be turned to pain,
 Let gain be turned to loss.*

*My Comforter Thou art,
 Jesus my gracious Lord!
 Who do I have in heav'n but Thee?
 Who else my love on earth?*

*I care not for the pain,
 Hardship and loneliness.
 Dear Lord, embrace my spirit, soul
 and body with Thy love.*

*I ask of Thee, my Lord,
 To guide me with Thy grace;
 Stand by my side to give me strength
 To safely pass through life.*

*Satan, flesh, and the world
Do tempt and press me sore;
Unless Thy might upholds me, Lord,
I just might shame Thy name.*

*While time is fleeting by,
Lift me above this world;
That at Thy return I can sing,
"Hallelujah, Amen."*

During the second academic semester of 1922, evangelistic meetings began to be held at school. Hundreds came to experience the saving grace of God. At lunch times and in the evenings, there would be students praying in the chapel. The proctor of the school was amazed at the lack of disciplinary cases. During holidays, students (wearing gospel placards on their chests or backs) would go out to the streets to preach. In January of 1923 Miss Ruth Lee (formerly an avowed atheist but now a fulltime Christian worker) was invited to Foochow to conduct evangelistic meetings. Though only four preaching services were scheduled to be held, many people were saved. Watchman and his fellow-workers felt the need of continuing on. The Spirit of God moved so mightily that the meetings could not be stopped. Daily, many came to hear the gospel. Watchman recalled, "I have never seen a greater revival. People were saved daily. It seemed as if whoever met us got saved." This continued on for about a month before they formally rented a place. Such was the beginning of the work in Foochow.

Watchman continued with his story. "In 1923 I was a young man. I had six fellow-workers who were also young in age. I frequently had arguments with one of them. We each had our temperament and particular idiosyncrasy. I said he was wrong, and he said I was wrong. Every Friday we had our co-workers' meeting. The two of us often quarrelled. The other five would sit there listening to our wrangles. I acknowledged that I sometimes was wrong, but I believe he made more mistakes than I did. It was easy to confess my own fault, but it was hard to forgive another's fault. On Saturdays I usually visited

Miss Barber, carrying my accusation to her. I told her that my fellow-worker was so wrong in this and other matters that she should admonish him. Then she would say to me, ‘He is five years older than you are. You should listen to him, because the scripture says, “ye younger, be subject unto the elder” (1 Peter 5.5)’.

“I asked her whether I must be subject to him with or without reason. This, I had said to myself, I could never do. Christians should be reasonable. Yet she would not listen to me, but merely insisted on what the Scriptures said. I was very angry within. Why should the Scriptures say such a thing! I dared not lose my temper before her. On most Saturdays I would go to her and accuse that fellow-worker who was older than I. But she always would answer the same way—that the younger should be subject to the older. She said it again and again. I was dying with frustration.

“On one particular Friday afternoon I had battled with that older brother most fiercely. In the evening I returned to my room and cried. (I can laugh now; but at that time I rarely laughed, though I frequently lost my temper.) I thought that by going once more to my spiritual sister I could receive some sympathy from her and at last get her to avenge me. Who would have thought that I would get absolutely no sympathy from her but would be strongly chastened by her instead! I deeply regretted that I had been born five years later than that older brother.

“Yet once more we two brothers quarrelled. This time I regarded him as totally unreasonable. I was sure now that I would be vindicated. So I went again to sister Barber to accuse my older brother. I asked her whether I should still be subject to one who had committed such gross error. She answered, ‘Right or wrong is an altogether different question. Let me ask you, Today you accuse your brother before me with such an attitude; are you like one who bears the cross? Do you have the spirit of the Lamb?’ After all these many

years I still cannot forget the questions she put to me that day. The duration of the contention between the older brother and me was about a year and a half in length. As I even now recall it, I today feel that that was the most precious time of learning in my life. I praise the Lord, for His ways are higher than our ways. During this one-and-a-half years, I came to know what bearing the cross meant. Today we have more than fifty co-workers in China.* Had I not learned the lesson in those one-and-a-half years, I today would not be able to work with anybody. During those eighteen months I had no opportunity to voice my opinion and see it vindicated. I returned time and again to my room to weep. I suffered greatly. But as I think back upon it all this day, those eighteen months were indeed most precious. God knew I was a difficult person. So He arranged a special environment by which to smooth off all my sharp corners. Thank and praise the Lord, His grace carried me through. Today I would like to say to my younger fellow-workers: If you are unable to stand the grinding of the cross, you are useless in the Lord's hand. Only the spirit of the Lamb, gentle and meek, is approved of the Lord. Your ambition and ability are useless to Him. In walking this way your attitude should constantly be, I will not reason with people but will instead be willing to bear the cross. In the Church, bearing the cross, not reasoning, is the law."

During this period Watchman grew in his spiritual understanding. He discerned the difference between law and grace, hence he was able to preach a pure gospel. He also was led by the Lord to preach on the difference between the kingdom and eternal life, on the difference between grace and reward, and on the Second Coming of the Lord. He traveled to various places to lead meetings. "Between 1921 and 1923; reported Watchman in 1936, "the number of the saved increased quickly. At first I thought holding evangelistic

* It should be kept in mind that this was spoken in the year 1936.—*Translator*

meetings constituted the entire work of God. But by 1923 I realized that this was not His whole work. In reading the Book of Acts I saw that God wanted to raise up assemblies in various localities and that in the Church there should not be a mixture of the saved and the unsaved. Wheat and tares grow together in the world but not in the Church. There should indeed be the ingathering of souls and revivals in China, but there should also be the testimony of the Church: there should be people who in every place maintain the testimony of God. I now understood this to be God's purpose. Yet due to the fact that my fellow-worker did not have this light, I was sorely tried in spirit at the gathering in Foochow where I had been placed by the Lord. As the light we each received was different, our ways of working also differed. My brother's focus was on evangelism and revivals, but I wanted to build the local church."

In 1924 the question of ordination became a point of conflict between Watchman and his fellow-workers in Foochow. Some among them intended to invite an ordained missionary from Shanghai to come and have them ordained as ministers. Watchman strongly disapproved. He believed that according to Ephesians 4.11 ministers are the gifts of the ascended Christ to His Church. He accepted *divine* ordination, but not human ordination. He even preached a message on the ark of God among the Israelites, to the effect that once it had departed from Shiloh it never returned to that place, this thus signifying a warning to the believers not to backslide into old ways. This greatly displeased those brothers who were seeking after man's ordination.

Shortly thereafter, while he was away preaching, his fellow-workers in Foochow formally announced his expulsion from the work there. This aroused the resentment of many of the brethren in the gathering. They were determined to defend Watchman. In order to avert a split, however, he quietly left Foochow. A hymn which he wrote at the time gives expression to his inner feeling about

the situation:

*If from the right course I depart,
At once comfort I'll find;
But I remember how my Lord
Did suffer agony.*

*I'd utterly forsake this world,
And sever all the ties.
My path may narrow more and more;
I'm but a pilgrim here.*

*Though men may scowl and laugh to scorn,
I only want His smile.
Let others fancy outward shows,
His "best" is my desire.*

*Not after greatness do I seek,
Nor success in this life.
But humbly I would serve the Lord
That day to gain His praise.*

*I'm daily gazing at the light
Out of His judgment seat,
That all my living and my works
May stand the test of fire.*

*You may run after name and fame,
Or glory, wealth, and friends.
You can have all your great success,
Your followers and praise.*

*In solitude and poverty,
I wish to prosper not;
But faithfully I'll follow Him
Until I reach the goal.*

*I know, while here to earth He came,
His only gain was "death."
That's why no other wish have I
But with Him to suffer loss.*

*Since all my glories lie ahead,
Now patient I must be.*

*I will not go before my Lord
Much glory to receive.*

*That day, my honor I'll receive;
The Lord will dry my tears.
Today, while He must tarry still,
I'll press on faithfully.*

Having left Foochow, Watchman now traveled to Nanking and Shanghai. He received a word from the Lord in Luke 4.43 which records what Jesus declared: "I must preach the good tidings of the kingdom of God to the other cities also: for therefore was I sent." In November of the same year (1924) he went overseas with his mother to Malaya and spent about half a year abroad preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In May 1925 he returned to Foochow and rented a tiny but in Lo Hsing Pagoda, a small village down from the city near the sea. The following two years were a transitional period for him. It was also a time of rapid spiritual growth. Though he began to have a cough, he used this opportunity at Lo Hsing Pagoda to study intensively the Holy Scriptures as well as to read extensively the writings of such servants of God as Dean Henry Alford, B. F. Westcott, Martin Luther, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, David Brainerd and others.

In 1926 while Watchman was preaching in South China he fell ill. He was told that he had tuberculosis and had only a few months to live. "I was not afraid of death, I had peace in my heart. But that night, when I thought upon the work of God, I felt I should not die. I must put into writing what lessons I had learned from the Lord in the past years, so that they would not go to the grave with me. And thus did I prepare to write *The Spiritual Man*."

On and off as his health permitted him, Watchman wrote this monumental three-volume work till he accomplished the writing of all of it in June of 1928. At that time it was his thought that he had

made his very last contribution to the Church; and so he prayed, "Now let Your servant depart in peace" (see Luke 2.29).

It should be noted that towards the end of 1926 Watchman had been invited to Nanking for rest and to help with the translation into Chinese of the Scofield Correspondence Course. By May 1927 he went on to Shanghai. There he renewed his fellowship with some brothers and sisters who had arrived in that city ahead of him and who had already begun to break bread at the Lord's Table in Peace Wang's house at Hsiu Garden. From there the gathering moved to Keng Ching Lane, and then, in 1928, to Wen Teh Lane along Hardoon Road.

It was while Watchman was in Shanghai that he experienced deliverance from sin. "For years after my conversion I had been taught that the way of deliverance was to reckon myself dead to sin and alive to God (see Romans 6.11). I 'reckoned' from 1920 to 1927, but the trouble was that the more I did so, the more alive to sin I clearly was. I simply could not believe myself dead, and I could not produce death. Sin was still defeating me, and I saw that something was fundamentally wrong. . . . No one, you see, had pointed out to me that 'knowing' (verse 6 of Romans 8) must precede 'reckoning' (verse 11). For months I was troubled and prayed earnestly, reading the Scriptures and seeking light. I said to the Lord, 'If I cannot be brought to see this which is so fundamental, I will not preach anymore. I want first to get clear on this.'

"I remember one morning—how can I ever forget it!—that I was sitting upstairs reading Romans and came to the words: 'knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin.' *Knowing this!* How could I know it? I prayed, 'Lord, open my eyes!'; and then, in a flash, I saw. I had earlier been reading 1 Corinthians 1.30: 'ye [are] in Christ Jesus.' I now turned to that

passage and looked at it again: ‘of him [God] are ye in Christ Jesus . . .’ The fact that you are in Christ Jesus is *God’s* doing! It was amazing! So then, if Christ died, and that is a certain fact, and if God put me into Him, then *I* must have died too. All at once I saw my oneness with Christ—that I was in Him and that when He died I died. My death to sin was a matter of the past and not of the future. It was Divine fact that had dawned upon me.

“Carried away with joy I jumped from my chair and ran downstairs to the young man working in the kitchen. ‘Brother’; I said, seizing him by the hands, ‘do you know that I have died?’ I must admit he looked puzzled. ‘What do you mean?’ he exclaimed. So I went on: ‘Do you not know that Christ has died? Do you not know that I died with Him? Do you not know that my death is no less truly a fact than His?’ Oh, it was so *real* to me! I felt like shouting my discovery all through the streets of Shanghai. From that day to this I have never for one moment doubted the finality of that word in Galatians 2.20: ‘I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.’”

At the beginning of 1929, Watchman returned to Foochow to attend to some family affairs. In his heart he was ready to say or do anything God required if only he might recover his health. One day he met on the street his former professor at Trinity College. The latter looked at him through and through, and then sighed, “What has happened to you? We had high hopes for you at school, that you would achieve something great. Now look at yourself. What a pity!” It was true that his health was broken and that in the eyes of the world he had nothing praiseworthy to show forth. For a moment he felt very ashamed and was close to tears. Then, in the very next instant, he looked up to heaven and said, “Lord, I praise You that I have chosen the best way.” At that very moment the Spirit of glory filled his heart!

Returning to Shanghai he continued to serve the Lord with all the strength he had remaining. "Each afternoon I had fever, and through the entire night I could not sleep. I sweated cold sweat. I could hardly believe I could continue to live. Some brothers advised me to take more rest, but I felt I would rather work than rest. If God considered my work unfinished, then I would live. Otherwise, I had no longing to live in this world. I prayed and asked God to show me what I should do before I left this world. I forced myself to get up from bed and lead meetings. On the way to the meetings I had to hold on to the lampposts from time to time to steady myself. I would pray, rest, and then walk on. I told the Lord that it was worthy to die for Him."

Watchman's disease worsened. He explained the situation as follows: "At night I woke up every five minutes. I perspired a great deal. My hearing was so poor that people had to put their mouths near my ears for me to hear. My voice got coarse. Death seemed to be imminent. Telegrams were sent to various places asking for prayers. Nothing seemed to happen. A sister who was a nurse saw me and wept, for she had seen many severely-ill patients but none worse than I. Probably it had become a matter of three or four days before I would die. And when I learned about it from others I said that that was fine with me. In fact, I tried to comfort them.

"One day I inquired of God why He was treating me thus. I confessed many sins and tried to set all things of my life in order. My only fear was lest I would be unfaithful and without faith. I fasted and prayed for a whole day, rededicated myself to God, and promised to do His work only. From morning till three o'clock in the afternoon, my fellow-workers were praying in sister Ruth Lee's house. God granted me faith. Indeed, He gave me several words from the Scriptures concerning faith: 'in faith ye *stand* fast' (2 Cor. 1.24), 'we *walk* by faith' (2 Cor. 5.7), and 'the righteous shall *live* by faith' (Rom. 1.17). I rejoiced and thanked God that my Lord had healed

me.

“Immediately the testing came. I felt I should stand up. Yet how could I stand up? My heart struggled within me. After all, there was self-love in me. It was better to die in bed than to die attempting to stand. But the word of God was powerful. I had been in bed for one hundred and seventy-six days. I had not dressed myself once in all that time! But I found my clothes and got dressed. My perspiration fell like rainfall. Satan tempted me by suggesting that since I could hardly sit, how could I ever stand! I said in response, If God said stand, I stand: ‘in faith ye *stand*.’ As I stood up, I felt as though I were standing on cotton.

“Then God’s word came to me to ‘*walk* by faith.’ I thought it was quite a feat to stand; but how could I walk? I asked God where I should go. Go downstairs, came the answer. But the stairway was so straight up and high. I told God that I could walk in the room, but how could I go downstairs?!? I prayed and went to the door that led to the stairway. I opened the door and started to go down. I said to God that even if I died in walking I would walk. ‘Yet *I* cannot; therefore, help me, O Lord.’ I went down the stairs, indeed, holding on to the railing. There were in all twenty-five steps on the stairway.

“Upon my arrival at the bottom of the stairs, I walked quickly across the lane to sister Lee’s house. I prayed, ‘O Lord, hereafter, I shall *live* by faith.’ I knocked at the door. Unfortunately, there was no Rhoda who came to open the door for me (see Acts 12.13-14). The brothers and sisters had been fasting and praying for two or three days. And as I walked in, the scene grew similar to that with which Peter was confronted. The eyes of seven or eight people were all on me. No one dared to say a word or even to move. There was absolute silence. From half an hour and then to an hour, everyone was in the presence of God. I sat down with my heart full of thanks to the Lord. Whereupon I gave a brief portion of my testimony. Therefore I was

no longer bedridden.

“About four years ago [which would be around 1932], I went to a doctor’s house where some curtains were being auctioned . It was the house of the German doctor who had previously taken my chest X-rays. [In the space of two months] I had had my X-rays taken by him three times. On each occasion he voiced pessimism about the results. And on the fourth and last occasion I had gone to him, he refused even to take an X-ray of me. Instead, he showed me one taken of another person whose condition was better than mine but who had died within two weeks of having had the X-ray taken. He told me not to come back again. What he meant was, that I was to go home and wait for death. Yet who would have thought that this doctor would die first? I lifted up my hands in praise to God! By the grace of the Lord, and under His blood, I had remained alive!

“Moreover, through my illness I came to know what God wanted me to do next. God was seeking for overcomers in many places, people who would put themselves in God’s hand. Before I had become sick I not only had conducted meetings in many places but had also had the ambition of writing the best commentary on the entire Bible. After the illness, however, it became clear to me that this was not God’s will for me. Now it so happened that many years before, towards the end of 1922, I had published some issues of *The Present Testimony* magazine in Foochow. It now became clear to me after my severe illness that in the future, instead of gospel truths, commentaries, prophecies or doctrine, the central message of life would be printed in that magazine. Having had fellowship with brothers and sisters in many places, I saw that God had raised up many assemblies. But I also saw that as soon as the testimony concerning the Church began, opposition and slander came from all sides. Yet nothing moved us, for we knew what God had entrusted to us. Even as Paul had learned, we knew we must not be disobedient to the heavenly vision (see Acts 26.19).”

After the visit from the West of some “Exclusive Brethren” to Shanghai in October and November of 1932, Watchman was invited to repay their visit by going to England, the United States and Canada in June 1933. While in Great Britain he had the opportunity of seeing George Cutting, the author of the well-known Christian tract, *Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment*. Once, however, he slipped away from his Brethren hosts and visited the Christian Fellowship and Ministry Center at Honor Oak Road, London. He did not meet its key leader, Mr. T. Austin-Sparks, whom he had especially gone to see, but he did break bread with the saints there on the Lord’s Day. When this was heard of by the Exclusive Brethren, it was to them an unpardonable sin. After Watchman’s return to China, and following many communications back and forth, in 1935 they formally severed all fellowship with the brethren who met in the assembly in Shanghai as well as in other Chinese localities. Watchman and the brethren with him maintained that fellowship must be open to all God’s people. It is based on life, not on light. “Wherefore receive ye one another, even as Christ also received you, to the glory of God” (Rom. 15.7)*

In God’s providence an unexpected and happy turn of events came into Watchman’s life. His schooldays sweetheart, Charity Chang, whom he had much earlier given up for the Lord’s sake, was eventually saved and began to walk with the Lord. They met again, and their buried feelings towards each other were rekindled. After much prayer he concluded that it was God’s will for them to be united in marriage. The matter was negotiated and finalized by Watchman’s mother and Charity’s uncle, Chang Shui-Kwan, who

* For a more detailed discussion of this years-long incident, together with the complete text of the final reply made to these Exclusive Brethren by Watchman Nee and his fellow brethren at Shanghai, the reader can consult “A Reply to the Brethren Assembly in London,” in Watchman Nee, *Back to the Cross* (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1988), pp. 105-22.—*Translator*

was the family's legal head. It was the wish of Watchman's mother to have the wedding held on 19 October 1934, for that day was the anniversary of her own wedding. Watchman at first objected, because this would fall on the last day of the Fourth Victory Conference, held at Hanchow. He did not wish his wedding to interfere with the working of the Spirit of God at the Conference. He yielded to the persuasion of the brethren, however, and was united with Charity in a Christian marriage on that very afternoon.

But a vicious storm of animosity broke out after his wedding. Charity's aunt, Chang Mei-Chen, had vigorously objected to the match. She had in mind that her niece should have married a wealthy man. Bitter over what had happened, she placed a harshly-worded advertisement in a national daily paper for a whole week as a means to attack Watchman's moral character. She also printed tracts and distributed them among Christian circles. Indeed, she caused quite a turmoil among many Christians. This forced Watchman for a time to cease public ministry, and he retreated to a place that was far distant from Shanghai. Even when he and his wife returned to Shanghai after several months, Watchman still did not want to preach in public. At the suggestion of Ruth Lee, though, he did consent to lead a study on the Old Testament book, the Song of Solomon, with about ten fellow-workers at West Lake, Hanchow, for two weeks. The notes taken were later published in Chinese as *The Song of Songs*.

During the first part of the year 1935, Watchman felt the need for a breakthrough in his spiritual life. He thought of traveling to England to visit Mr. Austin-Sparks for help. While on his way there, but before he left China, Watchman and his wife spent some time with the American missionaries, Dr. and Mrs. Thornton Stearns, in Chefoo, North China. It so happened that at this same time Miss Elizabeth Fischbacher from Scotland was also a guest in the Stearns' home. They had wonderful fellowship together. Especially through the help of sister Fischbacher Watchman came into an experience of

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit while he was praying by himself. He was refreshed in his spirit. Whereupon he sent a briefly-worded telegram from Chefoo to Shanghai which simply declared: "I have met the Lord." Instead of continuing forward on the contemplated journey to England, he returned to Shanghai. Every morning for a whole week he met with his fellow-workers there searching the Scriptures together on this new experience of his and praying together. Then during September and October of the same year (1935), in a Special Conference that was called, he spoke on the theme, "The Victorious Life and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit." A revival broke out, and soon it spread to South China.

But as the Spirit of God was moving, the enemy was also busily at work. Several important incidents happened. In reviewing the situation Watchman and his fellow-workers came to the conclusion that Calvary must precede Pentecost, that the cross always precedes the power. This was indeed a most valuable lesson to learn.

In 1937 the Sino-Japanese War broke out. In the middle of 1938, Watchman traveled to England once again. This time he was able to see and fellowship with Mr. Sparks. He also ministered in both England and Denmark. It was in Denmark, incidentally, at the International School in Helsingor, that Watchman delivered a series of messages on Romans chapters 5-8, and which he had entitled, "The Normal Christian Life."

Returning to Shanghai in July 1939, Watchman took upon himself the work of training his fellow-workers. Realizing that the war would be long and the financial needs of the work would be great, he went into a business that ultimately proved to be a dark chapter in his life. Though he managed to channel some of the profits of his pharmaceutical firm to support his fellow-workers during that difficult time, he was greatly misunderstood by the church-at-large; with the result that at the end of 1942, he was asked by the

responsible brothers in the assembly at Shanghai to discontinue ministering there.

Believing in the sanctity of the Church, Watchman accepted their decision and retreated to Foochow. There he quietly prepared for the future. He began to buy some houses on Kuling Mountain, outside the city of Foochow, for creating a future training ground. He patiently endured all misunderstanding and refused to defend himself. Later he traveled to Chungking, the war capital of Free China. There, at the earnest and persistent requests of the saints who gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus in the capital city and the surrounding suburban areas, he ministered God's word to them for a short period. These were hidden years for Watchman.

The eight long years of the Sino-Japanese War finally came to an end. On 16 August 1945 the Japanese surrendered unconditionally, and the armistice with China was signed on 9 September at Nanking. Watchman managed to return to Shanghai, but the assembly there was still not ready to receive him. Not until April of 1948 did he have the first opportunity of addressing the saints in Shanghai. In his first address, and referring to himself in the third person, Watchman said that he was like a widow who had to raise a family of children. Because of this she had to remarry, hoping thus that she might be able to feed all of them. Unexpectedly, however, all her children deserted her after the second marriage. He used this simile to explain how he felt compelled to engage in business. At this point in his address Watchman broke down in tears. As he continued speaking, a great many of the saints touched the life of Christ and felt the authority of the Spirit. The atmosphere of the gathering suddenly changed. All the past misunderstandings vanished without the need of further explanation. The floodgates of God's blessing were thus opened, with quite a revival breaking out in Shanghai. People rededicated their lives to God and gave their all for the Lord's interests.

Watchman's burden at that time was the training of workers. He felt that his ministry was to minister to those who ministered. And hence, from June to the end of September 1948 the first training conference on Kuling Mountain was held. About seventy fellow-workers attended. These were months of intensive training. Meetings were held four or five days weekly. In the morning sessions Watchman would speak on such important subjects as the character of God's workman, the ministry of God's word, spiritual authority and submission, and so on. The afternoon sessions were given over to personal testimonies: one after another, the participants would give their own testimonies, to be followed by critiques—first by the other participants and last by Watchman himself. This was done for the purpose of helping to perfect the fellow-workers, since objective observers usually see more clearly than the persons themselves. However, this kind of critique could only be done among those who were fully committed to the Lord and to one another in the Lord. The evening sessions were devoted to helping in the training of new believers. The now well-known fifty-two Basic Lessons were given during these sessions.

A second training conference was held, commencing in the spring of 1949. About a hundred people participated this time. There was a point at which the completion of the conference was very much in doubt. The civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists came very near to Foochow. Though the training sessions were eventually moved down from Kuling Mountain to the city itself, there was a real question as to whether they could continue. After days of prayer and waiting on the Lord, Watchman received assurance from heaven above that the training should continue and that it would be completed.

Upon the conclusion of this second training conference, Watchman went to Hong Kong. From there he returned to Shanghai, which had already been occupied by the Communist army since 25

May 1949. He was concerned about the churches in China and wished to take a closer look at the changing circumstances. According to his observation, he felt the work could still continue on for a number of years. At the end of that same year he once again returned to Hong Kong where his family was. In January 1950 he conducted a special conference at Hong Kong that lasted a month. A revival broke out. This marked, in fact, a new departure in the history of the Lord's testimony there.

Watchman strongly sensed, however, that his responsibility lay with the brethren back in China. Though he knew the danger awaiting him, he decided to return to Shanghai once more. In spite of the pleadings of some brothers that he not return, his heart was nonetheless set toward Shanghai. Once back in that city, he himself worked most diligently, and exhorted the saints to "buy up the opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5.16 mg.). Moreover, he planned and prepared feverishly for the future days when he felt the movement of the workers would be restricted and the work would be prohibited entirely. Such days, unfortunately, came sooner than he thought.

In April of 1951 the new Communist government called the leaders of the various Christian groups in China (among whom was Watchman) to Peking for a meeting, during which the government explained its attitude towards the freedom of religion as guaranteed by the Provisional Constitution proclaimed by the Communists. There would be freedom of religion, government officials indicated, but such a privilege was to be enjoyed only by people loyal to the People's Republic of China and not by "reactionaries" or "anti-revolutionists." A drastic change soon came to the Church in China. "Accusation meetings" against those in all walks of life were now being staged all over the land. Christian groups were no exception. Under such pressure as this, Watchman and his fellow-workers labored day and night to prepare Bible materials and

spiritual messages for the saints as means of strengthening their faith.

Shortly before he lost his freedom Watchman wrote a hymn which might reveal his heart condition before the Lord at this time:

*Since long ago at Bethany we parted,
 Within my heart there is a ceaseless void;
 How can I take my harp down from the willow?
 How can my songs without Thee be enjoyed.?*

*And when at night I'm keeping lonely vigil,
 Grown numb alike to sorrow and to cheer,
 Then I recall the promise of Thy coming,
 But sigh, O Lord, why, why Thou dost not yet appear?*

*The manger wakes the thought: I too am homeless;
 Thy cross strips earthly pleasures from my soul;
 Thy coming bids me seek a better country,
 For Thou Thyself art now my final goal.*

*Since Thou art gone my joy has lost its flavor;
 My song the sweetness I would fain convey.
 Since Thou art gone the sense of void o'erwhelms me,
 Oh, how I long that Thou wilt come and not delay.*

*Though even now I know Thy loving presence,
 Yet in my heart there's still a sense of lack.
 Enlightening and tenderest sustaining
 Can no more satisfy: I want Thee back.*

*Despite Thy peace within, I still feel lonely;
 Despite Thy joy there still remains a sigh;
 When I feel more content, the silent yearning
 To see Thee face to face becomes an uttered cry.*

*What exile cannot but desire his homeland
 And long his people once again to greet?
 What soul on alien soil forgets his kindred?
 What parted lovers never yearn to meet?*

*O Lord, how can these earthly loves and pleasures
 With all the joy of Thy return compare?
 Then, if I cannot here behold Thy countenance,*

*What can I do but sigh till Thou, my Lord, appear?
 Could'st Thou, O Lord, forget Thy word of promise
 Soon to return and take me unto Thee?
 Yet day by day and year by year I've waited
 And still I wait, and no return I see.*

*Remember, Lord, the years I have been waiting
 While Thy dear footsteps linger far away.
 How long? How long? Oh! must I wait still longer
 Till Thou shalt come again in glorious array?*

*From generation unto generation
 Thy saints have come and gone, but have not seen
 Thy glorious promise pass into fulfillment.
 How long, how very long the time has been!*

*Why cannot we, dear Lord, discern Thy footsteps?
 Why are the heavens still so closely sealed?
 Oh! must our waiting be prolonged still further
 Before Thou in Thy matchless splendor art revealed?*

*Lord, I recall the many years I've waited
 For Thy return—yet, Lord, not I alone,
 But Thy dear saints through many generations—
 Beseeking Thee to come back for Thine own.*

*To countless tears and countless fervent pleadings,
 By Thine appearing haste to make reply.
 Oh, may Thou come, the echo of the ages,
 Come, come and answer now this mighty corp'rate cry!*

In April of 1952 Watchman was ordered by the Communist Chinese government to go to Manchuria. There he was arrested by the Department of Public Safety on the 10th of April. He was kept imprisoned in Harbin. No one knew what had happened to him for the government kept everything secret. Between 1952 and 1956, the government quietly prepared materials for his prosecution. On 18 January 1956 the Religious Affairs Bureau called a series of meetings in the Church Assembly Hall at Nanyang Road, Shanghai. The whole congregation was required to be present. A list of criminal charges was brought against Watchman and his fellow-workers. The

first official announcement of his arrest was printed in the *People's Liberation Daily*, Shanghai, on the first of February.

On 21 June 1956 Watchman appeared before the High Court in Shanghai and was found guilty of all charges. He was given the maximum sentence of fifteen years imprisonment, running from 12 April 1952. He was to serve his sentence in the First Municipal Prison in Shanghai. There he was assigned to translate scientific textbooks and journal articles from English into Chinese for government use. His wife Charity was permitted to visit him once a month under supervision. By April 1967 he had served his fifteen years, but he was not released. The authorities had attempted to force him to renounce his faith. Rumors had already been circulated that Watchman had given up his faith. But the Lord was dearer to him than his freedom. And thus his sentence was extended another five years.

He was secretly transferred from the Municipal Prison to Tsing-Tong Labor Farm in Tsing-Po County, a suburb of Shanghai. His wife was able to visit him there once. Then, suddenly, for several months there was no news of him. As a matter of fact, in January of 1970 Watchman was transferred to a stricter labor camp called White Mao Mountain Farm in far-off KwangTeh County, Anhwei Province. Unfortunately, his beloved wife Charity, having suffered a fall, passed away in late September 1971. This was a serious blow to Watchman, but he received it with resignation. He had long harbored a secret wish to be reunited with his wife after serving the entire twenty years. It was told that he once said to a fellow-prisoner, "My term of imprisonment and my wife's life are racing against each other. If I can be released while she is still living, I will take good care of her. For she has suffered much for me." His intense feeling of loss was nonetheless expressed in a letter he wrote to his sister-in-law, in which he said he was so heartbroken that he experienced a sorrow deeper than that of losing his parents. He asked

that a pinch of his wife's hair and the face towel she used be brought to him as a memorial for remembrance.

On 12 April 1972 he completed his twenty-year prison term. There was expectation that he would be released, but nothing was heard. On 22 April he wrote to his sister-in-law:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

I have received your letter of 7 April and learned from it that you have not received mine which acknowledged the receipt of each parcel you sent me. All the things you mentioned in your letter I have received. I am most grateful to you.

You know my physical condition. It is a chronic disease, an organic disease. When attacks come, they are most painful. At times of recession the disease is still with me. The difference is in the degree of activity, not in the sense of recovery. The summer has arrived. More exposure to sunlight may change a little the color of the skin, but it cannot affect the illness. However, please do not worry, because I maintain my joy. I hope you will also take good care of yourself. May your heart be filled with joy.

Wishing you well,

Shu-Tsu

April 22

The chronic disease to which the ailing Watchman referred was a severe case of heart disease. For several decades he had suffered enlargement of his heart. It was said to have doubled its original size. The doctor had told him he might drop dead at any time. He could not lift any weight. Many nights he would sit through till dawn because he could not lie down. The Lord had healed his tuberculosis miraculously and instantaneously, but his heart disease was never cured. Watchman himself once testified that in the healing of his tuberculosis he had experienced *the healing* of the Lord, but in the case of his heart disease he knew the Lord as *the Healer*. He lived daily by the resurrection life of the Lord. Indeed, it was nothing short of a miracle that he was able to live through the twenty years of hard

imprisonment. The Lord's life and the prayers of the saints must have sustained him.

On 6 May of the same year he wrote another letter to his sister-in-law:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

Tomorrow will be the half year anniversary of the death of sister Wei [a reference to Watchman's wife Ping-wei Chang]. The change during this half year is indeed very great. In looking back and touching the souvenir [i.e., the pinch of Charity's hair and face towel that had been sent him at his request], it causes me persistent heart pain. For the past twenty years [i.e., during his imprisonment] I was unable to serve her even once. This shall be my lifelong regret. It is all my fault that gave her trouble. My sickness lingers on. It fluctuates often. I try my best to live frugally that I may not trouble others. In sickness I really think much about my own people [i.e., his relatives] hoping to be with them. But I must submit to the dictate of environment. In the past ten days I was beside myself in pondering over sister Wei. How is your health? You are in my constant remembrance. Elderly people must take special care of themselves. Are you still considering coming to the South? I am at a loss as to what to say. I can only wish you well.

*Shu-Tsu
May 6*

On 16 May he wrote again to his sister-in-law:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

Your letter from Beijing dated the 6th and your letter from Shanghai dated the 11th have all been received. I hope this visit of yours could be longer so as to get more rest. In my illness I too long to have more contact with my own people. The mountain here is natural and the water is clear. One thing special here is that the children grow up healthier than those I saw in Shanghai. Hope you may have more rest. The ashes of sister Wei is a real problem. Let us decide about it after you come here. I do not have

any particular need. Maybe bring me a flashlight. I wish you well.

*Shu-Tsu
May 16*

A further letter to his sister-in-law was sent date 22 May:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

I talk with my superior about my leaving this place. He said, "It is impossible for you to go to Beijing or Shanghai. You have to go to a small place or village. When the proper document arrives, the government will process it according to its policy. You have no need to talk further with me."

So please try to find among my own people one who can facilitate my release. You can tell that person that I have my own livelihood and that I hope he will accept me. Please ask the community council to issue a permit of my acceptance into their locality.

Hope you can find one among my people. Shun-Tau Ma can also be one to consult with. Please discuss with him or somebody else. [Shun-Tau Ma was the husband of another of Watchman Nee's nieces who together with her husband had taken care of Mrs. Nee during Watchman's imprisonment.]

Saturday night my illness struck again. For several hours my heart trembled. I could endure only after I took medicine. I slept in bed the whole Sunday. In sickness I desire much to be with my own people just like "the fallen leaf returning to its root." I have lost contact with my own people for twenty years. So, I can only ask of you.

When you come, can you bring me one kilogram of meat hash and a kilogram of dried beef. The doctor told me not to eat egg yolk, fatty meat and internal organs because they will seriously damage my weakened heart muscles. So I can only eat lean meat without which I will be in lack of protein. Pretty troublesome.

Wishing you well,

*Shu-Tsu
May 22*

On the very same day brother Nee also wrote a letter to his niece's husband:

Shu-Tau, my nephew-in-law:

I believe your aunt [Watchman's late wife] while living must have told you about my condition.

You know my elder sister sends me my living expenses, so I have no problem of livelihood. I am old and sickly. I long to return to my own people as a fallen leaf returning to its root, to find a resting place. I earnestly hope you can take the responsibility of settling this matter. I depend on you to negotiate on all sides.

Your aunt had passed away six and a half month ago. My heart is broken. I could hardly live. I hope you will do your uttermost to send the document here. Your aunt while living mentioned many times of Hui-Nee and her children. I wonder how the children are now? Much remembrance.

I heard that in going to Chekiang there will be a problem of food coupons. [Brother Nee's niece had died and her husband had evidently moved to Chekiang.] I think I eat very little, and so it can be solved. Never mind.

Have not corresponded for twenty some years, but much remembered.

Wish you wel

Shu-Tsu

May 22

Two more letters were written by Watchman: one on 25 May to his sister-in-law and one on 26 May to his nephew-in-law Shun-Tau Ma:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

Tomorrow I shall be transferred from Maple Peak to the farm in Mountain Slope. So when you come, do not buy a ticket to Maple Peak. You should disembark at Mountain Slope. This station is a little farther than that of Maple Peak. It is the next

station. I had written a letter to you earlier than this one. I wonder if you have already received it. I hope to see you soon.

Wishing you well,

Shu-Tsu

May 25

Shun-Tau:

While in Maple Peak I had written you a letter, asking you to get a permit from your community council, proving that you are willing to take me in and also to provide for my living (you know my elder sister sends me my living expenses). Your attitude must be firm and clear . . .

Today I am transferred from Maple Peak to White Cloud Mountain Renovation Group. Hope you try your utmost best to get a reply. This document must be sent directly to the 14th Corp of White Cloud Mountain Farm. Please ask the community council to address the paper to White Cloud Mountain Farm, Kwang-Teh City, Anhwei Province. I eagerly hope to return to my own people. Please do your best.

Wish you well

Shu-Tsu

May 26

Then on the 30th of May 1972 Watchman Nee wrote what proved to be his last letter:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

I was transferred to the 14th Corp of Mountain Slope. This is a distance of 10 li [equal to 3 1/3 English miles] from the station. And also you must climb over a mountain. It is therefore not easy for you to come. You may [want to] cancel your trip. In sickness I still retain joy in my heart. Please do not worry. I shall still encourage myself not to moan over my sickness. As to the ashes of Ping-Wei [Watchman's late wife], please do what you feel right. I commit it to you and fully agree with your desire. Short paper but long affection.

Wish you well

*Shu-Tsu
May 30*

It appears as though brother Nee knew he would soon depart from the world. Indeed, he went to be with the Lord in the early morning of the next day.

On the first day of June 1972, while his sister-in-law was yet at Shanghai, she received a telegram from the White Mao Mountain Farm Labor Camp that simply read: “Watchman Nee died of sickness at the foot of the mountain.” Immediately upon hearing this sad news it was decided that Watchman’s sister-in-law, Ping-Tseng, his niece’s husband, Shung Wu, and his grandniece, Shao Ling Pao, would travel together to the Labor Camp. Two days later, on the third of June, the party of three arrived in Kwang-Teh County, but Shung Wu was able to proceed farther and to reach the Labor Camp at dusk of that same day. Having inquired about Watchman’s death, Shung Wu was told that, not having seen the prisoner come out of his room, shortly after nine o’clock in the morning on the 30th of May, prison officials pushed open the door of his room and found Watchman on the bed, barely breathing. Immediately they asked the Camp’s hygiene officer to examine him. Realizing the seriousness of his situation, they sent Watchman Nee by car to the Labor Camp Clinic which was situated at the foot of the mountain. All efforts there to rescue him failed and the stricken Watchman died at 2:00 A.M., 31 May. Captain Loh of the disciplinary corps declared it to have been a suicide—for, he said, he had a suicide note as proof. Prison officials had found a note under the mattress near his pillow. When pressed for it by Shung Wu, Captain Loh showed the note to him. It was truly in Watchman’s handwriting, written in large letters on a page taken from a notebook. It read:

Christ is the Son of God, who died to atone for men’s sins and who rose on the third day. This is the greatest fact in the universe. I believe in Christ and die.

*Signed,
Watchman Nee*

Upon his reading the note Shung Wu told Captain Loh that this was not a suicide note at all. Watchman had apparently had the premonition that due to his physical condition he would not live long. But he believed in the Christ he confessed even unto death. Furthermore, did not the telegram itself say that Watchman had died of sickness? Naturally, Captain Loh did not understand the meaning of the words, "I believe in Christ and die."

Captain Loh also reported to Shung Wu that because of the heat, they had cremated Watchman's body without waiting for the arrival of his relatives.

The next day, Ping Tseng and Shao Ling Pao both arrived at the Labor Camp. They were told the same story and were not allowed to enter Watchman's room to gather up things left behind.

Later, permission was given to the party to go to the crematory to collect Watchman's ashes. It was not a real crematory but a Labor Camp kiln which served the dual purpose of producing bricks and cremating bodies. The three relatives found the person who a few days earlier had cremated Watchman's body and inquired of him about the condition of the body. Said the cremator: "It was a peaceful body, nothing abnormal at all." "Would you say it was like the body of anyone who had committed suicide?" they asked. He replied that he had cremated many corpses and could surely recognize among them those that had committed suicide, but that he was certain Watchman's death was not a case of suicide because his body appeared so peaceful and joyful and most normal.

Indeed, Watchman Nee had kept his faith in Christ even unto death, and had maintained his joy to the very end.

Watchman's ashes were first buried temporarily in a mulberry field at Hai-Ning, Chekiang (a province west of Shanghai); but in October of 1989 they were finally laid to rest in Shang-San Public Cemetery at Soochow (not far from Shanghai), with a simple white marble tablet having been erected over the remains as a memorial.

1

God and His Eternal Purpose

God is the “I NOW AM”

Another point of special significance is that God is the God of today, that He is the One who is always now. In other words, with God there *is* no concept of time. This does not mean, however, that the Lord has no time; it is only meant to indicate that He is not bound by it. We human beings divide time into periods. We say that one period has already passed, another period is yet to come, and still another period is what we call today or now. Whenever we humans think of time, we always think of past, present, and future. But when we come into touch with God, His “time frame” is always now—for He has no past and neither has He a future, because what has passed is still present with Him and what is yet to come is also present with Him! Again let me reiterate that we do not say God has no time: what we are trying to establish here is that time as we know it simply cannot apply to Him. Our time has tenses—both past, present, and future; but God has only uninterrupted present. With Him there is neither past nor future.

—SWR 60-1

*“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,
and the God of Jacob”*

“God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, Jehovah, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Ex. 3.15).

Here an additional explanation is being given. Who is this

Jehovah your God? He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. So far as God *himself* is concerned, He is Jehovah, the I AM. So far as *men* are concerned, though, Jehovah is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. On Deity's side, He is God, He is Jehovah; this is what He has revealed to men. On men's side, God has revealed himself to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and this is to cause us to see what power He will manifest in *our* lives just as He has manifested His power in those men.

Why does God not declare himself as the God of Adam? For we know that Abraham sinned even as Adam did. Why then did He not call himself the God of Adam? Why did He not say the God of Abel, the seed of Adam? Why instead did He call himself the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob? Why according to the flesh was our Lord Jesus presented in the New Testament as having been born of the seed of Abraham? Why from among all men should God have called himself the God of these three particular persons? Wherein lies the difference between these three and other people? Well, apart from the fact that God had covenanted with these three men, He takes them up as representative personages. He chooses them to represent three types of men in the world.

What type of man is Abraham? He is a giant of faith. He is rather uncommon; in fact, he is quite special. As the God of Abraham, God declares himself to be the God of excellent people. Yet, thanks be to God, He is not only the God of the excellent. Were He merely this kind of God, we would sink into despair because we are not persons of excellence. But God is also the God of Isaac. What type of person is Isaac? He is very ordinary. He eats whenever he can, and sleeps as he has opportunity. He is neither a wonder man nor a wicked person. How this fact has comforted many of us! Yet God is not only the God of the ordinary men, He is also the God of the bad men: He is the God of Jacob too, for in the Scriptures Jacob is pictured as one of the worst persons to be found in the Old Testament.

Hence through these three persons, God is telling us that He is the God of Abraham the best, the God of Isaac the ordinary, and the God of Jacob the worst. He is the God of those with great faith, He is the God of the common people, and He is also the God of the lowest of men such as thieves and prostitutes. Suppose I am special like Abraham; then He is my God. Suppose I am ordinary like Isaac; then He is also my God. And suppose from my mother's womb I have been bad like Jacob was in that I have striven with my brother; then He is still my God. He has a way with the excellent, with the common, and with the worst of humanity.

From that day in Exodus onward, God has always called himself by this wonderful name without any change. Even when the Lord Jesus was about to face death, He said this: "As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. 22.31,32). Here our Lord adds one more meaning to that name. When God calls himself by such a name, it reveals the fact that He is also the God of resurrection. However excellent Abraham may be, he is subject to death and decay; but God will cause him to be raised again from among the dead. As common as Isaac is, he too will die and decay; yet God will also raise him. And as bad as Jacob is, he also will die and decay; nonetheless, God will raise Him up too. In the realm of resurrection, all which belongs to the natural will pass away. God is the God of the living, not of the dead. So that in the resurrection realm, God is to be the God of these three men. This indicates to us Christians—and whether we are naturally talented, ordinary, or bad—that we will all decay; nevertheless, our God will re-create us and make us new in Him. Though we are so different in the natural, God will eliminate all the differences and be our God all the same. For what He looks at is not our natural endowment but the life He has given us. According to the natural, there exist vast differences among Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob; but in resurrection they all receive the same life. God overlooks the natural and looks only at His work of grace. He is able to dispense grace to totally different people and make them almost the same.

What is meant by resurrection? It means the natural has passed away and the supernatural has come. Regardless the fact that some people are highly talented, that some are rather ordinary, and that some are tricky and bad, God in His Son can make all new. How useless is the natural, only the supernatural is profitable. For the eyes of God are focused on resurrection. And hence He can be the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

—FGG 13-16

Abraham saw God as Father. He proved Him to be the source of all things. Isaac received the inheritance as a son. It is a blessed thing to have a gift bestowed upon us by God. Yet even what we receive we may seize upon and spoil. Jacob attempted to do this, and was only saved from the consequences by having his natural strength undone. There must be a day in our experience when this happens. The characteristic of those who truly know God is that they have no faith in their own competence, no reliance upon themselves. When Jacob learned this lesson, then in truth there began to be an Israel of God. . . .

Abraham represents faith; Sarah represents grace. It is impossible to separate them. If the one is gone the other is useless. Here was one more treacherous thing that had to be rooted out before Isaac could be given. Faith that does not rest on God's grace is valueless. You cannot sacrifice Sarah. . . .

This fact of bestowal and acceptance is the great characteristic of Isaac. The God of Isaac is God the giver. He is the God who comes out to us. We must know Him in this way as well as knowing Him as

Father. If we only know Him as the God of Abraham there is no approach to Him. As the God of Isaac He comes to us and gives us everything in His Son. None can go forward and attain to God's purpose unless he knows how to receive in this way. Romans chapter 7 offers us a picture of the man who has not yet found the God of Isaac. He is forever under the law, and cries constantly: "To will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not." He has not seen that everything is offered to him in Christ, nor how full that provision is. The secret is receiving, not doing. The way through is not by the exercise of the will but by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8.2). We know what the God of Abraham wants—we can't help knowing—but we don't know how to get there until we have found the God of Isaac. Victory, life, salvation, all is bestowed, not attained. When you are born into a wealthy home, it is very difficult to be poor! You *are* rich; you were born that way. . . .

It is now that we can begin to look at the difference between the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Isaac, as we have said, speaks to us of God's impartation to us of Christ, whereas Jacob illustrates our disciplinary schooling by the Holy Spirit. Isaac reminds us of God's gifts made over to us absolutely, a reminder that gives us wonderful confidence and assurance. Jacob, on the other hand, draws our attention to the Spirit's inward working upon us to form Christ within, a working whose costliness draws forth rather our fear and trembling. Isaac is able to witness to victory in Christ, Jacob causes us to know our own extreme weakness and uselessness. In Isaac we boldly proclaim that sin is beneath our feet; yet in Jacob we tremblingly confess that as long as we live we may fall again. Isaac assures us that Christ's fullness is ours, so that we may confidently praise Him. Jacob recalls our attention from Christ to the Christian, to our deficient and inadequate selves.

The contrasts we have adduced above represent two experiences that run parallel throughout Scripture and are integral to our

Christian life. The trouble is that we are apt to give our attention to one of the two only. There are, on the one hand, some very strong, almost extreme words in Scripture. "God . . . always leadeth us in triumph." "Sin shall not have dominion over you." "To me to live is Christ." "I can do all things through Christ." They are bold, strong, almost boastful affirmations. Yet the same people who say these things must also say: "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling." "I am chief of sinners." (Note there the present tense in the Greek.) "We have no hope in ourselves." "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." "We also are weak in him." "When I am weak, then am I strong." "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses."

So we see another kind of Christian, utterly weak, sinful, trembling. We see another kind of Christian life, altogether lacking in self-confidence. These two together, Isaac with his confidence in Christ, and Jacob with his self-knowledge, are the life of the Christian.

It is because we only see one side of this that there are so many divergencies among those who preach the victorious life. We must know Christ's fullness, but we must also know our own corruption. These are things we must see, and these are what the God of Jacob shows us through the schooling of the Spirit, until we reach the place where we really know ourselves. In too many of us there is a departmental knowledge of God. We know the fatherhood of God, but not the positiveness of Christ. Or we know this, but lack the brokenness of the Spirit. Some know the God of Jacob without knowing the God of Isaac; they see their own weakness, but do not know Christ's strength. No wonder they feel depressed about it! If we want a full knowledge of God we must know Him in all of these three ways, and even then we shall find that we are constantly making further progress! . . .

The difference between the natural man and the old man is a basic one. God has given us His Son. When we enter into Him and He into us, what happens? One day we receive Him as our Saviour and Lord, and quickly discover that our old man was dealt with once and for all in His cross (Romans 6.6). God made no effort to patch him up or improve him, but crucified him outright in Christ, finishing him for good. Therein the question of sin was settled. To know this is of the greatest importance. In God's eyes the old man had to die. Then our eyes are opened and the truth dawns on us that he is already dead in Christ; and that Christ himself is our new life, indwelling, empowering, becoming to us everything. This is a tremendous discovery.

But along with this new life indwelling, there remains within us the natural man, the good, honest, worthy human nature that wants to please God. It is this that God encounters in Jacob. . . .

In the figure of Isaac we have Christ imparted to us so that, in the words of Galatians 2.20, it is "no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." In the figure of Jacob we have Christ being wrought in us, so that "that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God." It is the Holy Spirit's work to form Christ in us in this latter way. God deals with the natural man that Christ may be inwrought in us, so that we manifest the fruit of the Spirit (5.22). . . .

Isaac's life was peaceful, with no strivings. Jacob's way was one long struggle throughout. For Isaac everything went easily; Jacob found even the simplest things presenting difficulties. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all three; so we cannot have Isaac without Jacob, nor, praise God, Jacob without Isaac.

We ourselves are in the position of both. From the Lord's side we are rich, complete in Christ. Yet because of our own natural strength, God's hand has a chastening and formative work to do upon us. We cannot escape the discipline, but equally surely we shall never be

without the absolute fullness of divine bestowal. If there is a difference in the discipline it is because some of us have more of Jacob to be dealt with than do others. That is all! . . .

The whole meaning of Peniel is here. Our natural life has a life principle, which ordinarily we do not recognize. God may take pains to point it out to us, but we do not see it at all until we come to a place like Jacob's Mahanaim, when God brings into jeopardy the thing we have been most proud of. That pride is the thing God hates. The revelation of that natural strength kills what it reveals. Is there something we secretly boast of? Something we are very careful of because it represents our greatest achievement, the best feature of ourselves? When God touches that, we are too ashamed to live. God's touch brings not only weakness but shame.

Peniel is "the face of God." "I have seen God face to face," said Jacob, "and my life is preserved" (Gen. 32.30). God uses light to expose to us the true situation, and that is what brings us down to the ground. The light exposes what is the true spring and motive of our life. God in mercy must bring us there, where we see that all we have boasted of and gloried in is shame.

Remember, God is dealing with what we *really are* by nature, and at Peniel he begins his work. For there, in the light of God, we must be as we are, we cannot pretend. Pretense is not Christianity. We may very much want to be different, but what we are by nature, we are. Nothing hinders God more than pretending it is otherwise. The more "humble" some people are, the more one wishes they would show a little pride, because that would give God a chance to get on with the work. For it is never our pretense, but only God's touch that brings about the transformation. If the work is to be done by me, it will get me nowhere. From being "natural" I shall merely become unnatural. But if the work is God's work, the change wrought by Him has a definite purpose and direction. From Jacob He changes us

to Israel.

—CHL 20, 82, 100-1, 119-21, 127-9, 145-6, 157-8

What is God’s purpose in creation, and what is His purpose in redemption? It may be summed up in two phrases, one from each of our two sections of Romans. It is: “the glory of God” (Rom. 3.23), and: “the glory of the children of God” (8.21). . . .

The Lord Jesus was the only begotten Son, and as the only begotten He has no brothers. But the Father sent the Son in order that the only begotten might also be the first begotten, and the beloved Son have many brethren. There you have the whole story of the Incarnation and the Cross; and there you have, at the last, the purpose of God fulfilled in His “bringing many sons unto glory” (Heb. 2.10).

—NCL 108-9, 111

God’s Eternal Plan

God conceived an eternal plan even before the foundation of the world. His plan, as we have said, serves the dual purpose of (1) having all things to manifest Christ, and (2) making man to be like Christ—which is to say, for man to have the life and glory of Christ. In realizing His dual aim, however, God encounters two problems: (1) the rebellion of Satan, and (2) the fall of man.

In an earlier age an archangel became jealous, through pride, at seeing Christ the center of all things. He wished to exalt himself to be equal with the Son of God. Intent on grasping for himself the centrality of Christ, he rebelled. One third of the angelic hosts followed him in rebellion against God. Even the living creatures on earth followed suit. Satan’s rebellion hurled all things into chaos, it being no longer possible for them to manifest Christ. All things today

may still declare the glory of God (Ps. 19.1), but they certainly cannot manifest God himself.

God therefore created man in order that (1) having the life and glory of Christ and being given dominion over all things, man might bring all things back to God; and (2) being united with God, he might be used of Him to deal with Satan's rebellion. Unfortunately, man fell.

Hence for God's dual purpose to be realized, He must now resolve these two problems. He must (1) redeem fallen mankind, and (2) eliminate Satan's rebellion.

In order to realize God's dual purpose and resolve God's twin problems, the Lord Jesus came down from heaven to become man and accomplish the work of redemption. He is the Christ of all things as well as the Christ of mankind. He is the centrality as well as the universality. Universality means that which is not limited by time and space. Christ is not only the Christ of the Jews and the Christ of the church, He is the Christ of all things. He is all, and in all.

The redemption of Christ has three cardinal features: that of (1) substitution—for the individual; (2) representation for the church; and (3) headship—for all things. Christ is the Head, therefore He includes all. And the death of Christ is an all-inclusive death. So that just as the Federal Head died, so also all things included in the Head died too. His death as Federal Head had brought all things as well as mankind into death, thus reconciling all things and mankind back to God.

Christ has resolved every problem on the cross. There He crushed the head of the serpent. He has solved Satan's rebellion and destroyed all the latter's works. There too He redeemed the fallen race and reconciled all things to God. Through the cross He imparts His life to men that they might be like Him.

In sum, by the cross Christ has realized God's double purpose and resolved God's two great problems.

The Position and Responsibility of the Church

What position does God give the church? What is the vision God entrusts to the church on earth? Why does He permit Satan, whose head is already crushed, to remain on earth? God leaves the church on earth not only to preach the gospel to save sinners but also to demonstrate the victory of Christ on the cross. He permits Satan to remain on earth for the sake of creating opportunity for us to prove the victory of His Son. He expects us to exhibit the victory of His beloved Son. Consequently, a defeated believer brings disgrace to God.

The Church is the body of Christ. And the body ought to carry on the work of the Head. The Church is the fullness of Christ. As Christ overflows, there is the Church. The Church is to continue what has already been done and taught as recorded in the Four Gospels.

—GP 45-8

2

The center of God's truths is Christ. The centrality of God is none other than Christ—"The mystery of God, even Christ", wrote Paul. A mystery is that which is hidden in God's heart. Never before had God told anyone why He created all things, including mankind. For a long time it remained a mystery. Later on, however, God revealed this mystery to Paul so that he might explain it. And this mystery, explained the apostle, is Christ.

The Lord Jesus is the Christ of God as well as the Son of God. At the time of conception the angel Gabriel told Mary that the child to be born is the Son of God (Luke 1.35), whereas at the hour of birth an angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds that the child newly born is Christ the Lord (Luke 2.11). Peter acknowledged Jesus as both Christ and Son of God (Matt. 16.16). By His resurrection from the dead Jesus Christ our Lord is declared to be the Son of God (Rom. 1.4). By the same token He has been made both Lord and Christ by God (Acts 2.36). In believing Jesus as Christ and as Son of God men may have life in His name (John 20.31). In himself, so far as His own place in the Godhead is concerned He is the Son of God. But in God's plan and according to God's work the Lord Jesus is God's Christ because He is anointed by God. From eternity to eternity, He is the Son of God. He becomes Christ as far back as when the plan of God was laid. The purpose of God is centered on His Son, "that in all things he might have the preeminence"; the plan of God is also centered upon His Son so that Christ might be "all in all" (Col. 1.18, 3.11).

God created all things and mankind for the sake of manifesting His glory. Today believers are manifesting a little something of Christ. But one day all things shall manifest Christ because the whole universe shall be filled with Him. In creating all things God desires

that all things will manifest Christ. In creating man He wishes that man should be like His Son, having the life of His Son and possessing the glory of His Son in order that His only begotten Son might be the firstborn among His many sons. The reason for God to create and to redeem man is all for the sake of Christ. Redemption is undertaken in order to achieve the aim of creation. Christ is the bridegroom, and we are the bride. He is the chief cornerstone, and we are the many living stones of the building. God created us so as to satisfy the heart of Christ. As we see the relationship of Christ with us, we give thanks. As we see the relationship of God with Christ, we offer praises. The centrality of God is indeed Christ, for all the purpose of God is centered upon Him. Now there are two aspects to God's purpose: (1) that all things might manifest the glory of Christ, and (2) that man might be like Christ, having both His life and glory. . . .

In eternity past God has predetermined to establish a house over which the second person in the Godhead, the Son, shall rule. He has given all things to the Son as His inheritance. All things are of the Son, through the Son, and to the Son. The Father plans, the Son inherits whatever the Father has planned, and the Holy Spirit accomplishes all that the Father has planned. The Father is the Planner, the Son is the Heir, and the Holy Spirit is the Executor. The love of the Father towards the Son commences in eternity past. He is the Beloved of the Father. Even in eternity the Father has loved the Son. When the Son comes to the world the Father still declares, "This is my beloved Son" (Matt. 3.17). The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hands. As the Son faces death He knows that the Father has given all things into His hands (John 13.3). His resurrection and ascension are for the sake of filling all things (Eph. 4.10). . . .

God creates man in order for man to be like Christ, having the life as well as the glory of Christ. As God manifests himself through

Christ, so the latter manifests himself through man. God calls us in order that we might become partakers of His Son, being made to be conformed to the image of His Son so that His Son might become the firstborn among many brethren. From eternity past up to the resurrection the Lord is the only begotten Son. But after He is raised from the dead He becomes the firstborn Son. Accordingly, after the resurrection He says this to Mary Magdalene: “Go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father” (John 20.17). These many sons become sons in the only begotten Son. By the death of God’s only begotten Son, many sons are born.

But God causes us to be heirs as well as sons. He gives us the life of His Son. He also makes us co-heirs with His Son. The Son came to be man, being made a little lower than the angels; but He is later on crowned with honor and glory. He is to lead many sons into glory. The reason why God creates man is that man may receive the life of His Son and enter into glory with His Son. All is to satisfy the heart of His Son. Let us thank God, because He creates us and redeems us for the sake of satisfying the heart of Christ.

—GP 4-6, 8-9, 12-13

The Love of Christ

We must have before us now two passages of the Word, one from Genesis 2 and one from Ephesians 5, which, considered together, are of great importance at this point.

“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof: and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And the man 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” (Gen. 2.21-23).

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5.25-27).

In Ephesians 5 we have the only chapter in the Bible which explains the passage in Genesis 2. What we have presented to us in Ephesians is indeed very remarkable, if we reflect upon it. I refer to what is contained in those words: “Christ . . . loved the church.” There is something most precious here.

We have been taught to think of ourselves as sinners needing redemption. For generations that has been instilled into us, and we praise the Lord for that as our beginning; but it is not what God has in view as *His end*. God speaks here rather of “a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but . . . holy and without blemish.” All too often we have thought of the Church as being merely so many “saved sinners.” It *is* that; but we have made the terms almost equal to one another, as though it were *only* that, which is not the case. Saved sinners—with that thought you have the whole background of sin and the Fall; but in God’s sight the Church is *a divine creation in His Son*. The one is largely individual, the other corporate. With the one the view is negative, belonging to the past; with the other it is positive, looking forward. The “eternal purpose” is something in the mind of God from eternity concerning His Son, and it has as its objective that the Son should have a Body to express His life. Viewed from that standpoint—from the standpoint of the heart of God—the Church is something which is beyond sin and has never been touched by sin.

So we have an aspect of the death of the Lord Jesus in Ephesians which we do not have so clearly in other places. In Romans things

are viewed from the standpoint of fallen man, and beginning with “Christ died for sinners, enemies, the ungodly” (Rom. 5) we are led progressively to “the love of Christ” (Rom. 8.35). In Ephesians, on the other hand, the standpoint is that of God “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1.4), and the heart of the gospel is: “Christ . . . loved the church, and gave himself up for it” (Eph. 5.25). Thus, in Romans it is “we sinned, and the message is of God’s love for sinners (Rom. 5.8); whereas in Ephesians it is “Christ loved,” and the love here is the love of husband for wife. That kind of love has fundamentally nothing to do with sin as such. What is in view in this passage is not atonement for sin but the creation of the Church, for which end it is said that He “gave himself.”

There is thus an aspect of the death of the Lord Jesus which is altogether positive and a matter particularly of love to His Church, where the question of sin and sinners does not directly appear. To bring this fact home Paul takes that incident in Genesis 2 as illustration. Now this is one of the marvelous things in the Word, and if our eyes have been opened to see it, it will certainly call forth from us worship.

—NCL 208-10

The Sinner’s Friend

In the Gospels the Lord Jesus is presented as the Friend of sinners, for historically He was found, first of all, moving among men as their Friend before He became their Saviour. But do you realize that today He is still in the first place our Friend, in order that He may become our Saviour? Before we have reached the point where we are willing—or indeed able—to receive Him as Saviour, He comes to us as a Friend, so that personal encounter is not debarred to us and the door is held open for us to receive Him as Saviour. This is a precious discovery.

—WSM 34

Christ as the Son of Man is the conclusion of all who descend from Adam; but Christ as the Son of God commences a new creation. Christ is the last Adam, and by His death He concludes the old creation. But by His resurrection Christ commences a new creation. By His death He deals with sin; by His resurrection He gives us life. Consequently, the Bible calls upon us to believe in the Son of God.

—GD 72

“I am the way and the truth and the life,” says the Lord Jesus (John 14.6). This clearly informs us that the way which God gives is Christ, the truth which God gives is also Christ, and the life which God gives is likewise Christ. Christ is our way, Christ is our truth, Christ is our life. It is through Christ that we come to the Father. In God’s heart, that which is related to Him is Christ, who is also His Son. What He gives to us is Christ himself; He has not given us many things outside of Christ.

Oftentimes in spiritual matters, we see and we touch a thing which is merely a term or a letter, void of any spiritual usefulness to us. How we need to ask God to open our eyes that we may know His Son. The characteristic of Christianity lies in the fact that its source, depth, and riches are involved with the knowledge of God’s Son. It matters not how much we know of methods or doctrines or power. What really matters is the knowledge of the Son of God. Knowing God’s Son is the way, knowing God’s Son is the truth, and knowing God’s Son is the life. Our power comes from knowing His Son. All that God gives to us is His Son, not a lot of things. Hence the whole question lies in knowing God’s Son.

Christ Is the Way

The word of Jesus is, “I am the way.” This way may also mean the method. What He here tries to convey to us is that He is the way by which we come to God as well as the method by which to reach God. Having Him, we have the way; and possessing Him, we possess the method. Every true believer must learn this lesson at least once—that is, that the Lord Jesus is the way, the Lord Jesus is the method. If you have been saved, you have at least this experience of trusting the Lord Jesus as your way to God. For He is the way, without whom no one can come to God. All truly saved Christians know how to walk in this way. . .

“I am the way,” asserts the Lord Jesus. Christ is the way, Christ is the method. Dear friends, is Christ your way and is Christ your method? Or is it only a way and a method? Thank God, if *Christ* is our method, everything will be successful. But if ours is just a method—and however good, accurate and incomparable it may be—it still is dead and has no spiritual value. The reason for many unanswered prayers and ineffective testimonies is found in our not touching the Lord. We have merely copied the method of others; we have not touched the Lord himself. . . .

Christ Is the Truth

The Lord not only introduces himself as the way, He also speaks of himself as the truth. The truth does not refer to the words spoken about Christ; it is Christ himself who is the truth. How often Christians take the teaching and the interpretations of Christ as truths, though in actuality truth is not the relating of a thing but is the person of Christ. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free, says the Lord (John 8.32). Brothers and sisters, just consider how many truths have actually made us free? The word of God states that the truth shall make us free, but how many times truth is merely a

doctrine to us. Our eyes have not been opened to see Christ. We may have talked about many doctrines for some ten years, still we have not seen. We may have listened to them for an equal length of time, and yet again we have not seen. People may be able to speak on the doctrine of co-death without knowing the power of this death. Or to converse on resurrection life without experiencing power. If all we talk about is doctrine, we are handling something dead. . . .

Christ Is the Life

Following the words “I am the way and the truth,” the Lord continues with “and the life.” We are mindful of the fact that life issues forth spontaneously in work, but work cannot be a substitute for life. We ought to be crystal clear here that work is not life—for life is effortless, life is Christ himself. How people toil to be Christians! How we are wearied through daily exertion. Most severe are these doctrines, for they demand of us to be humble, gentle, forgiving, and long-suffering. They literally wear us out. Many concede that to be a Christian is a difficult task. This is especially true with young believers. The more they try, the more difficult it becomes. Upon having tried for a length of time, they still bear no resemblance to a Christian. Brothers and sisters, if Christ is not life, *we* have to do the work; but if *He* is life, then we do not need to struggle. Repeatedly we say that life is Christ himself, and work can never substitute life. . . .

Christ Is the Resurrection

Let us turn again to resurrection. That which has encountered death and survives is called resurrection. Whatever outlives death is resurrection. Death came to man after he ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Ever since then, man has been unable to endure death. All who have entered the grave never return. Once gone, they never come back. In the whole universe, among

countless numbers of people, there has only been one who has gone into death and come out of it—and this one is our Lord. “I am. . . the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore” (Rev. 1.17,18).

The Lord is the Lord of resurrection. Resurrection speaks of what passes through death but is not held by death. The Bible uses the word “held” to describe the power of death. People enter into death and are not able to come out again because death holds tightly fast all who have entered. But death is not able to hold Christ. Hence this is called life, and it is also called resurrection. Resurrection is the life which was put to death and is alive forevermore. Our Lord Jesus is life because He was dead—having entered into hell, the deepest recess of the earth—yet is alive forevermore. Death has no power to hold Him in its grip. He comes out of death. And such a life as this is called resurrection. Hence a life which bears the marks of death and yet is alive is called resurrection.

Quite a few people are asking why it is recorded in John Chapter 20 that after the Lord Jesus was raised from among the dead He left the imprint of the nails in His hands and that of the spear in His side for Thomas to touch and to probe? We know this is the meaning of resurrection. What the Lord intended to show Thomas was not that He had been wounded and had died but that He had been wounded and yet He is now alive. He bears in His body the imprint of death; nonetheless He is alive. This is called resurrection.

Such ought to be true in our case. We have in our lives many things which do not carry the imprint of death and therefore they cannot be labeled as resurrection. Only what bears the imprint of death and is alive is called resurrection. Do not imagine that it is well with you if you have eloquence, cleverness and ability. It is quite possible for you to have eloquence, cleverness and ability without the imprint of death. People may judge whether or not there is

resurrection by noting if the imprint of death is upon our eloquence, cleverness and ability. A brother may have great talent and may be most capable; he seems to be very much alive. Yet there is no mark of death in his talent because he has such confidence in himself. He trusts that he never does wrong and is sure of success in whatever he undertakes. This person possesses immense self-confidence, self-reliance, -assurance and -strength, but he does not have the mark of death. We do not mean to say a resurrected person does not have power; what we are trying to affirm here is that in the power of a risen one there is the sign of death. He is able to work, but he dare not rely on himself. He can do many deeds yet he has lost that touch of self-assurance, and his own strength has turned into weakness. This we call resurrection.

In his letter to the church at Corinth Paul confesses the following: "I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" (1 Cor. 2.3). These are words spoken by one who truly knows God. How tragic that there are so many strong and self-confident people among believers. But here is a man who acknowledges himself as being in weakness, in fear, and in trembling. There is the mark of death in his body.

Consequently resurrection and the cross are inseparable. The cross eliminates. Things which issue out of ourselves are unable to rise again once they have gone through the cross, for they are lost in death. Only what passes through death and survives, what has the sign of death upon it and lives, is resurrection. Resurrection presupposes a passing through death, and passing through death always eliminates something. . . .

Hence the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is based on His life. Due to a deathless life in Him, He cannot be held by death. With such undying life in Him, He shrugs off death as He is put into it. Let us well recognize that when we pass through the cross experientially we

will take many things into death without there being any chance of bringing them out. Only what is of God can be resurrected. In our encounter with the cross we are truly being subtracted. The cross is indeed a huge subtraction; it takes away many things. . . .

We have briefly mentioned how all spiritual things are in Christ. God has given Him to us to be all these things. This is a most essential point of understanding in spiritual life. Is our experience mere experience or is it Christ? Is our righteousness simply righteousness or is it Christ? Is our sanctification only sanctification or is it Christ? Is our redemption merely redemption or is it Christ?

Frequently we talk about the way, but that way may not be Christ himself. In like manner, we can speak of truth and of life without necessarily speaking of Christ. In brief, we have many things outside of Christ. This constitutes a formidable spiritual problem to God's children. We may confess with our mouth that Christ is the center of all things, nevertheless in our lives we have many matters other than Christ, as if these can help us to be Christians. How we need to have our mind renewed so as to understand that aside from Christ God has no intention for us to have many so-called spiritual things. According to God's arrangement, there *are* things; only, these things are Christ. For Christ is the sum of all spiritual things. Christ is our righteousness—He has not given us a righteousness. Christ is our sanctification—He has not granted us a thing called power to make us holy. Christ is our redemption—He has not offered us a redemption. Christ is the way—He has not opened to us another way in which to walk. Christ is the truth—He has not presented some truth before us for us to understand. Christ is the life—He has not conferred on us a thing called life. . . .

The Lord not only says that He is “the bread of life”; He also declares: “I am the light of life.” Bread is for satisfaction, light is for seeing. Satisfaction gives strength while seeing affects walking. We

have already seen how Christ is the bread of life. We shall now see how He is also the light of life. . . .

The Lord Jesus is himself light. Consequently, whoever encounters Him sees and is fallen and weakened as though dead. Many possess a rough and tough character. They have never been broken by the Lord; neither themselves nor anybody else can deal with them. Then the light of the Lord shines on them. As soon as they see the light, they become broken vessels. A person who sees the Lord is definitely weakened and broken. No one is able to live after beholding the Lord. This is light. . . .

Christ Is Both God's End and God's Means

God's end is Christ, so also God's means is Christ. It is through Christ to Christ. What we may learn before God concerning His purpose is especially opened up to us in Ephesians and Colossians. Let us now view God's purpose by looking into these two books. However, let us note that there is one distinction between them. In Ephesians, we are shown how, according to God's predestined purpose, He has so arranged that at the fullness of the times He is to sum up all things in Christ—both things in the heavens and things upon the earth. Colossians, on the other hand, reveals further that God has not only caused Christ to have first place in everything but even more, Christ is to be all and in all. Hence Colossians discloses to us Christ as the means as well as the end of God. God's end is to let Christ have the first place in all things. In order to realize that goal, God must have Christ as all things. Only by His being all things and dwelling in all things can Christ sum up all things both in the heavens and upon the earth. If Christ is all, naturally all things are summed up in Him. If He dwells in all, what else can all things be?

Remember that in God's eye there is only Christ, not things. He sees neither affairs nor things, He only beholds Christ. The affairs

and things which we usually think of are non-existent in the view of God. Today we probably reckon that there are lots of things and affairs in the world. According to our worldly viewpoint, there are affairs here and matters there; but according to God's estimate Christ is all. Consequently there is neither affair nor thing. Christ is all and He is in all. And that will be the day when the eternal purpose of God shall be fulfilled. . . .

Here do we understand what God requires is not a lamb, nor is what He gives the bread of life. We also come to understand that God does not provide the way, the truth, and the life, neither does Christ merely use His power to restore man's life or man's sight. In the whole of John's Gospel we see only one monumental fact, which is, that Christ is *all* these things. He says He is the light of the world—He does not say He is able to give people light. He says He is the bread of life—He does not say He will give us the bread of life. He says He is the way—He does not say He will guide us to walk in the way. He says He is the truth—He does not say He will teach us a truth. He says He is true life—He does not say He will give us a life. When Lazarus died Christ did not tell Mary and Martha He had the power to raise up their brother; instead He declared that He is the resurrection.

Please note that the bread of life is a thing, so too is the light, the way, the truth, the life, the resurrection, or the lamb. But in Christianity there are no things—only Christ. This is the whole of the matter.

What we need to comprehend before God is that in our experience there is neither thing nor affair but only Christ: not that He gives us light, but that He *is* our light; not that He leads the way, but He *is* the way; not that He gives us a life, but He *is* our life; not that He teaches a truth, but He *is* the truth. Brethren, do you grasp the difference here? Whatever Christ gives is His very own self. . . .

Christ Is Our Wisdom and Righteousness and Sanctification and Redemption

One of the most popular scripture verses used in our preaching is 1 Corinthians 1.30 which states that “of (God) are ye in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God, both righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (literal). God has not given us righteousness, He gives Christ to us since Christ is our righteousness. God has not given us sanctification, He gives us Christ because Christ is our sanctification. God has not given us redemption, He gives us Christ because Christ is our redemption. God has not given us wisdom, He gives us Christ inasmuch as Christ is our wisdom. It is for this reason that we say God’s Christ is God’s everything. God’s Christ is God’s thing and affair; aside from Him God has neither thing nor affair. . . .

Nothing Impersonal in Christianity

Before God it is not a matter of the endowment of Christ; rather, it is God giving Christ himself to us. God has not granted us humility and patience and gentleness, He grants the entire Christ to us. It is Christ who becomes our humility, patience, gentleness. It is Christ, the living Lord. And this is what is truly called Christianity. . . .

. . . God will take away all things in order to give you one Person who is to be simultaneously your humility, your patience, your gentleness, and your love. For Christ is all. And this is what Christianity actually is. God builds incessantly until this universe must confess that Christ is indeed all. . . .

Further Knowing

Let me explain further what is meant by knowing Christ. It means knowing Christ in things and affairs. What can this denote? It

denotes knowing Christ as your things and affairs. Some are able to say they know Christ as their patience. This is reckoned as knowing Christ. Others may know Christ as their love; still others know Christ as their humility. Such knowledge will effect a drastic change in life. Henceforth you are able to say that there is no thing in your life. I trust some of you can make this statement, for you recognize what it really means. In your world, even your spiritual world, there is nothing but Christ. For instance, you have no holiness except Christ. This does not imply, of course, that you are not holy, only that Christ is now your holiness. Immediately you comprehend that Christ is all. Hereafter you may be completely delivered from these outward matters. The whole approach is a matter of knowing Christ, not a matter of prayer or exhortation or encouragement. . . .

Christ Alone

What most people fail to recognize is that in the spiritual realm there is nothing but Christ. There is no patience nor humility nor light in the spiritual world; these things do not exist. It is Christ and Him alone. . . .

—CS 7-8, 11-13, 15-16, 27-30, 37-8, 47, 50, 56-61, 63, 69-71, 79

Christ is our light; and He is the *living* Word. As we read the Scriptures, that life in Him brings revelation. “The life was the light of men” (John 1.4). Such illumination may not come to us all at once, but gradually; but it will be more and more clear and searching, until we see ourselves in the light of God and all our self-confidence is gone. For light is the purest thing in the world. It cleanses. It sterilizes. It kills what should not be there. In its radiance the “dividing asunder of joints and marrow” becomes to us a fact and no mere teaching. We know fear and trembling as we recognize the corruption of our nature, the hatefulness of self, and the real threat to the work of God of our soul-life and energy, untamed and

uncontrolled by His Holy Spirit. As never before, we see now how much of us needs God's drastic dealing if He is to use us, and we know that, apart from His dominion, as servants of God we are finished.

—NCL 244

When Scripture speaks of the appearing of the Lord Jesus it uses "morning star" and "the sun" as types. The appearing of the morning star is for the saints, while the appearing of the sun is for the entire world. The morning star appears just before dawn; and only the watchful may see it. In view of this, Christians should be most watchful. The sun appears in the day and is therefore seen by all people. The morning star appears first and the sun thereafter. Before our Lord appears to the world He will manifest himself first to those who have loved His appearing. What a blessed hope this is! Yet do we really love His appearing? . . .

Our Lord is "the first" since He is the Source of all things: He also is "the last" since He is the End of all things. As we review the story of our salvation we know it is the Lord who first calls us and not we who seek the Lord; it is He who first loves us and not we who love Him. Thus do we know Him as the first.

But then we may sometimes wonder, Now that we are saved, what will be the extent of His salvation? Suppose the Lord saves us just this much and no more, what will happen to us?—If the work of God stops right here with initial salvation and goes no further, what can we do?—Where will the salvation of God lead us to?—What will be our future? Or we may even ponder our situation on a much wider scale. As we read the Book of Genesis, we of course learn that God is the Creator and Source of all things. But we also read how later on the serpent slipped into the Garden of Eden, how man then fell, and that Adam and Eve were driven out of the same Garden. In addition,

the way to the tree of life was guarded by cherubim with the flame of a sword which turned in every direction. And finally, we learn from the early Genesis account that the earth was cursed and death came into the world. Now in our understanding of how these things happened, how can we refrain from asking what the final result of these things will be? Here we see that God has made a beginning with this world, yet what will be its end?

To these questions God himself gives the answer. The Book of Revelation, in fact, is God's answer. In the very first chapter we have this declaration by the Lord: "I am the first and the last." This is the revelation of Jesus Christ. And in the last chapter of this Book He again declares: "I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (22.13). This too is the revelation of Jesus Christ. In other words, what God has begun, He will in truth finish; what has not been solved earlier in the Garden of Eden, He will solve later on. His redemption is perfect and complete; and His eternal plan must be accomplished. All the problems which we cannot resolve today, He will definitely solve in the coming day. Thank God, one day Christ will conclude all things because He is the last just as He is the first. This, then, is the revelation of Jesus Christ. God shows us that this One who is the first and the last is indeed the answer to all questions.

"And the Living one"—We read in John's Gospel: "In him was life" (1.4); and also, Jesus' words: "I am the resurrection, and the life" (11.25). These passages show that Christ is the Source of life. His life is the uncreated life, He is eternally self-existing. He is the One who lives forever. He is the life.

"And I was dead"—Our Lord did in fact once become dead. On the one hand He died as a substitute for sinners. It was a case of "the righteous [dying] for the unrighteous" (1 Peter 3.18). On the other hand, through His death He released His life. How marvelous is this

death!

“And, behold, I am alive for evermore”—Christ has risen from the dead. Innumerable people encounter death and die. Yet none has ever come back; no one by his own power has ever been resurrected. Indeed, during these thousands of years of human history millions and billions of people have passed away. “To go and not to return” seems to have been the unchanging rule since we have not seen any ever come back. Yet God allowed our Lord Jesus to die that through death He might prove His victory over death.

He did become dead, but now He is alive forever. How great is this declaration: “I am alive for evermore”! At the time of Pentecost the apostle Peter unequivocally declared: “[Jesus] God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2.24). Death could not hold Him because death *has no power* to hold Him. The resurrection life can endure death. Though dead, now resurrected—this very fact of history proves how Christ’s life can endure death and is able to pass through death. Many encounter something unpleasant and immediately feel as though they are meeting up with death. But this resurrection life of the Lord Jesus is not afraid to die. By passing through death it proves its power to outlive death. Resurrection life is that which can pass through death and still live. Whatever passes through death but is finished is *not* resurrection life. . . .

The Lord is not only “alive”—He is also “for evermore”! He died only once, and He also was resurrected but once. After He was raised from the dead, He thereafter lives forever. He now exhibits not only the glory which He had with the Father before the world was (John 17.5) but also the added “glory of man.” He ever lives—and not just for His own self but for us too: because “he ever liveth to make intercession for them” and He now “appears before the face of God for us” (Heb. 7.25, 9.24). Did he not say to His disciples, “Because I

live, ye shall live also” (John 14.19)? And are not these words spoken to us too?

Knowing the Lord Jesus as the God who lives forever enables us to sense the presence of the Lord unceasingly in our spirit. Nothing strengthens us more than this sense of the Lord’s actual presence. This is not a kind of emotional, imaginative, or psychological lift. Abraham, for example, knew God deeply after many years of following Him, and hence he “planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of Jehovah, the *Everlasting God*” (Gen. 21.36). Daniel was known as the “servant of the living God”; and when he was thrown into the lions’ den, his God shut the lions’ mouths and they did not hurt him (Dan. 6.20,22). . . .

Yet there is more! The Lord not only “is alive for evermore,” He also “has the keys of death and of Hades”—This tells us that all the things in the afterlife are in the Lord’s hands. Death is joined with Hades (note that the “Hades” mentioned here is not “hell” or “the lake of fire”; in Hebrew it is *Sheol*, in Greek it is *Hades*, and it means “the invisible world”). In Revelation 6.8 it is said that Hades follows death. In Revelation 20.14 we see that both Hades and death end up in being cast into the Lake of Fire. In these two passages just cited it would seem that both Hades and death have taken up personality. This would appear to be confirmed by such Scripture passages as Hebrews 2.14 which says the devil has the power of death and Matthew 16.18 which mentions the gates (or powers) of Hades. Behind death and Hades there is a personal devil who holds the power. But our Lord has risen from the dead. Over Him death and Hades have no more power; quite the contrary, He holds the keys of both. Here we see that far from death and Hades holding power over our Lord, the Latter has in fact overcome them!

—SWR 95, 99-103, 104-5

The Holy Spirit

3

In considering the gift of the Holy Spirit it is helpful to think of this in two aspects, as the Spirit outpoured and the Spirit indwelling, and our purpose now is to understand on what basis this twofold gift of the Holy Spirit becomes ours. I have no doubt that we are right in distinguishing thus between the outward and the inward manifestations of His working, and that as we go on we shall find the distinction helpful. Moreover, when we compare them, we cannot but come to the conclusion that the inward activity of the Holy Spirit is the more precious. But to say this is not for one moment to imply that this outward activity is not also precious, for God only gives good gifts to his children. . . .

The Spirit Outpoured

Let us turn first to the Book of the Acts chapter 2 verses 32 to 36 and consider this passage briefly:

(32) This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses. (33) Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear. (34) For David ascended not into the heavens; but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, (35) till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet. (36) Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified.

We will set aside for the moment verses 34 and 35, and consider verses 33 and 36 together. The former are a quotation from the 110th Psalm and are really a parenthesis, so we shall get the force of Peter's argument better if we ignore them for the time being. In verse

33 Peter states that the Lord Jesus was exalted “at the right hand of God” (mg.). What was the result? He “received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost.” And what followed? The miracle of Pentecost! The result of His exaltation was—“this, which ye see and hear.”

Upon what basis, then, was the Spirit first given to the Lord Jesus to be poured out upon His people? It was upon the fact of His exaltation to heaven. This passage makes it quite clear that the Holy Spirit was poured out because Jesus was exalted. The outpouring of the Spirit has no relation to your merits or mine, but only to the merits of the Lord Jesus. The question of what *we* are does not come into consideration at all here, but only what *He* is. He is glorified; therefore the Spirit is poured out.

Because the Lord Jesus died on the Cross, I have received forgiveness of sins; because the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, I have received new life; because the Lord Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of the Father, I have received the outpoured Spirit. All is because of Him; nothing is because of me. Remission of sins is not based on human merit, but on the Lord’s crucifixion; regeneration is not based on human merit, but on the Lord’s resurrection; and the enduement with the Holy Spirit is not based on human merit, but on the Lord’s exaltation. The Holy Spirit has not been poured out on you or me to prove how great *we* are, but to prove the greatness of the Son of God.

Now look at verse 36. There is a word here which demands our careful attention: the word “therefore.” How is this word generally used? Not to introduce a statement, but to follow a statement that has already been made. Its use always implies that something has been mentioned before. Now what has preceded this particular “therefore”? With which is it connected? It cannot reasonably be connected with either verse 34 or verse 35, but it quite obviously relates back to

verse 33. Peter has just referred to the outpouring of the Spirit upon the disciples “which ye see and hear,” and he says: “Let all the house of Israel *therefore* know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified.” Peter says, in effect, to his audience: “This outpouring of the Spirit, which you have witnessed with your own eyes and ears, proves that Jesus of Nazareth whom ye crucified is now both Lord and Christ.” The Holy Spirit was poured out on earth to prove what had taken place in heaven—the exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth to the right hand of God. The purpose of Pentecost is to prove the Lordship of Jesus Christ. . . .

Faith Is Again the Key

As with forgiveness, so equally with the coming upon us of the Holy Spirit, the whole question is one of faith. As soon as we see the Lord Jesus on the Cross, we know our sins are forgiven; and as soon as we see the Lord Jesus on the Throne, we know the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us. The basis upon which we receive the enduement of the Holy Spirit is not our praying and fasting and waiting, but the exaltation of Christ. Those who emphasize tarrying and hold “tarrying meetings” only mislead us, for the gift is not for the “favored few” but for all, because it is not given on the ground of what we are at all, but of what Christ is. The Spirit has been poured out to prove *His* goodness and greatness, not ours. Christ has been crucified, therefore we have been forgiven: Christ has been glorified, therefore we have been endued with power from on high. It is all because of Him. . . .

The Spirit Indwelling

We move on now to the second aspect of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which, as we shall see in our next chapter, is more particularly the subject of Romans 8. It is that which we have spoken of as the Spirit indwelling. “If so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. . .

“ (Rom. 8.9). “If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you. . .” (Rom. 8.11).

As with the Spirit outpoured, so with the Spirit indwelling, if we are to know in experience that which is ours in fact, our first need is of divine revelation. When we see Christ as Lord objectively—that is, exalted to the throne in heaven—then we shall experience the power of the Spirit upon us. When we see Christ as Lord subjectively—that is, as effective Ruler within our lives—then we shall know the power of the Spirit within us.

A revelation of the indwelling Spirit was the remedy Paul offered the Corinthian Christians for their unspirituality. It is important to note that the Christians in Corinth had become preoccupied with the visible signs of the Holy Spirit’s outpouring and were making much of “tongues” and miracles, while at the same time their lives were full of contradictions and were a reproach to the Lord’s Name. Quite evidently they had received the Holy Spirit, and yet they remained spiritually immature; and the remedy God offered them for this is the remedy He offers His Church today for the same complaint!

In his letter to them Paul wrote: “*Know ye not* that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Cor. 3.16) For others he prayed for enlightenment of heart, “. . . that ye may *know*” (Eph. 1.18). A knowledge of divine facts was the need of the Christians then and it is no less the need of Christians today. We need the eyes of our understanding opened to know that God himself, through the Holy Spirit, has taken up His abode in our hearts. In the person of the Spirit, God is present, and Christ is no less truly present too. Thus if the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts we have the Father and the Son abiding in us. That is no mere theory or doctrine, but a blessed reality. We may perhaps have realized that the Spirit is actually within our hearts, but have we realized that He is a Person? Have we understood that to have the Spirit with us is to have the

living God within?

To many Christians the Holy Spirit is quite unreal. They regard Him as a mere influence—an influence for good, no doubt, but just an influence for all that. In their thinking, conscience and the Spirit are more or less identified as some “thing” within them, that brings them to book when they are bad and tries to show them how to be good. The trouble with the Corinthian Christians was not that they lacked the indwelling Spirit but that they lacked the knowledge of His presence. They failed to realize the greatness of the One who had come to make His abode in their hearts; so Paul wrote to them: “Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” Yes, that was the remedy for their unspirituality—just to know who He really was who dwelt within. . . .

The reason why many Christians do not experience the power of the Spirit, though He actually dwells in their hearts, is that they lack reverence. And they lack reverence because they have not had their eyes opened to the fact of His presence. The fact is there, but they have not seen it. Why is it that some of God’s children live victorious lives while others are in a state of constant defeat? The difference is not accounted for by the presence or absence of the Spirit (for He dwells in the heart of every child of God) but by this, that some recognize His indwelling and others do not. True revelation of the fact of the Spirit’s indwelling will revolutionize the life of any Christian.

The Absolute Lordship of Christ

“Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body” (1 Con 6.19,20).

This verse now takes us a stage further, for, when once we have made the discovery of the fact that we are the dwelling-place of God, then a full surrender of ourselves to God must follow. When we see that we are the temple of God, we shall immediately acknowledge that we are not our own. Consecration will follow revelation. The difference between victorious Christians and defeated ones is not that some have the Spirit while others have not, but that some *know* His indwelling and others do not, and that consequently some recognize the divine ownership of their lives while others are still their own masters.

Revelation is the first step to holiness, and consecration is the second. A day must come in our lives, as definite as the day of our conversion, when we give up all right to ourselves and submit to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ. There may be a practical issue raised by God to test the reality of our consecration, but whether that be so or not, there must be a day when, without reservation, we surrender everything to Him—ourselves, our families, our possessions, our business and our time. All we are and have becomes His, to be held henceforth entirely at His disposal. From that day we are no longer our own masters, but only stewards. Not until the Lordship of Christ in our hearts is a settled thing can the Spirit really operate effectively in us. He cannot direct our lives until all control of them is committed to Him. If we do not give Him absolute authority there, He can be present, but He cannot be powerful. The power of the Spirit is stayed.

—NCL 123-6, 129-30, 139-41, 143-5

4

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned. (Mark 16.16)

We would suppose that most Protestants become a bit apprehensive over this verse. When they see it, they change it in their mind to read “He *that believeth and is saved shall be baptized.*” The Lord, however, has not so said. In order to escape the error of the Roman Catholic Church, Protestants unwittingly alter God’s word and thus fall into another error. The Lord speaks clearly that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” No one is authorized to change it to “he that believeth and is saved shall be baptized.”

The Objective of Salvation Is the World

Now let us be clear as to the meaning of the word “salvation” in the Bible. What is the objective of salvation? This may not be easily understood by new believers because they lack an accurate knowledge of what salvation is. According to the Bible, salvation is related to the world, not to hell. The opposite of eternal life is perdition. . . .

What is baptism? It is your emancipation from the world. It frees you from the brotherhood to which you once belonged. The world knew that you were one with it, but the moment you are baptized, it immediately becomes aware of the fact that you are finished with it. The friendship which you had maintained so many years has now come to an end. You were buried in the tomb, you terminated your course in the world. Before baptism, you knew you had eternal life; after baptism, you know you are saved. Everybody recognizes that you are the Lord’s, for you belong to Him.

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Why? Because having believed and been baptized, it is now an open fact where one stands. Were there no faith, there would not be that inward fact which alone makes things real. But with that inward reality, baptism puts one outside of the world and terminates the former relationship with the world. Baptism, therefore, is separation. . . .

Baptism is a public announcement that declares, “I have come out of the world.” Never take the word “salvation” purely in the personal sense. According to the Bible, it is more a matter of coming out of the world than of escaping hell. . . .

What Is the Real Meaning of Baptism?

Now that the Christian is baptized, he needs to look back and assess the real meaning of baptism. “Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6.3). “Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col. 2.12). This is a looking backward, not forward. Remember that the words in Mark 16, Acts 2, Acts 22, and 1 Peter 3 were words spoken *before* baptism, while the words in Romans 6 and Colossians 2 were spoken *after* baptism. After baptism, we are notified by God that in our baptism we were actually baptized into the Lord’s death and were buried with Him, and so also we were raised with Him in resurrection.

Romans 6 stresses death and burial, though in addition it touches upon resurrection. Colossians 2, however, emphasizes burial and resurrection. It is therefore a step further, for its focal point is resurrection. The water serves as a tomb. What is buried must be dead, but what emerges must be alive in resurrection. Romans describes the first part of the truth and Colossians the last part of the same truth.

—ALS 3-4, 7-8, 14

Baptism As an Answer to God

And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name. (Acts 22.16)

I would not, brethren, have you ignorant, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. (1 Cor. 10.1-2)

Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (Rom. 6.3)

In these three passages we will see the meaning of baptism. Baptism is “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3.21). Since it is an inquiry or demand of a good conscience towards God, it is therefore an answer to God. God must therefore be asking a question. The answer to His question is an act, which is baptism. It is logical for us to believe that the question God asks is also formulated in an act—in the cross. What God asks of the believer is the following three-fold inquiry: (1) Look at the cross where My Son was crucified for your sins; what is your response to it? (2) I have included you in the death of Christ; you were nailed with Him there on the cross; what is your answer to this? and (3) Having been given such a wonderful Saviour, what is to be your attitude to Him hereafter?

Baptism is our answer to all three parts of this question. It is our answer to the cross. First of all, God placed the sins of us, the worst persons in the world, upon Jesus, the best person in the world. The blood of Jesus washes all our sins away. What have we got to say to this? Our answer is “Baptize me.” Baptism is the answer of a good conscience towards the matter of sins. If one is baptized, he must know that the blood of Jesus has washed all his sins away. God puts

a representative thing before us—the cross; and we, too, put a representative thing before Him as our answer—baptism. Baptism is our response to God, embodied in an act. Though we say nothing, God understands, the angels understand, and even Satan understands. This act of confession reaches God, who also accepts it.

Secondly, God declares that it is not only our sins but even ourselves whom He has nailed to the cross with Christ. We are altogether rotten and sinful, and therefore He can do nothing with us except to finish us on the cross. How do we respond to that? Again, our answer is baptism. Since I have died with Christ, I will be baptized to show that I am baptized into His death. I am rotten and vile, from inside to outside; there is no hope for me; and hence, I must be eliminated. Thank God, in Christ I died, I am finished.

And thirdly, having the issues of my sins and my self settled through the blood and the death of Christ (for His blood has cleansed me from my sins and His death has eliminated me), what should be my attitude towards Christ from now on? Once more, I answer with baptism. For in baptism I am baptized into Christ. From now on “it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2.20). Whatever Christ does I do. His all becomes my all. His power becomes my power; His glory, my glory. All that He is and all that He does become mine, even my very life. We have become one. No one sees me anymore; all only see Him.

Baptized into Christ. What shall I do with such a Saviour? What will be my life from now on? My answer is certain: from this moment on Christ becomes my aim, my goal, my Lord, my life, my all. I live for Him alone, not for the world nor for self, but wholly and only for Him. Baptism is like the “second edition” of Calvary, that is, it is my personal version of Calvary.

. . . In 1 Peter 3 we learn that the ark, in passing through water, expresses the act of New Testament baptism. The waters of the Deluge signify the water of baptism: “[who] that aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water: which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (vv 20,21). How are we saved and what saves us? Baptism saves us. Are you surprised at my saying this? Does baptism indeed save people? May I frankly tell you that unless we are baptized we cannot be saved. For Peter likewise declared that the baptism as typified by the flood saves us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mark 16.16a declares that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.”

How we change Mark 16.16a to read: “He that believeth and is saved shall be baptized.” The Bible, though, puts baptism before salvation. And thus we become confused. Our view is that only the saved can be baptized. Yet the word of God asserts that without baptism there is no salvation—that “he that . . . is baptized shall be saved.” In short, a person is saved because he has been baptized.

Please do not misunderstand the meaning of being saved through baptism. For the Bible tells us of *various* aspects of salvation, not just one. Justification, for example, is that aspect which emphasizes man’s position before God; the aspect of God’s acceptance of man emphasizes the difference between the believing ones and the sinners; forgiveness, the remission of our past transgressions; and eternal life the disparity between us and death. But the aspect of salvation as represented by baptism emphasizes our *relationship with the world*. For salvation speaks not merely of our escaping hell in the future; according to its *strictest* interpretation, salvation points to our deliverance from the world today.

Who will know you are saved? Who will know you as being of Christ? You may readily say you are saved, yet you are not able to open yourself up and expose your faith to people. We as human beings are unable to see man's inward faith. Only God can see faith in man. He knows you are already justified, accepted by Him, that your sins have been forgiven and you have received eternal life. But men do not know all this. James asserts that men cannot see faith; they can only see works. Hence the first work every Christian must do before men is to undergo baptism.

The first act before *God* is to "believe" but the first act before *men* is to be "baptized." To be baptized is to come out of the world and enter into Christ. It is to come out of the house and enter the ark. Baptism is a declaring—as Noah did in his day—that the judgment, wrath and punishment of God have fallen on the world because it resists and rejects Him. Baptism is also a declaring that we are not willing to be ranked among the people of the world but will come out of them and enter the Ark that God has prepared for us. Accordingly, baptism is not a ritual of having water sprinkled upon us or of our being immersed. It is rather a declaration that there is no longer any relationship between the world and us since you and I have been delivered from the world.

The real meaning of baptism lies in the fact that we who formerly lived in the world are now dead and shall never rise again because of the judgment which Jesus Christ has suffered for us. Though physically we are in the water for but one or two minutes, spiritually speaking, it means *we* shall never come up out of the water again. From the viewpoint of the world, we are hereafter separated forever from it. We have no part with it. Our parents, wives and children are dearest to us. Yet if they are dead, they will be put away. They will not be taken out of their graves and kept in their house with the living. Similarly, in the eyes of the world, Christians are looked upon as being dead and buried.

The world is composed of two sizeable federations: one is the men of the world, the other is the saved ones in Christ. To be saved is to come out of the world federation which opposes God, is sinful and unclean, and to enter into the Christ federation. And therefore, we must be baptized, because baptism can save. (Of course, one must first *believe* in the Lord; otherwise he cannot be saved). According to Mark 16.16, to be baptized is to be liberated. Baptism thus stands as a great liberating force from this world and all that is of it. Yet baptism is even more than a liberation, it is also an entry; through baptism we enter into Christ because it is a being baptized into His death.

—FGG 91-4

The Bible tells us that after our co-crucifixion with Christ we need to be buried with Him too. The biblical meaning of baptism is not only a cleansing but also a burial. We must be baptized because in so doing we testify to the fact that we believe we are dead. Hence we ask someone to bury us beneath the waters of baptism. This confirms our belief that we have died. Anyone who does not believe that he is dead should not be baptized. For this would be a burying him alive! He who is baptized must believe he was crucified with Christ. How do you express your faith? How do you testify to the completed work of Christ? Through baptism. When you are buried in the water and are baptized, you express your faith (1) in the cleansing of your sins through the blood of Christ and (2) in the co-crucifixion of your old man with Christ on the cross. You believe the fact; therefore, you receive baptism to prove you are now cleansed and dead.

Hence the condition of baptism is two-fold. The Bible not only tells us to rise up and be baptized to wash away our sins because we believe God has already atoned for our sins and cleansed them; it also tells us to rise up and be buried in the water because we believe we are dead. Not only sins washed away, but also the person buried

out of sight. Sins are washed away, and the person is likewise washed away. Such is the meaning as well as the testimony of baptism.

—GG 64

The Body of Christ

5

Hearing the teaching and seeing the reality of the body of Christ belong to two totally different realms. Hearing the teaching of the body is merely an outward understanding of a principle, whereas seeing the body of Christ produces a consciousness within. It is similar to the situation in which merely hearing the doctrine of salvation only gives the person the knowledge of how God saves sinners, but that inwardly accepting the Lord Jesus as Saviour creates within that person an awareness of God as well as a consciousness of sin. What a difference between the two! Consequently, we should not overlook this matter of life consciousness (it not simply being an outward sensation, but an inward feeling too). Such consciousness is life's expression. The presence or absence of this consciousness reveals the reality or unreality within. It gives us insight into whether or not there is the life of Christ within. . . .

The plague of individualism can grow from simply expressing one person's individualism to that of several persons. You may notice in the church that three or five, perhaps even eight or nine persons will sometimes form a small circle. Only these few are of one mind and love one another. They do not fit in with the other brothers and sisters. This indicates that they too have not perceived the body of Christ. The church is one, it cannot be severed. If a person has really known the body, he cannot endorse any kind of individualism. He cannot form a party or any small circle. . . .

As Christians, we should admire and seek for spiritual things, but we ought not have any emulative pretensions nor any trace of jealousy. Our attitude individually towards spiritual work should be: What I can do I hope others can also do; and what I cannot do I wish someone else can do; I would like to do more as well as I would expect other people to do more. How I need to realize that I can only

be a single vessel in the work; I cannot monopolize it. I dare not consider the work and its result as altogether mine. If I insist that everything must be done by me, I have not apprehended the body. The moment I apprehend the body, immediately I realize that both my labor and that of others mean gain to the head as well as to the body. And let all glory be to the Lord and all blessings be to the church. . . .

See the Need for Fellowship

He who sees the body of Christ most spontaneously sees not only the stupidity of independent action but the need for fellowship as well. Fellowship is not an external exercise in social intercourse; it is the spontaneous demand of body life. What is erroneously but commonly assumed to be fellowship by God's children is a visiting of homes of some brothers and sisters at times of leisure and chit-chatting with them a while. In actuality, fellowship means realizing the total inadequacy of my own self. I am desirous of doing all things with the other members of the body. Although for doing many things I am not able to gather all the brothers and sisters in the church, I still can do them with two or three brothers and/or sisters according to the principle of the body. . . .

Submit to Authority

If you really see the body of Christ you are conscious of the loveliness of God's children, of the error of division, of the need for fellowship, and of the responsibility in you as a member of the body of Christ. All these facets of awareness are because of body consciousness. Moreover, as you are aware that you are in the body, you must become equally aware that you are under the authority of the head. For whoever knows the life of the body of Christ and is conscious of being a body member will invariably sense the authority of the head, who is Christ Jesus the Lord.

We must not only submit to the *direct* authority of the head, we need also to submit to the *indirect* authority of the head. My physical hand is under the direct authority of the head of my body, but when my arm moves, my hand moves together with my arm—for my hand submits to the head through the arm. Consequently, whoever sees the body of Christ sees also the authority which God has set in the body of Christ for him to submit to. . . .

It is clear from the above observations that authority is the law of the human body, and insubordination to it is symptomatic of disease in the body. Equally true will this be in the spiritual body of Christ. If a person does not know what authority is, how can he say he knows the body of Christ? Let us see that the one who knows the body can discern—even when only three or five people are assembled together—who among those assembled is his authority; because there is manifested in their midst the authority of the head to which he needs to submit. How natural and how beautiful it is in the human body for the fingers to submit to the wrist, the wrist to the arm, the arm to the shoulder, and so on. And this same beauty can be displayed in the body of Christ. . . .

Christ being the head of the church and the church being the body of Christ, the whole body is thus summed up in the head. Nothing in the body can live outside of the head. If our human body is separated from the head, that automatically means death to our body. All the movements of a person are governed by the head. Whenever the head is wounded and thereby loses its effectiveness, the activities of the body stop and the body ends in death; for the head is the central control of the life of the body. Now the word of God declares that he who has the Son of God has life (1 John 5.12). A Christian receives life from the Lord Jesus, who is the Son of God; yet this life never leaves the Lord. He who has the Son has life, but this life, says God's word, is in the Son (1 John 5.11), and not even for a moment has this life left the Son. Hence, apart from the Lord Jesus we just cannot

live. . . .

Christ is the life of the body; He also is its authority as the head. Because life is in Him, authority too is in Him. He is our life, therefore He has authority; and when we obey His authority, we have life. Hence if we see what is the body of Christ, we cannot avoid accepting the control of the head, since a body with its members is not able to move at will but does so only at the order of the head. If there is no command from the head there is no movement in the body. No member of the body can take its own initiative, but must be governed by the head. Where life is, there is authority. True authority is life. And since the Lord controls our life, He has authority over us. . . .

What is meant by “follow”? To follow signifies that the way I tread and the place where I go are all decided by someone else. We are following the Lord; therefore we have no authority to decide our own path. The body in its relation to the head can only obey and follow. If we wish to live out the life of the body of Christ we must cover our own head; that is to say, we must not have our personal opinion, egoistic will, or selfish thought. We can only obey the Lord and let Him be the head. The Lord alone is in that position; nobody else can be. I cannot be head, neither can anyone else in the church be, for the body has only one head and is in subjection to that head, which is Christ. We all must therefore obey Him. . . .

Let us realize that we all must hold fast the head. To do this means to acknowledge that Christ alone is head. It means absolute obedience to His authority. “May grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love” (Eph. 4.15,16). From this passage we learn that the members of the body of Christ

are fitly framed and knit together because all hold fast the head and live out the life of the body. This does not suggest that God wants you to pay attention only to the one who sits next to you, but that He preeminently wants you to have a proper relationship with the Lord. If you maintain such a relationship with the head you will have a good relationship with other body members. All matters between you and your brothers and sisters may be easily solved if you can submit yourself to the head. If you have no controversy with the Lord you will have no problem with any brother or sister. . . .

What are the conditions for holding fast the head? On the one hand we must let the cross deal deeply with the flesh and its natural life and on the other hand we need to learn to walk according to the Spirit. Thus shall we enjoy a wholesome body fellowship. Without the dealing of the natural life by the cross we cannot live out the body life. . . .

God permits us to be individuals, but He does not allow us to be individualistic. Before we enter experientially into the body of Christ we are full of individualism. Even our spiritual pursuit is inspired by this trait. Why seek for holiness? That I myself may be holy. Why desire for power? That I personally may have power. Why look for fruits of labor? That I individually may have fruits. Why wish for the kingdom? That I myself may possess the kingdom. Everything is bound up with “I”. This is not the body; this is individualism. . . .

We therefore need to see ourselves not only as believers but even more so as members. I am a member; hence I am not the whole—not even the half—but only a small part of Christ’s body. It is unquestionably a tremendous deliverance to see the body and to recognize oneself as only a member. Formerly many things were centered on our individual selves. Whether it was work or living, all was highly individualistic. One day when we discerned the body we were naturally delivered from individualism. In salvation we first see

Christ and then we are saved. By the same token, we first see the body and then quite naturally we are delivered from individualism and become members of the body in reality. Not in the sense that we outwardly say we will act according to the principle of the body when we are faced with a situation, but in the sense of acting according to the principle of the body because we have received the revelation and have entered experientially into the body of Christ. With the natural life being dealt with, we spontaneously perceive that we are members. . . .

Each member has his part in serving the body of Christ. Everyone who belongs to the Lord has his portion. He has Christ within, and what he has in Christ has a characteristic of its own. It is this characteristic which becomes the distinctive feature of that one's service. To serve the church is to serve with what one obtains in Christ.

The portion of service which we have in the body of Christ is based on our knowledge of Him. Yet this is not a common knowledge, because a common knowledge of Christ is inadequate. Only a specific knowledge of Him will constitute a specific ministry in serving the body of Christ. Hence specific service is based on specific knowledge of the Lord. Having learned what others have not learned, you receive from the Lord a specific lesson, and with this specific knowledge of Him you may serve. In the human body, for example, the eyes can see, the ears can hear, and the nose can smell. They all have their own functions, and thus each has its own portion. Similarly with the members of the body of Christ. Not every member can see or hear or smell; but each member has his own special ability. This, then, is that member's ministry.

What is your specific ministry? That which you learn especially from the Lord, that which you specifically receive from Him. Only specific ministry can serve the church and cause the latter to increase.

Only what comes from above is able to make for the increase of the body. Whatever you have learned before the Lord is what you may transmit of the life of the head to the body and what you may supply to the church which she does not already have. Hence each member needs to seek earnestly from the Lord what the church has never possessed so as to transmit this to the body of Christ. Today the Lord is looking for those people in whom life is given and by whom the work of the increase of the life of the body might be done. They are used to supply life to the church which she has never known before, to increase the measure of the stature of the Lord, and to be the channel of the life to the body. From them the life which they receive from the Lord flows into the church, thus causing the increase of the stature of the body of Christ.

To serve the body of Christ means to supply to it the life which a member receives from the head; that is to say, he supplies the life of the head to the church. When the eyes of a seeing member see, the entire body is able to see. In other words, that member of the body of Christ who has insight into spiritual things becomes the eyes of the body so as to supply seeing to the body. Hands cannot by the sense of touch discern the odor of a thing; but the nose can; it serves the body with its ability to smell. And thus smelling becomes the specific ministry of the nose to the body. Ears, too, serve the body, but with hearing. So hearing is the specific ministry of that member of the body of Christ who can serve as the body's ears. And such can be called the service of the member. And the result of the operation of each such service will be to increase the strength of the body, causing the latter to gain more of Christ. Hence the service or ministry of the member is to serve the church with Christ, thus imparting Christ to others. . . .

Never for a moment think that because the grace you have received is so insignificant you therefore have no place in the church. As long as you are a member, you have a definite function. There is

no one having the life of God who is not a member of the body of Christ, and no member is so small as to have no function of his own. The less than the least of the members still has his function in the body, and that particular function cannot be replaced by any other member. No matter how tiny is that function, no one else can substitute it. Not even the greatest function in the body can stand in for the smallest one: none can take the place of the other: you cannot be a substitute for me, nor can I be a substitute for you. Oh, if we could see this we would leap for joy. . . .

The Authority of Life

No member has any authority, for authority rests only in the head. It is a serious mistake for a member to claim he has such authority in himself. A member does not possess direct authority; he has only the authority delegated to him by the head. And this authority is not something positional, it is wholly of life. Such authority does not come through “appointment” but by “being”: If a member is not an eye, the body has no way to appoint him as its eye. If he is not a hand, the body cannot make him a hand through appointment. He has the authority of holding or of seeing only because he can hold or see. And as he functions along that line, people receive help.

It is a serious blunder if, in a church, authority becomes a matter of position and not of life—if a person is appointed because of his social position and not because of his spirituality. The word of God plainly shows us that authority is in life, not in position or background. Authority in a person is established in living, not in ordination. In his personal and corporate life he has experienced dealings in practical matters and has learned what other people have yet to learn. In the body of Christ, all authorities are out of life. . . .

. . . In the church we need to learn how to submit to one another. If members do not mutually submit, the life mentioned in Romans 8

will not be able to be manifested. On the contrary, brethren will feel as though air were leaking out of them—they can hardly go on. But to those who have discerned the body of Christ, they consider submission to be a most joyful thing. . . .

Many times the leading of the Holy Spirit in us is to bring us to receive another's leading and to accept help from others. If we do not accept another's help, we will miss out on much the Lord has for us. Some Christians decide everything by their own personal feeling. Where, then, is the body? Such believers live entirely in the individual realm; they do not see or experience the body. . . .

The Covering of the Body

As we have seen, the church is the body of Christ and every Christian is a member of that body. The body of Christ not only supplies but also protects its members. The body protection to each member is especially seen in spiritual warfare. Such protection is of utmost importance. One reason why a child of God is attacked by the devil is because he is too individualistic and thus he lacks the protection of the body. How very foolish and dangerous for anyone to expose himself in the days of spiritual conflict. Because such a person is not under the covering of the body Satan is given opportunity to attack.

We should understand that spiritual warfare belongs to the church, not to an individual. The Epistle to the Ephesians is a letter which deals with the body of Christ. In its first chapter this letter speaks of how God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places so that we may know the power of His Son's resurrection. In the same chapter it also shows us how the Lord Jesus is the head of the church and how the church is the body of Christ—the vessel which contains Christ. How exceedingly rich is the church because she is filled with Christ who fills all and in all. In the second chapter

Paul tells us the origin of the body of Christ. Although the church is so rich, she should not forget her former state. She is in possession of such a rich position because of the salvation of God in redeeming her from her fallen condition. The third chapter deals with the mystery of God which reveals how both the Gentiles and the Jews are being brought together to form one new man in Christ. Chapter 4 unveils how God will build up the body of Christ and cause it to increase gradually in stature. And chapter 5 emphasizes the need for us to accept the restraint of the body since the church is the body of Christ. And finally, chapter 6 mentions the armor of the body: "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand" (v.11). Please notice that it is "you" plural and not "you" singular who are to put on the whole armor of God. This one special armor is for this one entire body. True, each member has his peculiar feature. But only by putting all these peculiar features together can there be the whole armor of God that then makes the body fit for spiritual warfare.

In view of this fact, let us not forget that this spiritual armor is given to the church and not to anyone individually. You as an individual cannot cope with Satan. It requires the church to deal with the enemy. What you as an individual cannot see and safeguard, other members see and guard against. Satan is not afraid of your personal prayer, but he trembles indeed when a few pray together. Some members of the body are given faith in large proportion which then can serve as a shield for your protection. Some others have the word of God in a special measure, and this can stand as the sword of the Holy Spirit. When one or several of them wield the sword—that is, when he or they use the word of God—this serves to help you. We must realize that spiritual warfare is preeminently a *joint* battle. It is not something that you are to get into singlehandedly. If you go to the fight alone, you draw the attention of Satan to yourself for his assault. . . .

The Restraint of the Body

Since we are but members of the body of Christ we should never think of ourselves as being everything. Being individual members, we ought to accept the restraint of the body. If in the church you are a hand, you must not only be happy to be a hand but also be glad to receive the restraints which come from other members. Do not let the hand move independently. Each part of the body is under the restraint of the body; none can take individualistic liberty. Suppose, for instance, that you now need to take a trip. Even if some member in your physical body is too lazy to move, it must nonetheless go with your body. It is inconceivable that your body could go away and leave that particular member at home. In just such a manner are we to be the members of the body of Christ. We must be joined in one with other brothers and sisters.

The work of the cross, besides bringing us *into* the body, has its sphere of operation *within* the body as well. If we are merely members to each other as those in a *congregation* are, we may not need the cross; but if we are joined together to be one *body*, we must have the cross. For the cross will take you and me away, it will take away our natural life, our individual movement, our inflated self. The cross is a must among Christians, it is a must in the church. Whether we like it or not, we must communicate with our brothers and sisters because we are all in the same body. Being in the body, we have to accept restraint. We cannot afford to be free-handed. Now if we do not wish to be a member of the body, we may indeed seek for our personal satisfaction alone. But if we want to be a member, we cannot look only for our own fulfillment. If you or I should encounter a troublesome brother, we really need the cross in such a situation. For the cross will test us, the cross will drain out all our offscourings, it will clear away all our uncleanness. In short, we must be restrained by the body. Such restraint makes impossible our freewheeling. It reminds us of the need of the cross. Unless we allow

the cross to do a deep enough work in our lives we are not able to be fitly joined to our brothers and sisters. . . .

In spiritual things how we need to depend on other members and in so doing to know the restraint of the body. Some members are given by God the gift of performing miracles; some receive grace to preach the gospel; and others are divinely equipped to be teachers. If you are chosen to preach the gospel, preach it with glad and willing heart, and be humble enough to receive the Bible teaching from those who are gifted to teach. If you have the gift of a teacher, do not therefore consider yourself as able in all other things. You should respect and receive the gift and work of others. In this, too, we need to learn restraint. What we cannot do, we should let others do; and we should learn to accept the work of other people as if it is our own. In spiritual work, no one can do everything freely. . . .

The Supply of the Body

The body possesses an inherent principle, which is fellowship. The fellowship of the body means not just receiving but also supplying. Should you only regard yourself as one on the receiving end of things and reckon yourself as fairly good if you receive with quietness and in an orderly manner, you lack an understanding of the meaning of the supply of the body. You also will become a weight to the body, an ailment and a burden to it.

Keep in mind that fellowship is the life of the church, that fellowship is an inherent principle of the body. Every part of our physical body is involved in a constant flow of life. Whenever a part is cut off from the body's system of communication, that part dies. But when a part is sick, all other parts of the body rush to help and to protect it. Now just as the law of the physical body is, so is the law of the spiritual body. The rule of church life, therefore, is the principle of mutual supplying. And whenever a member violates this rule, he

brings death to the body and he himself becomes a weight upon it. . .

. . . There are three cardinal principles which are indispensable to our living in the body of Christ—the first of which governs the relationship between me and the head; the second of which governs the relationship between me and the body; and the third, my place as a member.

My Relation to the Head (Christ)—Subjection

The meaning of my Christian consecration has to do with my desire to be obedient to the Lord. I do not want to be free, nor will I be rebellious to authority. The first principle on living in the body of Christ is to be in subjection to the authority of the head, since the very existence of the body with its varied functions and activities depend on authority. Whenever authority loses its ground in us, the body is immediately paralyzed. Whichever part of the body is disobedient, that part experiences paralysis. It is only a paralyzed body which is not subject to the command of the head. Where life is, there is authority. It is inconceivable to reject authority and still receive life.

All who are full of life have been obedient to authority. How, for example, can my physical hand have life and yet resist the control of my head? My hand is living because it is manageable by my head. The very meaning of living for my hand signifies that my head is able to direct and use it. The same is true in the relationship between any member of the body of Christ and the head. The very first principle for each member who lives in the body of Christ, therefore, is to obey the Lord who is the head. If you and I have not been dealt with until such time as we become obedient persons, then what we know about the body is merely doctrinal in nature, not a matter of life. . . .

My Relation to the Body (Church)—Fellowship

Our relationship to the head is subjection, while our relationship to the body is fellowship. Among God's children, fellowship is not only a fact but also a necessity. The life of the body of Christ relies on fellowship, for without it the body will die. What is fellowship? For me to receive help from other members—that is fellowship. For example, in the body of Christ perhaps I am a mouth, and I can therefore speak forth. But I need the fellowship of that member who may be ears in order that I may also hear; I need the fellowship of him who may be eyes so that I may see; I require the fellowship of the one who may be hands in the body in order that I may take hold of things; and I also require the fellowship of the member who supplies feet to the body in order that I may walk. And hence it is by means of fellowship that I can receive the distinctive functions of other members and thus make all that they have mine. . .

My Place As a Member—Service

If we have now seen that the life of the body is communicative and mutually supplying, we should likewise begin to realize before God that we should not be simply those who consume life but even more so be those who supply life. If there are too few members to supply life in the body of Christ while at the same time there are too many members who wait to receive the life supply, the strength of the body will be exhausted. Accordingly, we ourselves need to pray for other people. God will use our prayer to supply life to other members. Whenever they have need, life will flow into them.

—BOC 7, 13, 15-16, 19-22, 24-30, 34-40,
44-5, 54-66, 72-4, 76-8, 80, 85-9

This matter is of the greatest significance. The body of Christ is one. As a person has only one body, so the oneness of the body of

Christ should be manifested on earth now. It should not wait to be demonstrated in heaven. In 1 Corinthians 12 it says of the body of Christ that, “Whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (v.26). This distinctly shows that the body of Christ is something on earth. If it were in heaven, we might speak of honor but we could not talk about suffering, for it is impossible for the body to suffer when in heaven. Only on earth is a member open to suffering; only on earth is the body subject to persecution. For this reason, the oneness of the body of Christ is not just a future reality in heaven but is also a present fact on earth.

In His prayer in John 17, the Lord Jesus prays for the oneness of the church on earth: “That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me” (v.21). If we omit the middle parenthetical section of this passage and read the remainder: “That they may all be one, that the world may believe that thou didst send me; we can clearly see that the oneness of the church is to induce the world to believe. Since those who are to believe are people in the world, it is evident that this oneness must be manifested before the world. The Lord expects the world to believe. This oneness, then, is present on earth today. . . .

I would like to stress here that the oneness of the body is the unity of the church. The church’s unity is limited to the body and cannot be extended beyond the body. The word of God never sanctions oneness with nominal Christians. . . .

Let us see now what the church is. The church is composed of all who have the life of Christ, all those to whom Christ has imparted himself. These people are the body of Christ. Consequently, Christian oneness includes all the children of God. It does not embrace any nominal Christian who has not been regenerated and

still belongs to the world. Such people do not belong to the church and thus are not included in its oneness . . .

Oneness Includes All the Body

The scope of Christian oneness is very precisely defined. It includes all children of God. The measure of the body of Christ is the measure of Christian oneness. Christian fellowship is as comprehensive as the body of Christ.

We wish to draw the attention of all brothers and sisters to this thing: God wishes His children to be one in the Holy Spirit. God does not say that just any oneness will do; He insists that oneness must be in the Holy Spirit. Only this is called Christian oneness. It is a oneness in Christ. To keep Christian oneness, we must keep in Christ, in the body, in the oneness of the Holy Spirit. So, the scope of Christian oneness is as inclusive as the body.

Today there is much misunderstanding about oneness. Many mistakenly assume that as long as there is oneness, it satisfies God's desire. But if the oneness is not circumscribed by the body of Christ, it is not worth keeping. To keep a oneness which is smaller than the body of Christ is to make what Scripture calls division. God wants us to keep the oneness of the Holy Spirit and the scope of that is the body of Christ. . . .

The Basis of Oneness Is Judgment

Finally, let brothers and sisters remember one thing: the oneness of the body is not only a oneness of Christians but it is also a oneness with God.

In the Old Testament, we can see that each time God is present there will be judgment. The presence of God is the presence of the

law, and consequently it is also the presence of judgment. God is holy. If He were not present, judgment would not be brought in. But to keep the oneness of the Christians, we must maintain the presence of God. God's presence brings in law and judgment. As soon as something is not right, God judges it. Without God's presence, everything can be tolerated; with God's presence, no sin can be left unjudged. If a church tolerates sin, it can never keep the oneness.

May brothers and sisters see what the basis of oneness is. It is very elementary: oneness is based on the forsaking of sin. God's children today are so divided because of many sins. Where there is sin and evil, there is bound to be separation. It is a fundamental mistake to assume that patience or forbearance is the basis of oneness. No, the Bible never advocates either patience or forbearance as the basis of oneness. It rather affirms that oneness is based on the forsaking of sin.

If anyone wishes to fellowship with God, he needs to walk in the light. If we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another (1 John 1.7). So we may say that fellowship is the basis of oneness, and fellowship is based on dealing with and forsaking sin. If we are all in God's light, we have fellowship one with another; otherwise, we have no way to fellowship.

“Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord . . . and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6.17-18). God bases His fellowship with us on our coming out and being separated. Do not, for the sake of gaining man's affection, ever lose fellowship with God. This is the cause of many defeats. . .

In the Old Testament God shows us how He took a rib out of Adam and built Eve. Eve came out of Adam. Or, to use another

expression, Eve was Adam. Similarly, if we ask, “What is the church?”, the reply is that the church comes out of Christ. As God built Eve with that which He took out of Adam, so He builds the church with that which is taken out of Christ. Christ has given us not only His power, grace, nature, and will, but also His own body. He has given us His bones and His flesh. He has given himself to us, just as Adam gave his bone to Eve.

The Bible tells us that Christ is the head of the church, and the church is the body of Christ. Individually, every Christian is a member of the body of Christ, for every one comes out of Him.

One thing to especially notice is that the body of Christ is on earth. It is on earth, though it does not belong to the earth. It is heavenly, yet it is on earth. Do not think that the body of Christ is in heaven. When Paul persecuted the church, the Lord Jesus challenged him on the road to Damascus, saying, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” The word of the Lord here is really wonderful. He did not say, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou my disciples?” but He said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” He did not ask, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou my people?” or “Why persecutest thou my church?” He simply said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Thus it was revealed to Paul that the church and Christ are one. The oneness of the church and Christ is of such a nature that to persecute the church is to persecute Christ. Moreover, the incident on the Damascus road indicates that the body of Christ is something on earth. If it were in heaven, it would not be persecuted nor could it be persecuted. But today the church on earth is the body of Christ. Thus Saul could persecute the church. . . .

Church Unity in the Holy Spirit

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ.

For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Con 12.12-13).

To say that the church comes out of Christ touches upon the matter of the source of the church. All Christians have new life. The one life of Christ has been multiplied into tens of thousands, and thousands of thousands of Christians. Chapter 12 of John shows us how a grain of wheat falls into the ground, dies, and bears many grains. All the grains partake of the life of the first grain. One grain becomes many grains, and the many all come from the one grain.

We have seen how one grain can become many grains, but how can many grains again become one? Scripture shows us that the formation of the body of Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. How does the Holy Spirit accomplish this work? He does it by baptizing many grains into one. From one Christ come the tens of thousands and thousands of thousands of Christians. These thousands of thousands of Christians are baptized into one body in one Spirit. Such is the basic teaching of 1 Corinthians 12.12-13. To use a different metaphor, we may say that all of us are like stones hewn out of the same rock and then cemented together into one whole by the Holy Spirit.

The body of Christ, then, has two basic principles: first, unless it comes out of Christ, it is not the body of Christ; second, unless there is the work of the Holy Spirit, it is not the body of Christ. We must be baptized in the Holy Spirit and be filled with the Holy Spirit so as to be joined into one. To say that the church begins at Pentecost is correct; to say it begins at the house of Cornelius is also correct; for both Jews and Gentiles have been baptized into one body. We first receive life from the Lord and this life is in the Holy Spirit in order to make us one body. Everyone who knows the Lord knows this body. Everyone who knows the Holy Spirit knows this body. If

people walk according to the Holy Spirit, they are naturally aware of Gods children being one body. The physical body has many members, but the head, through the nervous system, controls all the members. Likewise, the head of the church joins the many members together into one body through the Holy Spirit. . . .

The church comes out of Christ, and, through the operation of the Holy Spirit, becomes one body. All the members are fitted together and coordinated with one another in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the fellowship or communication of Christians falls within the body. In other words, the basis for Christian fellowship is the body.

We are members one of another and we are one body. Naturally our fellowship is based on the body of Christ. There is no other relationship for fellowship except that we are all members of the body of Christ. We are neither all Jews nor all Greeks, all freemen nor all bondmen. We cannot base our fellowship on any of these relationships. Hence, the body is the one and only basis of our fellowship. . . .

Let me tell you, when all those with one talent rise up to serve the Lord, then we will have the church in our midst. Today's predicament is due to the monopoly of service by the people with five talents and with two talents, thus leaving idle the people with one talent. We must show the one-talent people that, little as they have, they must serve and serve faithfully. This is called the body; this is body life. Let each one learn to serve God with what he has; let no one try to push his responsibility upon others. Then we shall see that the body of Christ with its body life is built on the people of one talent.

—LOA 130-2, 134, 137-8, 148-9, 193-4, 199-201, 208

6

The Testimony

The Testimony of God

I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies. (Ps. 119.125)

We frequently mention the testimony of God, but what is His testimony and to what does it point?

The word “testimony” or “testimonies” is used more often in the Old Testament than in the New. Here we would take note especially of two places in the Old Testament. One is found in the Pentateuch of Moses, particularly in the Book of Exodus, where the word “testimony” is used profusely: such as in the phrases “the ark of the testimony” and “the two tables of the testimony” (see Ex. 25.22, 31.18). The other is found in Psalm 119 where the word “testimonies” is repeatedly employed. By looking closely at these two places we may have our eyes opened to know what is the real meaning of the testimony of God.

Psalm 119 refers many times to the word of God, to the precepts of God, the law of God, the statutes of God, the commandments of God, and also to the testimonies of God. The psalmist lists testimonies together with God’s word, precepts, statutes, commandments, and so forth. We are exhorted to keep His testimonies in the same way as we are required to keep His word, precepts, law, statutes and commandments. It may sound a little strange to our ears when we say we must keep God’s testimonies. But we find in the Bible that His testimonies are of the same nature as are His word, precepts, law, statutes and commandments.

In Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers we find not only that God’s testimony stands on the same footing as His word and His law, but

that even the two tables of stone on which His law was inscribed are called the two tables of the testimony and also that the ark in which the two tables were placed is called the ark of the testimony. All these things are of God's own doing.

Thus we are shown what the testimony is. The testimony is the law. In other words, it represents God's heart desire, which is also God's requirement—or may we say it, God's standard. As a matter of fact, the two tables of the testimony mentioned in Exodus picture for us a beautiful theme: the very standard of God. What is God's standard? His standard reveals himself, showing us what a God He is. And the testimony is given to us in order that we may know what is the absolute standard of God.

When this testimony comes to man, it becomes law. On God's side, it is testimony; but on the human side, it is law. Hence law and testimony are one and the same thing though viewed differently. It is testimony with respect to God; but it becomes law with respect to man. It testifies to what God requires; it delineates what needs to be kept by man. With regard to God, testimony is His demand; with regard to man, testimony is his duty. It bears witness to the kind of God we have as over against the sort of life we humans live. When it is placed in our hand, such a testimony convicts us of our unrighteousness since we have fallen short of the divine standard. But while it remains in the Lord's hand, it reveals what a God He is. Testimony, therefore, is the self-revelation of God.

This becomes even clearer in the New Testament period. The Lord Jesus comes to bear witness to the Father; the Holy Spirit comes to bear witness to Christ; and the church is to maintain the testimony of Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. The witnessing of Christ is none other than telling people who Christ is and what Christ is. And this is called testimony. With respect to God, this testimony is nothing less than himself; with respect to us, this

testimony is a most serious thing for it becomes law to us. It behooves us not to sin against this testimony. For whenever we do sin against it, our action will not be easily overlooked by God.

Testifying for God Requires Knowing Him

We must acknowledge that this testimony is a tremendous thing. (Please note that the “testimony” referred to here is different from what is commonly known as “giving testimony.”) For the primary idea surrounding this testimony is God’s speaking concerning himself. By this testimony He himself tells us what a living God He is. He comes to man to bear witness to himself as to what kind of person He is. We must confess that this testimony is a spiritual reality, that which is ultimately real. Whoever fails to touch the ultimate reality does not touch the testimony. Strictly speaking, no one can bear witness for God, since from eternity to eternity the divine testimony is given by God himself. He alone can tell us what He is.

We may say many words about God and declare what a God He is, and in so doing we profess that we are testifying for Him; but all our words are of no avail. We may multiply our words ten or even a hundred times; even so, the testimony of which we have been speaking cannot be given by man: it has to come from God himself. If He himself does not speak, there will be no testimony. Do we see the gravity of this matter? If God chooses not to speak about himself, who can testify for Him? We may talk and talk, but this is useless for *we* are speaking. If God does not speak, all is vanity. As an illustration, suppose we go to a court to testify for some person. What value are our words if in spite of our eloquence the party directly involved keeps his silence and shows no expression whatsoever? Let us therefore be reminded once again that the testimony of God is God speaking of himself, and if He fails to speak, there is *no* testimony.

Hence to testify for God requires of man that he touch God himself so as to be able to speak the words which God wishes him to say. Man can speak only after God is known, seen and revealed to him. Only when he has touched this ultimate reality is he able to open his mouth and testify for God. In case he has not touched this reality, he will have no words to say and therefore no testimony to give. One may spread the commandment or statute or ordinance or word of God, but testimony is quite a different matter. What comes to man is commandment, statute, ordinance or word, but testimony remains with God. All these other matters are external whereas testimony is the absolute reality. It consequently needs Christ, who comes from God to bear witness for God. Then too, it is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from Christ and bears witness for Christ. And hence the one who knows Christ and knows the Holy Spirit can bear witness for God and His Christ.

Such a witness does not rely upon the man's word or doctrine or teaching, because it is Christ himself who has come forth. A testimony may become a doctrine, but a doctrine can never become a testimony. When testimony is given, commandment may come upon man for him to obey; yet this commandment is not the testimony. This testimony is something totally different from the testimony we commonly know of. How often we say we cannot testify for we do not have the experience. Yet let us realize that even experience is too small to match up with *this* testimony. For this testimony is more than a matter of experience. It is touching the Lord himself. Yes, manward, testimony is indeed experience; nonetheless, the term experience is far too inadequate when discussing testimony. Because testimony is a matter of touching the Lord, He alone can testify for himself. Since there is none greater than God, He is the only One who can bear witness for himself.

One of the great problems confronting the church is the fact of too much doctrine coming from man. People speak on many doctrines

and give many teachings on the Scriptures. They tell us what we ought to do, and what is scriptural or what is not scriptural. They are completely immersed in matters such as these. But true testimony is a matter of touching the ultimate reality; only touching God himself gives the testimony. Read again the five books of Moses and Psalm 119, and you will discover that the way God uses the term “testimony” is entirely different from the way we ordinarily employ the term. Testimony is of such immensity that it is not easily comprehended by our mind, because it is God himself speaking, and by which He reveals himself and also His demand. Whoever touches this divine testimony has in reality touched God himself.

Sinning Against God Is Sinning Against the Testimony

What is meant by sinning against the testimony? It simply means sinning against God. Whatever touches the character or the way of God touches His testimony. God *will* have His absolute character manifested. And that which misrepresents His character sins against His testimony. Whenever God’s testimony is involved, He will not overlook the event. Whatever defames or falsely represents Him, He will immediately deal with it, since it affects His character, His position, even His very self. . . .

Whoever Sins Against the Testimony Is Chastened

We believe God frequently chastens His people for this one thing—that He wishes to vindicate himself. He clears himself of any adverse involvement with what man has done before men and also before the devil. If man is unable to maintain God’s testimony, God has to come forth to defend it. But this means that man will be chastened by Him. When we sin in matters which touch only ourselves, it seems as though the Lord is not as serious concerning them as when we sin in matters which offend Him himself. In the latter case He will rise up to chasten and to declare His innocency.

Let us therefore walk very softly before God. Let us not sin in anything, especially let us not sin against His testimony. Always have a heart of fear and trembling, asking the Lord to keep us from sinning, particularly from sinning against the testimony. . . .

Have you ever pondered over the fact that when God chastens us to vindicate himself, Satan can no longer accuse? In chastisement God shows the enemy that He, God, has no part in the matter, thus preserving His holiness. For this reason, our first reaction under chastisement should not be asking for relief but asking for help to satisfy God. Each time we come under chastisement of this nature, we may tell brothers and sisters that this is due to our offending God in a certain matter. Our word may sound simple, but our doing this will uphold the fact that the Lord has had no part in the matter. Some brothers and sisters only know crying under chastisement. Why cry? Because the discipline is too severe? Because there is hardship? Oh, these are not for crying. We ought to see that God's chastisement, as severe and hard as it may be, is His vindication of himself. Since His name is upon us, He can easily be complicated by us. And hence He has to extricate himself from any adverse involvement which our actions may bring about. During the time of such chastisement let us bow our heads and worship God, saying: "I will gladly accept such discipline; I will gladly stand on such ground; I will gladly let the devil, the church and the world know that you have had nothing to do with it but that it is all my fault." The more we submit ourselves under God's disciplinary hand the more He is vindicated, and therefore the quicker discipline of this kind will pass away. On the other hand, the harder we try to escape such discipline and the more we struggle against it, the less we shall be able to get through. . .

The Testimony of Jesus Christ

Who bare witness of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw. (Rev. 1.2)

In the Book of Revelation, “the testimony of Jesus Christ” is mentioned several times. It was because of the testimony of Jesus Christ that the apostle John was exiled to the island of Patmos (Rev. 1.9). Because of “the testimony” which they had maintained, the saints of old were slain (Rev. 6.9). Satan attacks fiercely those who “hold the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12.17). At the return of the Lord, they who hold fast to “the testimony of Jesus” shall reign with Him. Furthermore, an angel declared to John that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19.10). And finally, Paul in one of his epistles also had this to say: “even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you” (1 Cor. 1.6). What, then, is the testimony of Jesus Christ?

It would take some little time to answer this question fully. We therefore can only briefly explain here its essence. The testimony of Jesus Christ includes four aspects: first, who Jesus is—that is to say, what He formerly was, and what He now is; second, what His relationship to man is; third, what He has done and accomplished on the cross; and fourth, what His relationship to God’s eternal purpose is. We believe that these four aspects embrace the full scope of the testimony of Jesus Christ. Much could be said about these four aspects, but we will only state them concisely.

First, who Jesus formerly was and who He is now. These matters touch on the Person of Christ, which subject occupies a most prominent place in spiritual theology. Let us not deem theology to be merely learning a special technique. We will discover that the deepest, sharpest and most subtle of the devil’s devices is to attack the Person of Christ. He seeks every opportunity to lead men astray towards some profound and philosophical approaches to the Person of Christ. If he is able to entice a godly believer to fall on this point, he can destroy the life ministry of that individual. Do keep well in mind that the devil plots with all his cunning to ensnare God’s children on this very issue. The farther we follow the Lord, the

keener will Satan tempt us concerning the Person of Christ. For he is fully aware that if he strikes God's children on this point, he strikes at the very heart of all issues.

Were you to be seduced to doubt the Person of Christ, your whole being would be finished before God. A slight questioning or a little error in your talk in regard to the Person of Christ will finish you in terms of being used in the hand of God. The devil focuses his attacks on consecrated believers to lure them away from the straight path of the truth concerning this matter. Because of this, we must judge carefully the so-called theological views of men, that we may not be trapped in Satan's net.

Who Jesus is—this is the foundation of the testimony. All false teachings and destructive doctrines assault directly or indirectly this central theme: they attack the Person of Christ. Many try to interpret Him in a roundabout way; at the end we will discover that they neither confess Christ as God nor allow others to acknowledge Him as God. Hence the first aspect of the testimony of Jesus Christ is concerned with His Person.

Second what the relationship of Christ to man is. One term may be used to explain and to define His relationship to man and that is the word "representative." Christ has done things which exceed any power of man and that are impossible to him. He is God, therefore He acts like God. However, Christ does all things for man. He joins himself to man by becoming flesh. He is the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3.16). He has four limbs and five sensory organs just as we have. He becomes one of us therefore He can be our Representative. His life, His work, His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, and His present position and work in heaven are all representative in nature. And hence the testimony of Jesus Christ includes His relationship with man in whatever He represents both now and before.

Third, what the Lord Jesus has accomplished on the cross. This covers His death, burial, resurrection and reigning. All these are universal in character—that is to say, they are all-inclusive. His death is an all-inclusive one, and so are His burial, His resurrection and His reigning all-inclusive. This is the testimony of Jesus Christ.

And fourth, as to His relationship to God's eternal purpose we can say that God has ordained in eternity that the Lord Jesus shall be the Head over all things. He is the King of kings. The too is the testimony of Jesus Christ.

We believe the four aspects which we have just mentioned comprise the testimony of Jesus Christ since they include all the contents of the Bible. You can draw a line from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from Genesis to Revelation, and link up these four cardinal matters. Today, the testimony of Jesus Christ is deposited in a vessel which is called the church, the body of Christ. And it is deposited in the following fashion: first, this testimony is the sum of all the revealed truth; and second, this testimony is the power of the truth as incorporated in the vessel. For this testimony of Jesus Christ as deposited in the vessel of the church is the same truth which the Holy Spirit has wrought out in Jesus Christ. It is therefore not a kind of objective truth for the mind to comprehend but is that truth becoming our life, our nature and our experience through the working of the Holy Spirit in us. And thus the testimony is deposited in that vessel which is the church. The Holy Spirit reveals and incorporates this testimony in the church, which is the body of Christ. And we who have believed in Jesus are members of this body.

—TG 3-9, 17-19, 29-33

7

The Church

“Jehovah God said, It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2.18a). In other words, God wanted to have Adam *and Eve*. The purpose of God is to have a victorious Christ plus a victorious Church.

His purpose is to have a Christ who overcomes the devil’s work plus a Church that overcomes the devil’s work. His purpose is to have a reigning Christ and a reigning Church. This is the foreordination of God. This is what He has predetermined in His heart and what He will do for His good pleasure. He does what He desires. He wants Christ; He also wants a Church that is like Christ. He wants Christ to rule as well as He wants a Church ruling together with Christ. As Christ needs a companion in battle, so He needs a companion in glory. What God requires of the Church is for her to be like Christ in all things. He wants Christ to have a companion. . .

The Church Comes Out of Christ

So, what is the Church? The Church must be that which is taken out of Christ. By looking at the two aspects of Adam, we have no difficulty in understanding this statement. On the one hand, there is Adam himself as a person. On the other hand, there is that which Adam typifies. As to Adam himself, he was made out of dust. Natural men are all made of dust. With respect to typology, however, Adam is a type of Christ. What was built out of Adam was Eve, and that typifies how the Church is built out of Christ. Eve was built with Adam’s rib. In other words, she came out from Adam. In short, Eve *was* Adam. What, then, is the Church? The Church is but another form of Christ even as Eve was the other form of Adam.

From this we can see that the Church is Christ. Many think that the putting together of us believers makes the Church. Such a

concept is far from the truth. What is truly the Church? It is that part which is taken out of Christ and *not* what is naturally made with dust. The Church is the new man built by God with Christ as the material and not the natural man made of dust as the building material. In other words, the material of the Church is Christ: without Christ, the Church has no position, no life, no existence: for the Church is born of Christ. . .

Only that which comes out of Christ is the Church. Human ability, capability, concept, power and all else that is of man himself are all outside of the Church. Whatever is natural is out side of the Church. That which comes from Christ alone is in the Church. Eve was not made of dust but was built with Adam, a picture—a type—of the Church and Christ. The preciousness lies in the fact that Eve was built with a rib taken out of Adam: that which came out of Adam (and not that which came out of dust) was called Eve. Likewise, only that which comes out of Christ can be called the Church. Whatever does not come out of Christ has no relationship to the Church.

One might have been very open and straightforward before he was saved. And upon being saved he continues to use this open and straightforward nature of his to serve God, for he assumes his natural openness to be something useful in the work of God and something about which to boast. The question here is, from whence does this openness come? Does it emanate from Christ? Has it been dealt with by the cross? If it has not emanated from Christ or been dealt with by the cross, it has no usefulness to the Church. Even as what came out of the body of Adam alone became Eve, so only that which today comes out of Christ can truly be viewed as the Church. Whatever comes out of the natural man himself is not and cannot be part of the Church.

One might, as another example, have been very eloquent before he was saved. He used to be gifted in telling stories to people. Now

that he is a Christian, he merely changes the subject and preaches the gospel. Let us not think that because this is preaching it cannot be wrong. The question to ask is, from where does this eloquence come? And has it been dealt with by the cross? Should this eloquence in him be naturally endowed and be something which has not passed through the cross, then it can only be deemed as that which comes wholly from the natural. And accordingly, this believer is bringing into the Church what belongs to earthly Adam. And as a consequence, he drags the Church down. Whatever comes from the natural is not of the Church.

Let us take a further example. A person could be one who is very clever, having a good brain. Formerly he used this brain to do research on philosophy, science or literature. But now that he is saved he employs this same clear and able brain in researching the word of God. Once again it needs to be asked, from whence does this good brain originate? And has it been dealt with by the cross? Has it come under the control of the Holy Spirit? If this is purely something he was born with, and something which has remained undealt with by the cross, then it belongs to earthly Adam—it is something out of self, out of the natural, out of flesh and blood. Though he may have changed the subject matter—the object of his research now being God's word—his brain remains the same old entity. And in using such unrenewed mind to study the Bible, he will not be able to help the Church but to the contrary will damage her. For only that which is out of Christ is the Church. What comes out of man is not the Church.

We need to be dealt with by God to the extent that all which is of the natural will be checked by God. Our natural strength must be dealt with by the cross. It must be subjected to the control of the Holy Spirit; otherwise it will do damage to the Church. Whatever emanates from the natural life of Adam is made of dust; and hence, nothing of that can be acceptable to God. Just as that which was built

of the rib bone that came out of Adam was Eve, so only that which is built with the resurrection life of Christ is the Church (“bone” in the Scriptures, incidentally, speaks of resurrection life, and we know that none of the bones of Christ was broken at the cross). . .

God’s eternal purpose is to obtain a man, and this is a corporate man who comes out of Christ. This is the Church. The Church is not the adding of some Christians to some other Christians, nor is it many, many individuals. The Church is comprised of one life. It is the Church because all these individuals share one life in common—they share the one Christ. You possess a portion of Christ, he possesses a portion of Christ, another possesses a portion of Christ, everyone possesses a portion of Christ. By gathering together the Christ in all these people, the Church comes into being. In this regard, let us take note of the fact that the man whom God desires to have is not divided and fragmentary. When He created man, male and female created He them. But the male is singular in number, so is the female singular in number. Even so, Christ is singular, and likewise is the Church singular. In the sight of God, there is only one Christ and only one Church. In the future, in fact, we shall see but one man in hell as well as only one Man in heaven. There is not a third man. For God sees only two men in the whole universe, as is made clear in 1 Corinthians 15, which reveals the fact that Adam is the first man but Christ is the second man as well as the *last* Adam (vv.45,47). As typified by Eve, the Church—the Body of Christ—is one and not many.

Although there is the life of God in us, God has to work in us to break our individualism. He must break our misconcept of self-sufficiency. We ought to be united into one with the other children of God. Just as there is only one Eve, so there is but one Body of Christ. All God’s children—all those who share the life of Christ—are not many isolated individuals but are those united to be one Man. Day by day God must break down our individualism that

we may know what is the life of the Body.

Every true Christian knows the life in Christ; yet sadly, not all Christians know the life in the Body of Christ. As the life of Christ is a reality, so too is the life of the Body of Christ a reality. Christians are not to remain fragments, they are to be united into one—even as Paul once wrote, declaring: “Seeing that we who are many are one bread, one body” (1 Cor. 10.17a). If you live by Christ, you will be one with all Christians. If you live by your own life, you will be separated from all the children of God.

Consequently, two steps are needed for the Church to be what it should be: the distribution of Christ and the destruction of individualism. The distribution of Christ happens at the time of regeneration; the destruction of individualism, however, occurs after our salvation as the Lord works daily in our lives till one day we are able to confess before God that we can do nothing on the basis of our own individual self but that henceforth we will do all things according to the principle of mutual help, of fellowship, and of the Body. For we have come to see that the Church is the Body of Christ—that what comes out of *Christ* is the Church but what comes out of *man* is *not* the Church.

In Christian life, the very first lesson is this matter of source; yet the very last lesson is also this lesson of source. The first lesson is that I do not wish to do anything out of my own self, and the last lesson is also that of not doing anything out of one’s own self. This does not mean that we do not seek or are not zealous; it simply means that all our seeking or all our zealousness must come from the Lord. It is not that we will not work, but that we will only work the work of God. It is not that we will not seek for power, but that we will seek the power that comes from the Lord. The entire issue lies in this matter of source: from whence is it all derived? In the Gospel of John we read that the Lord Jesus declared: “The Son can do nothing

of himself? (5.19a). If this be so with the Lord, then how can we His followers ever do anything out from ourselves? We must see before God that we can do nothing of ourselves. We must be brought by Him to the place where we recognize that we can do nothing by ourselves but must do all things only by the Lord. . .

God Builds the Church Out of the Non-Vicarious Death of Christ

Atonement and life-giving are two different aspects of Christ's death. Atonement is negative in character, for it deals with our sins. We have sins; therefore, we deserve to die. Christ, however, came to bear our sins; and through His death He accomplished the work of atonement. This aspect of His death is related to sins. But in the death of Christ there is another element, whose purpose is not to atone but to give life to us. Through His death we receive His very life—even Christ himself.

Adam's sleep (which typifies death) was not for the purpose to atone for Eve but to build or make Eve with a rib taken from out his side. (At the time of Genesis 2, sin had not yet come into the world. The story of Adam's fall in Genesis 3 still lay in the future.) Thus, Eve, as it were, was born through Adam. Through Adam's death-like sleep, Eve received life. Likewise, in the death of Christ, there is an aspect of Him which gives life to the Church.

After Adam had been put to sleep, God pierced his side and took a rib out of Him. Similarly speaking, we know that in the death of Christ there was a piercing of His side too (see John 19.31-37). Yet His side was pierced not for atonement since this was done *after* His death. At that moment the problem of atonement had already been settled. According to Jewish custom, by sunset the crucified one must be taken down from the cross; but in case the crucified one had not died, the soldier or whoever would break his bones to speed up the process of death. For example, the two robbers crucified with

Jesus had not yet died, so the soldiers broke their legs. But when they came to the Lord Jesus, they saw He was already dead, and hence they had no need to break His bones. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately there came out both blood and water. In other words, when the Lord's side was pierced by a spear, the work of atonement had already been accomplished. Thus are we shown that the work of Christ includes not only shedding of blood for the atoning of sins but also shedding of water for the giving of life to us. This latter element is something outside the vicarious aspect of the death of Christ. To put it differently, the blood is for dealing with our sins, and the water is for giving His life to us. This is what the pierced side signifies.

We need to distinguish the two sides of the death of Christ. One side is for solving the matter of atonement after what happened at the time of Genesis 3. Christ came to atone for our sins, and this is to lead us back to God's purpose in having created man. But there is another side to Christ's death which has absolutely no relationship to sins. It is wholly for the release of His very own life that men might have His life and live on earth according to heaven. Due to these two purposeful sides of death, the Scriptures use two different elements to represent them. The *vicarious* death is sealed by the blood; the *non-vicarious* death is sealed by the water. May God open our eyes to see and to understand this momentous event. The blood is to atone for sins, the water is to give us life. The blood is shed because there is sin before God and we have sinned. The water, however, signifies Himself, His very own life. We read in John 19 that "there came out . . . water" (v.34). We note in John 20 that the Lord showed His side to the disciples (see v.27). This latter chapter deals not at all with atonement; for earlier in its verses we read this: "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God" (v 17b). And this is clearly a matter of giving life. . .

The Relation between the Body and the Bride

The Church has two distinct positions with respect to Christ: according to life, the Church is the Body of Christ; according to destiny, the Church is the Bride of Christ. One might also say that speaking of union, the Church is the Body of Christ; speaking of intimacy, the Church is the Bride of Christ.

When in God's word we are shown the oneness of Christ and the Church, we are told how Christ is the Head and the Church is the Body. When we are shown the distinction between Christ and the Church, God's word declares that the Church is the Bride of Christ. There is no doubt in the Scriptures that Adam was Adam and Eve was Eve, with God declaring them as two; but He also declares that these two are to become one flesh: "the two shall become one flesh" (Eph. 5.31b). This all bespeaks the relationship between the Church and Christ: from one there becomes two, and from two there becomes one. In the beginning when God created man, He created male and female. But Eve *came out of* Adam, so Eve and Adam were one. By the same token, the Church *comes out of* Christ, so she and Christ are one. Yet Eve was *with* Adam, hence she and Adam were distinct. Likewise, the Church is *with* Christ, and therefore the Church is distinct from Christ. Hence we may say that speaking of union, the two are one; but speaking of distinction, the one becomes two.

These two different positions are also shown in relation to time. Today, the Church is the Body of Christ. Accordingly, today as the Body of Christ, the Church is to manifest the life of Christ. One day, when the life of the Church is matured, this spiritual Church will be brought by God to Christ to be His Bride.

As we study the typology in Genesis 2 we can perceive what is the relationship between Body and Bride. Eve was made or built with the rib of Adam; so Eve, as it were, was Adam's body. Because she

was built with a part of Adam's body, her position towards him was to be his body. But after Eve was built, she was led by God to Adam and became Adam's bride. Such, then, is the relationship between body and bride. In our speaking of Eve being Adam's body, we mean that Eve came out of Adam. And in our speaking of Eve being Adam's bride, we mean that Eve—having been brought to Adam—became his helpmeet, his bride. What came out of Adam was Adam's body; what was brought to Adam was Adam's bride.

Let us see that only that which came out of Adam could be Adam's helpmeet. For let us recall that when all the birds of the heavens were brought to Adam, the latter could not at all find a helpmeet among them because none of them had come out of Adam. Similarly, when all the cattle were brought before him, Adam again failed to find his helpmeet among them because they too had not come out of him. Likewise, all the beasts of the field were rejected as well, for their origin was also wrong. Not one from among all these potential candidates for helpmeet had come out of Adam; therefore, not one of them could qualify to be Adam's helpmeet. Who, then, *could* be Adam's helpmeet? Only Eve could. She, too, was brought to Adam just as the birds, the cattle and the beasts had been brought. But there was a basic difference between Eve and these living creatures. None of the latter had come out of Adam; Eve alone had done so. And as a result, she could become Adam's bride. She came out of him, and she returned to him. In short, what came out of Adam was his body; what returned to him was his bride.

Spiritually speaking, only that which comes out of Christ can go back to Christ. What does not come out of Him can never return to Him. But that which comes from heaven can return to heaven. Whenever in the earthly return we speak of home, we are referring to the place from whence we come. Our returning home is to go back to the place from where we came. So, too, is it in the spiritual realm: if we are not those who come from heaven, we will not be able to

return to heaven. That which came out of Adam could alone return to Adam; for Adam could accept only what came out of him. This typifies that Christ will accept only those who come out of Him. Those who came out of Christ can alone return to Him. Whoever receives life from Christ will be received by Him. . .

The central issue to be noticed in all this is: that only what comes out of Christ is in the Church and has spiritual usefulness. God will never use the old creation to build the new creation. He will never use what comes out of man to build what is of God. In other words, He will never use the fleshly to produce the spiritual. The Lord Jesus tells us: “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3.6). Will that which is born of the flesh turn to be spirit afterwards? Never. For Jesus also declared that “that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” Again, then, the issue is totally a matter of source. A simple inquiry into the source of a thing can determine if the result is spiritual. We cannot use the flesh to produce the spirit. What is spoken out of our natural thought can only beget such thought. What is done with emotional stimulus can only get emotional reaction in response. Only that which is done in the spirit produces the spirit. Hence, the question here is not whether the goal is right but whether the procedure is right. Frequently people conclude something to be right if the goal is right. But God asks about more than the goal, He also asks about the procedure: how you do it. Some may argue: I am for the Lord; what I do is Church work which is winning souls or expanding the kingdom of heaven. I put all my talent and cleverness into it. Is this not very good? Nonetheless, what belongs to the natural man, whether talent or ability or cleverness, if it has not been dealt with by the cross, has no spiritual usefulness. For the Lord emphatically declares: “That which is born of the flesh *is* flesh” and shall always remain flesh. Hence, not only the goal must be spiritual, the procedure must too be spiritual. Only that which comes out of the Holy Spirit obtains any spiritual results. . . .

Therefore, sectarianism and individualism must be eliminated. Sectarianism is not an outward matter; it is a heart matter. Martin Luther once said that the greatest pope does not live in Rome but lives here in the heart. We should know that what hinders God's purpose most is not outside sectarianism but our personal failure to recognize the life of the Body. Here, two revelations are needed: the first one needed is to see that the Body is one; the second is to see that I myself am a member of the Body. Seeing that the Body is one keeps a person from divisiveness. Seeing himself as only a member of the one Body prevents a person from being self-satisfied and becoming individualistic. The entire Body alone is a unit whole. I as but one member am too small to be the whole unit. May God deliver us from being independent that we may be useful. . .

“Having Cleansed It (Church) by the Washing of Water with the Word” (Eph. 5.26)

. . . The Church in the eternal purpose of God is without sin, without even the history of sin. She is wholly spiritual and is all of Christ. But how about her in man's history? She is not, and has not been, totally of Christ, for she has, and has had, many earthly things in her. How, then, can Christ bring her into perfection? He will cleanse her by the washing of water with the word of Christ. Water as we have previously mentioned denotes life, the life that is released through the non-vicarious death of Christ. Accordingly, Christ uses His life with His word—His *rhema*—to cleanse us. [For the meaning of *rhema* as distinguished from *logos*, see “From the Beginning” below.]

What does it mean to be cleansed “by the washing of water with the word”? First of all, we need to see before God where the problem of the Church lies. Her deficiency is not in having too little of Christ but in having too much of things other than Christ. The Church in God's will is totally of Christ, having no sins, no flesh, and no

natural life in her. But how about our actual condition? Everyone of us who truly belongs to Christ has something in him or her which is wholly of Christ. And for this, we are most thankful. Nevertheless, alongside this, we have many things in us which are not of Christ. For this reason, we need cleansing. What is meant by cleansing? Cleansing signifies a subtracting, not an adding. If what is signified is an adding, then the term should be changed to read: *dyeing*. The Eve in Genesis 2 needed no cleansing because at that moment she typified the Church in God's original plan. But with us, it would be self-deceiving if we were to consider ourselves as having no need for cleansing. Of a truth, God's plan is to bring us to the point of there being in us no need for cleansing. Today, however, we must still be cleansed.

How does God wash us? He washes us by His life with the word. Oftentimes we have no knowledge of where we need cleansing. But one day the life within us will not let us go. Shortly afterwards, His rhema word comes, demanding us to deal with a particular matter. On the one hand, life touches us; on the other hand, the word tells us. There have doubtless been times when you have been doing a thing which appears to be correct and reasonably right as well. And yet within you something is touching you and will not let you pass. Then the Lord begins to speak to you. The rhema word for that moment and hour has come—that powerful word of the Lord has arrived. It tells you that this matter needs to be dealt with and to be cleansed. With life on one side and the Lord's rhema on the other, you are being cleansed. On some other occasion, the order is reversed. At first you feel no unease, nor do you sense anything wrong while doing a particular thing; nevertheless, the rhema comes and the Lord speaks a word to you, telling you that this is wrong. Your inner life demands you to deal with it and you allow it to be dealt with. Hence, this becomes our daily living: either the Lord's life forbids first and then the word comes, or the word comes first and then the life deals with it. So that this is what is meant by being cleansed "by the

washing of water with the word” so as to make us holy.

Whether or not we advance spiritually depends on our attitude towards water and the word—that is to say, towards life and rhema. In the event we sense any life sensation within us, we must not be lax about it. We should ask the Lord, “O Lord, give me rhema that I may know and deal with it.” Or if the Lord gives us rhema first—if He has already spoken to us and caused us to know—then we should ask Him to supply us with life to deal with the situation. By this means of gaining our attention, the Lord is able to cleanse us and make us holy. . . .

Here in the Scriptures, we see four women: Eve in Genesis 2, the wife (the Church) in Ephesians 5, the woman in the vision in Revelation 12, and the wife of the Lamb in Revelation 21. These four women are actually one woman who passes through four stages in her history. When she is in God’s plan, she is called Eve; when, on earth, she is redeemed and manifests Christ, she is called the Church; when she suffers persecution from the dragon, she is the woman in the vision in heaven; and when in eternity she obtains full glory, she is the wife of the Lamb. These four women therefore disclose to us what God has done from eternity to eternity. The one in Genesis 2 is the foreordained woman in God’s heart in eternity past. The one in Revelation 21 is the woman who arrives at God’s purpose in the eternity to come. And in between these two, one is the Church whom God has prepared for Christ, and the other is the woman who gives birth to the man-child in the last day. In other words, these four women speak of the four stages of the history of but one woman. One stage is in the eternity past; two stages are between the two eternities; and one stage is in the eternity to come. Although they are differently described, they are united into one. The wife of the Lamb is undoubtedly the woman in Ephesians 5 because even as the Lamb is most assuredly the Lord Jesus, so the woman in Ephesians 5 can be none other than the wife of the Lamb. Moreover, the woman in

Ephesians 5 is likened to Eve, and Eve is likened to the wife of the Lamb in Revelation 21. And once having the overcomers, who represent the work of the whole Church, this woman in Revelation 12 is admitted to be the woman in Revelation 21. In eternity to come, God will indeed obtain a woman who rules and deals away Satan. With the appearing of the wife of the Lamb, God's purpose is reached.

—HWB 25-6, 28, 29-31, 32-5, 37-9, 47-9, 50-2, 58-60, 108-9

From the Beginning

From what we have already said it will be evident that Ephesians sets out to give us the highest New Testament revelation of the Church. This appears again in the order in which the Church's history is treated in this letter. Here, as we have suggested, we not only see her as from sin redeemed; we are shown too her course from the beginning of creation. Whereas Romans introduces sin in Chapter 1, and only approaches the subject of the Body of Christ in Chapter 12 after dealing at length with the justification and sanctification of the individual sinner, Ephesians begins differently, going back further into history to do so. It is striking that, as early as Ephesians 1, the Church comes into view as already "chosen in Christ," and that even though the question of sin follows hard after this statement, it is not treated at any length until Chapter 2. The letter as a whole sets out, in fact, to give us the Church's complete history, comprising both her place in the fulness of God's purpose in Christ and the work of God's grace by which He redeemed her to bring her there.

This view of the Church goes back to the very start of things. It sees her there in the mind of God much as Eve appears in the second

chapter of Genesis, before the irruption of sin into the creation.* This comparison makes Eve unusual, even unique, among the women of the Old Testament who may be felt to be types of the Church. In each of them some aspect of the Church is depicted. We see her presented to the bridegroom (Rebekah), chosen from among the Gentiles (Asenath), passing through the wilderness (Zipporah) receiving her inheritance in the land (Achsah), altogether dependent upon her kinsman-redeemer (Ruth), and militant for her Lord (Abigail). Yet, interesting as is this sequence of types, none is so instructive as that presented by Eve. For they all succeed the Fall, and therefore directly or indirectly have moral issues and responsibilities associated with them. But Eve, viewed as in that blessed period before sin entered, remains uniquely typical of the Church as the one who fulfils all God's desire for her in union with His Son.

For Eve was one and alone; and she was absolutely for Adam. "Have ye not read," said Jesus, "that he which made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the twain shall become one flesh?" (Matt. 19.4,5). At this point the spiritual type, preceding the entry of sin and for the present untouched by it, expresses most perfectly God's original and eternal intention to have a Bride for His Son.

Moreover the figure of the Church that Eve presents is a double figure, and this may help us to understand Paul's language in Ephesians. First, as a part of Adam, taken from him in sleep, she was his body. Then, created, perfected and brought again to him, she became his bride. Other created things were brought to him, but not being *of* him they could not be his help-meet. This distinguishes Eve from the rest of the creation. It also typically distinguishes the

* While the Church was no doubt revealed to man only long after the Fall, we must, I think, allow that she was planned by God before it.—*Author*

Church of Christ from the entire old creation today.

For sin *has* entered. The Fall is a fact of history. “Through one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.” “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” The work of redemption thus became a divine necessity. The cross had to become history, not merely now to fulfil the figure of sleep and waking and new creation foreshadowed by the sleep of Adam. It must deal as well with the new situation the Fall has created* Sin and death must by it be met and done away. Christ Jesus must humble himself for our sakes, becoming obedient even to the death of the cross. The price must be paid and Satan’s power broken. Every individual sinner must come to the Saviour and find remission of sins through the atoning blood. So it is that we see ourselves—and rightly—as in the valley of sin, the trophies of redemption. That, as I said, is Romans. Yet even after all this history, Ephesians finds God choosing, rather, to view us as within His eternal purpose, altogether *from* Christ and altogether *for* Christ. . .

. . . In the sphere of divine purpose there are not many individual vessels, but one Vessel. God created one Eve, not many men. Without Christ, I personally do not possess life; without the Church His Body, I have not the means to live the life I possess as it should be lived.

But now, not only do I have the life; I have also with me the Giver of life himself. Let us return for a moment to the latter part of Ephesians 5. In the passage from verses 25-30 I think we can distinguish these two things, the Bride and the Body. In verses 25-27 we have the first law of love, “Husbands, love your wives, and it is based upon two things: the past tense of Christ’s love for His Bride,

*This is perhaps the reason why, unlike that of believers, the death of Jesus is never described in the New Testament merely in terms of “sleep.”—*Author*

expressed in His death on her behalf, and the future tense of His purpose for her. This is the *eternal* view. Again in verses 28-30 we have a second law of love, “Husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies;” and this is based upon one thing: the present tense of Christ’s love for that which is, in essence, himself, His Body. This latter is the view *today*. The first passage sees Christ and His Church apart, having separate existence, and is concerned with her union, as Bride, with Him, the Giver of life. The second sees Christ and His Church spiritually identified, without separate existence, and concerns her identification and present unity of life with Him as His Body. From One there have become two; from being two they will again be one. This is the mystery of the Church, that all that is from Christ returns to Him.

The work of Christ now is to love and cherish her, to protect and preserve her from disease and blemish, caring thus for her because He loves her as His own self—because, speaking reverently, the Church *is* Christ! How does He nourish and preserve her? “By the washing of water with the word” (verse 26). In this verse “the word” is not *Logos*, the great, objective, eternal Word of God; it is *rhema*, the smaller, more personal and subjective spoken word. “The words (*rhemata*) that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life” (John 6.63). *Rhema* always suggests to us something very personal and intimate: “Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.” “Now lettest thou thy servant depart, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace.” “The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.” “We toiled all night, and took nothing: but at thy word I will let down the nets.” “He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee. . . And they remembered his words.” “The Holy Ghost fell on them. . . And I remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said, . . . Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost” (Luke 1.38; 2.29; 3.2; 5.5; 24.6-8; Acts 11.15,16.)

How is the Church's return to the plan of God effected? "By water *with* the word": the water of His risen life, checking us and exposing, by contrast with itself, all that needs to be eliminated; and His word, dealing with what has been revealed, and renewing us by cleansing away the blemishes. Sometimes maybe the word comes first and then the life, but the effect is the same. "The second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word . . . And when he thought thereon, he wept" (Mark 14.72). The Church to which God's word has no power to appeal is no Church. But the word is His instrument of cleansing and renewal. If only we realize this, and allow it to do its work, though we may fail, we shall not long remain unaware that we have done so.

And blessed be God, the day will come when the Body, taking its character wholly from Him who is its life, will have been made ready to become the Bride, His help-meet. Because, as His Body, she has attained to the measure of the stature of His fulness (4.13) she will be presented to Him at the last, "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (5.27). Wholly like Him because wholly of Him, she will be wholly for Him. She has expressed His glory; she will be presented to Him clothed in that glory, with no scar of sin, no wrinkle of age, no time wasted, no flaw of any kind, but holy and without blemish. Christ, by His word, has left in her no ground for Satan or demons, men or angels—no, nor yet even for God himself—to lay any charge against her. For in her, now, all is new, and all is of God. Should we not, then, if this is to be its blessed effect, greatly treasure the word that God speaks to us today? . . .

In his writings Paul gives us two somewhat different views of the Body, one in Ephesians and the other in 1 Corinthians. Whereas the one sees the Church in the heavenlies, the other sees her planted firmly on the earth. In Ephesians the Church—*all* of it—is the Body. To the Corinthian believers Paul can nevertheless write: "Ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof" (1 Cor. 12.27). If, as

many do, we regard Ephesians as a circular letter, this may help to explain why Paul, thinking in large, universal terms, occupies himself there with *the* Body of Christ, whereas in 1 Corinthians, writing this time to the church in a particular Greek city, he shows us that Body functioning in a given situation on the earth, and doing so in the way *a* body functions.

That, I take it, is the explanation of a significant little clause in 1 Corinthians 12.21: “The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.” We should be careful not to misunderstand Paul here. The Body of Christ, whether universally in heaven or locally on earth, has only one Head, Christ himself (Eph. 4.15). There cannot be many local “heads” of churches, or there would at once be schism in the Body, and Paul is not suggesting that there can. Rather is he using in 1 Corinthians the *metaphor* of a human body to illustrate practical principles of relatedness and function, by which the heavenly and eternal Body of Christ operates *down here*. Just as the Head, Christ, cannot dispense with the least of His members, so, he affirms, can no single member get along without any other member.

Thus in first Corinthians we see the whole matter treated in relation not so much to divine purpose as to human responsibility. The former is essential, for none could function without it, but the question is, are we bringing it down and applying it where we are today?

The problem seems to be to have the two. It is easy to accept the Ephesian side—the heavenly view of what God will have. Our troubles begin with 1 Corinthians. For the spiritually minded that letter is altogether too practical, and because it is so, they are always in danger of evading the difficulties of its application. They seek (and rightly) to avoid the extreme of deducing, from the available evidence of New Testament practices, a foolproof pattern or system

of church life and then following that slavishly. They know only too well this will produce but a lifeless copy of that historic beginning. So instead they fix their eyes almost exclusively upon the glorious heavenly Church set forth in Ephesians, only to fall into the opposite error—that of keeping the vision so ‘spiritual’ that it becomes almost, if not quite, imaginary!

Yet 1 Corinthians 12 is a very simple passage, and perhaps it is just because it is so simple that its meaning is missed by many. What is here is not heavenly, nor is it earthly, *but heavenly and yet expressed on earth*. The revelation of the Body in the heavenlies is intended spontaneously to issue in very practical results, and it is these results that are there defined.

Gods principle is the principle of incarnation.* God desires—indeed for Him it is more than a desire; it is a divine necessity—to show the heavenly life in an earthly expression, not in angels or spirits but in men, not as something vague and imaginary but in a form that is real and practical. It is blessed to be living in the heavenlies in Ephesians, but remember, the same apostle who wrote Ephesians also wrote Corinthians. Gods character demands that His Church, universal, spiritual, heavenly, should have its earthly expression in local churches, set in places no less dark than the pagan city of Corinth. And because there is this earthly expression, men will always be ready enough to step in with their opinions, and have a hand in the arrangements. “We must be earthly *sometimes!*” they say in extenuation. But 1 Corinthians 12 shows us that even in such an earthly environment, the church is still to operate on the principles of the heavenly Body. For the local church is not merely an outward type, it is a real manifestation of Christ in the earth today. “Ye are the Body of Christ.” Here in Corinth you Corinthian believers are

*We use the term with caution. It is unwise to carry too far the parallel between the Church and her incarnate Lord.—*Author*

called to be the whole Body in essence. . .

If we have once recognized the heavenly Body, we shall be very glad to have the tiniest part in it. Of course, refusal to function because we have only one talent may reveal in us desires and ambitions outside the will of God, or worse, a dissatisfaction with that will. But no, if it pleases Him to make me the greatest member, praise the Lord! If He chooses instead to make me the least, praise Him no less! Am I a hand, or a foot? I will gladly be just that. I am perfectly satisfied with His choice, and willing to function in His appointed sphere, and if I accept His gift and use it, the one can grow to two, and very quickly there will be five or even ten.

Paul wrote: “Encourage the faint-hearted” (1 Thess. 5.14), and the word is literally “small-souled.” We should encourage the one-talent man, not because of the magnitude of his gift—it isn’t so very big after all—but because the Holy Spirit indwells him. His ground of expectation is to be God himself. . . .

So the first law of function is that we use what we have been given. We cannot excuse ourselves and say, “I am not needed here.” Nor shall we find spiritual refreshment by taking our Bibles and notebooks and retiring to a quiet spot to prepare for some imagined future ministry, if in so doing we are evading a present responsibility. Our physical body may be refreshed thereby, but not our spirit. No, the rule is always to serve others with what we have in hand, and as we do so, to discover that we ourselves are fed. Recall the story of Jesus at the well. He was hungry, for He had sent His disciples to buy food, and thirsty, for He asked the Samaritan woman for a drink. But when the disciples came back He could claim to have eaten. He had been strengthened by doing the will of God in ministering to one soul in need.

The fellowship of the Body is always two-way; receiving and giving. Wanting only to receive is not fellowship. We may not be

preachers, but when we come to worship we nevertheless bring what we have. There must be help of the pulpit from the pew. Sitting and looking on will not do. We must give others to drink, not necessarily by speaking, but maybe by quiet prayer. And if we do just sit and listen, we must *be there* in spirit, not somewhere else!

“Occupy till I come”: what a great range of ministry we have got *where we are*! The bit of work entrusted to us is for the Body, so there is no room for jealousy of others. We cannot draw comparisons, and complain to our brother, “God uses you and he doesn’t use me.” Would some of us prefer to be like Peter and win souls? Let us remember, the eleven stood up with Peter. Peter was the mouthpiece, but he could never dare to say, “I won those souls.”

So every member of the Body has a ministry, and every member is called to function in the place appointed by the Lord. It makes no difference who does the work if the glory is His. We must turn to God’s account the position given us by Him, and not run off hoping to grow in retirement. “I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth.” There can be no glory in that direction.

Accepting Limitation

The second law of function is found in verses 17 and 18: “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members each one of them in the body, even as it pleased him.” The principle here set forth is that, in our life together, we are always to leave room for the function of others.

Putting it bluntly, do not try to do everything and be everything yourself! No one in his senses would desire to see the whole Body function merely in a single way. It is not reasonable for the whole to be an eye, nor for the eye to attempt the work of the whole. The Lord

has ordered variety in the Body, an ear and a nose as well as an eye and a hand; not conformity, and certainly not single-organ monopoly. Thus, if the previous principle was for those lagging behind, this one is for those who are too forward, wanting to *be* the whole Body. The word to them is, I repeat, Don't try to do or be everything; you are *not* everything! . . .

Esteeming Others

Thirdly, we come to verses 21 and 22: “The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary.” Put quite simply, we must never seek to cut off another member. We must not think we can act in the capacity of the Head and dispense with the members. Weakness or uncouthness in a member is no warrant for our cutting him off.”* We dare not say to another: “I have no need of thee.” Rather do we discover how much we can learn from members we would not naturally esteem. We may often have to call for prayer-help from those we might even be inclined to despise. Alas, how readily do we feel we should demean ourselves and lose our spiritual status by so doing! Yet the Lord affirms that he has a place for, and can use, even the feeblest of His members. . .

Keeping the Unity

And fourthly, verses 24 and 25 tell us: “God tempered the body together, giving more abundant honor to that part which lacked; that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.” What the apostle here says in

* Of course there is such a thing as discipline in the Church where sin is concerned . . . , but this is not what is in view here.—*Author*

conclusion is that we are resolutely to refuse schism. It is totally disallowed. The divine will is that *there should be no schism in the Body . . .*

What, then, is the secret of practical unity? Here are two statements about it. “For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Con 12.13). “There is one body and one Spirit” (Eph. 4.4). What they reveal is a remarkable relation between the Body and the Spirit. The hidden reality, the Spirit, has its counterpart in the manifestation, the Body. The Body is one because the Spirit is one. For remember, the Holy Spirit is a Person and you cannot subdivide a person. “God tempered the body together,” because the one Body is to be a manifestation of the one Spirit. There is always unity in the Spirit. The divine fact is certain. The only question is, do we always give diligence to *keep* the unity? (Eph. 4.3) . . .

“Love One Another”

Let me try now to illustrate the working of this faculty that I have called “Body-consciousness”—this sensitiveness to the Body of Christ. It works first of all in the matter of love. “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3.14). All, who are members of the Body, love. This is remarkable. It is not that any need to wait till they are told. Spontaneously, whether they think about it or not, they love. They may need exhortation, but that is in order to stir up what they have. I remember a friend telling me how, when his first child was put into his arms, his heart went out in love to him. No one needed to tell him it was a father’s duty to love his child. He simply found love there. But is it not equally true that, no matter who or what a brother is, as soon as you know he is a Christian, your heart goes out in love to him? This is consciousness of the Body. . . .

God does not therefore tell us to hold fast our fellow members, but to “hold fast the Head.” This is the way of fellowship. For Christ is not divided; He is one. Lay hold of Him, and we shall find welling up in our heart a spontaneous love for all who do the same.

Oneness is Christ’s, not ours. Because we are His, therefore we are one. For example, to say we have fellowship with a brother because we like him is to violate the oneness by centering it in ourselves. Though we may not naturally take to some so readily as to others, to let this affect our fellowship is simply to reveal its false basis. Or again, do we do something for a brother, and then complain of his ingratitude? That can only be because we did it seeking thanks, and not for Christ’s sake—not because, in the first place, God so loved us. Our motive was wrong, because our relation to the Head was deficient.

It is “holding fast” to our fellow members that leads to exclusive friendships. The Body has no room for these. If one Christian becomes infatuated with another, so that an unhealthy friendship develops, sure enough, before long their friendship will issue in faction. For fellowship that is “after the flesh” is on a wrong foundation and can only lead eventually to sorrow. When two members cling exclusively to one another, we may justifiably fear that the love they express is not purely of God. “Love one another” is either something in the sphere of the Body, and therefore Christ-centered, or it is wrong. May God save us from uncrucified natural choices, and help us in these things to follow the Spirit.

—WSM 89-93, 95-100, 102-4, 106, 108-9

The Authority Upheld

The church is a corporate body having the special characteristic that its members, as long as they live in this world, live in obedience.

We take obedience as our principle of daily life.

The church today needs to be brought to the place where she can declare that what God did not obtain at the time of Adam, He now has obtained in her. That which God failed to get from the nation of Israel is today found in the church. What the world—the men of every tribe and tongue and people and nation—does not have, the church does have. In other words, on this huge earth there is at least one group of people which upholds the authority of God. Though the people in this wide, wide world are rebellious, the church is the one body that is obedient to authority. She should be able to lift up her head and say, “Lord, what You did not get from Satan and his rebellious followers, You now have in the church.”

Thus, unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places, God’s authority is now made manifest through the church. The church today is not only on the earth to preach the gospel and to build herself up but also to manifest the authority of God. Everywhere else God’s authority is rejected, but here in the church His authority is upheld. People in the world do not seek the will of God, but the church is here seeking His will. In other words, the church is an obedient body. If you are unsaved and therefore not in the church, you are excepted; otherwise, once you come into the church, you must before God uphold this one basic principle of enabling God’s authority to be accomplished in the church. God’s will cannot get through anywhere in the world, but His will should be able to prevail in the church. You and I must uphold God’s authority in the church.

For this reason, the brothers and sisters in the church must all learn to be obedient. Please bear in mind that no sin is more serious than that of disobedience, for it contradicts the very reason for the church’s existence. What mattered with the Lord Jesus on earth was not whether He lived well but whether He was obedient. As a matter

of fact, if the Son had done anything on His own, it could only have been good. But He insisted that He could do nothing by himself, for He did not come to do His own will but to do the will of the Father who sent Him. Remember, there is one authority in the universe that must be upheld, and the Lord did uphold it. Today, may the church do the same.

What God earlier failed to obtain in different dispensations He will obtain in the church. What He has failed to get elsewhere, He will now have in the church. Hence the church is the only place where you can learn the lesson of obedience. In the church, we speak not only of good or bad, right or wrong, but, even more, of obedience. We need to see that there is no testimony more important today than the testimony of obedience. Because the whole universe has fallen into rebellion, God is not able to find any place at all except in the church where men will accept His authority. For this reason, God's children must learn to obey in the church.

Obedience is the life of the church. It is her very nature and, therefore, her basic principle. She exists for the purpose of upholding obedience. She is the precise opposite of the condition of the surrounding nations. While the nations of the earth take counsel together against God and against His anointed, saying, "Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Ps. 2.3), while they struggle to be free of the law of the Son of God, the church declares with joy, "I most gladly put myself under His bonds and His cords in order to learn obedience." This is the church. She becomes not only a body which obeys the direct authority of God but also an organ for the testimony of obedience. She upholds on earth God's indirect, delegated authority as well as God's direct authority. . . .

The Law of the Body

The church is the body of Christ. Within the body is an inherent law. Every member has his use, and every member is governed by a strange and mysterious law of function. It is imperative for the members to learn how to be subject to the law of the body. If any member should act independently, out of his own idea, it betrays a sickness. The characteristic of the body is oneness. When that oneness is wrecked, the body most surely is sick.

For this reason, no child of God should violate the law of the body of Christ and act independently. Independent actions always speak of rebellion. Rebellion is expressed by independent action. To act independently is to not be in subjection to the authority of the Head, to the principle of oneness which God has ordained for the body, or to the law of oneness prescribed in the Bible. Independent action is a matter both of disobedience to the Lord and of insubjection to the body. . . .

We are fearful of those who act independently, those who reject the control of the body and follow their own whims, who do not learn to obey the authority of the Head in the body. After we have believed in the Lord, the first spiritual principle we should remember is that the body is God's ordained authority on earth. The body is an authority. God's law is in the body and I must not violate it. I cannot follow my own will. I dare not do anything by myself, for if I do, I become as an uncontrollable malignant cell in the body, working for myself and destroying the oneness of the body. I will be a cancer, unable to coordinate with others, totally independent, detrimental to the body. Let us therefore learn to accept the judgment of the body and learn to follow the movement of life in the entire body.

The longer you are before the Lord as a Christian, the more you see that the oneness of the body is a fact. You see that it is a tremendously serious fact and that therefore you must learn not to

corrupt it. If you break it, you are lawless, disobedient, and rebellious, and the authority of God is not upon you. As we no doubt realize, authority must be upon each cell, for the cells of the body must work together, not independently. This is most marvelous. How appropriate it is that Scripture uses the body as an illustration of the church. . . .

Subjection to Church Authority

Matthew 18 further shows us that if two or three brothers fail to convince you, they should bring the matter to the church. The whole church then should deliberate before God. If the decision still is against you, what will you say then? Will you say, “Though the body judges me to be wrong, the head reckons me right; though my parents forsake me, the Lord keeps me; though my brethren reject me, the Lord receives me. I will bear the cross here”? No, such an attitude would show that you are outside the church. How can you consider yourself persecuted and ill-treated, suffering at the hands of your brethren? My advice to you is to humble yourself and say, “Whatever the church says is right, for there can be no further judgment. If all the brothers and sisters say I am wrong, I am wrong, in spite of my own feeling.” We need to learn how to be in subjection to the authority of the church.

There is the authority of God in the church. Do not be so hardened as to refute the decision of the brotherhood. A proud person has no place in the church, for he knows neither obedience nor the church. Let us learn to be gentle, humble, and submissive. The church has authority before God. What the church rejects, God rejects.

Every child of God needs to learn obedience in the church. It may be one person, two or three persons, or sometimes even the whole local assembly, but each of these are representative of the church. We must learn to be gentle and tender before God. Do not be hard

and arrogant. God's children stand by the principle of obedience.

—LOA 221-4, 227, 230-1

The Lord's Presence Is in the Gathering

. . . The Lord twice promises us His special presence: once in Matthew 18 and once in Matthew 28. The latter, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," pertains to witnessing for Christ; the former, "for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," pertains to meeting in His name. These two promises of His presence are different from the presence of the Lord with us personally.

Many only know His presence in a personal way, but such knowledge is insufficient. His most powerful and overwhelming presence is known only in the meeting. Although there is His presence with you personally, it is bound to be of a lesser degree. Only in assembling together with brothers and sisters do you experience His presence in a way that you never did before. Learn, therefore, to know this presence in the meetings. It is a tremendous grace which cannot be otherwise obtained.

How wonderful the assembling of God's children is! We do not know how the body operates, but we do know that it does function. As one brother rises, you see light. When another brother stands up, you sense the presence of the Lord. Still another brother opens his mouth to pray, and you touch God. Yet another says a few words, and you receive the supply of life. Let me tell you, this is something beyond explanation—how the body of Christ works together. We will not understand until we stand before the Lord at His return. Today we can only follow that which the Lord has ordained.

How We Should Assemble

How should we gather? The Bible lays down a basic principle: all gatherings must be in the name of the Lord. The meaning of this is simply that we gather under the authority of the Lord and also are centered upon Him. Our purpose in coming together is to meet with the Lord, for our attraction is to Him. Let it be clear that we do not go to the meetings to see certain brothers or sisters, for our attraction to the meeting is not them. The Lord is the center. We go, along with many other brothers and sisters, to appear before Him.

Why is it that we gather in the name of the Lord? Because, physically speaking, the Lord is not here. Were He physically present, His name would not be so prominent. But since He is absent, His name becomes more noticeable. Today our Lord is physically in heaven, yet He has left a name on earth. So today we gather in His name that we may draw nigh to Him. He promises us that if we do so gather, He will be in our midst: that is, His Spirit will be in the midst of our gathering.

When we assemble, we do not go to hear a preacher but rather to meet the Lord. This is a concept that must be firmly established within us. Should we meet in order to hear a certain man, are we not gathering in this man's name and not in the name of our Lord? Many advertise the names of speakers in the newspaper; unknowingly they are asking people to gather around these men.

Although our Lord is in heaven, He is yet among us because His name is in our midst and so is His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the custodian of the Lord's name. He is sent to protect and look after the Lord's name. He is here to exalt that name which is above all names. We must, therefore, gather unto the name of the Lord.

Another principle which governs a gathering is the edifying or building up of God's people. According to 1 Corinthians 14, this is a

purpose found in all the gatherings—that others, not ourselves, may be edified. Paul explains how speaking in a tongue edifies oneself but that it needs interpretation so that others may receive help. If there is no interpretation, the one with the tongue should keep silent in the church. In other words, the principle of speaking in a tongue is for self-edification and not for the edifying of others, whereas that of interpretation is to impart what one has to others for their edification. That which only edifies self and not others should not be expressed in the meeting.

—AT 38-40

Church affairs are to be decided by the principle of the breastplate of judgment. Those among the Lord's people who are matured and godly ought to bear on their shoulders and carry on their breasts all the saints of God. They should come to the Father and read the conditions of His people in His light. And only then should they come to a decision. The affairs of a local assembly are not ordered by one or two persons. That is not God's way. Yet some may perhaps observe that during the apostolic period did not the church listen to the words of the apostles? To which it must be replied that, yes, this was true; but unlike a pope, who issues orders, the early apostles brought God's people to the Father and sought for revelation from Him. . .

Let all brothers and sisters reflect on the fact that when the people of God become a body, the Lord's way of revelation to them undergoes a change. At that time He will reveal His mind through all His people. God's will is to incorporate himself in His people, and thus His speaking is but the echo of himself having spoken among His own; for before the elders rise to speak, God has already put His thought into the hearts of the brothers and sisters. As the elders carry the brothers and sisters to God, they read in their spirits the condition of these brothers and sisters. As they read and read, they see the God

who is in the body and hear the words being transmitted through the body. Such words reveal God's need among His children as well as the current need of the children themselves. By this alone can God be touched and the children themselves be touched. In other words, by this means alone can the God who is in the body be touched.

Hence God reveals himself through all His children. The affairs of the church cannot be decided by a few people, nor can they be decided by a show of hands among all the people. They are to be decided by the revelations which the elders receive as they come before the Lord with godly fear and carry all the people with them. This is the way the Lord will lead His children in the church.

Elders of the church ought to learn to understand the conditions of all the saints by always carrying them in their hearts. They should learn to know the mind of God. Whenever there is any problem they should carry all the brothers and sisters to God's light and there read out the mind of God in resolving the problem. All the epistles of the New Testament are written on the basis of this principle. The writers of these letters know the mind of God as well as the situations in the various local assemblies. They carry on their hearts the affairs of these churches. They write down what they have been enlightened about as they have been before God, and because of this there is not one superfluous word. What is written are the words of the revelation of God. . .

In a local assembly God has no way to speak to that church except all in the assembly learn to receive the dealing of the cross daily. Whether elders or apostles, old or young, teachers or those taught—everyone has to allow the cross to break him or her. Then will God speak to all more distinctly. The elders especially must accept the dealing of the cross, because every action and every word of the elders exert tremendous influence on the brothers and sisters. Before the elders make any decision they must not only scan the

conditions of all the brothers and sisters but also carry their affairs to the Father of all lights for prayers and considerations.

This principle is an awesome one, because it shatters one's personal idea. Not just the elders but even the youngest of the brothers and sisters must observe this principle. For however small a person may be, God is in him; and therefore he can affect God's will among His children either by his manifesting it or by his concealing it. For this reason, each of the brothers and sisters needs to learn to be controlled by God in word and deed—that is to say, to receive brokenness through the cross. If all the brethren in a local assembly learn this principle, how greatly will God be able to speak to them.

Let us realize that in the church no one can despise anybody else. You cannot even disdain the opinion of a brother who usually bothers you a great deal. If you trample his thought under your feet, you may regret it someday. Take note that this word comes out of the bitter experiences of those of us who have learned. Do not despise anyone, nor hold anybody in contempt. You must carry even their *murmurs and oppositions* to God and carefully read their *complaints*. You must still bear *them* on your shoulders and inquire of the Lord regarding even such as they. In this respect, consider David, who brought to God even the words of personal reproach spoken by others against himself and read and inquired about *them* before the Lord (see, e.g., 2 Sam. 16.5-14).

Hence you cannot act arbitrarily, you cannot and must not think that only those who *approve* of you may help you to understand God's will. Frequently, those who *oppose* you cause you to know His will. If you continually look for those things which will guarantee the rightness of your step, no matter from what quarter, that is the principle which will keep you from falling. If you do not want to be provoked into making decisions against God's will and to hurt the hearts of brothers and sisters, you must live strictly by this

principle. This principle alone will drive away your prejudice and your personal opinion. It will also enable you to read intelligently before God His will among all the brothers and sisters. The word which you read is the very word which God speaks to His children. By this principle the Lord is able to articulate His will through His children and make it known to you. And by the operation of this principle the heart of heaven as well as the heart of earth may be satisfied. . .

There is one final element in this matter that needs to be mentioned here, which is the question of authority. What is authority? On first appearance, it would seem as if authority is something based on position: whoever occupies a position of leadership has the authority that goes with it. But according to the Scriptures, what is real is quite different from what seems to be. For authority in the Scriptures is not something based on position. Where then does it have its basis? Its basis is in life. The people of Israel recognized the authority of Aaron, for example, because they saw that *Aaron's* rod budded. Authority without resurrection life is useless. Authority in the church is based upon life, not upon position. It is not because people have elected you that therefore you have authority. No one in the church can boast of having authority on the ground of occupying a certain position. David submitted to the authority of Saul for he feared God, but Saul was rejected by God because he rebelled against Him. Saul had the *position* of a king, but he lacked the *life* of a king. Consequently, since the authority of Saul was positional and not of life, God did not sanction or endorse his authority.

Let us note that to the degree that the resurrection life of God is in you to that degree will be your authority. And to the extent that you lose God's resurrection life in you to that extent will you lose your authority. Let us also note that the Bible stresses the fact that for brothers to be true elders they must not lord it over the flock of God but rather be examples to the flock (see 1 Peter 5.3). Now example is

the result of the resurrection life of God being lived out. True authority is never established by someone assuming a stern face and declaring, I am an elder and therefore I have authority! Anyone who in such fashion dares to threaten people to submit to his authority will have his authority questioned. In the church all the brothers and sisters must submit to one another in humility. Authority is exemplified in love so that the children of God will obey from their hearts. May God have mercy on us by giving us examples in His church.

—WSS 81-6, 88-9

In order to understand authority in the Church, we must first know what authority is; otherwise, we will never come to grips with it.

What is authority? There is nothing in the universe more difficult to explain than this. The Bible speaks of two matters difficult to interpret: glory and authority. What is holiness, righteousness, gentleness or patience? Many seem to have little difficulty in understanding these matters. But what can the glory of God and the authority of God mean? Few can really comprehend and expound these two things. The first is related to God himself; the second is related to His government. God himself is glorious, and His government is maintained by His authority.

God's authority is that law or principle by which He organizes the universe. He rules His creation with authority. How, in the first place, did God create the heavens and the earth? By authority. How did He restore the world? Again, by authority. It is most amazing that when on the first day he made the light, He did not as it were collect massive amounts of electricity and make light. Not at all. He simply gave the command, Let there be light, and there was light. Similarly on the second day, He said, Let there be a firmament, and there was a firmament. He gives his command in word and does everything by

means of authority. Word here represents command, which in turn represents authority. It is not by power nor by method. Do you now see that God uses only authority? By it He created the universe, and by it He also rules the universe. Both the beginning of the universe and its continuity ever since subsist through the authority of God.

In the beginning—after the universe was created—we know that God set up cherubim or archangels to rule all things. God himself has the preeminence over all things, and He ruled the first world through His cherubim. At ascertain point, however, sin came in. Now sin is lawlessness, and lawlessness is basically the overturning of God’s authority. And the fall of one of God’s cherubs (Lucifer) who becomes Satan was due to this very thing of lawlessness, because as the Bible explains, he wanted to exalt himself to be equal with God. Thereafter, sin entered the world as well, and again it was due to lawlessness, because as we are told in Genesis, Eve did not submit herself to Adam. In the absence of any command from her husband, she ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Although the world is now full of sins, authority is still the principle of God’s government in relation to the world. We may easily notice the authority that has been established by God in many areas of earthly life: wives are to be subject to their husbands, servants are to be subject to their masters, employees to their employers, students to their teachers, citizens to various governmental or administrative officials, subordinates to their chiefs—the latter classes in all these relationships are authorities that have been set up by God. For He wants men to be submissive to authority. These authorities are not only appointed by God, they also represent God. It is clearly stated in the Letter to the Romans: “There is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God” (13.1). No Christian student should boycott a class, no Christian laborer should strike, no Christian son or daughter should be unfilial, no Christian people should rise up in insurrection. For if they do

these things, they are not merely overthrowing the people directly over them whom they oppose, they are also overturning the very authority of God. What God uses to create and to sustain the universe is His authority. Both Lucifer and Adam tried to subvert that authority, and thus both had sinned; for whoever in God's created order does not recognize authority or submit to it is guilty of lawlessness, and lawlessness, as we have seen, is sin.

Many believers have never perceived this marvelous thing called authority. To be a good Christian one must know what authority is, because it represents God. By tracing authority to its highest source, you will eventually see God. This is why a Christian should not only submit to the chief executive and the other officials of his country but also to the police on the street. You cannot despise a policeman because he may earn so little a month. He has authority, and he represents not only the government but also God, for there is no authority in the world except it be of God. Oh, do let us see that the Bible is very strict on this point. Paul, Peter and Jude are all in agreement with this word found in the Book of Acts: "Thou shalt not speak evil of a ruler of thy people" (23.5). In our conversation, therefore, we should be careful not to villify the leaders of our government.

In the Book of Jude it is recorded that when the angel Michael contended with the devil about the body of Moses, Michael did not bring against Satan a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke thee" (v.9). This is because at one time Michael had been a subordinate angel to Lucifer (Satan) the archangel. Hence he simply said, "The Lord rebuke thee." He did not speak on his own; he only appealed to the higher authority of God. Michael knew what authority was, and thus he dared not reprimand the devil by himself.

When our Lord was on earth, He was completely under authority. While young, He was in subjection to His parents' authority. He kept

all their rules. Though He is the Creator, He accepted all the limitations in being a man. He did indeed say to His mother, “Knew ye not that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2.49) Yet had you or I uttered these words, we would not have returned home with our parents to continue being subject to them. But how different was the Lord. He obediently went down with them. And when much later He stepped into public ministry, He was in subjection to the authority of the government of the day. Even when He was unfairly judged, He still was subject to its authority. He did not revile those in authority. He allowed them to inflict their worst on Him. Never has the world seen a person so submissive to authority as He was.

Once Paul stood before the Jewish council to be judged. He was truly willing to be in subjection to authority. When the high priest commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth, Paul, not knowing it was the high priest, said to him, “God shall smite thee, thou whited wall”! (Acts 23.3) But when he was told he should not revile the high priest, Paul quickly apologized. From the Scriptures we may readily discern how very important this matter of authority is.

The biblical word which is coupled with that of authority is “submission”, with the Bible therefore speaking of authority on the one hand and submission on the other. Authority and submission are interrelated. If a person is submissive, he is in subjection to God’s authority. Otherwise, he is one who will try to overturn the authority of God.

In the Church God established His authority, to which we all must be in subjection. We need to submit to authority in our home, in society, and in the world. God has ordained that we submit to such authority. Let us lay hold of this principle. All who think of overthrowing authority are in reality those who think of overturning God. Do not imagine that we may be in subjection to God while at

the same time we are disobedient to our parents or are rebellious against husbands or masters or school principals or whoever else is in authority. Never can this be. If we do not submit to these authorities whom God has ordained on earth, how can we obey God? By the same token, if we are not in subjection to the authority in the Church, we are being disobedient to God. . .

What Is Authority in the Church?

How is divine authority in the Church delegated? The authorities which God sets in the Church are the elders and the apostles. God appoints the first in a local assembly, He appoints the second in the midst of many assemblies. The authority of an apostle is over various assemblies, whereas the authority of an elder is in the local assembly. In order to manifest His authority in the Church, God sets up elders in local assemblies to represent His authority. Hence the other name used in Scripture for elder is “bishop,” which carries within its meaning the sense of authority in his “overseership.” The Bible instructs us to submit to the elders because they have authority. And because all authorities initiated by God are representative in character, so the authority of the elders is also representative—to manifest the authority of God. Irrespective of how well the elders represent divine authority, a Christian must nonetheless learn to submit to them because all authorities are of God.

At the inauguration of any gathering of believers in a locality; there are no elders. But gradually some people who commence to function like elders will begin to be manifested within the group. As was mentioned already, elder and bishop are different names for the same office. The term elder points to the person, while bishop points to the service. Furthermore, the elders in the Bible are always plural and never singular in number. For things are less likely to go wrong when the spirits of two, three, or more persons are receiving the same guidance. Individualism is never a biblical principle; it can easily

lead to error. . . .

How the Gift of Pastoring Builds Up the Church

The Greek word translated “pastor” is only used in Scripture once, in Ephesians 4. The remaining instances of this same Greek word are translated as “shepherd.” Hence the meaning of this word is that of feeding or watching over. When God gives a man a pastor’s gift, he is given the ability to lead the believers in feeding them, in helping them to grow, in teaching them the Bible, and in praying with them.

The evangelist will lead people to salvation, that is to say, he will bring people in. The teacher is able to release the truth so that all may understand the truth of the Scriptures. The pastor can help them grow. He may not be able to preach, but he certainly knows how to feed the believers. . . .

The Church Is One

The Bible teaches that the Church is one. The Church which Paul belonged to is the same Church to which we all belong. Our Church is the Church also of the apostle John, Martin Luther, Calvin and all the other regenerated people throughout Church history. The Church of the Bible has no distinction as to time, geography, or race. In the eyes of God, from the beginning to the end, past and present, at home and abroad, there is only one Church, not two or more Churches. The Bible recognizes the body of Christ, which is one and one only. There can never be two bodies of Christ because there is but one Head. Though the members are many, the body is one. Hence all the saved people, ancient and modern, at home and abroad, form one Church, one body.

Why, then, are there “the churches” in various places? Since the Letter to the Ephesians speaks of one body, one Spirit, one hope, one

Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God (Eph. 4.4-6), why do the Scriptures mention the churches? Is there any contradiction in the Bible? For it speaks of one body on the one hand and the churches on the other. This tells us of the different aspects of the Church. Actually, there is only one Church, for the body of Christ is one. But in different localities, there may be as many as three to five thousand believers gathered together or as little as two or three (Matt. 18.20). In any city or village where a group of believers is gathered together, those believers there are the church in that city or village. The Scriptures most emphatically employ the phrase “the church in (or at)” such and such a place. The word “in” shows us that the Church is one, even though its various members are scattered and sojourn in many, many localities. The Bible treats all the believers who sojourn in a given locality as constituting the local church, a miniature representative of the one and only Church.

One thing is exceedingly precious: “We, who are many, are one bread” (1 Cor. 10.17). The “we” here includes all the believers. There is only one loaf. . . .

Each Is Responsible

Practically speaking, we would like to ask the question—What is the responsibility of the brethren? Each brother or sister must not only bear the responsibility of the local meeting but also consider all the brothers and sisters who are in Christian fellowship throughout the earth. . . .

The Bible usually takes a city, the smallest executive governmental area, as the boundary of a local assembly. A local assembly is the unit of the Church in God’s word. It does not join with other assemblies and make the resulting larger church a central church. In other words, in the eyes of God, He has not made Rome as the central church. He never makes any local assembly the center of

the churches to be in control of other assemblies. There is no center on earth in God's government. Even Jerusalem was not a center to the early churches.

—CW 1: 9-15, 33, 49-50, 56, 98

It is the responsibility of every saved man to serve the Lord according to his capacity and in his own sphere. God did not appoint elders to do the work on behalf of their brethren; after the appointment of elders, as before, it is still the brethren's duty and privilege to serve the Lord. Elders are also called "bishops" (Acts 20.28; Titus 1.5,7). The term "elder" relates to their person; the term "bishop" to their work. "Bishop" means "overseer," and an overseer is not one who works instead of others, but one who supervises others as they work. God intended that every Christian should be a "Christian worker", and He appointed some to take the oversight of the work so that it might be carried on efficiently. It was never His thought that the majority of the believers should devote themselves exclusively to secular affairs and leave the church matters to a group of spiritual specialists. This point cannot be overemphasized. Elders are not a group of men who contract to do the church work on behalf of its members; they are only the head-men who superintend affairs. It is their business to encourage the backward and restrain the forward ones, never doing the work instead of them, but simply directing them in the doing of it.

The responsibility of an elder relates to matters temporal and spiritual. They are appointed to "rule, and also to "instruct" and "shepherd." "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching" (1 Tim. 5.17). "Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according unto God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves

ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5.2,3).

The word of God uses the term “rule” in connection with the responsibilities of an elder. The ordering of church government, the management of business affairs and the care of material things, are all under their control. But we must remember that a scriptural church does not consist of an active and a passive group of brethren, the former controlling the latter, and the latter simply submitting to their control, or the former bearing all the burden whilst the latter settle down in ease to enjoy the benefit of their labors. “That the members should . . . care one for another” is God’s purpose for His Church (1 Cor. 12.24). Every church after God’s own heart bears the stamp of “one another” on all its life and activity; mutuality is its outstanding characteristic. If the elders lose sight of that, then their ruling the church will soon be changed to *lording* it over the church. Even while the elders exercise control in church affairs, they must remember that they are only fellow-members with the other believers; Christ alone is the Head. They were not appointed to be “lords” of their brethren, but to be their “*examples.*” What is an example? It is a pattern for others to follow. Since they were to be a pattern to the brethren, then obviously it was neither God’s thought for them to do all the work and the brethren none, nor for the brethren to do the work whilst they simply stood by and commanded. For the elders to be a pattern to the brethren implied that the brethren worked and the elders worked as well; and it implied that the elders worked with special diligence and care, so that the brethren should have a good example to follow. They were overseers, but they were not “lords” of their brethren, standing aloof and commanding; *and* they did direct the work, but they did it more by example than by command. Such is the scriptural conception of the rule of the elders.

But their responsibility does not merely relate to the material side of church affairs. If God has equipped them with spiritual gifts, then they should also bear spiritual responsibility. Paul wrote to Timothy,

“Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching” (1 Tim. 5.17). It is the responsibility of all elders to control the affairs of the church, but such as have special gifts (as of prophecy or teaching) are free to exercise these for the spiritual edification of the church. Paul wrote to Titus that an elder should “be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers” (Titus 1.9). The preaching and teaching in the local church is not the business of apostles but of local brethren who are in the Ministry, especially if they are elders. As we have already seen, the management of a church is a matter of local responsibility, so also is teaching and preaching.

On the spiritual side of the work the elders not only help to build up the church by teaching and preaching, but by pastoral work. To shepherd the flock is peculiarly the work of elders. Paul said to the Ephesian elders: “Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops, to feed the church of God” (Acts 20.28). And Peter wrote in the same strain to the elders among the saints of the Dispersion, “Tend the flock of God which is among you” (1 Peter 5.2). The present-day conception of pastors is far removed from the thought of God. God’s thought was that men chosen *from among the local brethren* should pastor the flock, not that men coming from other parts should preach the Gospel, found churches, and then settle down to care for those churches. A clear understanding of the respective responsibilities of apostles and elders would clear away many of the difficulties that exist in the Church today.

The Plurality of Elders

This work of ruling, teaching and shepherding the flock, which we have seen to be the special duty of the elders, does not devolve upon one man only in any place. To have pastors in a church is scriptural, but the present-day pastoral system is quite unscriptural; it is an

invention of man.

In Scripture we see that there was always more than one elder or bishop in a local church. It is not God's will that one believer should be singled out from all the others to occupy a place of special prominence, whilst the others passively submit to his will. If the management of the entire church rests upon one man, how easy it is for him to become self-conceited, esteeming himself above measure and suppressing the other brethren (3 John). God has ordained that several elders together share the work of the church, so that no one individual should be able to run things according to his own pleasure, treating the church as his own peculiar property and leaving the impress of his personality upon all its life and work. To place the responsibility in the hands of several brethren, rather than in the hands of one individual, is God's way of safeguarding His Church against the evils that result from the domination of a strong personality. God has purposed that several brothers should unitedly bear responsibility in the church, so that even in controlling its affairs they have to depend one upon the other and submit one to the other. Thus, in an experimental way, they will discover the meaning of bearing the cross, and they will have opportunity to give practical expression to the truth of the Body of Christ. As they honor one another and trust one another to the leading of the Spirit, none taking the place of the Head, but each regarding the others as fellow-members, the element of "mutuality", which is the peculiar feature of the Church, will be preserved. . .

The Basis of the Churches

In the Word of God we find "the church of God" spoken of in the singular (1 Cor. 10.32), but we find the same Word referring to the "churches of God" in the plural (1 Thess. 2.14). How has this unity become a plurality? How has the Church which is essentially one become many? The Church of God has been divided into the

churches of God on the one ground of difference of locality. Locality is the only scriptural basis for the division of the Church into churches. . .

Spiritually the Church of God is one, therefore it cannot be divided; but physically its members are scattered throughout the earth, therefore they cannot possibly live in one place. Yet it is essential that there be a physical gathering together of believers. It is not enough that they be present “in the spirit,” they must also be present “in the flesh.” Now a church is composed of all “the called-out ones assembled” in one place for worship, prayer, fellowship and ministry. This assembling together is absolutely essential to the life of a church. Without it there may be believers scattered throughout the area, but there is really no church. *The Church* exists because of the existence of its members, and it does not require that they meet in a physical way; but it is essential to the very existence of *a church* that its members gather together in a physical way. It is in this latter sense that the word “church” is used in 1 Cor. 14. The phrase “in the church” (verses 19, 23, 28) means “in the church meeting.” A church is a church assembled. These believers are not separated from other believers in any respect but that of their dwelling-places. As long as they continue in the flesh they will be limited by space, and this physical limitation, which in the very nature of things makes it impossible for God’s people to meet in one place, is the only basis sanctioned by God for the forming of separate churches. Christians belong to different churches for the sole reason that they live in different places. That division is merely external. In reality the Church as the Body of Christ cannot be divided, therefore even when the word of God refers to the different assemblies of His people, the places named vary, but it is still “the church” in every one of these places, e.g. “*the church* in Ephesus,” “*the church* in Smyrna,” “*the church* in Pergamos,” etc.

In the New Testament there is one method and one alone of

dividing the Church into churches, and that God-ordained method is division on the basis of locality. All other methods are man-made, not God-given. May the Spirit of God engrave this truth deeply on our hearts, that the only reason for the division of God's children into different churches is because of the different places in which they live. . .

There is a beautiful balance in the teaching of God's word regarding the relationship between the various churches. On the one hand, they are totally independent one of another in matters relating to responsibility, government, and organization; on the other hand, they are to learn one from another and to keep pace one with another. But in everything it is essential to have both the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the pattern in God's holy word. . .

There must be a spiritual relatedness amongst the churches if the testimony of the Body is to be preserved, but there must at the same time be an absolute independence of government if the testimony of the Head is to be maintained. Each church is under the immediate control of Christ, and is directly responsible to Him alone. . .

How to Preserve the Local Character of the Churches

Since the churches of God are local, we must be careful to preserve their local character, their local sphere and their local boundary. Once a church loses these, it ceases to be a scriptural church. Two things call for special attention if the local nature of a church is to be safeguarded.

In the first place, no apostle must exercise control in any official capacity over a church. That is contrary to God's order, and destroys its local nature by putting the impress of an extra-local minister upon it. No apostle has the authority to establish a private church in any place. The church belongs to the locality, not to the worker. When

people are saved by the instrumentality of any man, they belong to the church in the place where they live, not to the man through whom they were saved, nor to the organization he represents. If one or more churches are founded by a certain apostle, and that apostle exercises authority over them as belonging in a special sense to him or his society, then those churches become sects, for they do not separate themselves from other Christians (saved through the instrumentality of other apostles) on the ground of difference of locality, but on the ground of the difference of instrumentality of salvation. Thus apostles become the heads of different denominations, and their sphere the sphere of their respective denominations, whilst the churches over which they exercise control become sects, each bearing the particular characteristic of its leader instead of the characteristic of a church local.

The Epistle to the Corinthians throws light on this subject. There was division among believers in Corinth simply because they failed to realize the local character of the church and sought to make different apostles—Paul, Apollos, and Cephas—the ground of their fellowship. Had they understood the Divinely ordained basis for the division of the Church, they could never have said, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” for, despite their especial love for certain leaders, they would have realized that they belonged not to any one of them, but to the church in the locality in which they lived. . .

Another thing is essential for the preservation of the local character of the church—its sphere must not become wider than the sphere of a locality. The current method of linking up companies of believers in different places who hold the same doctrinal views, and forming them into a church, has no scriptural foundation. The same applies to the custom of regarding any mission as a center, linking together all those saved or helped by them to constitute a “church” of that mission. Such so-called churches are really sects, because they

are confined by the bounds of a particular creed, or a particular mission, not by and within the bounds of locality. . . .

The Unity of the Spirit

The Church of God includes a vast number of believers, living at different times, and scattered in different places throughout the earth. How has it come about that all have been united into *one* universal Church? With such disparity in age, social position, education, background, outlook and temperament, how could all these people become one Church? What is the secret of the unity of the saints? By what means has Christianity caused these people, with their thousand differences, to become truly one? It is not that, having a grand convention and agreeing to be one, Christians become united. Christian unity is no human product, its origin is purely Divine. This mighty mysterious unity is planted in the hearts of all believers the moment they receive the Lord. It is “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4.3).

The Spirit who dwells in the heart of every believer is one Spirit, therefore He makes all those in whom He dwells to be one, even as He himself is one. Christians may differ from one another in innumerable ways, but all Christians of all ages, with their countless differences, have this one fundamental likeness—the Spirit of God dwells in every one of them. *This is the secret of the oneness of believers, and this is the secret of their separation from the world.* The reason for Christian unity and for Christian separation is one.

It is this inherent unity that makes all believers one, and it is this inherent unity that accounts for the impossibility of division between believers, except for geographical reasons. Those who have not got this are outsiders; those who have got it are our brethren. If you have the Spirit of Christ and I have the Spirit of Christ, then we both belong to the same Church. There is no need to *be* united, we *are*

united by the one Spirit who dwells in us both. Paul besought all believers to endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4.3); he did not exhort us to “have” the unity, but merely to keep it. We have it already, for obviously we cannot “keep” what we do not have. God has never told us to become one with other believers; we already *are* one, therefore we do not need to create unity, we only need to maintain it.

We cannot *make* this unity, since by the Spirit we *are* one in Christ, and we cannot *break* it, because it is an eternal fact in Christ; but we can destroy *the effects* of it, so that its expression in the Church is lost. Alas! that we have not only failed to preserve this precious unity, but have actually so destroyed the fruits of it, that there is little outward trace of unity among the children of God. . . .

In nature the Church is indivisible as God himself is indivisible, therefore the division of the Church into churches is not a division in nature, life, or essence, but only in government, organization and management. Because the earthly church is composed of a vast number of individuals, a measure of organization is indispensable. It is a physical impossibility for all the people of God, scattered throughout the world, to live and meet in one place; and it is for that reason alone that the Church of God has been divided into churches.

We must realize clearly that the nature of all the local churches is the same throughout the whole earth. It is not that the constituents of one local church are of one kind, and the constituents of another local church are of another kind. In nature there is no difference whatever; the only difference is in the localities that determine their respective boundaries. The Church is indivisible, therefore in nature the churches are indivisible too; it is only in outward sphere that there is any possibility of dividing them. Physical limitations make geographical divisions inevitable, but the spiritual oneness of believers overcomes all barriers of space.

—CW 11: 79-83, 87-9, 99, 101-4, 112-3, 118-9

Elders—Basic Qualification Is Spirituality

The Bible has clear instructions on elders. Here I wish to remind brethren of the basic qualification for an elder—that such a person must have spiritual worth: that he knows spiritual things and possesses spiritual understanding, that he is familiar with God’s ways. In other words, an elder must be experienced in spiritual matters and be able to discern the spiritual conditions of God’s children so that he may manage the affairs of the church. This spiritual foundation he must have to begin with. And with the gift and ability which God has added to him, he is then able to take care of the church. Only such persons can become elders in the church. . .

Principle of Body Ministry

Let all be clear on this principle. The entire body of believers must engage in Levitical as well as in priestly ministry. All must work, whether little or much; and all must work heartily. We have a natural tendency to use those people who have the two talents. Church history bears this statement out. On the one hand, the five-talents people know how to exercise themselves; they do not need any encouragement to serve. The one-talent person, on the other hand, tends to bury the talent he has, and once done, it is difficult to stir him to action. Yet the two-talents individuals are most available. They have a little ability but they will not bury it. They will put themselves to work. Nevertheless, if only the two-talents brethren are used and the one-talent brethren are left unused—that is a total failure [see Matt. 25.14-30].

What is the church? The church is that in which all the one-talent people engage in temporal as well as spiritual services. You who are assembled here at these training sessions, do not shake your heads

and sigh, "This person is useless or that person is useless." I tell you, if such attitude exists among you, the church is finished. For if you *treat* him as useless, he *will* be useless. You can of course tell him that he is useless *in himself*, but you are to also tell him that *the Lord has given him one talent and commanded him to trade* with it. *The Lord* will use him. Now if you do not know how to use the single-talented ones, by this very fact you are proven to be lacking in leadership ability before the Lord. You who are leaders are to use all the so-called useless brothers and sisters, for this is the work of a worker. A worker will use all the useful brothers and sisters and he will also transform all "the useless" into usefulness.

The basic principle to recognize is that the Lord never gives anyone less than one talent. In the Lord's house, no servant is without any gift. He has at least one talent. And hence none can make excuse, saying, "The Lord has not given me anything." I want you to know that all God's children are servants. We all are servants as well as children. In other words, being members one of another in God's house, we all have ministries. If we consider anyone to be useless to the Lord, we do not know what the grace of God is. We ought to understand His grace fully, seeing that if He has said that this person or that person is His servant, can anyone of us stand up and say that that person is not? If it were left up to us to choose, more often than not, we would consider only three or five in the entire assembly as being useful and choose only them; yet God declares that *all* are His servants. Accordingly, we must let all serve.

Whether or not we shall succeed in our work hereafter will depend very much on how we see the work done. Will it be done by a few especially gifted persons, or will it be done by all the servants of the Lord? Is the entire church working? That is the critical question.

Body of Christ Is Living Organism

The body of Christ is not a doctrine; it is a living organism. If such is so, then we must be sure to learn this one thing: that only when all the members are functioning do we have the reality of the body of Christ. Only then can we see the church. . . .

Two Ways—Gift and Authority

Gift Cannot Be Left Unused

First, you should not use a brother because you see he is useful and leave another brother unused because to you he seems useless. In the church there cannot be any member left out. To recover the testimony of the Lord Jesus, all the one-talent must rise up. All who belong to the Lord are members of the body. Everyone must rise up and exercise his gift. And then you shall see the church. Do not despise the one-talented. Do not substitute others for them or suppress them. Believe in God and put them to work. Since God has confidence in calling them servants, you must have faith to cause them to work.

Authority Solves Problem of the Flesh

Second, in the church we need have no fear of the activities of the flesh. For two things must be established in the church: one is authority, the other is gift. All the one-talent people should come forth to serve, to work, and to bear fruits. What if the one-talented come with their flesh? Let me say to you that their flesh must be dealt with. The solution to this lies in authority, for authority represents God.

Gift is gift, and authority is authority. They are two different things. All the one-talent people must exercise their gifts, and the problem of their flesh is to be solved by authority. Suppose a brother

is serving, and his flesh is brought in. Tell him this: "Brother, you cannot do that, you cannot bring in your flesh." Or say to him, "This attitude of yours is not right, we will not permit such an attitude." When he hears this, he probably will go home tomorrow and refuse to do anything. If so, you must seek him out and say to him, "You cannot quit, you must do the work." Although he has brought his flesh in, he should still be allowed to do the work; only he must be told what he can do and what he cannot do. Deal with him with authority.

This that has just been discussed looms as a very great temptation. As soon as the one-talent person is used by the Lord, his flesh immediately comes in. The flesh of the person and his one talent appear to be joined together. We must resist the flesh but use the one talent. Today's practice is that we too often bury the one talent as well as bury the flesh. Where, then, is the reality of the church in all this? No, we must do differently! Use authority to deal with the flesh, but also encourage the one-talent people to function. Perhaps they will say, "To do is wrong, and not to do is also wrong, what, then, should I do?" The answer is, "To do is indeed wrong, because the flesh has come in; yet not to do is also wrong, because the talent is buried. The one talent you have must come in, but the flesh must go out."

If authority can be maintained and all the functions of the members of the body can be brought in, you will behold on earth a glorious church. The way to recovery is then made easy. I do not know how long a time our Lord will grant us in the future. I believe, however, our way is becoming clearer and clearer. We must concentrate all our thinking and galvanize all our energy on helping brothers and sisters to serve together as a body. And thus will the life of the church truly begin, and the Lord will surely come soon. . .

Head Gives Authority, Members Have Fellowship

The use of the body lies in fellowship. The first body principle is that of authority, the second principle is that of fellowship. The supply of coordination is based on the supply of authority and the supply of fellowship. What comes from the Head is authority, what comes from the body members is fellowship. The Head gives authority that we may have order in the body—that is to say, order in the church. Further, though, within the members there is mutual fellowship. These are the two fundamental principles of body life.

—CW, 111: 17-18, 56-7, 59-60, 148

The ground of the Church is quite an important matter. For the Lord has truly shown in the Scriptures that the Church has a definite ground. I would suppose all the brethren know that the blessing of God is in the Church, that God's Spirit is in the Church, that God's light is in the Church, and that especially the life of our Lord Jesus is in the Church. Though we usually pay attention to the Lord's life being in us individuals, His life is in fact in the Church. Since God has deposited so many spiritual things in the Church, it is evident that she becomes an important issue. . . . Whether the place I am in is a church forms a most serious personal challenge for each one of us to consider.

We must see clearly before God that many spiritual things are in the Church, not upon individuals. The word of the Lord is plain yet wonderful: "upon this rock I will build my church." And the outcome will be, added the Lord, that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16.18b). In other words, this promise is given to the *Church*, it is *not* given to individuals. How often in the Christian life it is hard *individually* to resist, but when the Church arises, Satan is defeated. I surmise that in these years there has not been a lack of personal blessings, but such are nonetheless rather limited. Only in

the Church are the blessings unlimited and abundant. Hence, as a person walks outside of the Church the presence of God as well as the blessings he receives become circumscribed. He will not be able to touch many things in God. Pardon me for speaking frankly, but within the last ten years I have noticed that the people who do not know the Church are unable to keep that which they had had before but gradually lose out; whereas those who know the Church keep on growing and find the riches of the Head as their richness.

Let me mention here two things which are essential to a local church. The New Testament clearly presents these two fundamental conditions. They are (1) the authority of the Holy Spirit and (2) the boundary of locality. Let us notice that without the Holy Spirit there can be no church. . . . From start to finish, the church can have only one authority, one power and one life—that of the Holy Spirit. There is but one authority, one power and one life, which is the Holy Spirit. . . . For the assembly of the saints is where the Spirit of God can unhinderedly express His thought. Just as the Lord while on earth used the body given Him by Mary, so today in the Holy Spirit He is able to use the church. . . . In one word, only that which can express the mind of the Holy Spirit can be called a local church.

Today's basic problem lies in our obeying authority. Yet to whose authority do we submit? Let me tell you that if it is considered an infringement should a younger brother speak out of himself, the action of an older brother who likewise speaks out of himself is also an infringement. Only the authority of the Holy Spirit is true authority. Why is it that the younger should be subject to the elder? Because the elder ones having learned more before God know more of the authority of God and thus make it easier for the Holy Spirit to flow out from them. It is like a pipe that—without any obstacle clogging up the passage—is accustomed to the flowing of water for many years. For the younger ones to be subject to the elders is not because the elders are themselves authority, but only because the

Holy Spirit finds it easier to speak through them. . . . We do not establish the authority of the elder. We assent to the authority of the Holy Spirit which comes more easily through an elder. In other words, in the local church there is but one authority, the authority of the Holy Spirit. What comes out of man himself has no authority. Neither the elders, nor the older ones, nor the more spiritual have any authority in themselves. The Holy Spirit alone has authority. This is called the body of Christ. . . .

You who serve God must remember one thing: Whether you have served twenty, thirty, fifty or sixty years till your hair has turned white, you are but a channel transmitting authority; you are only the outlet of authority, you yourself are not authority. Whenever *you* become authority, everything is finished!

We use authority to *serve* brothers and sisters, not to *control* them. . . . Authority is not for control, but for *supply*. Therefore, do not exercise authority to rule over the brethren; rather, use it to supply and to serve them. . . . Let us learn to be the outlet of the authority of the Holy Spirit that we may support the brethren. Let us not establish our own authority. . . .

A church must have the second fundamental condition earlier mentioned, which is the boundary of locality. You may ask, is it not enough for the establishing of a church if all who assemble together live under the authority of the Holy Spirit? No, that is not enough. For the Scriptures show us that two things are essential in the establishment of a local church. First is the authority of the Holy Spirit, and the second is the boundary of locality. Does this seem strange to you as though this is falling from heaven to earth? The church appears to be half heavenly and half earthly. Indeed, the divine church is on earth as well as in heaven. The heavenly half speaks of the authority of the Holy Spirit, while the earthly half speaks of the boundary of geographical locality. How marvelous that

the Scriptures show us clearly that the church belongs to locality. This we can see in such descriptive phrases as “the church which was in Jerusalem” (Jerusalem being a city), “at Antioch, in the church that was there” (with Antioch being a locality) or “the church in Ephesus” (Ephesus being a seaport) (see Acts 8.1, 11.22, 13.1; Rev. 1.1). The ground of all the local churches mentioned in the Scriptures is set on the geographical localities where they are. They all take locality as their boundaries. . . .

City Church vs. House Church

In the New Testament there are four places which employ the phrase “the church that is in . . . house”: (1) “Salute the church that is in their house” (Rom. 16.5). The “their” points to Prisca, and Aquila who are mentioned in verse 3. This indicates the simple fact that the church in Rome, just as the churches in a thousand localities elsewhere, began in a brother’s home. The principal persons in that brother’s house are brothers and sisters. At that time the number of brethren in the local church was few; therefore, they could meet in a house. This is a matter of history, not a matter of teaching. Teaching can be explained away; history cannot be explained away because a fact of history is a fact. All who are familiar with history know that thousands of churches have begun in somebody’s house. The church in Rome at that early period was the church that met in the house of Prisca and Aquila. . . .

(2) “Aquila and Prisca salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house” (1 Cor. 16.19b). This was in approximately A.D. 59. At that time, Aquila and Prisca did not live in Rome but in Ephesus (see Acts 18.18-19). And the church in Ephesus met in their home. Hence, it is called “the church that is in their house.” This does not suggest at all that in Ephesus at that time there was on the one hand the “city church” and on the other hand the “house church” that met in the house of Aquila and Prisca. No, it

means that the church in Ephesus was the assembly of the saints that met in the house of Aquila and Prisca. This is unalterable history.

(3) “Salute the brethren that are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church in their [or, her] house. And when this epistle hath been read among you [Colossians], cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans” (Col. 4.15-16). It is a historical fact that the church in Laodicea assembled in the house of Nymphas. Nymphas was a believer in Laodicea, not in Colosse. Accordingly, Paul called the church in Laodicea the church that met in the house of Nymphas.

(4) “To Philemon our beloved and fellow-worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in thy house” (Philemon 1-2). Philemon was a believer who lived in Colosse. He was Paul’s fellow-worker. And the church in Colosse was the church that met in his house. Again this is plain history. . . .

Having now seen how the so-called “house church” was mentioned four times in the New Testament and what that meant, let us next look at it from another angle: Can or cannot the house be the unit of the boundary of the church? I do not know if you understand what this phrase—“the unit of boundary”—means. Let me try to explain. When we weigh a thing, we use the “pound” as the unit of weight. When we measure a thing, we use the “foot” as the unit of length. Can a “house” therefore be deemed the legitimate unit of the local church’s boundary? A careful reading of the New Testament will reveal that that just cannot be. No, the unit of the boundary of the local church is not a “house church” but is a city or a locality. This is God’s teaching.

Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea were all localities at the time of the New Testament. And in each of these localities there was a single local church.

So that with locality serving as the unit, in those biblical instances

where there were two or more units spoken together, they could not be called one church but rather they were called churches. Accordingly, in the Scriptures we find such descriptive phrases as “the churches of Judea” (Gal. 1.22), and “the churches of Galatia” (1.2)—yet these were both provinces, and a province constituted a composite of many localities.

Let me inquire again in our discussion as to whether a house can be deemed the boundary unit of a church. Here our mind needs to be very clear, or else we will be mistaken. We must understand that the term “house” as employed in the Scriptures (see earlier for the four instances) and the term house as spoken of nowadays by the advocates of the house church are two different things. The house according to the teaching of the New Testament Scriptures referred to the place where the local church met. And this meant that the church that was identified with a certain person’s house was also the church of that *locality*.

But today? Man’s teaching asserts that in the city of Rome, for example, there can be *two* local churches: one whose location is on a given street and one that is in the house. Or that in Colosse, there could be *three* churches: one on the street and two in two different houses. And thus, according to the teaching of man, the house church is one that is smaller in boundary than the locality. Taking unjustified advantage of the word “house” in the Scriptures, they consider the unit of the local church’s boundary to be the house and not to be governed by locality.

But does the New Testament warrant accepting the idea of the unit of church boundary being smaller than the locality? This question can easily be answered. We have already seen that there was but one church in Rome, one church in Colosse, and one church in Laodicea. The reference to the church in Laodicea in the Book of Revelation is always singular in number, and in heaven it is also

represented by but one golden lampstand.

What is even more striking evidence from the Scriptures is the fact that during the early days the saints who comprised “the church which was in Jerusalem”—which at that time had apparently possessed the largest number of believers, as many as perhaps ten thousand—had met in different houses: “day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home” (Acts 2.46). . . . The word “home” here does not refer to just one house. Once more the Scriptures tell us this: “every day, in the temple and at home” (Acts 5.42). Again, the word “home” cannot be limited to but one house. On a subsequent occasion, after Peter had been released from prison by an angel, he came to “the house of Mary” (Acts 12.12), which was one of the houses where the church in Jerusalem gathered to pray. The question now needs to be posed again: Can such a home be deemed the unit of church boundary? History shows us that among all the churches of that early period, Jerusalem had the largest number of believers and also had the greatest number of home meetings. If God had thought of using the “house” or “home” as the unit of the local church’s boundary, Jerusalem would have been best qualified to be set forth as the model. Yet God did not do so. And if He chose not to make the “house” or “home” the church’s unit of boundary at Jerusalem, then we know for certain that He has not deemed the “house” to be that unit in other places either.

What, then, is the fact which confronts us? Jerusalem had so many home meetings, and yet God had only one local church in Jerusalem. Every time the Holy Spirit mentioned Jerusalem He only and always used “church” in singular number and never “churches” in the plural number. The Scriptures have only “the church in Jerusalem, never “the churches in Jerusalem” nor “the house churches in Jerusalem.” There may have been meetings conducted in many homes throughout the city, but the church in Jerusalem was *one local church*.

Attempting to make the “house” as the local church’s unit boundary is a human conception; it is not scriptural teaching. The Biblical formula on this matter—“the church which was in Jerusalem” (Acts 8.1)—makes impossible the establishing of single, independent, isolated house churches. . . .

When the house is smaller than the locality, the house cannot serve as a unit of boundary for the local church. Only when the house is equal to the locality can it be acknowledged as such. Let us see and acknowledge that the unit is based on locality.

—GOC 1-4, 6, 9, 18, 20-1, 22-4, 26

What things the apostle John wrote, whether Epistles or Gospel, were written last. Revelation naturally was also written last. Matthew, Mark and Luke—these three Gospels record the acts of the Lord Jesus while on earth; the Gospel of John, however, narrates the life of Him “who descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven” (John 3:13). The Epistles of John were written at the time when the truth of God was being confused by the gnostics. These writings too, as it were, carry people to heaven to see there God’s eternal fact. John translates us out of ourselves as men into fully accepting the Son of God. What this apostle wrote has a specific characteristic—which is, to bring us back to the very beginning. The Gospel of John tells us that Christ is in the beginning; the Epistles of John communicate to us the Word of life which is from the beginning; the Revelation of John transports us to the eternity to come. The Gospel is to reveal to us the Son of God who came in the flesh. He was in our midst yet men mistook Him. They regarded Him as only Jesus of Nazareth. John nevertheless shows us that this Jesus who was in the flesh is from the beginning. This is the most hidden fact. The Epistles of John are no different. There, His Person is the Son of God and His Office is Christ. Sadly, men neither recognized Him as the Son of God nor acknowledged Him as Christ, the

Anointed One of God. Consequently, John emphasizes in his Epistles these two points in order to bring us to the hidden fact at the beginning. When he wrote the Book of Revelation it was at the time of world chaos and the iron rule of the Roman Caesars. He also takes us to the hidden story in the future, enabling us to understand God's view towards the world situation. Yet in Revelation there is not only the world situation to be dealt with but also the Church condition. The book discloses to us what the Lord is pleased with and what He condemns during the time of disarray in the outward appearance of the Church. It also reveals what is the Lord's appointed way for His Church. The Church exhibits many varied appearances in history. Yet what kind of state is desired by the Lord? All these are the hidden secrets which John conveys to us in his Revelation writing.

In the Bible there are two sets of seven letters. God used Paul to write the first set of letters to seven churches; namely, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. He used John to record the second set of letters—likewise sent to seven churches. The first set of letters deals with the Church in a time of relative normalcy, while the second set of letters deals with the Church in an extraordinary time. Just as the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke convey a normalcy about them in that they help men to know God, the Gospel of John is God's reaction to men's distortion, and hence this latter Gospel lays much stress on truth and grace. The Epistles of John are also God's reaction to abnormality, so they touch a great deal on light and love. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, God can be seen dealing with the abnormal conditions of the Church. The first set of letters to seven churches—those written by Paul—consider the proper conduct and behavior of the Church. But in the time of John's writing, the Church has degenerated terribly. Accordingly, he was commanded to put into writing the second set of letters to seven churches as found in the Book of Revelation. The first set of church letters confirm the truths the Church should know; the latter set communicate the way

the Church ought to travel during her earthly pilgrimage. Today we who really desire to walk in the way of the Lord must read Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Today the Church constitutes a very serious problem for the Lord. So Revelation tells us what we should do. If Christians are not going to Revelation to find the way, I wonder where they are heading!

Going a step further in this comparison, the first series of church letters was written *before* “the last days”; on the other hand, the latter set was written *during* “the last days.” 1 John 2.18, for example, clearly mentions another time—“the last hour”: “Little children, it is the last hour: and as ye heard that anti-christ cometh, even now have there arisen many anti-Christ; whereby we know that it is the last hour.” Christians who only read the first series of Church letters will not be able to understand God’s will for the last days.

In the Bible the ministries of three persons are especially prominent: those of Peter, John and Paul. 2 Peter is the last extant letter written by Peter. There he mentioned apostasy. 2 Timothy is the last extant letter written by Paul. In chapter 2 he wrote: “the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same [that is, the testimony] commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (v.2). In his 1 Timothy letter he had stated that the Church is the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth (see 3.15). But in 2 Timothy he wrote that “now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth” (2.20a). The issue revolves around whether or not a man purges himself from being a vessel unto dishonor to be one unto honor and follows after righteousness, faith, love and peace with all those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (see vv.21-22). The Epistles of John are the last extant ones written by that apostle too. In them he talked about the coming of the spirit of the Antichrist and how we need to hold on to the truth (see 1 John 4.1-3).

I today sense a great burden within me. Usually we say that from the first formation of the Church to the present time is the Church Age. The matter is not that simple, however. We should at least distinguish between the normal and the abnormal therein. Today the outward appearance of the Church is in ruin. If we do not see *this* fact, how can we read with understanding the Book of Revelation? The first set of Church letters dealt with the normal. Now, though, things have become abnormal. What should we do about it? True, confusion on earth will not affect spiritual reality, for God's reality remains unchanged. Yet in outward appearance, the Church is at least confused. The Roman Church declares that she is the Body of Christ. According to a 1914 report, apart from various fragmentary groups, there were already one thousand five hundred well-organized and formidable denominations. Each has proclaimed itself to be the Body of Christ. Even prior to the departure from the scene of John, Paul and Peter, disintegration within the Church had already commenced. Paul wrote to Timothy: "all that are in Asia turned away from me" (2 Tim 1.15a). This included even the Church in Ephesus where Paul had taught and labored the longest. In the light of such circumstances, every child of God must seek to know one thing: How should I follow and serve the Lord? When the Church is outwardly in ruin, we should ask ourselves what we must do. Revelation chapters 2 and 3 can show us the way. If we are truly seekers before God, these two chapters can tell us what to do.

When reading the Book of Revelation, the first thing everyone would like to know is, what kind of book it is. All seem to recognize that Revelation is prophecy. But if we should pursue the matter further and ask whether the section dealing with the seven churches is prophecy, many would begin to waiver. Both in chapters 1 and 22 we are told that the characteristic of Revelation is its prophetic nature. Not only the seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls are prophetic portions, even the portion covering the seven letters is prophetic in nature. For this is indeed a thoroughly prophetic book.

No one, as the Book itself declares, should dare to add anything to it, nor should any man take anything away from it. Since, then, it is a book of prophecy, we ought to treat it as such and try to discern its fulfillment. Let us therefore pay attention to the nature of this Book of Revelation: that first, it is prophecy; and second, that because it is prophecy, it shall be *fulfilled*. At the time when Revelation was being set down, there were of course more than seven local churches in Asia. Why, then, did John mention only these seven churches? While on the island of Patmos receiving from the Lord the divine revelation he was to set down for the Church, John saw only these seven local churches because they were able to represent all the other churches. God chose these seven particular yet appropriate churches and infused each one of them and all of them with the prophetic element.

According to Revelation 2 and 3, on earth there are but seven churches in view; in heaven there are likewise but seven lampstands in view. This presents a problem. A church on earth has a counterpart lampstand in heaven. Are there only these seven churches in the entire world? If so, then it would appear that the church in Chungking is cut off, so, too, the church in Nanking is excluded. How can this apparent discrepancy be solved? The answer can be found if we bear in mind that this of which we are speaking is prophecy. And hence, in prophecy only seven churches need be chosen for whatever prophetic purpose may be in view. These seven churches, therefore, can and do represent all the churches—the history of the church past, present and future. If so, then there is no need for an eighth item of representation beyond these seven. Though there are indeed more than seven local churches on earth, these seven now before us can be taken as representations of them all. There are only seven lampstands in heaven because the histories of these seven particular churches on earth reflect the history of the entire Church.

Let us pay special attention to the word in chapter 1 that declares,

“Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein: for the time is at hand” (v.3). Let us also pay attention to what is written in chapter 22: “Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book” (v.7b). We may therefore conclude that these prophecies are the commandments of God. Though they are clothed outwardly with a prophetic garment, they are inwardly the commandments of God. And hence this is a book of practice (“keep the things”, “keep the words”) and not a book of research. The prophecy given here is different from the other prophecies of the Bible in that the prophecy of this book is given to men to *keep*. There is a common rule between John and us, which is, that this prophecy—from the beginning of it to the very end—is given us to keep. How can anyone who does not keep the words and keep the things written about in this book ever understand Revelation? How, for example, can he comprehend the section that deals with the seven churches?

In reading Revelation 2 and 3 we see not just the prophecy we need to keep, we also see the Lord as the Lord of judgment. The very first portion of Revelation is the preface to the entire book, and the next portion serves as the prelude to chapters 2 and 3; for chapters 2 and 3 commence with the revelation of the Lord Jesus. Here we see the Lord “clothed with a garment down to the foot” (1.13). The priest of old would wear a long garment; hence, the Lord Jesus here is represented as the Priest. The lamp-stand mentioned is in the Holy Place of the tabernacle of old. Its light was never allowed to go out: it was to shine day and night incessantly. Thus it would require the priest in olden times to do the work of trimming and adding oil all the time within the Holy Place. The Lord Jesus is now the Priest who, as pictured here in chapter 2, walks among the churches to examine which lamp is bright and which lamp is dimmed.

The act of trimming is representative of correcting and judging, and judgment—the Bible tells us elsewhere—begins with the House

of God: the Church. Christ is therefore seen walking among the churches and doing the work of judgment. And that judgment today is viewed from the perspective of eternity. John was most intimate with the Lord, so much so that he had even leaned on His breast (see John 13.25, 21.20). The Son is in the bosom of the Father, and John is in the bosom of the Son. But in this moment of revelation, when John saw the Lord, he fell down as one dead because he saw the Lord as the Lord of judgment. In the past we have seen Him as the Lord of grace; now, however, we see Him as the Lord of judgment, and that will cause us to fall down as dead. His judgment now, though, is the judgment of a priest who performs the work of trimming. The day will come when it is *pure* judgment. Every child of God must one day encounter the terror and holiness of the Lord. Then he will not argue any more, for light eliminates all argument. Light not only enlightens, it also slays. Every enlightening revealed in the Scriptures slays the natural life of man. Man may have many reasons, but before the Lord of judgment all these vanish. Like John, all will prostrate themselves on the ground as though dead. The farther people drift away from the Lord, the greater shall be their self-confidence. But none can stand the light of God. We need one day to be dealt with by God.

Now the heading of each of these seven letters reveals something of who the Lord is; and all the words of each letter which follow thereafter are based upon this facet of revelation as to who the Lord is. All who do not know the Lord cannot see the Church; for the Church is the continuation of the cross; and he who knows not the cross does not know in reality the extension or continuation of the cross.

All seven letters commence with some facet of the Lord in revelation and conclude with the call to overcome. Who are the overcomers? Are they special, "above level" persons? The meaning of overcomers in the Bible denotes ordinary, common people. Those

who do not conduct themselves in an abnormal way in an extraordinary time are overcomers. Today most people are “below level.” Yet overcomers are not *above* level, but are simply *on or at* the level. Today God is calling for overcomers who will respond to the normal rule of what was from the beginning. Let us see that the will of God never changes; on the contrary, it is like a straight line. Today men have fallen, and in falling they have fallen down below this straight line. Overcomers, however, are those who are being restored to God’s original purpose.

Two more things need to be observed here: one is that the churches are said to be *golden* lampstands among which the Lord walks; the other is that in the Lord’s right hand are seven stars which are the *angels* of these seven churches.

Let us discuss briefly the first of these two matters. Metals in the Bible have their symbolic meanings. Iron symbolizes governmental power; brass signifies judgment; silver, redemption; and gold, the glory of God. Whether in the ancient or in the modern world, there is one thing no one can ever know—which is, the glory of God. Though God’s holiness is hard to comprehend, we can still know it. We can also know His righteousness. But His glory is unknown to men because it is akin to God himself. Notice, however, what we are told here: that the Church is made of gold, the Biblical symbol for God’s glory and nature. People in the Church are born of God; they are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man (see John 1.13). The Church has absolutely no intrinsic relationship to men. What are the works of wood, hay and stubble as spoken of in 2 Corinthians (see 3.10-15)? They are the works of the flesh. But the works of gold, silver and precious stones signify that they are all of God.

The second matter. These seven letters were written to the angels of the seven churches. They are different from Paul’s set of church

letters in that these latter were written directly to the churches themselves. In the letter to the Philippians, for example, we read in it especially how Paul has mentioned all the saints, the bishops and the deacons—those to whom the letter had been addressed. The seven letters in Revelation, however, were written to the *angels* of these churches, notwithstanding the fact that they were words spoken by the Holy Spirit to all the churches. The seven stars to be seen in the Lord's right hand, we are told, are the angels of these seven local churches. Angel in Greek is "angelos," meaning "a messenger." In reading Revelation 2 and 3, many have attempted to discover similarities between this latter set of church letters and the former set written by Paul, with the result that all sorts of wrong interpretations have been made concerning these angels. Who are these angels? The term angel used here is singular in number; and hence, each letter was written to but one angel. Yet the one angel to whom each letter is addressed, though singular in number, is corporate in nature. This is borne out by the fact that at the end of each letter (which, it must be kept in mind, was written to one angel) the repeated call to overcome is always addressed to a plural number. And hence the angel is a corporate messenger who is capable of representing the few in the entire local church. Accordingly, the *way* of God—though not His purpose—has changed. Formerly it was the church that stood before the Lord; now it is the angel who stands before Him. Lamplight is inferior to starlight. In this new situation, therefore, the Lord has chosen the star whose light ever shines—and shines more brightly. Moreover, He says that this star is His messenger. Let us note, too, that the star is in His right hand. Today a group of people is considered by the Lord to be His messenger, since the character of that local church is deemed to be reposed in them. Whenever the outward appearance of the church becomes a problem before the Lord, a group of people—as seen here in the angel—is viewed by the Lord to be representative of the church. Formerly, those who were representative of the church had position, they being elders of the church. Now, though, the responsibility of representing the church

rests upon a spiritual messenger corporate in nature. The messenger may therefore not be elders or deacons but merely ordinary common saints who overcome. Today God places the responsibility of the church upon those who can truly represent the church. Today the issue of responsibility no longer lies in position or office but in real spiritual power before God.

The Book of Revelation is written to all the servants of God (Rev. 1.1). Whoever is not servant in heart cannot understand it. All who are not blood-bought and constrained by divine love to be bondservants of the Lord are unable to comprehend the Book of Revelation.

John wrote this book in about 95 or 96 A.D. during the time when Domitian was the Roman Caesar. Of the twelve apostles, John was the last one to die. The apostolic church ended with John. At the time of his writing Revelation these seven letters of chapters 2 and 3 were prophetic in nature. Today as we read them they are still prophetic though now they stand fulfilled in the history of the Church. John had looked forward, while we today look backward.

In the first three letters [see Rev. 2], the call to overcome is placed after "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." First, "He that hath an ear," and then, the promise to the overcomer. But commencing from the letter to the church at Thyatira, this order is reversed. This indicates that the first three churches form one group while the latter four churches form another. Between the two groups there is a basic difference. Formerly, only after the history of Ephesus had passed away would Smyrna come into view; only after Smyrna had passed away would Pergamum come into being; and only after Pergamum had passed away would Thyatira come into the picture. But now Sardius did not have to wait till Thyatira had passed away because Thyatira will continue on till the Second Coming of the Lord. Nor must Sardius pass away before

Philadelphia came into being or Philadelphia pass away before Laodicea came into view. While Sardius yet existed, Philadelphia came on the scene, and while Philadelphia still existed, Laodicea came. Thyatira, Sardius, Philadelphia and Laodicea will all continue on till the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. The first group of three churches came and went—each of the three in turn; but though the four in the last group came indeed one after another, they all shall continue to co-exist till the Second Coming of the Lord.

—OC 3-10, 44

8

What is the normal Christian life? We do well at the outset to ponder this question. The object of these studies is to show that it is something very different from the life of the average Christian. Indeed a consideration of the written word of God—of the Sermon on the Mount for example—should lead us to ask whether such a life has ever in fact been lived upon the earth, *save only by the Son of God himself*. But in that last saving clause lies immediately the answer to our question.

The apostle Paul gives us his own definition of the Christian life in Galatians 2.20. It is “no longer I, but Christ.” Here he is not stating something special or peculiar—a high level of Christianity. He is, we believe, presenting God’s normal for a Christian, which can be summarized in the words: I live no longer, but Christ lives his life in me.

God makes it quite clear in his word that He has only one answer to every human need—His Son, Jesus Christ. In all His dealings with us He works by taking *us* out of the way and substituting Christ in our place. The Son of God died instead of us for our forgiveness: He lives instead of us for our deliverance. So we can speak of two substitutions—a Substitute on the Cross who secures our forgiveness and a Substitute within who secures our victory. It will help us greatly, and save us from much confusion, if we keep constantly before us this fact, that God will answer all our questions in one way and one way only, namely, by showing us more of His Son. . . .

The First Step: “Knowing This . . .”

The normal Christian life must begin with a very definite “knowing,” which is not just knowing something about the truth nor

understanding some important doctrine. It is not an intellectual knowledge at all, but an opening of the eyes of the heart to see what we have in Christ. . . .

We now come to a matter on which there has been some confusion of thought among the Lord's children. It concerns what follows this knowledge. Note again first of all the wording of Romans 6:6: "Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him." The tense of the verb is most precious, for it puts the event right back there in the past. It is final, once-for-all. The thing has been done and cannot be undone. Our old man has been crucified once and for ever, and he can never be un-crucified. This is what we need to know.

Then, when we know this, what follows? Look again at our passage. The next command is in verse 11: "Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin." This, clearly, is the natural sequel to verse 6. Read them together: "*Knowing* that our old man was crucified, . . . *reckon* ye yourselves to be dead." That is the order. When we know that our old man has been crucified with Christ, then the next step is to reckon it so.

Unfortunately, in presenting the truth of our union with Christ the emphasis has too often been placed upon this second matter of reckoning ourselves to be dead, as though that were the starting point, whereas it should rather be upon knowing ourselves to be dead. God's word makes it clear that "knowing" is to precede "reckoning." "Know this . . . reckon." The sequence is most important. Our reckoning must be based on knowledge of divinely revealed fact, for otherwise faith has no foundation on which to rest. When we know, then we reckon spontaneously.

So in teaching this matter we should not over-emphasize reckoning. People are always trying to reckon without knowing. They have not first had a Spirit-given revelation of the fact; yet they

try to reckon, and soon they get into all sorts of difficulties. When temptation comes they begin to reckon furiously. “I am dead; I am dead; I am dead!” but in the very act of reckoning they lose their temper. Then they say, “It doesn’t work. Romans 6.11 is no good.” And we have to admit that verse 11 is no good without verse 6. So it comes to this, that unless we know for a fact that we are dead with Christ, the more we reckon, the more intense will the struggle become, and the issue will be sure defeat. . . .

What, then, is the secret of reckoning? To put it in one word, it is revelation. We need revelation from God himself (Matt. 16.17; Eph. 1.17,18). We need to have our eyes opened to the fact of our union with Christ, and that is something more than knowing it as a doctrine. Such revelation is no vague indefinite thing. Most of us can remember the day when we saw clearly that Christ died for us, and we ought to be equally clear as to the time when we saw that we died with Christ. It should be nothing hazy, but very definite, for it is with this as basis that we shall go on. It is not that I reckon myself to be dead, and therefore I will be dead. It is that, because I *am* dead—because I see now what God has done with me in Christ—*therefore* I reckon myself to be dead. That is the right kind of reckoning. It is not reckoning *toward* death but *from* death.

The Second Step: “Even So Reckon . . .”

What does reckoning mean? “Reckoning” in Greek means doing accounts, bookkeeping. Accounting is the only thing in the world we human beings can do correctly. An artist paints a landscape. Can he do it with perfect accuracy? Can the historian vouch for the absolute accuracy of any record, or the map-maker for the perfect correctness of any map? They can make, at best, fair approximations. Even in everyday speech, when we try to tell some incident with the best intention to be honest and truthful, we cannot speak with complete accuracy. It is mostly a case of exaggeration or understatement, of

one word too much or too little. What then can a man do that is utterly reliable? Arithmetic! There is no scope for error there. One chair plus one chair equals two chairs. That is true in London and it is true in Cape Town. If you travel west to New York or east to Singapore it is still the same. All the world over and for all time, one plus one equals two. One plus one is two in heaven and earth and hell.

Why does God say we are to reckon ourselves dead? Because we *are* dead. . . .

Living in the Spirit means that I trust the Holy Spirit to do in me what I cannot do myself. This life is completely different from the life I would naturally live of myself. Each time I am faced with a new demand from the Lord, I look to Him to do in me what He requires of me. It is not a case of trying but of trusting; not of struggling but of resting in Him. If I have a hasty temper, impure thoughts, a quick tongue or a critical spirit, I shall not set out with a determined effort to change myself, but instead, reckoning myself dead in Christ to these things, I shall look to the Spirit of God to produce in me the needed purity or humility or meekness, confident that He will do so. This is what it means to “stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you” (Ex. 14.13).

Christ Our Life

“I thank God through Jesus Christ!” That exclamation of Paul’s is fundamentally the same in its import as his other words in Galatians 2.20 which we have taken as the key to our study: “I live; and yet no longer I, *but Christ.*” We saw how prominent is the word “I” throughout Romans 7, culminating in the agonizing cry: “O wretched man that *I* am!” Then follows the shout of deliverance: “Thank God . . . *Jesus Christ!*” and it is clear that the discovery Paul has made is this, that *the life we live is the life of Christ alone.* We think

of the Christian life as a “changed life” but it is not that. What God offers us is an “exchanged life,” a “substituted life,” and Christ is our Substitute within. “I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me.” This life is not something which we ourselves have to produce. It is Christ’s own life reproduced in us. . . . [*The Third Step: “Present Yourselves . . . and Your Members”* (Rom. 6.13,19)]

The Fourth Step: “Walk . . . After the Spirit”

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but the Spirit (Rom. 8.3,4).

Every careful reader of these two verses will see that there are two things presented here. First, they are what the Lord Jesus has done *for* us, and second, what the Holy Spirit will do *in* us. The flesh is “weak”: consequently the ordinance of the law cannot be fulfilled in us “after the flesh.” (Remember, it is again here a question not of salvation but of pleasing God.) Now, because of our inability, God took two steps. In the first place He intervened to deal with the heart of our problem. He sent his Son in the flesh, who died for sin and in doing so “condemned sin in the flesh.” That is to say, He took to death representatively all that belonged to the old creation in us, whether we speak of it as “our old man”, “the flesh”, or the carnal “I.” Thus God struck at the very root of our trouble by removing the fundamental ground of our weakness. This was the first step.

But still “the ordinance of the law” remained to be fulfilled “in us.” How could this be done? It required God’s further provision of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is He who is sent to take care of the inward side of this thing, and He is able to do so, we are told, as we “walk . . . after the Spirit.”

What does it mean to walk after the Spirit? It means two things.

First, it is not a work; it is a walk. Praise God, the burdensome and fruitless effort I involved myself in when I sought “in the flesh” to please God gives place to a quiet and restful dependence on “his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Col. 1.29). That is why Paul contrasts the “works” of the flesh with the “fruit” of the Spirit (Gal. 5.19,22).

Then second, to “walk after” implies subjection. Walking after the flesh means that I yield to the dictates of the flesh, and the following verses in Romans 8.5-8 make clear where that leads me. It only brings me into conflict with God. To walk after the Spirit is to be subject to the Spirit. There is one thing that the man who walks after the Spirit cannot do, and that is be independent of Him. I *must* be subject to the Holy Spirit. The initiative of my life must be with Him. Only as I yield myself to obey Him shall I find the “law of the Spirit of life” in full operation and the “ordinance of the law” (all that I have been trying to do to please God) being fulfilled—no longer *by* me but *in* me. “As many, as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. 8.14).

—NCL 11-12, 54, 62-6, 176-7, 180, 195-7

How can we be victorious, righteous, holy? First we must understand clearly that God has not constituted Christ our example to be copied. He is not giving us His strength to help us imitate Christ. He has not even planted Christ within us to help *us* to be Christlike. Galatians 2.20 is not our standard for record-breaking endeavor. It is not a high aim to be aspired to through long seeking and patient progress. No, it is not God’s aim at all, but God’s method. When Paul says, “Yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me,” he is showing us how only Christ satisfies God’s heart. This is the life that gives God satisfaction in the believer, and there is no substitute. “Not I, but Christ,” means Christ *instead of* me. When Paul uses these words he is not claiming to have attained something his readers have not yet

reached to. He is defining the Christian life. The Christian life is the Christ life. Christ in me has become my life, and is living my life instead of me. It is not even that *I trust Him* as a separate, sufficient act. No, *God gives Him* to be my life.

Moreover, in the new life there is a law—the law that determines what that life is like in expression. It is not just that a *life* is present in me, for if this were all, I would then have to hold tightly onto it. No, there is a *law* of that life (Romans 8.2) and that law looks after itself. . . .

The daily life of the Christian is summed up in the word “receive.” Every challenging thing that God demands of me—long-suffering, meekness, humility, goodness, holiness, joy—is not something I *am*, or something I *do*, or some virtue I acquire or attain to. It is Christ in me. Each is the manifestation of *Him*. Let Him be revealed, naturally and spontaneously, and that is enough.

“He is made unto us. . .” If He were our Justifier, Sanctifier, Redeemer, we could understand. But it does not say He does these things. It uses abstract nouns: He *is* these things [see 1 Cor. 1.30 mg.]. Christ in us meets every demand of God, and every demand of the circumstances around us.

It is not in us to be humble, nor shall we find it helps to trust in the power of Christ to make us humble. Christ is humble, naturally—that is, by his very nature—and He is made our humility, for Christ is our all. Even faith and trust and obedience, if we regard them as virtues by which we attain, will prove ineffective. It is not that I trust His word, therefore I can be long-suffering. It is that Christ is long-suffering, and, praise God, Christ is in me! Once again, this is Isaac, natural, simple, spontaneous, trusting implicitly and without question, because the Father has made absolutely sufficient provision.

—CHL 111-4

The operation of His life in us is in a true sense spontaneous, that is to say, it is without effort of ours. The all-important rule is not to “try” but to “trust,” not to depend upon our own strength but upon His. For it is the flow of life which reveals what we truly are “in Christ.” It is from the Fountain of life that the sweet water issues.

Too many of us are caught *acting* as Christians. The life of many Christians today is largely a pretense. They live a “spiritual” life, talk a “spiritual” language, adopt “spiritual” attitudes, but they are doing the whole thing themselves. It is the effort involved that should reveal to them that something is wrong. They force themselves to refrain from doing this, from saying that, from eating the other, and how hard they find it all! It is just the same as when we Chinese try to talk a language that is not our own. No matter how hard we try, it does not come spontaneously; we have to force ourselves to talk that way. But when it comes to speaking our own language, nothing could be easier. Even when we forget all about what we are doing, we still speak it. It flows. It comes to us perfectly naturally, and its very spontaneity reveals to everyone *what we are*.

Our life *is* the life of Christ, mediated in us by the indwelling Holy Spirit himself, and the law of that life *is* spontaneous. The moment we see that fact we shall end our struggling and cast away our pretense. Nothing is so hurtful to the life of a Christian as acting; nothing so blessed as when our outward efforts cease and our attitudes become natural—when our words, our prayers, our very life, all become a spontaneous and unforced expression of the life within. Have we discovered how good the Lord is? Then *in us* He is as good as that! Is His power great? Then *in us* it is no less great! Praise God, His life is as mighty as ever, and in the lives of those who dare to believe the word of God the divine life will be manifest in a power not one whit less mighty than was manifest of old.

—SWS 38-40

“For to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1.21). Does this verse say *like* Christ? No. Does it say *imitate* Christ? Again, No. Does it say taking Christ as the *model* and following Him? No once again. It says that for me to live *is* Christ. It is absolutely impossible to imitate, and it is completely useless trying to be good. Even though we are able to read the Bible and pray and live a good life, if our life is wrong, our living will likewise be wrong. Nothing is wrong with our aspiring, weeping, and repenting before God and saying, “O God, I really want to obey You”—no, what is wrong with us is simply that our life is wrong.

God not only appoints Christ to die at Calvary for us but also makes Him our life. . . .

Very often, however, we do try to measure up to such a life. We admire such a walk and we are willing to suffer for it. But what happens is that before one sin is cleared up, another has appeared on the scene. Or else before we have finished our repentance for one thing, the very same thing has occurred once again. Before our repentant tears have even dried, the woeful thing has returned to haunt us.

Oh, let me say that if only we could truly believe that “we cannot”—how much better it would be! God does not want you to try. The life which He gives us is not a fall-and-repent type of life. He wants us to live as Christ lives; because it is Christ in us who wishes to live out His style of life.

Mary gave the Lord a body through which He could exhibit a God-like life. In like manner, if we give ourselves to the Lord and accept this Christ, God will cause us to live out the life which Christ himself once lived.

Please note carefully that to be holy and not follow your own will, to love the Lord with singleness of heart and obey Him entirely is not something you can try to do or to imitate. It depends completely on the Christ whom God has provided for us. And this is full salvation. God has provided Christ for two purposes: on the one hand Christ keeps the law for us, on the other hand He lives in us so that we too may keep the law of God. On the one hand He died for us, on the other hand He lives in us. At Calvary He accomplished salvation for us; now He implements that accomplishment in us. At Calvary He justified us; dwelling in us He now makes us righteous. Not only did *He* obey God, but by living in us He causes *us* to obey God too. He not only did everything *for* us; He also does all things *in* us. . . .

God's salvation causes the Lord Jesus to live in us as well as to die at Calvary for us. He not only pays all our debts but also lives in us so that we will never have to run into debt again. God does not save us merely to escape hell and to enter heaven: He saves us to the extent of Christ being our life. If you have only received half a salvation, you will doubtless be miserable and fail to experience the full joy of salvation. Jesus Christ is our life to do everything in us. God never demands Christians to *do* this or to *do* that. For Paul says, "For to me to live is Christ"—and having Christ living in him, Paul is able to endure beatings, persecutions, many perils, imprisonment in Jerusalem, and transference to Rome. It is not by his being like Christ nor imitating Christ, but by Christ living in him that he finds strength for all such things. As a monkey cannot be transformed into a man, so a Christian cannot imitate Christ. . . .

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who was made unto us wisdom from God, both righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. 1.30 mg.). If we read this verse most carefully and slowly we can readily see that at the time we are saved God has made Christ to be our personal righteousness and our personal sanctification. The answer is Christ. What is victory? It is Christ. What are patience and

humility? They are Christ. Anyone who is able to answer in this way has found the secret. My whole being is corrupt and fleshly; but Christ is my holiness. He is my sanctification. There is no one who is holy and victorious; even so, there is a way in which we can say to God, "O God, I accept Your Son!" And that will be our holiness and that will be our victory. . . .

How to Let Christ Live Out His Life in Me

Now we know that only Christ is victorious. We also know that He lives in us. For when we believe in Him, we have Him. Yet day by day I am still myself as though nothing had happened. What should we do in order that Christ may live out His life in us? There are two ways, or may we say that there are two conditions.

First, *surrender*. Yes, Christ is indeed in me, but He cannot do anything if I do not let Him. You and I must obey God. What precisely is surrender? Surrender is not a promising God to do His will, nor is it *making covenant* with God to do what cannot be done. To surrender is for me *to take my hands off my own life*. It is to give over into God's hand my good and bad, my strength and weakness, my past and future, my very life and very self so that God alone may work in me. . . .

The second way or condition for Christ to be able to live out His life in us is *to believe*. Since we have surrendered, we must now believe that God will deliver us from what we love, what we cannot and will not give up. "Commit thy way unto Jehovah; trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass" (Ps. 37.5). To commit is to surrender; to trust is to believe. And the result is that "he will bring it to pass." Knowing that we have no way, we commit ourselves to God and believe that the Lord who dwells in us will accomplish the work.

Can you say, I am victorious? Hallelujah, I can say I am victorious, because the Bible tells me so. How pitiful that our faith is less than the size of a grain of mustard—nay, even less than a speck of dust! If we have faith, God will begin to work. When the Lord created the heavens and the earth He merely used His mouth, for when He said “Let there be light” there was light! If we have faith, He most certainly will begin to work because He is anxious to have His work done. . . .

We need to see that surrender and faith are intimately related. When these two actions are joined together, there is victory and no defeat. We will have no victory if we merely believe and yet are unwilling to give our lives to God in exchange for the life of Christ. Though at the time of regeneration we have already come into possession of this life of Christ, God *will not force* us to live by the life of Christ if our will is not surrendered to God to *let* Christ live in and out through us. And by the same token, if we only surrender but do not believe, such surrender will be reduced to a kind of dead work; for although we are prepared to give God *the right to work*, we have not given Him the *opportunity to come in*.

Hence we must (1) lift up our head to look to God and say, I hand over my all to You, I am willing to let You work; and (2) believe that God has already worked according to His word.

Christ has taken care of all the conflicts, for the divine government is upon His shoulders. Let us believe Him day by day, because faith needs to be continued whereas surrender is done once and for all. We may surrender to God in one instant and need never do it again. (Though some people surrender gradually and slowly, this is unnecessary.) Having committed ourselves to God in surrender, we believe He will cause Christ to live His holiness and victory in and through us. Formerly we were saved from the punishment of hell; now we are saved from the power of sin. Nothing

needs to be done except surrender and believe. May we prove that we are truly victorious.

—SS 80-4, 87-8, 91-4

Romans 5 shows us we are in Adam; Romans 6 tells us we are in Christ. Romans 7 exposes the fact of how we yet live in the flesh, whereas Romans 8 educates us about how to live in the Spirit.

Whenever we live in the flesh, everything we get from Adam is there. But if we live in the Spirit, then all that is in Christ becomes ours. Hence we need revelation as to how we are in Christ and to believe it. Then we must yield to the Holy Spirit and obey Him in order to live according to the Spirit and experience all that is in Christ.

Many Christians, however, fail to realize that they are in Adam. Therefore they see no need of being delivered out of him. They think that after their sins are forgiven, all their problems now lie in their behavior. They do not see that the real issue is in themselves.

How many of us reason that if we can only change our habits, ways, thoughts, acts, and so forth, we will be all right. Not so, however; for there must be a complete exchange of life. *We* must be displaced and replaced with *Christ*. We must see that whether we win or not, we ourselves are rotten and vile, altogether Adamic. Fundamentally speaking, we share Adam's very life. We are born of Adam. We are by nature Adamic.

How does God treat us little Adams? "He that hath died is justified [or, released, mg.] from sin" (Rom. 6.7). How did we get into Adam in the first place? Whose responsibility is it that we are in Adam? Whose fault and by whose work do we obtain this sinful nature of Adam? We can trace all this back to one person, Adam himself. All was done by Adam, not by us individually. In the same

way, we get free of Adam and receive a new life with a new nature through another Person and His work.

When Adam ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, we were there in the loins of Adam. We too ate of it and failed God. We disobeyed God and sinned against Him. The entity and the solidarity of the human race come to the fore here. Just so is it also with our righteousness received from Christ and our being in Christ: “of him [God] are ye in Christ Jesus.” Because God has put us in Christ, all which God has done in Christ, all which He has given to Christ—even all the work and nature of Christ—become ours.

If we look within ourselves, we cannot see how we were in Adam; therefore we cannot believe it. Likewise, if we look within ourselves, we cannot see how we are in Christ. Accordingly, we must look away from ourselves and look off to Christ. We must see ourselves in Christ there at Calvary. For by looking within ourselves, we will never believe that we have been crucified and have died. All we see will be our sins, defeats and failure. But if we look at Christ and see ourselves in Him, we will know that we have died in spite of what we may see within ourselves or what our life experiences tell us. Hence it all depends on whether or not we have seen this glorious fact, whether or not our eyes have been opened to see ourselves being in Christ. It is not that we are “identified” with Christ, but that we actually are “included” in Christ. This requires revelation. With revelation everything will change.

The word does not say, “Abide *into* Christ.” It says, “Abide *in* Christ.” We are already there in Christ. Do not get out. Satan tries to get us to look at our life, experiences and defeats in order to say to us that we are not in Christ. We should never say a word or entertain a thought which even approaches our not being in Christ. We must hold unwaveringly, absolutely and tenaciously to the glorious reality that we are in Christ at all times.

—GFB 19-22

This point should be carefully considered lest it slip away from us. A believer (one who has confessed his sins and has been saved by faith in the Lord Jesus) ought to have well in mind that the crucifying of his old man is not an independent act outside of the Lord Jesus; rather, it is accomplished through union with the Lord Jesus. As Christ died, our old man died with Him, too, for it died in His death. The ignorance of this fact explains the failure of many. Believers tend to use their *own* power to crucify the old man. Yet however much they may try, that old man is still alive, because it is absolutely impossible for them individually to crucify the old man outside of Christ. Most believers do this through ignorance. They do not know that apart from dying with Christ, there is no other way to put the old man to death. The old man is to be crucified with Christ. . . .

“Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 6.11). This word “reckon” is of utmost importance. We all want to “touch” and see if our old man is dead. We always like to “feel” whether our old man is dead or not. Yet, if it depends on our “touch” or “feel, our old man will never die, since he does not die simply because we “touch” or “feel.” As a matter of fact, the more we “touch,” the livelier will be our old man; the more we “feel, the more present will be our old man. The old man is not crucified by “touch” or “feel”; he is crucified through “reckoning.”

What is it to “reckon”? To “reckon” is to exercise faith, to “reckon” is to exercise the judgment as well as the execution of the will. “Reckoning” is totally different from “touching” or “feeling.” For these latter are related to the senses; but “reckoning” is in the realm of faith and will. Hence, the way to deal with the old man does not lie in the realm of feeling. To say “I do not feel my old man is dead” is totally wrong. The death of the old man does not depend on

whether or not you feel it so; it is determined by whether or not you reckon it so.

How do you “reckon”? To reckon yourself as dead to sin is to account yourself as already crucified, that is, to account your old man as already crucified. It is reckoning the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ to be also the cross of your old man. Thus you consider the death of the Lord Jesus to be likewise the death of your old man. Indeed, you deem the time when the Lord Jesus died nineteen hundred years ago as having been as well the exact time of the death of your old man. For the old man having been crucified with Christ is a fact, an *accomplished* fact. In the eyes of God, the sin factor is already dead; and so, we must reckon ourselves to be dead to this sin factor. In our believing from the heart that God will realize in us what we reckon, and in our deciding with the will that we have died to sin, we shall no longer be bondservants of sin.

This “reckoning” is an attitude as well as an action. An action is taken once, but an attitude is constantly maintained. An action is taken as a timely move against a certain matter; an attitude is maintained as a lasting estimation of that matter. We ought to reckon ourselves as dead to sin. This is to say that we should take a singular action of reckoning ourselves as dead, and then follow through by a permanent attitude of reckoning ourselves as indeed dead to sin. Action commences; attitude continues. We ought once and singularly to reckon before God, believing ourselves to be dead from that day onward. Having taken that action, we then need to affirm it daily with a corresponding attitude—that is to say, with maintaining the belief of our being dead to sin. . . .

Here again, though, God’s children encounter difficulty. They are troubled by their “forgetting” to reckon. But they have used the wrong faculty. For, reckoning is the judgment of the will, not the consideration of the mind. Whether you overcome or not depends on

your attitude of reckoning yourself as dead, not on your memory of reckoning. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of your will in maintaining this death attitude, you may consciously or unconsciously possess this attitude, which remains the same whether remembering or forgetting. Naturally, the mind has its place, but it is not necessary for it to affect the will. The will should instead control the mind and cause the latter to help the former in sustaining this attitude.

Let us stand, therefore, on the ground of the cross and let us—daily, hourly, consciously and unconsciously—reckon our old man as dead. This is the secret of overcoming sin and the devil. We know that sin and the devil are closely related. If sin does not reign in us, the devil will have no ground in us.

If believers will understand and accept this aspect of the truth of the cross, apostasy and defeat shall be greatly diminished. Lasting victory is inseparable from constant standing on the ground of the cross.

Nevertheless, even after we take the action and maintain the attitude of reckoning our old man to be dead, the sinful nature in us does not henceforth become annihilated and disappear. For as long as we live in this mortal body, the sinful nature will co-exist with us. To say that our sinful nature can be annihilated in this life is a great heresy. We can deliver the old man to death by the power of the cross of Calvary and render it powerless and withered as though dead, but we cannot annihilate it. Whenever we are careless and unwatchful, whenever we do not stand on the death ground of Calvary, our old man will renew its activities and resume its office. Satan is always looking for an opportunity to reactivate the old man. And as soon as there is a loophole, the old man will recover its original position.

In view of this, we ought to be watchful lest the old man be

revived. Is not this most difficult? Indeed, it is hard to the flesh. For this reason, a believer must have the power of the Holy Spirit in letting the cross work in him. The cross and the Holy Spirit are inseparable. On the one hand, the cross makes victory over sin possible to the believer; on the other hand, the Holy Spirit substantiates the accomplished fact of the cross in the life of the believer. A Christian who wishes to be delivered from the power of sin must not make provision for the flesh. He must be watchful and count no cost. He must be more disappointed in himself and place more reliance on the Holy Spirit. To man this is impossible, but to God all things are possible. . . .

To die to self is, in experience, deeper and more advanced than to die to sin. The children of God usually pay much attention to overcoming sin. They have suffered much in sin. They know how their regenerated life grieves over sinning. They have tasted the bitterness and sinfulness of sin. Naturally, at times like this, their greatest desire and interest is indeed to overcome sin in order that they will no longer be in bondage to it. So that after they receive the light of their co-death with Christ, they will reckon themselves as dead by the power of the Holy Spirit, thus allowing the Spirit to manifest the accomplished work of the cross upon their lives.

Yet just here lies a great danger; they may be inclined to consider this overcoming experience to be the highest life, as though there is nothing more to be added. Because they pay such a great amount of attention to their sin, they feel contented once sin is overcome. Now we should in fact pay attention to our sins. Believers should not be careless about them. Overcoming sin is the foundation of all righteousness, and it is the turning point of the Christian life. We certainly cannot expect to make any progress in spiritual life if sin still reigns over us. But this does not mean that after overcoming sin we can circumscribe its boundary and thereafter stay put. We ought to understand that this is but the *first* step in the renewal of redeemed

sinners. The future is quite boundless. Let us not conclude that there is no more advancement. For after overcoming sin, the believer is faced with yet another problem: how to overcome “self.”

Believers often misinterpret the real meaning of “self.” Some combine “self” and “sin” together into one. They think “self” is the sin factor which must die. Of course, self and sin are unquestionably associated in many ways; nonetheless, self is not sin. Believers use self-measurement to measure all their outward actions. Whatever they deem to be wrong, they condemn it as sin. Such self, being in their minds the sin factor, ought, they believe, to be crucified. They do not realize, however, that though self is evil, it is not *altogether* evil. What issues from the sin factor is doubtless all sinful, corrupted and defiled. When the sin factor manifests itself through self, naturally there is no good. Even so, what sometimes issues from self is, according to human eyes, fairly good, decent, moral and righteous. If we use our measurement of sin to measure self, we will no doubt get rid of the evil part and retain what to men’s eyes is the good part. This is because believers do not know the *root* of self—that it can issue forth in what men consider to be good as well as in what men consider to be evil. And thus they will dwell within the realm of “self” and fail to enjoy the full and abundant life of God. How subtle is Satan who always tries to hide this fact from believers and keep them in darkness, causing them to be contented with their sin-overcoming experience but not to seek as well the higher experience of overcoming self.

Self life is the natural life. Influenced by Adam’s fall, our natural life is corrupted beyond comprehension. Mankind inherits a sinful nature as the result of the fall of Adam. This sinful nature is closely knitted together with our natural life, which is the self. This self of ours is our “I” which forms our individual personality. In other words, this is our soul. Since the sinful nature is so intimately bound up with self, it is quite difficult to differentiate the latter from the

former in their combined action of sinning. For as soon as the sin factor is stirred, self immediately approves and executes. And thus an outward sin is committed.

We cannot distinguish too clearly between sin and self. To an unbeliever, these two appear to be so united that it is hard to separate them. Originally, self took the initiative to sin; but due to its exceeding great power, sin now influences self, even controlling and suppressing it. It induces self to will to sin. Since self is totally depraved through the fall of Adam, it is in complete agreement with sin. Although at times the conscience may raise its feeble protest, such remonstrance is transient and soon disappears. In the life of the unregenerated person, sin and self cooperate perfectly and are fully mingled. For the unregenerated, sin is “self becoming flesh.” For them, self is the sum total of the sins of the fallen man. It is not only the source of sin, it is also the phenomena of sin—its root, stems and leaves. Self is simply the original life of sin. The sin of the unregenerated is their self. In short, to them, self is sin.

After a person is born again, and in the initial stage of his Christian life, the believer still maintains this posture of not dividing “sin” and “self.” But as he receives more grace from God and as the work of the cross and the power of the Holy Spirit become more evident in his life, he is gradually able to distinguish between these two. During the middle stage of the Christian life the child of God becomes capable of discerning what is sin and what is self. He who has experienced Romans 6.11 often finds victory over sin but not victory over self. From the viewpoint of an advanced Christian, it is much easier to overcome sin than to overcome self. But when a believer possesses the experience of overcoming self completely, he has apostolic life—that is to say, the matured life which the apostles had.

Self life is the life of the soul. Self is our personality and all that it

is composed of. From self proceeds our personal idea, flavor, thought, desire, inclination, like and dislike. Self life is the animating power of the person. Let us recognize that the self is *our very self*, including its love and hate. Its life is our *natural* power for doing good. Self is a life which is resident in the lives of those believers who have *not* died to it and is a life which frequently tries to relive itself in the lives of those believers who *have* died to it. In short, self life is a self-centered life.

After a believer has accepted the sin aspect of the work of the cross, the sin factor—which is to say, the sin nature—is paralyzed as though dead, it thus having been rendered inactive. Yet the self life remains *very* active because it has not heretofore been noticed or not noticed very much. During that period of time, this self life is *like* the life of Adam *before the fall*. It is not spiritual, however, since it has not been transformed by the tree of life; nor is it carnal, for it has not yet sinned. In other words, the self of the believer is capable of committing sin or of being spiritual as it wishes. That is why the life of the believer during that period is analogous to Adam's before the fall. It is not spiritual, because it has not been liberated nor has it received the higher life of God. But, then, it is not carnal either, because it has already accepted the finished work of the cross and has reckoned itself to be dead to sin. It therefore belongs to the *self*—soulical, natural and untransformed. Through carelessness, it could fall downward and be defiled by the sins of the flesh. But by advancing into the deeper work of the cross it could become fully spiritual. If it remains in the self-centered realm, it will most likely fall and become carnal.

This, then, is a dangerous stage in the Christian's life. On the one hand, he should watch lest he fall; on the other hand, he should prepare for practical righteousness. The danger is to do good in his own power. This may not be noticeable; often, in fact, it is rather hidden. Sometimes it takes God many years to convince the believer

how he is self-possessed and does God's will in his own strength!

What the self includes is very broad. Our will, excitement, affection, intelligence—all belong to its realm. The self is the "I" in each one of us. Its life is the power of my living. The self is the soul, which is a significant element or organ in man. Self life is that life of the soul which is the motivating force of that organ. When a person is in the self stage, his self life imparts its power to the will, excitement, affection and intelligence to do good. Its will has the strength to resist temptations from outside; its excitement creates a sense of joy and of the nearness of God's presence; its affection turns on a deep intimacy with the Lord; and its intelligence causes him to conceive many wonderful teachings of the Bible as well as many methods by which to serve God. Yet these all are done by self and not by the spiritual life of God. Indeed, during this period, God frequently grants special grace to the believer. He gives him many wonderful gifts in order to draw him away from self and to follow the Lord. Yet according to experience, what the believer does and what God has planned are totally opposite. The believer will use these gifts for his own purpose instead of wholly turning to God. These gifts become the "lifesaver" of "self." What untold years and works God must spend on him before he denies self and turns wholly to the Lord!

When a believer receives a deeper knowledge of the wretchedness of self, he is then willing to deliver it to death. What is the way to the death of self? It is none other than the cross. Let us read and consider two passages in the Scriptures which reveal the relationship between the cross and self. The first is: "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2.20).

What Galatians 2.20 asserts as having happened is something which has been done once and for ever. The moment we realize that self must die, we should singularly exercise faith to confess, "I have

already been crucified with Christ.” “I” in the original Greek is “ego”—the “I.” Aside from the cross, there is no true way of putting the “ego” of self to death. The phrase “with Christ” is also something to be especially noticed here. For the crucifying of self is not an independent act of the believer. He does not crucify himself alone by his own power. Self is crucified with Christ, in union with Christ and together with Christ. This does not imply that I help Christ in crucifying self, because Christ has *already* done it for me—I now simply recognize and believe it to be true.

Furthermore, Christ is the main player here. The passage reads that “I have been crucified with Christ” instead of it saying “Christ has been crucified with me.” It is not because, I wishing to die, therefore Christ comes to accompany me. No, no. It is when Christ died that He brought all of my “ego” to the cross to there be crucified. For this reason, I am not *going to be* crucified; rather, I only confess this already accomplished fact. The words “have been” show that this is in truth a fact, not a theory. Our being dead to self is not only possible but is attainable, even factual. The apostles of old had experienced this life of self-death. But so we too may have this kind of life.

This is a *co*-crucifixion, not a *single* crucifixion. Apart from the Lord, we can do nothing. To crucify self with our own power is a myth. It can never be done. Unless we have died in the Lord's death, we will never die. Christ alone in His death brought the old creation and all to the cross. It is foolish and futile to set up another way other than Christ or attempt another plan other than His. Hence, there is nothing left for us to do but to confess that what Christ has accomplished is ours and to ask the Holy Spirit to apply the work of the cross in us.

Simply come to God, deny self and surrender all. Let us deliver our self life, with all that it contains, to the death of Christ's cross by

the Spirit of the Lord. We ought to say to God: “Hereafter it is no longer I, no longer my delight, idea, interest and prejudice. I deliver all to the cross. From now on, I will live only for Your will. Lord, it is You, not I” We should thus yield to the Lord and deliver our all to death. This, though, does not mean that henceforth our “self” is annihilated. No, self cannot be annihilated, nor should it be annihilated. Self will remain forever. But if that be so, then, why must self be crucified?

Here we need to understand an essential point: the problem before us is one concerning spiritual *life*. Such a problem lays stress on spiritual experience rather than on literary consistency. Many things might appear contradictory—even beyond reconciliation—in letter; yet, in spiritual life they are quite complementary void of any conflict. The very case before us falls into this category. According to letter, self seems to have died. How, then, is it not annihilated? Do realize that the word “dead” employed here is descriptive of a kind of experimental process. To say the death of self within this context of spiritual life does not suggest that hereafter there is no more self. It says instead that henceforth self will obey God, self will no longer be allowed to sit on the throne—it will be crucified, and all its selfish actions will cease. The self life will no longer be permitted to utilize self. For the self life and its living is now dead. There remains no more self life and its living. What is left is merely its skeleton.

We know the “self” has within it the faculties of volition, emotion and intellect. To believe that our “self” was crucified with Christ does not imply that all these faculties are cancelled out or annihilated. The soulful faculties of a person are never destroyed! To die with Christ simply denotes that self is no longer allowed to rule over its will, thought and feeling but that the Spirit of the Lord is to exercise control over all these faculties of the soul and cause them to obey the life of God within. Unless the self dies, it will never obey the Holy Spirit. The moment our self comes down from the cross, the self

returns to its old position. A believer himself has neither the power nor the method to control his self. But Galatians 2.20 gives us light on this point: “I [the self] have been crucified with Christ . . . and . . . I now live in the flesh.” Paul clearly states in the first clause that he has been crucified with Christ; nevertheless, in the latter clause, does he not also say that his self yet lives? Hence, the crucifying of self does not indicate the *annihilation* of the self; it simply denotes the *cessation of the activity* of the self and the allowing of the Lord to be Lord.

What we have just now discussed is something that is done once and forever. Yet is it sufficient for us merely to believe that our self was crucified with Christ? Is it in truth a once-and-for-all matter? These questions provide an introduction for us to consider the second passage of Scripture we wish to look at closely: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9.23).

This verse shows us three things we should do; yet actually, they are not three separate things but a single three-fold matter. The *first* step is to *deny self*. To deny means to forsake, to not care, to not be concerned about, to not acknowledge any demand. Denying self means a not letting self rule. This step is a singular action which needs to be taken by specifically believing that “I have been crucified with Christ.” In order to protect this step, we must taken another and *second* step, and that is: “take up his cross *daily*.” This shows that once we have willed to deliver self to the cross and not let it rule, we then must daily deny self. So that to “deny self” is a “daily” matter—never to be interrupted. To “deny self” cannot only be a once-and-for-all action. Paul declares, “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15.31). The Lord will give us a cross that we might bear it daily, because self is intensely alert; and Satan, who utilizes self, is untiring. Self is seeking for a chance to be re-enthroned. It will not lightly pass over any conceivable opportunity. Consequently, our taking up the

cross daily is most essential.

Here lies the watchfulness required of believers. We ought to daily, nay, hourly, take up the cross that the Lord has given to us. Confess incessantly that the cross of Christ is our cross. Make no provision for self, nor let it have any position. And finally, the *third* step is to “follow me [the Lord], which is to positively let the Lord be Lord, *fully* obeying the will of God and giving no opportunity nor possibility for self to renew its effort. All three of these steps or stages are centered upon the cross of Christ—which is to say that all three have it as their source. The first step—to deny self—is negative; the second step—to take up the cross—is negatively positive; and the third step—to follow the Lord—is totally positive.

BTC 3-4, 6-10, 12-22

Of God Are We in Christ

In order to make Christ our life, where does God commence His work? He does not first put the life of Christ in us, instead He first puts us in Christ. Before He can put Christ in us He needs to put us in Christ. The first thing He will do is to establish our relationship with Christ. Unless we have a relationship with the Lord we are in no position to have Him in us as our life. We must first be in Christ, and then we can have Him in us. This is the order by which God works.

Why does God want to place us in Christ? Because we are all sinners, and possessors of the life of Adam. Before God is able to give us a new life, He has to deal with us sinners, who are the progeny of Adam’s life. And this dealing He cannot apply directly upon us, for were He to do this we would all die and cease to live. Were He to deal directly with our sins, we would have no alternative to eternal death.

God has to deal with our Adamic life as well as with our sins on the one hand, and yet not bring us to death on the other hand. How does He solve this dilemma? He exercises His power to put us in Christ, so that when He deals with Christ He at the same time deals with us. We are all included in Christ; consequently, whatever God has done to Christ is also done to us. The effect of His dealing with Christ is the same as though we ourselves had been dealt with. Such is the basic teaching of the Bible concerning the Lord Jesus our Saviour. . . .

Were we not in Christ, we would not be able to be crucified with Him. No wonder someone has observed: If not *in* the Lord, then not *with* the Lord. How spiritual and scriptural is this word. Let us remember that if we wish to be with Christ, we have to be in Him. How can we be with the Lord if we are not first in the Lord? This concerns our basic faith about which we must be very clear.

“Of God are ye in Christ Jesus”—this is something entirely done by God. Because we do not know this fact, the church needs to preach the gospel to make it known. The church is to proclaim this heaven- and earth-shaking fact to all men, telling them that God has already included mankind in Christ—so that when the Lord Jesus was crucified, God in judging Him has also judged all who are in Him. Judgment is now past. And this is the gospel. The gospel is what God has done for us in Christ. The gospel is: that God has included us in Christ so that when He deals with Him He deals also with us. In Christ we have been dealt with, and God has completely solved our problem of man as well as our problem of sin. In short, we have died in Christ. Wherefore Romans 6.11 declares: “Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.”

We have died in Christ Jesus. Upon hearing this fact what should we do? We are human beings, we have our will. If we believe in this

fact, we should express ourselves in some concrete way. Now this is why we are baptized after we believe in the Lord and are saved. What is the meaning of baptism? It is to be baptized into Christ Jesus, even baptized into His death (Rom. 6.3,4). In other words, since God has put us in Christ we should so act as to show people how we are in Him. When in baptism we are submerged in the water, do we get buried in the water but rise no more? No. We rise up very quickly. So that in coming out of the water we express our being raised with Christ from the dead. Whoever comes up out of the water is a resurrected person. Therefore, when we are baptized we act out what God has accomplished in Christ for us. It is spiritual performance.

At the moment Christ is on the cross God puts us in Him and concludes this man of Adam. He must deal with this Adam; the account has to be settled. Just as we were born originally in Adam, so is it only through death that we are delivered from Adam. By being baptized into the death of Christ we are henceforth finished and are liberated from Adam. This is the first part of God's work. With regard to the second part—that is, Christ in us—we must go once more to 1 Corinthians 1.30, which in its latter segment states that Christ “was made unto us wisdom from God.”

Christ Is Made unto Us Wisdom from God

Having dwelt on the fact of our being in Christ, we will now focus on the matter of Christ in us. How does it come about that Christ is in us? Christ *in us* hinges on resurrection. Because the Lord Jesus has been resurrected and dwells in the Holy Spirit—for He is not only a man but also a man in the Spirit—therefore, He is in us. The Lord Jesus has said, “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed” (John 6.53-56). But only as a man in the Spirit may He be received into us. Had He remained as He formerly was on earth, He could not be taken in by us.

Let us realize that we eat the *fruit* of the tree of life, not the tree of life. A tree we can neither feed on nor take in. When the Lord Jesus was a man on earth He could be likened to the tree of life. Those who lived on earth at that time had no way to receive Him into themselves, just as today we cannot receive anyone into ourselves. If Jesus had not become the risen Lord but had simply continued on earth as before, He would forever be He, and we would forever be we, since there is absolutely no way to take Him in. Jesus of Nazareth, however holy and lovely He is, cannot be received into ourselves because He is a man. But today He not only is a man, He also has been raised from the dead and is now in the Spirit. Thus has He become the Lord who is receivable by us. . . .

Now God gives Christ to us that He may be our life as well as our substitute on the cross. Previously we reacted to all outside demands with our own life. If our own life was adequate, we did well; if inadequate, we did not do so well; and if totally incompetent, we simply failed. We always used our own life to react to and to manage all affairs. But today God has given Christ to us, and He wants Him to be our life. Before we received the Lord Jesus, we lived by ourselves; but after we receive Him, God purposes to let Him live for us. Since the Lord Jesus Christ dwells in us to be our life, we need no more to depend on our former life to live. Not that the Lord Jesus gives us so many commandments, shows us so many ideas, and tells us so many doctrines for us to comply with; but that He himself is in us as our life to do everything for us. Hereafter we should live by the life of the Lord Jesus. Formerly we reacted to all outside demands with our own life, hereafter we ought to let the life of Christ take over. . . .

Christ in us as our life reacts on our behalf against all outside demands. Life itself is one, but it produces all kinds of reaction to meet all sorts of outside requirements. When there is pride, Christ will be my humility if He is released at that hour. When there is

impatience, Christ will be my patience in His direct manifestation. When there is jealousy, Christ will be my love in His immediate expression. From this one Life comes forth many virtues. Due to a variety of circumstantial demands the manifestations of this Life are also various. Daily do we meet all kinds of situations; in all of them Christ manifests himself as many virtues. Hence the virtues of a Christian are not his works but are the reflections or manifestations of Christ. This we call Christ our sanctification. . . .

Christ is made our redemption *in us* as well as *before God*. His being made our redemption in us is especially related to our body. In being our redemption in us He becomes the life of our body as He delivers us from the law of sin which is in our members (Rom. 7.23, 8.2). So says Romans 8.11: "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwelleth in you." It does not say He shall resurrect us after we die; it says instead that He will give life to this our body of death today.

Look also at 2 Corinthians 4.10,11 which reads as follows: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh." What arrests our attention here is that though verse 11 in relation to verse 10 seems to be redundant, in actuality it is not repetitious. For verse 10 speaks of the life of Jesus being manifested *in our body*, while verse 11 speaks of the life of Jesus being manifested *in our mortal flesh*. Many believers may have the life of Jesus manifested in them, but they do not go deeper to experience the life of Jesus manifested in their mortal flesh. The difference between these two is immense.

Many believers while in sickness may be truly submissive and patient. They are neither anxious nor murmuring. They sense the

presence of the Lord, and they express in their face, voice and manners the virtues of the Lord Jesus. They really manifest the life of Jesus in their body by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, they do not know that the Lord Jesus is able to heal their sickness, that His life is also for their bodies of humiliation. They have received the grace to endure pains, but they have not obtained the healing of the Lord. They experience verse 10, yet they do not experience verse 11.

We need to know how Christ is made our redemption in relation to our body. To say that this our body of death is quickened into life does not imply that hereafter the nature of this body is changed into immortality. As a matter of fact, the nature of this body remains unchanged, though a new life in us is now supplying strength to this body. Formerly we relied on our natural life as the source of our body strength, but presently we depend on the life of Christ for its supply. We obtain the resurrection life of Christ to maintain our body, thus strengthened to do God's will.

Christ our redemption is not a small matter. Being our redemption, Christ not only becomes today the life of our body but also gives us a great hope, even "the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8.21-23; 1 Con 15.50-54; Phil. 3.21). One day, God will reveal how He has redeemed the creation and how we are His. At that day our body will be fully redeemed. It will put off corruptibility and put on incorruptibility. It will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and enter into the liberty of glory. Then, the dead will be raised, and we shall all be changed. This body of our humiliation will be transformed and be conformed to the body of Christ's glory. At that time we shall fully realize how Christ is our redemption! Who has the assurance of having a part in the first resurrection? Who has the certainty that one day his body will be changed? We do believe, and therefore we have the confidence. It is all because Christ is our redemption.

—GL 45-6, 49-51, 53-4, 67, 70, 73

The Secret of Christian Life

Many people greatly misunderstand Colossians 3.4, Philippians 1.21, and Galatians 2.20, especially the latter two. In Philippians 1, Paul tells us that, “For to me to live is Christ.” To him, this is a fact. But among God’s children today, there is a big misunderstanding. They think, “For to me to live is Christ”, is a goal to reach. They must try to so live that they may arrive at the goal. It is a standard to reach; it is their expectation. Let us remember, however, that Paul is not telling us here that his goal is “to me to live is Christ.” He is not saying that he must go through many years, trials, and dealings of God before he can reach the goal. What he says is that the reason why he lives is Christ. Without Christ, he cannot live at all. This describes his present condition, not his goal. This is the secret of his life, not his hope. His life is Christ; he lives because Christ lives in him.

Galatians 2.20 is another familiar verse among Christians. The misunderstanding many have with this verse is even graver than with Philippians 1. Again, they take this verse as their goal, as their standard. How they pray and wait and long to arrive at a point where “it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.”

But is Galatians 2.20 a hope? Is it a goal? Is it a standard to arrive at? Many make it so. They hope that one day they will arrive at the place where they no longer live, but Christ lives in them. This is their goal. What they fail to see is that this is God’s *way* of victory, not a goal or a standard. It does not say what I should do that I may live; neither does it say what I can do to make me live. It simply says that Christ lives in me.

Galatians 2.20 is not a standard or a goal. It is not something

which is set high above man for him to exert his utmost strength to reach. Rather, it is the secret of life.

1. Victory Through A Substitutionary Life

What is the secret of life? It means that the way of victory is not a goal but a process. Do not confuse the process with the goal. This is a marvelous grace God has given us. It is a way by which the defeated may overcome, the unclean may be dean, the common may become holy, the earthly may be heavenly, and the carnal may become spiritual. It is a way, not a goal. The way lies via a substitutionary life. As Christ is our substitute in death, so is He our substitute in life.

At the beginning of our Christian life, we saw how the Lord Jesus bore our sins on the cross so that by His death we were delivered from death, our sins were forgiven, and we were condemned no more. Today Paul tells me that because Christ lives in me, I am delivered from living. The meaning here is simple: since He lives in me, I no longer need to live. As He died on the cross for me, so now He lives in me in my place. This is the secret of victory. This is Paul's secret. He does not say, "I hope I will not need to live," or, "I hope I can let Him live." He just says, "No longer live I, for I have let Him live. Now it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

Let us pray much that God will enlighten us to see that man has no need to live for himself because Christ can live in him. The day that you heard you did not need to die, you felt this was a great gospel. Now, in another day, you are hearing that you do not need to live. This is also a great gospel. . . .

2. Not I, But Christ

As it is good news that we need not die, so it is good news that we need not live. For a person to strive to live as a Christian is really an

exhausting, impossible task. To ask an impatient, ill-tempered, proud person to live humbly will soon wear him out, he will be worn out by trying to be humble. No wonder the man in Romans 7 was tired! “For to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not.” To daily will to do good, yet daily be unable to do it—how very tiring this is. Then one day the gospel is preached to him, telling him that the Lord does not expect him to do good. Oh, this is a great gospel. The Lord does not require you to do good, neither does He want you to will to do good. He wants to come and live in you. The issue is not whether there is any good, but who does the good.

It is painful for you to try to live before God, for you can never satisfy His demands. You have to confess: “Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter” (Matt. 25.24). You are totally unable to answer God’s requirement. . . .

Therefore, God’s way and His secret for me is not in asking me to imitate the Lord Jesus, nor parceling out power to me in response to my begging that I may be like Christ. God’s way for me is what Paul expresses, “No longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.” Do you notice the difference? It is neither a life of imitating Christ nor a life of having power given; rather, it is a substitutionary life. It is no longer you, for God will not allow you to live before Him. It is Christ who lives in you and stands before the presence of God. So, it is not my imitating Christ, not my receiving the power of Christ, but letting Christ live in me. . . .

Crucified with Christ

At this point, you will most likely ask, how can I get out of the way so Christ can live? This is indeed a big problem. How can it be, “no longer I”? The answer is found in the first part of Galatians 2.20: “I have been crucified with Christ.” Unless I am crucified, I cannot

be removed. Unless I am crucified, it will still be I. It can be no longer I only if I am crucified with Christ. . . .

Therefore there are these two sides in our experiencing co-crucifixion. On the one side, Christ has died, so I have been crucified. This is the work of God. On the other side, I must acknowledge this fact and say “Amen” to it. I should not try to remold myself all the time. If I am still making resolutions, trying to be patient and humble, my reaction will counteract the work of Christ and render it ineffective. What I should do is bow my head and say, “You have said I must be crucified; I also say I must be crucified. You have said I am useless; I too say I am useless. You have said I have no patience, so hereafter I will not try to be patient. You have said I cannot be humble; hereafter I will not seek by myself to be humble.” Remember, it is the will to be humble that spoils the life. It is the will to be patient that blocks the victory. I am a person who has no patience, so why should I will to be patient? I am a person who has no humility; why should I will to be humble? I deserve nothing but death on the cross.

The Victorious Life

Now I declare that I am a crucified person. If I am to live today, it is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me. I am undone, but Christ has come. This is the way of victory. This is what Paul has shown us. This is how he lives the Christian life. What is the Christian life? Only this—that it is no longer I who live but I let Christ live for me.

I have been wrong all these years: sinful, weak, undone, proud, ill-tempered. But now I come into the presence of the Lord, saying, “Lord, I am undone. Starting from today I wash my hands of my own efforts. Please take over.” This is what is meant by “no longer I that live but Christ liveth in me.” “I have lived long enough; I am sick of

living; now, Lord, will you please try?” Let me tell you, it is as simple as that. The victorious life is none other than this: you need not live. You do not need to exhaust yourself in living; you need only look up and say, “Hereafter I will manage no more; You live and manifest Yourself!” So shall it be done. . . .

I have said this for many years, and I will say it again: the basic aim of temptation is not so much to get us to sin as to get our old man to act. Temptation lies in tempting our old man to resist. If the old man can rise up to resist temptation, he can also rise up to commit sin. So whenever temptation comes, we must refuse to move. “Lord, this is Your business, not mine. Lord, I look to You, for You live for me.” It is thus you learn to trust the Lord to live in you.

You need to believe daily; you should tell the Lord specifically, “Lord, I am useless. I accept Your cross. Lord, keep me so that I make no move. Under every circumstance, Lord, You take the initiative. Lord, You are the Lord and so You live.” Let me tell you, if you thus look to the Lord and trust Him daily, you will also be able to daily testify that it is indeed no longer you who lives but Christ who lives in you.

—NI 109-11, 113-5, 119-22

The Life Ordained for Christians

From the Holy Scriptures we may see that the life as ordained by God for Christians is one full of joy and rest, one that is uninterrupted communion with God, and is in perfect harmony with His will. It is a life that does not thirst and hunger after the world, that walks outside of sins, and that transcends all things. Indeed, it is a holy, powerful and victorious life, and one that constitutes knowing God’s will and having continuous fellowship with Him.

The life which God has ordained for Christians is a life that is hid with Christ in God. Nothing can touch, affect or shake this life. As Christ is unshakable, so we are unshakable. As Christ transcends all things, we also transcend all things. As Christ is before God, so we too are before Him. Let us never entertain the thought that we should be weak and defeated. There is no such thing as weakness and defeat; for “Christ is our life” as declared in Colossians 3.4. He transcends all; He cannot be touched by anything. Hallelujah! This is the life of Christ!

The life ordained for Christians is full of rest, full of joy, full of power, and full of the will of God. But let us inquire of ourselves as to what sort of life we are living today. If our life is not what God has ordained it to be, then we need to know victory. . . .

The life which the Lord has ordained for us is one of un-shadowed communion with Him, of doing the will of God, and of total detachment from all contrary things. Every Christian is absolutely able to overcome sins of the mind, body, flesh and spirit, our contrary disposition, unbelief, and even the love of sin. Thank and praise God, this is not an unobtainable, ideal life under consideration here. This is a totally practical way of living which all of us may have in experience. . . .

Although you may live a defeated life, you nonetheless know that this is not the life ordained by God. If sin still has the rule over you, you should clearly understand that this is not what God has ordained. For His word plainly says, “sin shall not have dominion over you.”

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8.1). In my preaching I have explained the word “condemnation” many times. Some twenty years ago, from an old manuscript excavated from the ground, it was explained that this word in the original Greek language had two usages: one, civil; the other, legal (and thus in this latter sense, the English word

“condemnation” is used). According to civil usage, it could be translated as “without strength.” Hence we may legitimately retranslate this verse as follows: “There is therefore now no being without strength to them that are in Christ Jesus.” How marvelous this is! Let me ask you again, whose verse is this? Only Wesley’s? or Martin Luther’s? or only Hudson Taylor’s? What does the Scripture say here? It says that those who are in Christ Jesus are no longer without strength. Who are these people? They are all Christians—since every Christian is in Christ, and no one in Christ is without strength.

“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death” (v.2). I will repeat a hundred times that it is not those special saints who are freed from the law of sin and of death. It is instead true that *every* Christian is set free from the law of sin and of death. What is meant by being “without strength”? It is what is spoken of in Romans 7: “to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise” (vv.18b-19). In other words, the total thrust of Romans 7 indicates that I am without strength, I cannot do it. The history of many a Christian is marked by a cycle of resolutions and broken promises. Yet we thank and praise God that His word unmistakably declares that no Christian is now without strength.

What is law? It is something which always repeats itself. A law acts the same way and produces the same result at any place and under any circumstance. It is a constant phenomenon, reveals a continuous habit, and always ends with the same effect. There is, for instance, the force of gravity at the center of the earth. Whenever you throw an object, that object is always attracted by this gravitational force and falls downward. This force of gravity is thus a universal law.

For some, then, the losing of one's temper becomes a law. He may endure temptation once or twice, but on the third occasion of being provoked he begins to be agitated, and by the fourth time he completely loses his temper. It does not matter which person or thing he encounters. At first he *can* endure a provocation, but his temper will always eventually explode later. So that with each occasion he is tempted to lose his temper, and without exception it ends up with the same result.

Pride oftentimes acts the same way. You may remain untouched at the first word with which you are praised, but you will feel your face begin to glow with pride upon hearing the second word of praise. Whatever passes through the same procedure and produces the same result constitutes a law. In short, we sin till sinning becomes a law.

It needs to be said again that it is not those special Christians who are made free from the law of sin. Rather, *every* Christian hereafter is not to be without strength; *every* Christian is now set free from the law of sin. The Scripture passages quoted above are facts, not commands. They therefore ought to be the experience of all believers. Yet how sad that our experience does not measure up to God's word. . . .

Victory is to be the Christian's *normal* experience; defeat is abnormal. For according to God's will, every Christian should more than conquer in all kinds of environment. Whether it be tribulation or anguish or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword, we shall not only conquer, but *more than* conquer! Any increase in difficulty will make no difference. The world may look upon Christians as mad. So what if we *are* deemed mad! Through the love of Christ, we will not mind these things, because we more than conquer them. And such is to be the Christian's experience as ordained by God. But what is *our* experience? Sad to say, we have not lived rightly. For with but a little tribulation which comes our

way we scream and complain how we have endured and suffered. Yet if we live rightly, we shall more than conquer in all these things.

“Thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savor of his knowledge in every place” (2 Cor. 2.14). The Christian life is not one that sometimes conquers and is sometimes defeated; is not one that is defeated in the morning and is conquering in the afternoon. It is *always* in triumph. According to the Biblical standard, it is to be deemed *strange* if you do *not* overcome and to be reckoned as *common* if you *do* overcome!

“The Strength of Israel [margin, “the Victory of Israel”] will not lie nor repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent” (1 Sam. 15.29).

The first mention of victory in the whole Bible is found in 1 Samuel 15.29. There it says that Victory will not lie nor repent. The Victory of Israel is neither an experience nor an event; it is a Person. I am sure we all know who that Person is. It is Christ! Hence let me tell you today that victory does not reside in ourselves, nor is it our own experience. Victory is not you as the problem; victory is the person of Christ living for you! And thus the victory we obtain will neither lie nor repent. Praise God, victory is a living Person!

According to the word of God, the nature of victorious life is many-sided. But we shall only describe five of its many characteristics.

The Meaning of This Life—Not a Changed Life, but an Exchanged One

First of all, please notice that victory is an exchanged life, not a changed life. Victory is not that I have changed, but rather that I have

been *exchanged*. One verse which is most familiar to us is Galatians 2.20: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God." What is meant by this verse? It has only one meaning: the life spoken of is an exchanged life. Basically, it is no longer I, for it has absolutely nothing to do with me. It is not that the bad I has become the good I, or the unclean I has changed to be the clean I. It is simply "not I." Today people make a serious mistake in thinking that victory is progressive and defeat is retrogressive—that if a person is able to control his temper or maintain an intimate fellowship with God, then he is victorious. Not so. Let us ever keep in mind that victory has basically no relation to one's own self. . .

The Principle of This Life—a Gift, Not a Reward

There is one thing we must understand in all this, which is, that victory is a gift and not a reward. What is a gift? It is something which is freely given to you. That which you earn through work is a reward. A gift, on the other hand, asks for no effort on your part. It is that which is given gratuitously with no requirement placed upon the receiver, whereas a reward demands that someone work for it. The life that wins which we talk about does not require any effort of yours: "thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15.57). Victory is something which God has prepared to give to us. Our victory is obtained freely, not attained through self-effort.

Too often we believers have a serious misconception—imagining that while salvation comes to us freely, victory depends on ourselves. We know we cannot add any merit or work of ours to obtain salvation. We must simply come to the cross and accept the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. This is the gospel! We realize we cannot be saved by works, yet we reason that for sanctification we must do

good works after we are saved. This is to say that though you cannot be saved by works, you need to depend on works for victory.

Let me tell you that just as you are not *saved* by works, so you do not *overcome* by works. God has declared that you are unable to do good. Christ has died for you on the cross, and He is now living for you within. That which is of the flesh is flesh, and God rejects all that came from it. Nevertheless, we usually surmise that while salvation is dependent upon the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross, we should think of doing good, should do good, and expect to do good for victory in our lives. Let us realize, though, that we can do *no* good. Victory is freely given us by God! . . .

The Way to This Life—Obtained, Not Attained

The life that wins is to be *obtained*, never to be *attained*. Obtained simply means gaining possession of a thing. Attained, on the other hand, implies you have a long way to go and that you will proceed slowly without the assurance of arriving at the goal someday. Yet the victory of a Christian is not attained through a slow process. Once I was climbing Mount Kuling. Brother Sing-Liang Yu invited me to go with him. As we gradually climbed, I felt increasingly tired. After we had covered some distance, I asked brother Yu how much farther we had to go. He replied that it was not very far to the top. So we continued to tread on slowly. Still we had not arrived. Whenever I asked brother Yu, I always got the answer that we were almost there. Finally we did arrive. But suppose I were to go up the mountain by being carried in a sedan chair; in that case I would have *obtained* Kuling, not *attained* it. All things pertaining to the Holy Spirit are obtained. So that all which is related to victory must be received.

“If, by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one; much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ”

(Rom. 5.17). Here God declares that victory is a gift for you to accept. Victory is not something for you to slowly attain. It is a gift given you; it demands no work of yours. Suppose I give my Bible to you. Do you need to exert effort to get it? Just stretch out your arm and you have it in a second. It being a gift to you, you need not go home and fast for it, neither must you kneel towards Jerusalem three times a day, nor are you obligated to resolve that you will not lose your temper hereafter. No, all you need to do is to receive it. So how many procedures must you go through to receive this Bible? There is no procedure but to take it with your hand. The same is it with victory; it is a gift that you obtain, not attain. . . .

What is the difference between “obtain” and “attain”? An important element in the difference is time. One is something instantaneous while the other is something gradual. . . .

Possessing This Life Is a Miracle

“Work out your own salvation . . . ; for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2.12b-13). Thus has Paul reminded us. The reason why we can “work out” according to Gods “good pleasure” is simply because it is He who enables us to so work out. It is God who moves within us to be holy. It is not because we have exercised great strength, but entirely because God works all in us. For this holy and perfect life is not the result of our effort but the accomplished work of the Lord himself.

I readily acknowledge that unless there is a miracle, many people on earth will never be able to get rid of their corruption. Some people do not know their failures; they do not see their inability. Other people realize that they have no control over their pride or disposition or temper. Unless there is a miracle, none will come into victory. For who among us can overcome sin? The human way is to suppress sin. But when God does the work, He miraculously removes

our old man and gives us a pure heart. Were we to know the victory of God, how happy we would be! . . .

The Consequence—an Expressed Life, Not a Suppressed One

The consequence of having this life that wins is seen in an expressed, not a suppressed, life. *Our* so-called victories are always done through suppression. One old lady held in her temper whenever she met unpleasant things. Outwardly she wore a smiling face, but inwardly she was controlling her feelings with great difficulty. After living such a suppressed life for some time, she found the pressure within her had so built up that she began to spit blood. And why? Simply because the problem had remained with her. Yet true victory in the Christian's walk is an *expressed* life, not a suppressed one. An expressed life signifies a showing forth that which has already been obtained. It is what Philippians 2.12 intimates to us, when it declares for us to "work *out* [our] own salvation." Previously we tried hard to cover ourselves; now we dare to express the victory of Christ in us. Formerly, the more suppressed the better; today, the more expressed the better. Since Christ lives in me, I want to express Him before the world. . . .

"I have been crucified with Christ" means that God was disappointed in me and also that I, like Paul, have despaired of myself too. God had seen me through and through. He knew that I had neither usefulness nor hope. So I too have reckoned myself as hopeless and confessed that I could never please God. There is nothing God can do but to put me to death. All who are in the flesh have absolutely no hope and are therefore worthy of death. . . .

The genius of victory lies in its having no need to overcome gradually. By faith we know Christ is our victory. For victory *is* Christ, and faith brings forth all that is Christ's in us. The grace of God has already given the Lord Jesus to us; today by faith we accept

all that God has given us so that the life, power, liberty and holiness of Christ may be manifested in our body.

This mystery of union is God's work by which the unsearchable riches of Christ become ours. Do we believe this? All that is Christ's is ours. Do we believe that God has given us His holiness, perfection, life, power and riches? God has joined us to Christ causing Him to be our head, our trunk and our food. Do we believe that Christ is now our righteousness and sanctification and redemption? Do we believe He is presently living out His life in us? God has indeed invited us, nay, He has *commanded* us to believe. Our union with Christ is patterned after the union of Christ with God; therefore, His patience, gentleness, purity and goodness are all ours. Just as in initial salvation we previously believed Him to be our righteousness, so today let us likewise believe Him to be our holiness. Yet how many fail in this respect. They know God's way of victory, but they do not have the faith. They know their inability, but they do not know Christ's ability. They see the total corruption of their flesh, but they do not see the riches of Christ as God's gift to them.

How do we receive this gift? By doing nothing; let us simply accept it. As we believe God's word, we receive His gift. This is the gospel. We receive by faith, and the Holy Spirit takes our faith to be the starting point for God's miracle to be done in us. People who have not experienced the mighty power of God may not take this seriously. But to the experienced, it is a precious reality. As we believe that all which is in the Lord is ours, the Holy Spirit will cause it to be truly ours. What a gospel this is! Whatever belongs to Christ becomes ours through faith! By faith this perfect life of Christ will daily live out itself in our body of death. With faith, it is not only "no longer I that live," but also "Christ liveth in me." Truly, beyond any doubt, Christ lives in us. Yet it is all because of faith. . . .

Some people find it most difficult to let go. Whenever temptation

comes, there is always a battle. Whenever temper arises, there is usually a fight. If the resolution on the first occasion fails, a stronger resolution will be made the next time. The more resolves, the more defeats. The more promises, the more failures. No matter how strong the next resolution is, the situation is as Romans 7 describes it: "To will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not. For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise" (vv. 18b-19). No promise is right because your hand has not let go. You yourself are still taking care of your affairs; therefore you cannot say with conviction, "I have been crucified with Christ"; neither can you say, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." Death means letting go, putting hands off, no more care, and no longer control. Only when it becomes impossible to you does it begin to be possible with God. So that the first important step is for you to take your hands off. . . .

What God has spoken is most trustworthy. We do not believe or trust in our experiences or feelings, but we do believe in the word of God. God says that the Lord Jesus not only died on the cross to be our righteousness but He now lives in us to be our sanctification. Therefore, we may not only say Christ is our righteousness but also say Christ is our sanctification. It is not that we *feel* that Christ is our life and sanctification, but that we believe He *is* our life and sanctification. God says Christ is our life, so we too say Christ is our life. God declares that Christ is our sanctification, therefore we also declare that Christ is our sanctification. God asserts that Christ is our victory, and hence we too assert that Christ is our victory. God says it, so we believe it.

—LW 1-2, 11, 21-4, 29-30, 33-4, 37-8, 40-3, 51-2, 58-9, 68, 93

Please remember that the principle of right and wrong, good and evil, is not Christianity. It speaks, rather, about life . . . Once a person has accepted the Lord Jesus and received a new life, a marvelous

thing happens to him, which is, that a principle of life is added to him. Yet through ignorance, he may set aside this *life* principle and follow the right and wrong principle instead.

What does following the principle of right and wrong mean? Whenever anything confronts you, you ask the question whether or not it is right and good or wrong and evil. Many people adopt this mode of living. You are already a Christian, and yet you decide after careful consideration that because this or that is good and right, you can do it. Because you choose to do only the good and right, you deem yourself a proper Christian.

But the word of God declares: “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2.17). At the most, humanity can only distinguish between good and evil. Ethical man chooses the good and rejects the evil. This, however, is not Christianity. The latter is not a judgment of outward good or evil according to a fixed set of criteria: that was true of the *Old* Covenant: that was the law: that, in fact, is still the religion of the world today. It is indeed morality and ethics, but it is not true Christianity.

What is Christianity? Christianity is life. It does not ask whether a thing is right or wrong, it asks instead what your inner life says: it is a matter of how the new life which God has given us addresses the situation. How very strange that what most people see and consider is only the outward criterion of good and evil. Yet that which God has given us is not an external standard. Christianity is not a new religion possessing a new Mount Sinai or a new set of the Ten Commandments. It is not a religion that puts forward a few commandments of do's and don'ts. It does not raise the question of right and wrong or good and evil. It is instead the life within you speaking to the situation. If you sense a rightness inside you about a given situation or proposed course of action and there are life, power

and anointing within, then you know you can proceed in life. Judging by human eyes, there are many things seemingly right and good; yet strangely, the life within you does not respond but rather shivers and is withered.

The word of God tells us that our Christian living is governed by inner life, not by outward considerations of good and evil. For the people of the world, though, the peak of their living principle is but that of good and evil. What difference will there be if we Christians should live according to that same principle? Just here, then, is where we are different from the people of the world: we are not governed by outside criterion or by outward law: we do not talk about morality or ethical concepts: we do not judge good and evil according to man's criticism or viewpoint: we hold instead to but one principle today, which is the principle of the inner life. If the life within me is powerful and living, I will do or say this or that. But if that life in me be cold or shriveled up, I cannot do or say it. My principle of living is governed by the inward and not the outward. This principle alone is true, all the rest are false. . . . Only when the Spirit of God moves within a person can he tell what is really right. When there is life, a thing is right; when there is no life, it is wrong. So that right or wrong is not judged by any outside criterion but by the inner life.

With this question resolved, immediately you see that to be a Christian you not only cannot do evil, you cannot even do good: you can only do what is of life. Here, then, are evil, good, and life. Yet to be a Christian does not mean that he is to do good things and things of life. No, it means that a Christian can do neither evil nor *good* things. For God has said: "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Good and evil are linked together here. They together constitute one way to live, and the inner life constitutes another totally different way. A Christian, therefore, must reject good as well as evil. For there is a standard even higher than good, and it

is called the criterion of life. . . .

One of the greatest mistakes among many of God's children is that their right or wrong is determined by what they see, by their own background or by their many years of past experience. Here, they do not know the true way of arriving at right or wrong. Please remember that the Christian life is lived according to the inner life. What many do before God is to consider the outside factors. Their decisions or judgments, therefore, are all according to the outward. Life, however, is altogether different. It is known by those with life. . . .

On the Mount of Transfiguration are (1) Moses who represents the outward moral standard, and (2) Elijah who represents the outward human standard. One is of the law, the other is of the prophets. Both the standard of the law and that of the prophets are present on the Mount. During the Old Testament time, the loudest voices came from the law and the prophets. But now on the Mount God seals both their mouths. There God tells Peter that the standard for Christian living today is to be found in Christ, in Him who dwells within us. We are now only to hear Him! (see Matt. 17.1-8) Accordingly, the issue is no longer a matter of right or wrong; it is now a matter of whether *the life* within approves or disapproves. There may be many things you say you can do, but the inner life will not let you; and as a consequence, you cannot and will not do them. . . .

What is the Sermon on the Mount? What are the instructions of Matthew 5-7? Let me say here that these three chapters inform us that it is not enough just to be right. Jesus' teaching here on the Mount is that we who are His followers must do till the life which God has given us is satisfied. Why should a Christian turn the other cheek after being smitten on the first cheek? Is it not good enough if he keeps silent and does not revile after initially being smitten? Would that not be an indication of great discipline? Yet Jesus

intimates by His teaching that the inner life regards this passivity as insufficient. When a follower of Christ turns the other cheek, it shows that he has neither anger nor hate inside and that he is able to bear further ill-treatment. Life is humble. Life is able to turn the other cheek. This is the way of life.

Many confess that Matthew 5-7 is hard and impossible. I would acknowledge that none of us can follow these teachings, for they ask of us our very natural life. The crux of the matter is this: that in you and me there is another life and that that life will not be satisfied unless we do what the Lord has taught. No matter how seriously your brother or sister sins against you, you have no peace if you cannot kneel down and pray for him or her. However good it is to endure patiently, you find no rest within if you do not keep the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

Hence these teachings on the Mount do no less than show us how to satisfy God's life in us in all that we do. Then there will be rest and joy. The whole matter of our walk revolves around whether we follow life or follow right and wrong. If we truly know God's word, we quickly discern the fact that all believers who judge according to the principle of right and wrong—and live accordingly—are faulty in their earthly walk. . . .

Let me say again that our way before God does not lie in following the principle of good and evil but in following the principle of the inner life. Whatever is done in life is worthwhile, whatever is not done in life—even should it be good—is condemned. Christians ought not only to confess before God because they have sinned. Many times they also need to confess because of having done *good* things. This is due to the fact that our living principle is not a matter of discerning between good and evil but of distinguishing between life and death. When there is life—that is to say, when life inwardly arises—what we do is right. If life does not arise, or if there

is no anointing in us, then we have to confess and ask God for forgiveness, irrespective of our having done right or wrong.

Consequently, Paul declared, “I judge not mine own self. . . . : but he that judgeth me is the Lord” (1 Cor. 4.3b,4b). Many do not understand what this means. Actually, it is very simple. If there is an outward standard of right or wrong, it is quite easy to judge whether or not I am right or wrong. But Paul did not judge by this outward principle; hence, he could only say, “I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing against myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord” (vv.3b-4). At the judgment seat of Christ, it is the Latter who will judge me. Also, said Paul, there is a life within leading me. So that in 2 Corinthians he further explained by declaring: “we walk by faith, not by sight” (5.7). In other words, asserted Paul, we do not judge by an external law that can be seen; instead, we judge by the leading of the Lord within us.

We learn this lesson before God. Let us never stop at the standard of right and wrong. I do not wish to suggest here that the standard of right and wrong is not good. Of course it is good! But for the Christian, that principle of living is not good enough. Christian living rises above the principle of right and wrong. If we live by the life of God we shall see that what He requires of us is higher than the demands of law. In view of this, to be a Christian is really quite a simple matter. The answer to all issues in life that confront us is, what does God say *in us* about them? Naturally there will be light within shining upon us. Please keep in mind that regeneration is a fact—that God dwelling in us through the Lord Jesus is also a fact. The Lord constantly manifests himself in us. May we therefore continually say to God, “Give me grace that I may live by the tree of life and not by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” May we always be attentive to what the life within us says. If we live by this principle, we will experience a great change in ourselves. Due to our living by the standard of right and wrong and not by that of life,

many problems have arisen and many things are being done badly. If we should now take the standard of life, however, all these will be resolved.

—TPL 3-7, 11, 13, 15-16, 18-20

Spiritual Experience

9

. . . In this book of the Song of Songs our relationship with the Lord is not presented as if patterned after the relationship of Jonathan with David but after that of the Shulammitte with King Solomon. Jonathan loved David because the latter had overcome the enemy; the Shulammitte maiden loves Solomon because of Solomon himself. Some people love the Lord only for the sake of the cross, but some others love Him not only for His cross but also for His resurrection. The cross is where the Lord won the victory and is thereby enthroned; resurrection, however, bespeaks the Lord himself. The queen of Sheba heard at first of Solomon's acts but later she saw him in person. What truly attracted her was Solomon himself. Hence we must not love the Lord only with Jonathan's love for David but also love Him with the Shulammitte's love for Solomon. This book teaches us to know Him as King. . . .

This Song stands in contrast to Ecclesiastes in that the latter book speaks of a life of wandering whereas Solomon's Song speaks of rest from wandering. Ecclesiastes tells us how men could not find satisfaction through the pursuit of knowledge, but this Song shows us how to be satisfied through love. Ecclesiastes talks about life's pursuit under the sun; this Song talks of one's life pursuit in Christ. Ecclesiastes informs us that the object as well as the way of our seeking are wrong; therefore the end is vanity of vanities. This Song instructs us that the object and the way of our seeking are right, so the end is good. . . .

First Division: The Initial Seeking and Satisfaction (1.2-2.7)

. . . Spiritual growth and earnest seeking are altogether inseparable. Unless a believer has within him a dissatisfaction for the ordinary as

well as a desire for the pursuit of personal love, both being created by the Holy Spirit, he will never seek for the experience of a close relationship with the Lord. Such desire is the root of all future experiences in spiritual growth.

How is it that I have such a desire? Because I have had vision. The Holy Spirit has given me a vision which ordinary people do not see. I have received a revelation of the Lord, knowing that “thy love is better than wine.” For this reason, I long for Him to “kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (1.2). . . .

The revelation of the chambers—“I am black, but comely” (1.5a). The first result of the maiden being in His chambers (see 1.4b) is to see her own blackness. Without seeking, there is no possibility of seeing. She now sees her real self. Perhaps this is the first time she has ever seen her blackness. This blackness is not a mutation but is original as in Adam. Yet at the same time, she also sees how she is accepted in the Beloved. Hence, she can say, “I am black, but comely.” This comeliness points to the acceptance in the Beloved Son. . . .

In the chambers the maiden has also seen the emptiness of outward works. She comes to the realization that what a Christian needs is not work but personal food and rest. The word “feedest” (1.7b) relates to food; and the word “rest” (1.7b) relates to rest. Hereafter her pursuit becomes none other than the food and the rest. The “rest” is a complete rest, for “noon” is the perfect hour: “the path of the righteous is as the dawning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4.18). . . .

“While the King sat at his table, my spikenard sent forth its fragrance” (1.12). How do we partake of the spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God? When God looks at the Lord’s death, He sees the sacrifice—the atonement. When we look at the Lord’s death, we see it as not only substitution but also union. Seeing this, we will emit

fragrance and exude praises. Unless we see that God's acceptable sacrifice is our enjoyment, we are not able to consecrate ourselves and give forth praises. But when we see that what we enjoy is the same as what God obtains, our spikenard will freely send forth its fragrance. (In this connection, we may see the sending forth of the fragrance of spikenard in the story of Mary—see John 12.1-8). The Lord gives us first and then we give to the Lord. First the enjoyment, then the consecration. . . .

Concluding words of the first division: (1) In this first division, we are given to know that the maiden sees the cross but she does not see the energy and power of resurrection.

(2) The danger in this stage of spiritual experience is to love too much a kind of inner communion.

(3) She has not known or experienced the obedience of the cross and the reality and cost of consecration. She has not practiced bearing the cross and walking in the way of the cross.

(4) Another danger lies in her not realizing that the Lord of the work is greater than the work itself, although she did see the error of presumptuous acts. (Though she has seen the mistake of keeping all the vineyards, she still considers keeping her own vineyard as most important.)

(5) There is a lack in her of not seeing her proper position with the Lord, notwithstanding her understanding of the value of the Lord to her in times past. In other words, she has already gained the benefits of the Lord's labor, but she has not allowed Him to receive the effect of His labor (that is, she has gained the Lord, but the Lord has not gained her.)

The Second Division: The Call to Be Delivered from Self (2.8-3.5)

. . . The maiden should now learn not to hold on to the Lord within but instead let the Lord lead her without; not to grasp the Lord with her own strength but allow the Lord to lead her. She should learn to believe the Lord's word, to follow by faith the Lord who "cometh, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills" (2.8), and not to live by the consciousness of the presence of the Lord. Thank God, though man may erect a wall, God always reserves a window for himself—and if not a large window, at least a small lattice (see 2.9). In the heart of a consecrated person, God usually has a way to enlighten him. . . .

Today our life is to receive daily the dealing of the cross that we may lose whatever is in Adam. Today we are not out to gain resurrection life but to lose the life in Adam. We already possess all that is of the resurrection life, yet at the same time we still carry with us much that is in Adam. Consequently, today it is not a matter of how much to gain but how much to lose. . . .

Here the maiden receives a great revelation: that she is not always with the Lord where He is. In times past she could only have the Lord's presence in her inward affection. Her consciousness of the presence of the Lord is limited to but one location. She thought such presence was the highest kind and the only one possible. Actually she has not learned to go forth "leaping upon the mountains and skipping upon the hills" in her duties—whether in family or in the world. She is totally ignorant of this till she receives this new revelation. For she has only the *presence* within her, not the rest of His presence. However, she does not have the strength to go for that presence everywhere. She has yet to learn the preciousness of this prevailing presence. She does not have the strength even to desire it, let alone the strength to possess it. She knows she cannot respond in joining, nor does she ask to go. She has not experienced the pain of

Bether. So the maiden coolly and quietly says, “Turn, my beloved.” She knows she cannot go where the Lord goes, though she is unaware of the loss of not going with Him. She seems to be content with the kind of presence within the wall. She does not realize how very sad is her inability to go with the Lord. She merely asks the Lord to quickly return “like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether” (2.17b). She has not asked the Lord to give her strength and to take her with Him so that she may avoid Bether, which means separation. She allows Bether to remain.

Yet what happens is totally beyond her expectation. For when the Lord retreats from outside, it causes her also to lose the consciousness of His presence. The Lord has not really left her, but in her feeling He truly has departed from her. The Lord’s educational method is to cause her to lose the consciousness of His presence if she is not able to bring that presence to bear upon the various circumstances of the world. We do not know how long a time His absence has been as intimated in 2.17. We know that hereafter we will not have the presence of Christ in our feeling if we cannot have His presence in our environment. Unless we have His presence by faith, we will not have His presence by feeling. This is why for some reason many Christians are unable to recover their past intimate sense of the Lord’s presence. For if the Lord cannot attain His goal, neither can you arrive at your goal. If you do not accept His new gift, you will find yourself losing your old gift. You may imagine that you can still live the way of 1.13, not knowing you have fallen into the experience of 3.1 (in the Chinese Bible both 1.13 and 3.1 have the word “night”). The maiden fancies she could continue to spend the night with the Beloved between her breasts, without realizing that the Lord has disappeared into the night. How she treasures the emotional feeling of her Lord’s presence. She would hide behind the wall to preserve that kind of sensation. She prefers not to enter into the world’s environments. She would let the Lord have His singular work and interest. She would keep her imperfect union with the Lord

and allow the Lord to engage in activities without her. For this reason, the Lord takes away her treasured sensation and causes her to lose His presence in order to draw her out to seek Him. This is the first time she is drawn outward. . . .

The maiden now decides to rise. She comes to see her stagnation of faith as well as her loss of feeling. To rise means not to lie asleep in bed anymore, not to rest further. What the Lord wants her to learn now is not the rest that is circumscribed by place and time. Formerly she took such rest as nothing better, but after being led by the Lord to go further, she realizes how incomplete was that rest. Hence, she will rise, forsake this rest, and begin to learn how to rest under whatever circumstances there may be. . . .

The Third Division: The Call to Ascend (3.6-5.1)

. . . *The Beauty of the New Creation (4.1-5)*. Due to this maiden's many experiences in the past, the King reiterates the word He had said before: "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair" (4.1a). Now the King can say these words without reservation. She has been fully united with the King; she will not retain any praise for her own use. Therefore, He can freely praise her.

In this section of praise, there are altogether seven items. These words of praise by the King disclose her outward manifestations of the total union she has with the Lord after having known the meanings of the cross and resurrection. In other words, these words reveal the new creation in Christ.

(1) "*Doves' eyes*"—this expresses spiritual insight. The first indication of spiritual progress is spiritual insight, that is, the ability to see spiritual things. The eyes of a dove are single; and the Holy Spirit is like a dove; therefore, it also speaks of the spiritual mind. A single eye gives spiritual insight. However, there can be a great

danger in having spiritual insight if the latter lacks a veil. A veil serves the purpose of covering. “Behind the veil” means that though you have spiritual eyes to see spiritual things, you do not let people know what you have.

(2) “*Hair*”—this signifies consecration and obedience. The Scriptures mention little about hair. In the case of Samson, hair was symbolic of his consecration. It means he leaves all he has to God, hence he possesses power. Our consecration before God is our power before men. As much as is our consecration before God, that much will be our power manifested among men. For the separation involved in consecration is the source of all power. Hair in the Scriptures has another meaning, which is to cover oneself. The hair of a woman as well as the hair of the Nazarite convey this thought. It means standing in a position of obedience and learning to cover up all that is natural to man and the flesh so that God may be manifested.

(3) “*Teeth*”—this declares receptive power. Teeth are the instruments of chewing food. The point here is not the food itself, but the receiving of the food. In the Bible we are shown how many varieties of food God has provided for us. Here we are shown the power of receiving these various foods. Such receptive power belongs to the grown-up, not to the infant. For only the mature one has the teeth to receive all kinds of food.

(4) “*Lips*”—this conveys the thought of expression. If teeth are for receiving, then lips are for expressing. If teeth are for food, then lips are to express what has been digested. In the new creation God notices not only our sight, consecration and receptivity, He also takes note of our words.

“*A thread of scarlet*”—this has two interpretations: (a) it points to redemption (see Joshua 2.18,21); and (b) it points to authority (see Matt. 27.28-29). On the one side, it is a sign of the lips being

cleansed (Is. 6.6-7); on the other side, it shows that all that is expressed is under the authority of the King—that is to say, the lips are under the control of the King’s authority, which is unlike what is said in Psalm 12.4: “those who have said, With our tongues will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?” Comely speech can only come forth from redeemed lips that are subject to the Lord’s authority (note that the word “mouth” in 4.3 can also be translated “speech” in the original). Mentioning teeth before lips indicates that unless what is eaten is right what is said cannot be right.

(5) “*Temples*”—this speaks of outward beauty. The temples on a person’s head are where man’s beauty is manifested. All our outward expressions such as pleasure, anger, mourning and joy are betrayed through the temples. “Like a piece of a pomegranate behind thy veil” (4.3b). This pomegranate is not a whole fruit but has been cut. Pomegranate in the Scriptures signifies that which is full of life, for it is full of seeds, each of which is full of sweet juice and is red in color. It is both sweet and pretty. This denotes that these outward beauties of a believer come from his being inwardly filled with the Lord’s life. Yet all are hidden from the eyes of the world. This is the meaning of “behind thy veil.” In other words, the Lord alone knows our beauty. Though we need to have a good testimony from those who are outside, and though in addition our light should shine before men, nevertheless, none of this is to be for display. It is only before the Lord that our beauty is displayed. Within the veil, shutting the door is forever to be the principle of the believer’s living.

(6) “*Neck*”—this suggests the submission of the will. The neck stands for man’s will. When man walks according to his own mind, hard and proud, the Bible labels the expression of such behavior as an “outstretched neck” (Is. 3.16). Hence the neck here speaks of man’s subjected will before God. The Lord considers man’s subjected will as most beautiful. Two phrases are used to describe this subjected will of man. First, “Thy neck is like [a] tower” (4.4a).

The primary meaning of tower is not being hunchbacked. He whose neck is not straight is a hunchback. And a hunchback in the Scriptures denotes one who is oppressed by Satan and therefore only looks downward (see Luke 13.11,16). Having a neck like a tower shows that the maiden is already liberated, free from Satan's bondage and the love of the world. The secondary meaning of tower is stability. Her will has been brought by God to such strength that she will not be influenced any longer by either the world or Satan. The second descriptive phrase used is, "like the tower of David" (again, 4.4a). This tower is out of the ordinary, for it is the tower of David—which means that it is a tower for David. Thus, besides being stable and free, the will of the virgin daughter of the Lord has been brought to the place of absolute submission to David [who is a type of Christ]. Her stability lies in her subjection to Christ; her freedom is likewise due to her obedience to Christ. We all should know the importance of our will being captivated by Christ.

(7) "*Two breasts*"—this bespeaks our affections. In our holy affections, the most prominent are to be our faith and our love. With these two we embrace our Lord. Here we sense the nearness of the Lord as well as we allow Him to be near to us. Faith and love combined are the sole way of our being united with the Lord. . . .

"Until the day be cool, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense" (4.6). For a believer to experience the daybreak and the total fleeing of the shadows, he has to wait till the Second Coming of the Lord. This maiden's only salvation now is to go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. Speaking in the first person, what she means to say here is that in spite of the praise of the Lord and the recognition of the Holy Spirit that I am totally one with the Lord, I still sense my weakness, corruption, duplicity and uselessness. Before that which is perfect is come, I will continue to walk the way of the cross and draw my spiritual life from the Lord. When I came

up out of the wilderness, I perfumed myself with myrrh (see 3.6), but now I go to the mountain of myrrh. Formerly I perfumed myself with frankincense (again, see 3.6), but now I will go to the hill of frankincense. Since my having perfumed myself with myrrh and frankincense enabled me to have a fuller union with the Lord and caused Him to praise me as comely, hereafter I will go to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. If the sufferings and the death of the cross delivered me from a wilderness life, henceforth I want to have a deeper union with the cross. I am willing to suffer more and experience deeper death till the morning dawns. As my living by the Lord's life empowers me to ascend, hereafter I am ready to deny my own life totally and to depend absolutely on the life of the Lord till He can see nothing of the old creation in me. . . .

“Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, with me from Lebanon: Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards” (4.8). A believer's position ought to be at the mountain top. Although many have failed, the place where the Lord has ordained for them to be is still atop the mountain. From there how very near is heaven! Indeed, we are surrounded by heaven. From there also how very distant is the earth! Truly the earth has departed. The three mountain tops mentioned here show us that even in the heavenly realm we can have a variety of peak experiences. They also show us that there is much room for maneuvering in the high places since the mention of them would intimate that we are not bound.

“Amana” means truth or reality. We may frequently look down from there as we live at the peak of the reality of all things in Christ.

“Senir” means flexible armor. Naturally, this speaks of the whole armor of God given us by the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 6.10ff.). The idea conveyed is warfare. Oftentimes we need to look at things below from the perspective of heavenly warfare.

“Hermon” means destruction. This naturally refers to the victory of Christ on the cross, for the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil. Many a time we need not fight but simply deal with all earthly matters from this victorious height.

Many are the peaks in ascension, and broad is the place of ascended life. There is much possibility for activities and growth. Ephesians shows us that the heavenly places (see chs. 1 and 2) are also the place where the enemy is (see ch. 6). Walking on the mountain tops and viewing from the peaks will mean encountering simultaneously the lions’ dens and the mountains of the leopards. The earth is where the lions roam; the world is where the leopards devour. But the lions’ dens are in the heavenly places, and so, too, are the mountains of the leopards. Before we know by experience what is ascension, that which we encounter is but the enemy’s works on earth. But after we know what the ascension life is, we will dwell in those places where the enemy takes up his abode. We shall see not only the enemy’s *works*, we shall also meet face to face with the enemy himself. Concerning the lion, the Scriptures stress his roaring. So the enemy’s work is threatening in nature. Concerning the leopard, the Bible lays stress upon his slyness, and therefore his work is to devour.

In the Lord having called the maiden-follower to the ascension position, it does not mean He has promised that hereafter all will be easy times and beautiful scenery. On the contrary, it means that though she will now be living at peak level, she will be closer there to the lions and leopards than ever before. The one who does not know Ephesians 1 and 2 does not know the spiritual warfare of Ephesians 6. Only the one who knows ascension is aware of the reality and proximity of the enemy. Even so, the Lord asks us to look down. Our peaks are still truth, armor and victory over destruction. Spiritual things are only discerned in the heavenly realm. Even earthly things become clear with heavenly insight. Heaven is the

only worthwhile viewing point. How often we do not look from heaven. We think we can explain many things merely with earthly sight. The result is none other than confusion. Even the smallest issue on earth should be viewed from the heavenly vantage point. Otherwise, we will be bemuddled over the tiniest matter. Nevertheless, our looking from heaven is also a looking from the lions' dens and from the mountains of the leopards. For this reason, in all such viewings by us, we cannot forget the enemy. If you can view from heaven, you cannot overlook the relationship of every matter with the lions and the leopards. He who has the view from the mountain top knows how the enemy also looks at these matters. The one to whom God has given the mountaintop view is also given the knowledge of the wiles of the enemy.

Therefore, in spiritual warfare the first essential is position, and the second is insight. Without position we cannot see the enemy; without spiritual insight we cannot recognize the enemy's wiles. Without these two essentials we can neither fight nor engage in any battle at all. . . .

“How fair is thy love, my sister, my bride! How much better is thy love than wine! And the fragrance of thine oils than all manner of spices” (4.10).

With repeated consecrations and dealings, the believer's love grows more and more perfect—till one day she is found to be minding only the things in heaven and not the things on earth. Then the Lord is able to say to her, “How fair is thy love! How much better is thy love than wine!” Earlier in 1.2 we saw that when the virgin praised the King, she could only say: “thy love is better than wine.” But here, when the King praises her, He asserts: “How *much* better is thy love than wine!” Thereby do we know that the believer's appreciation of the Lord's love is far less than the Lord's appreciation of the believer's love. Though we do sense the

preciousness of the love of the Lord, our understanding of the greatness of His love is still imperfect.

Because of His deep love for us, He can sense how our love satisfies His heart. We recall the story of David and Jonathan, how “they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until *David* exceeded” (1 Sam. 20.41b). Just so, our Lord has the preeminence in all things; for even in the matter of mutual loving, He occupies the first place.

“And [how much better is] the fragrance of thine oils than all manner of spices.” Now this maiden has the King’s oils, too. The King has received the anointing of the Holy Spirit, so the maiden also receives the anointing of the Spirit. The ointment has come down from Aaron’s head to the skirt of his garments (Ps. 133). Yet the emphasis here is not on the oil, but on the *fragrance* of the oils. It therefore refers to the *effect* of the Holy Spirit’s anointing. Fragrance cannot be seen by eyes nor heard by ears. It is to be smelled. It is something most difficult to explain. We are not able to describe what fragrance is. Is it not true that you discover that what impresses you in many believers is not something you see in them or hear from them, but is rather a special spiritual sensing when you are with them? You are unable to define it. Now that is what is meant by fragrance. It is the result of a life that is subject to the Holy Spirit. Such fragrance far exceeds all the virtues in this world. Sometimes we may acknowledge that a nonbeliever surpasses a believer on a certain point, or that a believer has a special natural goodness; yet all these can never be compared with the fragrance that diffuses from a life touched and molded by the Holy Spirit. . . .

“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his precious fruits” (4.16). The maiden knows that the King regards her as a garden and that the Holy Spirit

has given much grace and produced many fruits in her. She now no longer expects the smoothness of environments; on the contrary, she is ready to exude the fragrance of Christ under any circumstance. She has reached a place of knowing that the inward, not the outward, is all that matters. If what is inside is fragrance, then the outside environment—be it north wind or south—can only cause the fragrance to spread that much more. She no longer lives under environment. She is able to live with and above any circumstance. She is aware of being filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. She is well able to control circumstances as she wills. She can say with Paul, “I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound” (Phil. 4.12a); moreover, like Paul, she is determined that “Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death” (Phil. 1.20b). Her summoning of the winds of circumstance is her expression of faith as well as of subjection. South wind and north wind are indications of the different environments which the Holy Spirit arranges to train believers. She has therefore committed herself to the Holy Spirit’s training. However lovely the south wind is or however dreadful the north wind, they are the same to the one who lives in heaven. She is deeply conscious of the fact that whatever the environment may be, it only causes her to manifest the grace of the Holy Spirit. Here she especially anticipates the Holy Spirit to complete His work in her through environment.

Apart from having expressed herself to the Holy Spirit, this maiden is no longer as talkative as before. Her attitude now is that since many fragrant flowers have been planted in her, the Holy Spirit should let the winds spread the spices. Since my Lord has cultivated me as His garden and has graced me with fruits, let Him come to the garden and enjoy His precious fruits. In her first sentence she voices the phrase “*my* garden”; but in her second sentence it immediately comes forth as “*his* garden.” In other words, my garden is His garden. All is for Him, hence the fruits are all for Him. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is not meant to be the believer’s adornment; and it certainly is

not for his boasting. Though the fruits are borne in the life of the believer, they are nonetheless for the glory of God as well as for the enjoyment of the Lord. How she once again unconditionally offers back to the Lord all that He has done in her. . . .

Let us notice that the consecration and the acceptance here are different from the ordinary consecration and acceptance. The earlier consecration was to place ourselves wholly in the Lord's hand that He might work in us. The consecration here, however, is not for the sake of receiving anything from the Lord but rather, once having been wrought upon by the Lord, we give back to Him the joy, the fruit and the glory of His work. So that here is seen the offering up of the fragrance of the fruits. Likewise, the acceptance is also different here. The former acceptance was for the sake of the Lord's gaining an opportunity to plant; the acceptance now in view is not for planting but wholly for enjoyment. In times past, we were like a barren land beyond cultivation. We offered this barren-like soil of ours to the Lord and allowed Him to cultivate it and transform it into a perfect garden. The issue now in view is, for whom is this garden going to be? Experienced believers confess that this latter consecration is more difficult to yield up than the earlier one; and yet, it is far more glorious. Such consecration gives the Lord the fruits of His labor. . . .

***The Fourth Division. The Call of the Cross After Resurrection
(5.2-6.3)***

. . . In this Song, the Lord at first reveals himself as King because He seeks the throne in the maiden's heart. Later He calls her to leave her inner wall in order that she might enter into resurrection life. Still later, He discloses himself as the Bridegroom, seeking to perfect His relationship with the maiden. Now, however, He is going to give a totally new revelation of himself—"my head is filled with dew, my locks with the drops of the night" (5.2c). What kind of picture is this?

Here bespeaks His Garden of Gethsemane experience. For in *that* garden His head was truly covered with dew! And on *that* night of nights could be seen drops falling from His head (see Luke 22.44). He unveils himself, therefore, as a Man of Sorrows and One who is acquainted with grief.

In the previous portions of this Song we have seen the cross that is for atonement; we have also seen the union of the cross. In addition, we have seen the sufferings and death of the cross; we have likewise seen how the cross delivers us from the world and from self. Moreover, we have seen the molding work of the cross as well as the victory of the cross in the believer. Now once the maiden has experienced all these things, we might easily conclude that she is in possession of the highest experiences. We might assume that hereafter, her way is simply to walk step by step into resurrection and glory. Yet some of us may not be aware that the cross has still another aspect of its work to accomplish in her which she has not yet fully learned. Even if she did experience a little of it previously, her experience of it was but the beginning. Though she now knows the sufferings of the cross, she has no idea how broad and how deep are its sufferings. In spite of her knowledge of the molding work of the cross, she is ignorant of just what form she will be molded and shaped into. The Lord is now calling His follower to experience the cross in a way she has not experienced before or to experience it in a way that is far deeper than before.

Gethsemane tells us of God's rejection and all its consequences (see Is. 53.4-6). We are familiar with the atoning aspect of the cross, but His cross also includes the aspect of being rejected by God in outward appearance. It was for this latter aspect that the Lord suffered the greatest shame. With respect to His past earthly sufferings, one may certainly find that there was glory for God in them. Yet the Lord Jesus was not only despised by men; He was also rejected by God as though all He suffered was because of His being

smitten by God. Here can be seen the hand of God. Due to His being smitten of God, men rejected the Lord; and this constituted for Him His greatest shame.

In the atoning aspect, the Lord has never called us to be united with Him. But He wants us to have fellowship (which means to be a partaker) with Him in this other aspect of the cross. In times past, the problems we faced were sins and the world, and also Satan and the natural life of self. Although we have encountered the sufferings and the shaping and molding work of the cross, we were totally unaware of the deep experience there is in the cross of being rejected by God and humiliated by men. The Lord is therefore seen knocking here, saying, "Open to me" (5.2b). This means that He calls the maiden to open her heart once again to receive the Lord, whose locks are now filled with drops. In other words, she has yet to learn what is meant by being rejected by God and to learn something of the deeper misunderstanding and reproach that are a part of the cross. He addresses her as "sister"—which means He pleads with God's life that is in her. He also addresses her as "my love" (or, "my friend") because of her knowledge of God's purpose. But He uses two other forms of salutation: "my dove"—a symbol for the nature of the Holy Spirit that is in her; and "my undefiled"—a word that bespeaks her holiness, chastity and consecration. He does not mention the term "bride" here, however, because He is waiting to see what her response will be as to these other salutations which might then reveal whether she is able to manifest that most perfect union with Him—that of bride with the Bridegroom.

The Lord pleads with the maiden, calling her to open up to Him. Formerly she had opened herself to accept the Lord as King; now the Lord wants her to open up to receive Him as the Man of sorrows and One who is acquainted with grief. The Lord is now leading her to suffer with Him and to be conformed to His death in the deepest way. Nevertheless, He will not force her to walk in any way she is

unwilling to go. Therefore, He can only knock and plead until the believer becomes willing. . . .

“I have put off my garment; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?” (5.3) This call is really a surprise to many believers. They have no idea that the cross has an aspect of shame; yet as a matter of fact, they are not *total* strangers to the cross. It may even be said that their experience of the cross is quite deep; indeed, it was for the cross that they had suffered much persecution and reproach. But they have always looked upon the cross as their glory, their life and their power: they have never seriously viewed the cross as possibly being their shame as well. Let us understand that the cross can not only cause us to lose *worldly* fame but even lose *spiritual* fame as well. In such an event we will be reckoned by men as being rejected of God. God will subject us to trials without the consolation and sympathy of our acquaintances. Indeed, we will be regarded as those rejected of God and afflicted.

Perhaps believers are familiar with the reproaches of the world, but to them spiritual shame is a brand new experience. Such shame that flows out from misunderstanding will cause them to feel deeply because it touches their relationship with God. They are now given to understand what is truly meant by Paul’s statement: “I . . . fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ” (Col. 1.24).

How novel is this call! It is no wonder the hearer shrinks from it. The maiden may reason along the following line: “Is not God’s glory more important than anything else? In days past, I always considered how to glorify God’s name in my life. Now, though, if God really allows me to be misunderstood, allows my reputation among men to be taken away, allows them to reproach me and even to think that something has happened between me and God, then how can God be at all glorified?” Perhaps the maiden does not consider so much about herself as she does about God’s glory. Yet she does not realize

that what she is actually mindful of here is how she herself can glorify God. She needs to be stripped by God to the extent that even her good intention of glorifying Him must be cast away. The cross must work till you and I shall willingly and gladly accept whatever God has apportioned to us and allow Him to take care of His own glory.

This maiden who hears this new call may have another problem: she may be very concerned about her relationship to the work of God. Because of her knowledge of the cross she in the past had drawn many to herself to learn the way of the Lord. Her former experience of the cross made her a channel of life so that those who desired to follow the Lord followed her. If she accepts this new call and permits the cross to bring her to the place of shame, will she not lose the place and opportunity of her work? Her previous experience of the cross had attracted many people to her. Will not her new experience of the cross, she may now reason, drive them away from her? Will any come near to her any more? Will people no longer learn the way of the Lord from her? Such thoughts may make her hesitant.

“I have put off my garment; how shall I put it on?” In all my outward conduct, says the maiden, I have put off through the cross my old man and his deeds; will I not therefore be misunderstood if now I arise to accept the isolation and shame aspect of the cross, as though I were putting back on again the garment I had previously put off? Is not the experience of truly putting off all that is of my old man enough? Many believers at this stage fail to see the two sides of the cross—the negative and the positive. . . . What the maiden was attentive to was how the cross dealt with the old creation. She had not seen how the cross deals even with the new creation. She was only seeing what the cross delivers from; she was not seeing as well to what the cross leads. Perhaps she mistakenly thought these positive things belonged to the resurrection side beyond the cross, she not knowing that they actually belong to the cross. For the cross

on its positive side imprints upon the new creation a mold of shame, suffering and misunderstanding. Is not the life of the Lord Jesus the life of the new creation, and yet do we not see how the cross left upon Him the impress of its sufferings?

“I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?” I not only have had my whole body washed and have become clean from sins before the Lord; I also am washed clean daily from the dust and defilements which come from my contact with the world. I must maintain my cleanness, she reasons, and therefore I cannot allow myself to be defiled again as though I were backsliding. What she seeks is to preserve her cleanness; yet what she fails to see is that the defilement she believes will come from opening her door and receiving the Lord is not real defilement. (It is true that for her to open the door she must be re clothed, which may give the appearance of being defiled, but this is not to be construed as putting on the old man again and being defiled once more by the world; rather, it is a case of being mistaken by men as having indeed put on the old creation again and as having been defiled. Such excuse and hesitation on her part shows how there can be a *good* which can keep us away from the *best*.)

Hence the situation here is that she considers her own past experiences to be sufficient for her spiritual life and thus she fails to realize the importance of fully experiencing Philippians 3.10. Unknowingly, “self” has crept in. Her past experience seems to give her some position in the work and glory of God. Her two questions indicate her unwillingness once more to alter her current spiritual status. But the call of the Lord is for the purpose of disturbing our current status. All spiritual progress involves the changing of current programs. This is the price to be paid for spiritual advancement. Seeking spiritual ease is often the motive for resisting a higher calling. When our spiritual life is in repose, our conscience will not accuse us of any wrong. In view of the fact that many spiritual experiences do truly come out of the death and resurrection of the

Lord, we are very reluctant to pursue after the goal which Christ has ordained for us. Life as usual makes no demand upon our energy to seek after the new, thus reinforcing the desire of not losing our current peace. . . .

“My beloved is gone down to his garden” (6.2a). The way of recovery for the maiden lies first in her testimony. Notwithstanding her unfaithfulness she could still testify of the faithful Lord. Unconsciously she is drawn by God out of herself, hence she is able to tell of her own Lord. This is for her a “looking off unto Jesus.” By dwelling on His person, His grace, His work, His truthfulness and His love, the lost light is subtly restored to her.

In her utmost despair, the maiden tries her best to help others. She herself appears to have lost communion, yet she expects others to know His preciousness and to commune with Him. Although she talks out of her past experience, will not the Lord listen quietly nearby when believers speak to one another about Him? Most naturally the Lord will reveal himself at this hour. Though she is hungry, others are hungrier than she. As the maiden causes others to be satisfied, she herself without recognizing it is also being satisfied. Hence we can witness how she is delivered from self.

Symptoms of spiritual darkness and decline may once again appear in the maiden. But when she is drawn away from her self, these symptoms pass away. . . .

God's Work (7.1-13)

. . . “I am my beloved's; and his desire is toward me.” (7.10). What the maiden is now concerned about is what the Beloved gets. She has cast away her self-assertion. She is willing to lose even her Beloved if this suits Him. What concerns her at this stage is whether the Beloved has possession of her. That she is her Beloved's now gives

great satisfaction to her heart. The former motions of grasping with natural energy is now completely gone from her. At the outset, for her to be her Beloved's had only been a secondary thought. Later, it became her primary desire, yet she still could not forget how her Beloved is *hers*. Now, however, through her having had a deep enough experience, we no longer hear the maiden say, "My beloved is *mine*" (2.16a). From this brief review of her past, we can discern how tenacious in our spiritual pursuit does this "self" of ours continue to manifest itself that even in loving the Lord there is the possibility of reserving room for "self." Who in themselves—without the working of God in their hearts—can realize this?

Hence the issue is now no longer *my* pleasure but *His* desire. I now know that I live here on earth for His desire. The purpose of my living is to be a desired person desired by the Desiring One. Today, the question is not my feeling, neither my gain nor loss, nor my work, but rather, that I am His and His desire is towards me. This alone is sufficient.

When the maiden reaches this stage—that is to say, after "self" has been infinitely dealt with—she can now work with the Lord. She can initiate a work because she is full of the Lord. Though outwardly she may appear to be the one taking the initiative, it is actually the Lord who dwells in her who is originating the work. The union is so complete that her movement is usually dependable. . . .

The Fifth Division: The Sigh of the Flesh (8.1-14)

. . . When a believer's inward union with the Lord has reached the depth of what this maiden has experienced, he senses deeply the presence of his earthly tabernacle, his outward man. His outward man is decaying, yet his inward man is being renewed day by day. Though the Holy Spirit does quicken this mortal body, it remains a mortal body nonetheless. Though the power of God is made perfect

in my weakness, this body is still like a thorn. Accordingly, the more a believer advances—the more spiritual and heavenly he becomes—the more he feels how today's perfection is circumscribed by the flesh. Though he has the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit, he cannot but sigh in his heart and sigh together with all creation, waiting for the redemption of the body. When we live according to the flesh we do not realize the need for the redemption of the body. It is when our union with the Lord is practically complete that we become increasingly aware of the discrepancy between what is within us and the body without. The body may not be a hindrance; but at the least it is a weakness. Hereafter, then, we confess that the redemption of the body is a much desired grace. . . .

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?” (8.5) In the drama of this book, the maiden is shown coming up twice from the wilderness. The first time (see 3.6) shows us how she is liberated from a wandering life. Here, we see that she has already begun that perfect union with the Lord in His death, His life and also in all His grace. Henceforth she moves onward, leaving that life of wandering in the wilderness completely behind. Even though she did experience halting periods once or twice, these halts along the way are forgivable if not justifiable. Once the wandering life is over, it is forever passed. Why is it that the Scriptures should now mention again her coming up from the wilderness? should mention it again as though she had still been in the wilderness and only comes up from it now?

We must discover to what this wilderness points. We learn that the wilderness in the Scriptures is not only representative of the life of wandering but also of our life on earth. We have not just a wilderness in our life of the spirit but a wilderness in the physical body as well. Not only in spiritual life must we be delivered from the wandering of the wilderness, even in the flesh we must be released from this world as a wilderness. When the Lord reigns within us by

His Holy Spirit we begin to be freed from *the up-and-down life*. And when we shall hear the call of rapture, we will be liberated from this *world environment*. It is the cross of Christ that sets us free from spiritual wilderness; it is the Second Coming of Christ that emancipates us from this earthly wilderness. Thus would we understand that this second coming up from the wilderness symbolizes the rapture from this world. . . .

“Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel [Heb. *hard*] as Sheol; the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of Jehovah. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be contemned” (8.6-7). When the maiden looks at what she originally was, she cannot help but be filled with humility. She cannot help but see her own corruption, useless experiences, undependable will and the vanity of her own seeking. Her only hope rests in the Lord. She knows her perseverance does not depend upon her insistence but only on the Lord’s keeping. All occasions of spiritual maturing cannot guarantee a person’s perseverance until the coming return of the Lord Jesus. All depends on God and His keeping power. Knowing this, she cannot fail to ask, “Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm.” “Upon thy heart” signifies where the locus of love is; “upon thine arm” signifies where the locus of power is. “I ask You,” she entreats of her Lord, “to set me upon Your heart as everlasting as a seal and upon Your arm as indestructible as a seal. Just as the high priest of old had to bear the children of Israel in his heart and upon his shoulders, so I ask You, my loving Most High Priest, to remember me always in heart and to support me always with Your arm. I know my own weakness and emptiness. And I sense my total inability. O Lord, I am a helpless person. For me to be the one to maintain myself till I see Your face, I can only bring disgrace to You as well as suffer loss to myself. All that I hope and pray for today is Your love and power. Though I have loved You, I

acknowledge how untrustworthy it is. What I now expect is Your love towards me. I have held You before (see 3.4) as though I were fairly strong, but now I know my very strong hold upon You back then was but extreme weakness. My trust today is not in *my* holding power, but in *Your* holding strength. I dare not speak again of my love for You, nor dare I mention my hold upon You. Hereafter, everything depends on *Your* power and *Your* love.”

“Since Your love is strong as death,” continues the maiden, “who can shake it?” The sighs of parents, the tears of a wife, the sorrows of friends—none can call back the dead. For death would tightly keep what it holds, immovable and unloosening as it is. But if You love me, I shall never be moved because Your love can never be weaker than death.

“If You love me, Your jealousy will also follow. And Your jealousy is cruel as Sheol. You will reprimand, I know, and You will seek for perfection. You also will not allow anything else to share my heart with You; even if You possess the larger part, You are still unwilling. Your eyes cannot stand to see the love that belongs to You be invaded or defiled by men. I know You are jealous, for since the ancient days You are a jealous God (see Ex. 20.5). Has not Your apostle informed us of the jealousy of God for His own people (see 2 Cor. 11.2 mg.)? If You are jealous for me, who can stand against it? You will destroy all Your enemies, You will remove all Your obstacles, till You become the only Lord, the God of all creation and the undisputed King. Through Your keeping power, I will never lose my chastity before I see Your face.

“I know Your jealousy is cruel and hard as Sheol. What ever can be more harsh than Sheol? It cares not at all about what is most indispensable, most loving and most precious when it comes to collect the sinner. Tears cannot move it, nor can grief soften its heart. Pleading will not change its mind for it does not know what

compassion or kindness is. It has no sympathy nor affection. It is cruel. If I offer myself to You as a chaste virgin and if You see in me something that will arouse Your jealousy, then unquestionably You will not withhold any dealing till You win the victory. You will not consider the counsels, pleading and tears of intimate friends, close relatives or dear lovers in Your dealings with me. The only consideration is Your own feeling. Then I shall be kept.”

“The flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of Jehovah.” Jehovah is a consuming fire (see Heb. 12.29). His jealous love is as flashes of fire which will consume all that can be burned. All which is not eternal but soon passing away, all which belongs to the world and is out from men—all will be totally burned up.

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.” “Many waters” bespeak the many trials of the believer. “Floods” bespeak the persecutions from the enemy. Thus the thought of the maiden towards her Lord is: “Your love, the flame of Your love, O Lord, can never be quenched by trials nor drowned by persecutions. If You love me, neither trials nor persecutions can do anything.”

“If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would be utterly contemned.” This love of the Lord’s cannot be bought. In other words, it is beyond substitution. As Paul the apostle would declare (see 1 Cor. 13), I cannot substitute it with the tongues of men and angels, nor can I give prophecy, all knowledge and all faith in exchange for it. Even if I were to bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and give my body to be burned, I would be utterly despised. All these things are but a part of the substance of one’s house. To use them in exchange for the Lord’s love would be despised by Him. Therefore, O Lord, I dare not use more works, more businesses or more labors to earn Your love. . . .

“Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices” (8.14). At this point we see that

the experience of the maiden can be likened to a drop of water which has flowed into the sea. No more progress is possible, it is now simply a matter of flowing deeper and deeper. To her, it appears that what she is left with in this world is but her physical body because all the rest of her, she feels, has already been sent to the other world. Hence she cannot but cry out, "Make haste, my beloved!" Her continual prayer is: "May You come as swiftly as a roe or a young hart. As a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of spices, so shall be Your coming to Your kingdom. Though today's love is mature, it is still in lack of something. But at Your coming, faith will turn to sight, and prayer will change to praise. Love will reach the place of perfection with neither shade nor shadow. I can stand without blemish before the Lord and serve Him. What a day that will be! Therefore, come quickly, Lord Jesus!"

—SOS 1, 5, 10, 12, 15, 23, 25, 30, 33-5, 45-50,
53, 55-6, 58-9, 63-70, 80, 93, 96-102, 107

10

Christian Conduct

Since the day that Adam took the fruit of the tree of knowledge, man has been engaged in deciding what is good and what is evil. The natural man has worked out his own standards of right and wrong, justice and injustice, and striven to live by them. Of course as Christians we are different. Yes, but in what way are we different? Since we were converted a new sense of righteousness has been developed in us, with the result that we, too, are, quite rightly, occupied with the question of good and evil. But have we realized that for us the starting point is a different one? Christ is for us the Tree of Life. We do not begin from the matter of ethical right and wrong. We do not start from that other tree. We begin from *Him*; and the whole question for us is one of Life.

Nothing has done greater damage to our Christian testimony than our trying to be right and demanding right of others. We become preoccupied with what is and what is not right. We ask ourselves, Have we been justly or unjustly treated? and we think thus to vindicate our actions. But that is not our standard. The whole question for us is one of cross-bearing. You ask me, "Is it right for someone to strike my cheek?" I reply, "Of course not! But the question is, do you only want to be right?" As Christians our standard of living can never be "right or wrong," but the Cross. The principle of the Cross is our principle of conduct. Praise God that He makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good. With Him it is a question of His grace and not of right or wrong. But that is to be our standard also: "Forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you" (4.32). "Right or wrong" is the principle of the Gentiles and tax gatherers. My life is to be governed by the principle of the Cross and of the perfection of the Father: "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

—SWS 31-2

At least half, if not more, of our lives are lived in reactions. People talk and we feel happy; this is reaction. They talk and we become angry; this also is reaction. Somebody does a certain thing and we consider it wrong; this is reaction. Someone does something against us, so we lose our temper; this too is reaction. We become irritated when provoked, we defend ourselves when misunderstood, we endure when ill-treated; these all are reactions. In analyzing our lives, it seems that more than half of them are lived in reactions.

Difference in Reaction of Believer and Unbeliever

We Christians also live in reactions, but ours are different from those of the unbelievers. By observing how a person reacts, we can judge who he is. A Christian should not have unchristian reactions, nor can a non-Christian have true Christian reactions. If you want to know what sort of person someone is, just notice the kind of reactions he has.

Believers' reactions should differ from those of other people. The Lord both charges us as to how we should react and gives us the power to do it. He does not want us to react carelessly. Christian life is a chain of reactions. If we react properly, we are good Christians; otherwise we are poor Christians.

After we believe in the Lord and are saved, we are Christians. The Lord has given to us definite commands as to how we must react whenever we are faced with trials and persecutions. We are not given the liberty to react as we please. Christians' reactions, as well as their lives, should be under the control of God. If God controls our reactions, we will not react freely. As He commands us, so will we react. It is His life within us, the life He has given us, that does the reacting. . . .

Remember, solving the reaction problem resolves more than half of our Christian life. People act; we react. They say something; we react. They show some kind of attitude; we react. We are simply full of reactions. Since the greater part of our life is composed of reactions, for us to react in the Christian way is acceptable to God. . . .

Basic Principle of Reaction

Having briefly gone through our passage in Matthew, we can now discover what the basic principle of the Christian reaction is. Man's reactions to ordinary matters may be divided into three levels: first, the level of reason; second, the level of good conduct; and third, the level of God's life. He who lives on the level of reason will react temperamentally and angrily; he who lives on the level of good conduct will react patiently; but he who lives in God's holy life will react transcendentally.

If someone strikes your right cheek, you will say, "Why did you hit me?" Your heart is full of reasoning. Your cheek has been hit, you are angry and thus you reason with the one who did it. You are standing on the level of reason, and your reaction is anger and loss of temper. Or perhaps you are aware of the fact that Christians ought to behave well and that it is wrong for you to get angry. So you react as one whose coat has been taken from him by someone; you bear it with patience; you let them take it without uttering a word. You feel that as a Christian you cannot say anything but should be patient. Such reaction seems to be better than losing your temper. But the Lord tells us there is still another kind of reaction—a reaction which He expects of us.

The reaction which the Lord has ordained for us is not that we get angry when people strike our cheek, nor that we try to be patient when others take our coat. The Lord has not said if people force you

to walk one mile, walk that mile patiently. He says, instead, turn your left cheek to him. If he wants your coat, give him also your cloak; or, in modern terms, if he wants your shirt, give him also your coat. If he compels you to walk one mile, go the second mile with him. Such reaction is not called patience but transcendence. It rises above the demands of man. Man only demands so much, but, because we are before God, we give much more than his demand. It is not just being patient but transcending man's demand.

Brothers and sisters, I desire that from the first day of your faith in Christ, you may know what a believer's life is. The Lord has shown us that Christians should have only one reaction. That reaction is neither reasoning nor enduring, but transcending. Remember, if it is not transcendent, it is not Christian. To be patient is insufficient for a Christian. The Lord no longer says, an eye for an eye—if someone hurts my eye, I will hurt his. He says instead, add another eye. If someone hurts my eye, I give him another. Do you see that the Christian reaction is neither revenge in striking back nor patience in enduring? It is to give another eye. . . .

The Christian reaction is the left cheek, the coat, and the second mile. If people want my shirt, I give also my coat. If they compel me to walk one mile, I go the second mile. If they smite my right cheek, I turn the left cheek. All these show that I am not at all affected by the right cheek, the shirt, or the first mile. Therefore, such reaction is transcendent. If I were touched by the right cheek, I would not offer the left cheek. If I could not stand the first mile, would I walk the second mile? So, the question we must each ask ourselves is, how do I react?

We Christians are being delivered from the senses of disgrace or glory, of material possessions, and of self-will. As we are delivered, we transcend the problems of "face" or pride, of possession, and of self-will. We no longer are affected by these things. We are able to

walk the second mile.

We need to learn before God not to reason or argue. The first lesson of the cross is, do not reason. I do not believe that brothers and sisters will fall to such an extent as to seek revenge, so we will not touch upon the reaction of an eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth. We do, however, realize that it is possible for revenge to be one kind of reaction. We would rather, however, concentrate on the three other reactions. Though I do not believe a brother or sister will fall to the level of the law in seeking revenge, yet I am afraid there are many who will reason and talk about righteousness. “You should not have struck me; you reason. Remember, if anyone reasons with people, it shows he is already touched by the incident. The Lord’s reaction is different. He shows us that when people ill-treat us without reason, we can do just the opposite—treat them well without reason. As the first mile is absolutely unreasonable, so is the second mile wholly unreasonable. Both are without reason. To strike the right cheek is to strike with no reason; to offer the left cheek to be struck is also totally without reason. If it is utterly unreasonable for one’s shirt to be taken away, it is equally unreasonable to give away the coat. Do you see that Christians are not to reason? If others are unreasonably bad, then we must be unreasonably good!

A Christian does neither the right thing nor the good thing. When someone wants to take away my shirt, it is right for me not to give it to him, but it would be good if I did. However, as a Christian, I go further; I give both the shirt and the coat to him. Our way is clear. It is right for me not to give him my shirt. Why should I give it to him just because he wants to take it away from me? Nonetheless, it is good of me if I do give it to him; this is what a good person would do. But, remember, you are not a Christian because you do the right thing, nor are you a Christian because you do the good thing. A Christian gives not only the shirt but the coat as well. He who gives the second garment is a Christian.

What, then, is the Christian reaction? The Christian reaction is not to do the right thing nor the good thing but the transcendent thing. The more a child of God is persecuted and pressed and frustrated, the higher he climbs. How pitiful if you fall the moment you are squeezed. It is really regretful to lose your temper, to argue, or even to endure. The time when you are severely pressed against the wall is the time for you to rise up. Let me tell you, this is what a Christian is.

—NI 64-5, 67-74

Matthew 5.38-42 Here, a fourth matter of conduct to be discussed is what we can call Christian reaction. Our lives from morning to night are full of reaction. As other people make a move, we too move. Not that we *initiate*, but that we *react*. After others speak or act, we speak back or react. They move first, and then we respond to their move. Let us note that what we now find before us in this passage is not something spoken to the world or to international politicians. The Lord is not teaching politics or economics here. For something of that nature, we can go to Genesis: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” (9.6). This declaration of the Lord in Genesis is political in nature. But we Christians are not politicians. So that the particular reaction being spoken about there is not for us but for government, because government is based on law, and politics follows the law. However, what the Lord talks about in the Matthew passage now before us concerns the reactive conduct and walk which should characterize believers. Let us therefore look closely at what the Lord teaches.

“An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”—such is the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. Under Old Testament law, if you were to knock out one of my teeth, I would legitimately be able to knock out one of yours. And so, the first knocking out would be sin, but the second knocking out would not be sin but righteousness. Yet all who embrace such an attitude of righteousness

as this cannot enter the kingdom of the heavens. The one who reviles first and the one who reviles next must both remain outside the kingdom of the heavens. To exceed the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees is, according to the teaching on the Mount, to “resist not him that is evil.”

What then follows in the Lord’s teaching are three parables. If in each of these situations our reaction will be merely just and equal, we cannot enter the kingdom of the heavens. For he who reacts on the Old Testament law basis of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is one who seeks merely to be just, and that is precisely what the scribes and the Pharisees do: yet it does not lead them into the kingdom of the heavens. The righteousness of a Christian must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. This is because the life we as Christians have within us is a life that refuses to hurt people either (1) in initiating hurtfulness or (2) in reacting against it in kind. What the world judges as wrong is the first strike; but the second strike is deemed by the world to be self-defense. Even killing is sometimes acceptably called self-defense by the world. But the life within the Christian will not only not hit first, it will not hit at all. For there is no such element in it as smiting. The divine life within the Christian does not know how to smite first, nor does it know how to smite back: there is no characteristic of smiting about it at all. The life of the Christian is the life of Christ. This life will neither commence with hitting nor follow up with hitting. Needless to say, this is beyond the comprehension of the world; yet such conduct is not an “ism” or a movement or political or social tactic. It is simply the active and reactive behavior of the Christian.

“Right cheek . . . the other.” This is not what man can do. Even if some may do so, in their hearts they may be thinking that there will be a day of reckoning in the future before God. So that their conduct is equally invalid. In turning the other cheek, there must not be any hate resident within the person. Yet this kind of reaction which

comes forth from within is not expended or manifested just once. The patience and love that is expressed is long-enduring in nature. The love in me is greater than the hate in you. You ask for one mile, I can go two miles. You contrive to take my coat, I am willing to give you my cloak as well. It means that no one can provoke me beyond measure. What is in me is much stronger than what you can do. Now *that* is true Christianity.

My reaction, if it is truly Christian, is something the world cannot and does not have. It is more than mere patience. It is *grace*, of which patience is but a part. And no one can exhaust the Lord's grace in me. Let us see that what is taking place here is that God is testing me. Yet, as a matter of fact, it is not *I* whom God tests, but actually He is testing *himself*, in showing me, if He be allowed to do so, what the Lord who abides in me can do. God is well able to supply all the demands, yea, even *more* than what is demanded. Who, then, is able to "finish me off"? The inner reality is always greater than the outward trial. And *this* is what is termed true Christian reaction.

Here is neither resistance nor non-resistance. Turning the other cheek after having had the right cheek smitten is not non-resistance. Our Lord has not preached resistance; nor has He preached *non-resistance*. On the contrary, He says that there is a reaction within you which is greater than the evil of men. Here is a transcending power which the world does not know. There can be no person on the earth today more *positive* than a Christian who displays this kind of reaction. Here, too, is the most *powerful* person on earth, because this kind of Christian is able to control himself. Yet let us not mistake this as a sign of weakness: we have yet to meet a stronger person, for this kind of Christian is so strong that *he can afford not to care for himself*.

Let us look at this matter of reaction more closely. As we have

seen, to react is to take some action in response to what others do or say. Of the three parables told of in this section, the one concerning the coat and the cloak demonstrates for us how we must lay down the material things of the world; that of the other cheek to be turned and smitten especially has reference to our dealing with the glory of men; and the parable of the one and two miles points to the issue of freedom. With respect to this latter parable, any forcing of me to go your way encroaches upon my freedom. But the one who truly knows God is capable of letting go his freedom entirely. For God's demand is greater than that of the evil person. He who is evil demands the right cheek, the coat and the one mile, but God demands both the right cheek *and* the left, the coat *and* the cloak, first mile *and* the second. God's demand doubles that of the evil man. It is relatively easier to deal with the demand of the evil one, but it is very hard to cope with God's demand. No matter how people treat you, they cannot require higher of you than that which God requires of you. Many problems are created due to an unsettling relationship between us and God. If you have an absolute consecration before Him, you will feel that all the demands *men* make on you are *far less* than what *God* has asked of you.

Now reaction is very quick in happening. When people act, you respond almost immediately. And such response leaves no time to think. It gives you time neither to pray nor to consider. Hence Christian reaction is far more advanced than many other forms of righteousness. This form of righteousness requires more thorough learning before God; otherwise, you may indeed offer your left *cheek* when you *remember* but stretch out your left *hand* when you do *not* remember. How we need to have our consecration absolute so that when things happen we may react rightly without even thinking or remembering or considering or praying. So great and habitual is the grace of God upon us that even without consideration or thought our reaction is right.

The Christian Principle of Financial Management

How should a Christian manage his finances? Read Luke 6.38. “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, shall they give into your bosom. For with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again.”

As believers, we look to God for all our supplies. We live only through His mercy. The wealthy cannot depend on their wealth for food and clothing. During wartime, we have seen many rich people short in both of these. Paul exhorts us not to have our hope set on the uncertainty of riches nor be desirous of getting rich, for to do so will only pierce us with many sorrows (see 1 Tim. 6.7-10, 17-19). Only those who put their trust in the Lord, though they have no savings, shall not be in want. The Lord is well able to supply all their needs. But they do need to know that God’s supply does have a condition attached to it.

If God is able to feed so many birds of the sky, He certainly can support us. No one but God could feed all the birds of the sky and nourish all the lilies of the field. He alone has the superabundance of riches to take care of the birds and the lilies as well as His own children. He would not have us be in such straitened circumstances that we can hardly live. Whoever has fallen into privation has not managed his finances according to God’s principle. God has appointed a way for us to use our money. If we do not follow this law of spending, we will naturally fall into poverty. Only by following this law of God shall we be kept from want.

God is willing to supply our needs, superabundantly if need be. Never for a moment think that He is poor. The cattle upon a thousand hills are His; all things belong to Him. Why should God’s children

be poor? Why should they be in want? God is not one who cannot supply. He most assuredly can. But there is one thing we must do, that is, we must fulfill His condition before we are supplied. What, then, is His requirement? —give and it will be given to you. . . .

The Christian Way of Managing Finances

The Christian way of financing is to not hold money tightly in hand. The tighter one holds on, the deadlier it becomes. Such money will be useless; it will melt away like ice. Only in giving is money increased. If God's children learn how to give, God will perform miracles everywhere. Holding on to money will reduce the children of God to poverty. Young believers must learn this lesson. They should not be content just to be saved; they must learn to experience the blessedness of giving. God cannot trust anyone who holds money tightly and does not give it out, for such a one is untrustworthy. The more one gives, the more God will give to him.

—DA 198-9, 208-9

11

Covenant

The New Covenant is the foundation of all spiritual life. It is due to the New Covenant that our sin may be forgiven and our conscience may regain its peace. It is because of the New Covenant that we are able to obey God and to do the things well-pleasing to Him. It is also through the New Covenant that we can commune with God directly and know Him deeply within. Were it not for the New Covenant we would have no assurance of forgiveness, no power to obey and to do God's will, and no inward fellowship with God and deep knowledge of Him. . . .

The eternal purpose of God is revealed in the New Covenant. He who is the Lord's must know this covenant, else he shall not be able to apprehend God's eternal purpose in his experience. We are told that "death reigned from Adam until Moses, . . . sin reigned in death. . ." (Rom. 5.14,21). Now during this period the eternal purpose of God was not yet revealed. But when God "preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed" (Gal. 3.8), something of the shadow of grace was shown to us, yet the substance of grace was still unseen. "The law was given through Moses" (John 1.17), yet "the law came in besides" (Rom. 5.20). It is never included in the eternal purpose of God. "All the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Matt. 11.13), but "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1.17). Therefore, with Christ comes the dispensation of grace, the New Covenant, and the revelation of the eternal purpose of God. God's eternal purpose is revealed in the New Covenant. By knowing the latter we may expect the former to be accomplished in our lives. Otherwise, we will only be able to touch the fringe, not the substance, of salvation. If we know somewhat concerning the New Covenant, it can then be said that we have touched the greatest treasure in the universe!

What is the eternal purpose of God? To state it simply, it is God working himself into the man whom He has created. God takes pleasure in joining himself with man that the latter may have His life and nature. In eternity, before time began and before heaven and earth and man were created, God had already conceived this purpose. He desired that man should be like Him, glorified and conformed to the image of His Son (Eph. 1.4,5; Rom. 8.29,30). For this reason, He created man in His own image (Gen. 1.27). He then put the man He created in the garden of Eden, wherein were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God only forbade man to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In other words, God was indicating to man how he should eat the fruit of the tree of life, though the man himself must choose actively. According to the revelation of the Bible, the tree of life points to God (Ps. 36.9; John 1.4, 11.25, 14.6; 1 John 5.12). If man were to eat the fruit of the tree of life he would have life and God would enter into him.

We know how the first Adam—the first man God created—failed. Instead of receiving God’s life, Adam took the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and was thereby alienated from the lifegiving God. Nevertheless, we praise and thank God, for though the first man was defeated and fell, the Second Man—that is, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15.45,47)—has arrived at the eternal purpose of God. In the whole universe there is at least one man who is commingled with God: Jesus of Nazareth, who is at once God and man, man and God. The Lord Jesus is “the Word [that] became flesh, and dwelt among us. . . , full of grace and truth” (John 1.14). Though “no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1.18). God’s eternal purpose is to so work himself into man as to conform him to the image of His Son. This is the New Covenant. . . .

As regards God’s promise there is the possibility of it going unrealised—or even being abolished—if we do not ask or do not

fulfill the condition therein. But God's fact will not fail to be actualized in us for our lack of asking. Since it is already a fact, it needs no asking. (Again, this points to God's fact itself, not to our individual experience of it.) Never once does God require us to do anything special in order to obtain His fact. We need only believe in it, and we shall have it. God's promise can be delayed, but God's fact is never detained. It is altogether impossible for us to accept God's fact and to wait for several years before He gives it to us. Whatever God has already accomplished and given us in Christ cannot be postponed to the future. For if God should hesitate in giving to us, it would be contradictory to fact

Three things are included in God's gracious word—God's promise, God's fact, and God's covenant. In the first chapter we touched upon God's promise and God's fact; we shall now proceed to discuss God's covenant. All those whose hearts have been taught by grace will praise Him, saying, How very great and precious is it that God makes covenant with man!

God's promise is truly invaluable. In times of sickness, pain and trouble His promise is to us "as streams of water in a dry place, as the shade of a great rock in a weary land" (Is. 32.2).

Yet God's fact is easier for us to possess than God's promise. For He gives us not only the promise which is soon to be fulfilled but also the fact which is already accomplished. Truly He has put the treasure in earthen vessels "that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves" (2 Cor. 4.7).

But today God not only grants us His promise and the fact which is already accomplished in Christ but He also covenants with us as well. His covenant is even more glorious than His promise and His fact. In making covenant with man God condescends himself to be bound and restricted by an agreement. He is willing to forfeit His liberty in the covenant in order to facilitate our possessing what He

wants us to possess. The Most High God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, stoops to make covenant with man. Such grace is beyond comparison. We can only bow and worship before the God of grace.

What does a covenant mean? A covenant speaks of faithfulness and of legality. It is not primarily concerned with pleasure and grace. A covenant is to be executed according to faithfulness, justice and law. If we make a covenant with people, stipulating in it all the things that we will do, we will be breaking our word and be faithless in case we do not perform according to this agreement. We will be looked upon as unrighteous and dishonest. We will have instantly lowered our moral standard; and furthermore, we will be judged by law as violators of covenant.

From this we can readily see that when God makes covenant with man He places himself in a circumscribed position. Originally He could treat us according to His own pleasure. He could deal with us in grace or without grace. He could either save us or not save us. Before He makes a covenant, God has the sovereign right to do whatever He likes. But after He has made it He must act in accordance with the written words of the covenant, for He is bound by it.

So far as the covenant itself is concerned, it now becomes a matter of faithfulness, not a matter of grace. Viewing it from the standpoint of God's willingness to bind himself in covenant with man, it is without doubt the highest expression of God's grace. How He has condescended to stand on the same level with man and thus place himself in a covenant! And once God has made a covenant He thereafter is under its restriction. Whether He likes it or not, God cannot violate His own covenant. Oh, how great and how noble is the fact of God making covenant with man! . . .

The New Covenant expounds as well as succeeds the Abrahamic

Covenant. We are shown in Galatians 3 that these two covenants run on the same line. Though the Mosaic Covenant of Law which God established with Israel stands between the Abrahamic and New Covenants (see Gal. 3.15-17), yet the Law is added because of transgressions (see Gal. 3.19; Rom. 5.20). Only the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant are enacted upon promise, and, therefore, on the basis of faith (see Gal. 3.7,9,16-17; Heb. 8.6). They belong to the same system. In between the Abrahamic and New Covenants is the Covenant of Law which God established with the people of Israel. This is that “first covenant” mentioned in Hebrews 8.7, which is also what we usually call the Old Covenant. The Old Covenant (or Testament) does not refer to the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament (Genesis to Malachi). Strictly speaking, the Old Covenant covers the period from Exodus 19 to the death of the Lord Jesus. The conditions for the Old Covenant are reciprocal in nature: if the children of Israel keep the Law, God will bless them; but if they violate the Law, He will punish them. This is the Old Covenant. Yet there is a covenant earlier than the Old Covenant, and that is the one God made with Abraham. Now the New Covenant is a continuation of the Abrahamic Covenant—and not of the Old Covenant.

The First Covenant Has Fault

“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then would no place have been sought for a second” (Heb. 8.7). This indicates that the first one has been found faulty. So far as the covenant *itself* is concerned, “the law is holy” (Rom. 7.12), “the law is spiritual” (Rom. 7.14), “the law is good” (1 Tim. 1.8). But as to the *function* of the first covenant, “through the law cometh the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3.20), “and the law is not of faith; but [quoting from Lev. 18.5], He that doeth them shall live in them” (Gal. 3.12). Hence this is stating that the Law demands doing good yet it fails to give the life and power to do that good. Why? Because “the law could not do, in that

it was weak through the flesh” (Rom. 8.3); and therefore “by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Rom. 3.20). In a word, “the law made nothing perfect” (Heb. 7.19). Thus is the Old Covenant found to be faulty. . . .

The New Covenant Is the Better Covenant

If the first covenant is faulty, how about the second? The second one is the New Covenant (Heb. 8.7,13). The New Covenant has been enacted upon a better promise (Heb. 8.6), and it is written not on tables of stone but on tables that are hearts of flesh (2 Cor. 3.3). Regarding this New Covenant, God puts His laws into the mind of man and writes them on his heart (Heb. 8.10b). In other words, with the New Covenant it is God who both gives the charge and enables man to do His will. The New Covenant provides us who believe with life and power to do the good which we would desire to do, so that God may be our God and we may be His people (Heb. 8.10c; Titus 2.14). It also helps us to know God more deeply within ourselves, even without the need of being instructed by men (Heb. 8.11). Consequently, it is the blood of the covenant wherewith we are sanctified (Heb. 10.29), it is “a better covenant” (Heb. 7.22, 8.6) and “an eternal covenant” (Heb. 13.20). We want to shout Hallelujah! How sweet, how glorious, and full of grace is the New Covenant! . . .

God’s Promise

No covenant can be instituted without promise. There is promise in every covenant. But ordinary promise gives no surety, whereas covenantal promise undergoes a legal procedure, and is thus protected or prosecuted by law. To those who have been deeply taught by God’s grace and who know Him well, God’s promise and God’s covenant do not make much difference; for they know He is as faithful as He is righteous. They believe that once God has promised, it shall be done. There is no need for His promises to be put into

legal form. They look upon God's promise as being just as good as His covenant. But to those whose faith is weak, God's covenant is quite different from His promise, in that covenant seems to guarantee the fulfillment of promise. Although we cannot say all God's promises are God's covenants, we can dare to say that all God's covenants contain His promises.

“But now hath he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon *better promises*” (Heb. 8.6). This tells us that the New Covenant is a better covenant because it has been enacted upon better promises.

God's Fact

God's covenant contains not only promise but also will and testament. Hebrews 9.15 speaks of “the promise of the eternal inheritance, while verse 16 speaks of a “testament.” A testament implies that something is left behind, either property or thing. What is left behind is the fact. For example: A father leaves a will, stating how his properties are to be distributed—either to his son or to others. Those who inherit his inheritance enjoy the things which he has left behind. Consequently, a testament is not empty words; there must be fact involved. Since a testament is also a covenant, it is logical to further conclude that there is fact in a covenant.

However, a covenant is different from God's promise and God's fact, though it contains both. Without promise and fact a covenant would become vain and meaningless. We thank God, for He has joined together many promises and facts in the New Covenant. Praise the Lord, the New Covenant is so rich and perfect. . . .

How Is It That Today Is Called the Dispensation of the New Covenant?

If the New Covenant is to be established by God with the house of Israel in future days, how then can we call today the dispensation of the New Covenant? This is truly most marvelous and most gracious! On the night of His betrayal, the Lord Jesus “took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant. . .” (Matt. 26.27-28a—many ancient authorities insert “new” before the word “covenant”—ASV mg.). The New Covenant—oh, how musical, how marvelous, how attractive! Although we read about the New Covenant in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, for hundreds of years afterwards nothing was ever heard of it, as though it were a forgotten treasure. During the thirty or so odd years of our Lord’s earthly days He never mentioned the New Covenant. Day after day, year after year, He made no reference to it. How then did it happen that when He was having supper with the disciples He at this particular time took the cup, blessed it, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new covenant”? He not only mentioned the New Covenant but even stated that “this is my blood of the new covenant.”

O holy and gracious Lord, we worship You with tears of gratitude and praise You with tears of joy! How full of life and full of riches is the New Covenant. To those who know You not, it is but letter. But Lord, You know what it is, and You have unveiled it this day. You have opened the heavenly spiritual treasure-house and distributed its treasures to Your beloved ones. Lord, this is indeed most marvelous and most gracious! We want to thank and praise You once more.

Due to the exceeding greatness of the grace of the Lord, this New Covenant is now applicable to all the redeemed people. Though it shall be after those days that God will make a new covenant with the

house of Israel and the house of Judah, yet all the redeemed ones may enjoy it beforehand since the Lord has paid the price with His blood. This is just the same as our being justified by faith as Abraham was justified by faith, even though God made his covenant with Abraham and not with us.

We are today being put under the New Covenant which God has promised Israel some day to enjoy because the Lord Jesus has already shed His blood—even the blood of the New Covenant. The Lord is building us up with the principle of the New Covenant. He blesses us with the blessings of the New Covenant. We know the Lord Jesus shed His blood not only for the remission of sin but also for the establishment of the New Covenant. For remission of sin is only a process, a way to the goal. The purpose of the shedding of the blood is to establish the New Covenant. Atonement is related to the institution of the New Covenant in that without the problem of sin solved the blessing of the New Covenant can not come upon us. Thank the Lord, His blood solves the problem of sin and inaugurates the New Covenant. For this reason, this age is truly the dispensation of the New Covenant. How we praise God for it! . . .

Hence the blood of the Lord Jesus not only atones for our sins that we may not be penalized, but in addition it restores completely all that was lost in the garden of Eden as well as gives us many new things. “This cup”, said the Lord, “is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22.20). The Lord’s blood is therefore shed on the one hand for the remission of sins—which negatively speaking takes away all that is harmful to us, and is shed on the other hand for the inauguration of the New Covenant—which positively speaking restores our lost heritage and gives us new things too. The blood of the Lord is for both atonement and restoration.

The Relation between Blood and Covenant

What is the relation between blood and covenant? We may say that blood is the foundation while covenant is the document. The blood lays the foundation of the covenant and the covenant reveals the document established in the blood. Without the blood no covenant can be inaugurated, nor will it be effective. God enumerates in the covenant all the inheritance He is giving us, and this covenant He seals with the blood of the Lord Jesus. It is on the ground of this New Covenant of the blood of the Lord Jesus that we come into our spiritual inheritance.

On this account the New Covenant is an absolutely legal document. It is made wholly according to the righteous procedure of God. It is not merely the spoken word of God, but is a kind of document which He has drawn up through the blood of Christ. As we may know concerning the salvation of God, whatever is done before the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus is done by God's grace, but anything done after the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus is done by His righteousness.

This does not mean that after the Lord's crucifixion there is no more grace; it simply suggests that as water is to a pipe, so the grace of God is now flowing to us through the channel of righteousness: "As sin reigned in death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5.21). Grace reigns through righteousness. God not only gives us grace, He also gives that grace through righteousness. This is God's grace—that He loved us and sent His Son the Lord Jesus to die for us. If He did not love us He would not be gracious, nor would the Lord Jesus come to accomplish the work of atonement. But after the Lord Jesus has died for us and the work of redemption is finished, it is God's righteousness which saves us if we believe in the Lord.

Never can we say that God has no grace. For if He does not have

grace there would be no New Covenant. Yet should all which God gives us be built solely on grace, our faith may falter, because grace may one day cease since it has not undergone any legal process. Thank God, not only does He have grace, but also His grace is expressed in a covenant. In order to be gracious to us God binds himself with a covenant. We may say that grace appears in the guise of righteousness. Such righteousness does not eliminate grace; on the contrary, it is the highest expression of grace.

What we receive is God's grace; nonetheless, God has established His covenant with us through the blood so that on the basis of that covenant we may ask Him to treat us according to His righteousness. We indeed are now standing on the ground of grace, yet this grace is communicated to us through righteousness. The blood of Christ has become the righteous foundation by which God's covenant with us can *never* fail. So when we approach God on the ground of the blood and of righteousness, He cannot but fulfill towards us all that is in the covenant. . . .

For this reason, the Christian life is lived by laying hold of God's word, trusting that He is faithful and righteous. Whatever He says, so is it. If we wholly stand on the covenant which the Lord Jesus has set, God will take care of us. He will perform all that is in the covenant, for He has already accepted the blood of the Lord Jesus. Since God has attached His will to the covenant, he can only move within His covenant. Had God not made a covenant with us He would be free to treat us as He likes; but since He has established a covenant with us, God must perform according to its words: for He cannot be unrighteous. We thank God for loving us and being compassionate towards us to such an extent that He treats us according to righteousness. Oh! Can there be greater grace than this? . . .

Hence when we ask according to covenant we are not asking for things which do not belong to us, rather are we claiming what is

reserved for us in God (1 Peter 1.3,4). Praying according to covenant is not praying without ground; it is instead reclaiming for ourselves what has already been given us in the covenant. As we ask according to covenant God must stand on our side because of the covenant. For this reason, often when we come to God according to the New Covenant of the blood, we “claim” instead of “ask.” This certainly does not suggest we do not need to pray today. What is really meant here is that in today’s prayer the element of “claiming” should exceed that of “asking.” . . .

Covenant Is Also Testament

Why is covenant also testament? Who makes covenant with us—the Lord Jesus or God? According to God’s word it is God and not the Lord Jesus who covenants with us. God is the other party to the covenant. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus is the One who concludes the covenant, since it is inaugurated by His blood. From God’s standpoint it is a covenant, because He covenants or enters into agreement with us. But from the standpoint of the Lord Jesus it is a testament, because He has died that we may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Heb. 9.15). A covenant is valid without the need of the death of the covenanter, but a testament cannot be in force until the death of the testator. Therefore, it is God who covenants with us, and through the death of the Lord Jesus we receive the inheritance inscribed in the testament.

So far as the contents are concerned, the New Covenant and Testament are exactly the same. They are alike also in regard to the inheritance we inherit. The only difference lies in the way of approach—whether done so from God’s side or from the side of the Lord Jesus. According to the covenant which God has made with us, it is God who forgives our sins that we may be cleansed, who gives us life and power, and who imparts to us an inward knowledge that we may know Him in a deeper way. According to the testament that

the Lord Jesus has left to us, it is the Lord Jesus who leaves with us cleansing, life and power, and the knowledge of God. . . .

We thank God, for the Lord Jesus is both testator and executor. He is the testator by death and the executor by resurrection. He brought the blood into the holiest place (Heb. 9.12), thus signifying that the testator has died. He is now in heaven acting as the mediator of the New Covenant, thereby proving that He has the power of an executor. Oh, how worthy is our Lord to be praised! “Now hath he obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant” (Heb. 8.6). . . .

Forgiveness Is Characteristic of the New Covenant

Let us read again Hebrews 8.12—“For I will be merciful to their iniquities, and their sins will I remember no more.” This is one of the blessed portions given to us in the New Covenant. It speaks of God in Christ forgiving our sins. Because Christ has shed His blood for us, God is able to be merciful toward our iniquities. He not only forgives them but also remembers them no more. He can forget our sins, not because He has overlooked them nor because He has tried not to remember, but because the blood of Christ has blotted out our transgressions and washed our sins away (Is. 44.22, Heb. 1.3, Rev. 1.5). God has today bound himself within a covenant, and He will gladly be restricted by it. When He says He will be merciful to our iniquities, He will unquestionably be merciful. When he says He will no more remember our sins, He will most certainly not remember. This is the New Covenant. This is the gospel. . . .

The Law of Life

Let us again read Hebrews 8.10: “I will put my laws into their mind, and on their heart also will I write them.” Here lies the difference between the New Covenant and the Old. In the Old

Covenant the law was placed outside of men, having been written on tables of stone; in the New Covenant it is put into our mind and written on our heart. What is outside and written on tables of stone must be of the letter (2 Cor. 3.6). What, then, is the law which can be put within us and written on our heart? What is the nature of this law? From the word of God we find that the law which can be put into our mind and written on our heart is not of the letter but of life. Each law may not be of life, but every life has its law. The law which God puts in us is the life which He gives to us.

As soon as anyone has God's life, he has this law of life within him. God comes among men in His Son, and God's Son comes into men in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who brings to us this life, and the operation of this life in us is what is here called the law of life. In other words, this law of life comes from the Holy Spirit. This is what Romans 8.2 defines as "the law of the Spirit of life." And this law is singular in number. The law in the Old Covenant contains many articles, whereas the law in the New Covenant does not have articles one, two, three, on up to the last one; for it has but one article, which is the law of life. This is the New Covenant. . . .

Since what God has put in us is life, it naturally is a law, which operates spontaneously. This law will automatically "law" out life. And this life will spontaneously "law" out the contents of the life within us—even "law" out the riches of God. It will naturally flow if it is not obstructed.

Laws and the Inward Parts

"I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it" (Jer. 31.33b). To what do these inward parts refer? In order to understand we have to mention this matter of the "heart" (by heart here we do not mean the physiological organ). We will delve into this "heart" matter according to the record of the Scriptures and the

experiences of many of the Lord's people. So far as the Bible record is concerned, the heart seems to embrace the following parts:

(1) Conscience is attached to the heart—"having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. 10.22); "if our heart condemn us" (1 John 3.20). Condemning is a function of conscience, showing then that conscience is within the realm of the heart.

(2) Mind too is linked to the heart—"Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?" (Matt. 9.4); "reasoning in their hearts" (Mark 2.6); "the imagination of their heart" (Luke 1.51); "wherefore do questionings arise in your heart?" (Luke 24.38) All these instances are stories about the heart. "And understand with their heart" (Matt. 13.15); "pondering them in her heart" (Luke 2.19); "quick to discern the thoughts . . . of the heart" (Heb. 4.12). All these verses indicate that the mind is linked to the heart.

(3) Will is also tied to the heart—"with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11.23); "ye became obedient from the heart" (Rom. 6.17); "purposed in his heart" (2 Cor. 9.7); "intents of the heart" (Heb. 4.12). These all reveal that will is definitely linked to the heart.

(4) And emotion is joined to the heart—"his heart fainted" (Gen. 45.26); "Was not our heart burning within us?" (Luke 24.32); "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14.27). All of these passages confirm that emotion is joined to the heart.

On the basis of the above passages—and though we dare not assert that conscience is the heart, that mind is the heart, or that will is the heart, or emotion is the heart—we dare to affirm that the heart has at least conscience, mind, will, and emotion attached to it. The heart is able to exercise control over conscience, mind, will, and emotion. It may be said that the heart is the sum total of these four things. Conscience is the conscience of the heart; mind, the mind of

the heart; will, the will of the heart; and emotion, the emotion of the heart.

Hence the “inward parts” of Jeremiah 31.33 include at least conscience, mind, will, and emotion of the heart.

The Relation between Heart and Laws

What does it mean by “laws” in both Hebrews 8.10 and 10.16? We have mentioned before that the law of life is singular, not plural, in number. Why then do we find “laws” in these places? Why is “laws” plural in number? It can be explained in the following way. The life which we receive at regeneration is a law. This refers to the law itself. But the operation of this law in us is more than one. God’s life has its operation in all our inward parts. It operates in our spirit, in our mind, in our will, in our emotion. So that what Jeremiah records—“I will put my law in their *inward parts*”—points to the operation of the law of God’s life in every inward segment of man.

So far as the law itself is concerned, it is singular; but as far as the operation of this law goes, it is plural. It can be likened to the water we use. The source is one, yet the pipes are many. The life in us is one law, though it operates in all our inward parts. The life is one, while its operations are many. It works in all the inward parts, nonetheless its source is but one.

Heart Is the Passage of Life

Even though the spirit is the highest part of man, what really represents him is not his spirit but his heart. “Commune with your own heart” (Ps. 4.4) coincides with what is commonly understood to

be “heart and mouth consulting together.”* We may say that the heart is the real “I”; without question it is the most important thing in our daily living.

The heart stands between the spirit and the soul. All that enters the spirit must pass through the heart; so also is it true with all that issues from the spirit. “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov 4.23). This means that the heart is the passage of life. In other words, all fruits which man bears outwardly come from the heart. Such is its significance.

The heart is the passage or channel through which life must operate. It is for this reason that God must first move upon our heart before His life can enter into us. Had there been no sorrow of heart or repentance, God’s life would not be able to come in. God has to touch our heart—causing us either to sense the pain of sin or to taste the sweetness of His love and the preciousness of Christ—in order to bring us to repentance. Heartache is a matter of the conscience, while repentance is a change of mind. When our heart is so touched, our volition will decide and our heart will believe. And thus will the life of God enter into us as is a seed that is planted in us (1 Peter 1.23). . . .

How, then, can this life be expanded? We should not forget that just as the acceptance of life commences from the heart so the growth of life must also start from the heart. Whether our spiritual life expands or not depends on how open our heart is towards God. If our heart is open to Him our life will expand; but if our heart is closed, it has no possibility of expansion. So, then, it comes back to the matter of the heart. We cannot afford to overlook this.

We ought to recognize that the heart has its delight and inclination.

* A Chinese proverb.—*Translator*

To worship and serve God is not a matter of the heart, rather is it a matter of the spirit. On the other hand, to desire after God and to love Him is not a matter of the spirit but is of the heart. The heart can love God but it cannot touch Him. It may incline towards God but it cannot commune with Him. That which may touch God and communicate with Him is the spirit. . . .

Nevertheless, should you be a heartless person God is still unable to commune and communicate with you. Your heart is like the switch of an electric lamp. If the switch is on, the light shines; if it is off, the light disappears. If your heart is open to God it is easy for Him to commune and communicate with you. But if your heart is closed to Him it will be difficult for God to commune and communicate with you. God's life in us is a fact, nonetheless the heart is the switch of that life. Whether His life can flow from our spirit to our conscience, mind, will or emotion depends on the heart that serves as a switch. With an opened heart His life will reach all our inward parts; with a closed one, His life will not be able to get through.

The Heart May Block Life's Operation

After we are regenerated by the Holy Spirit we possess an uncreated life, even the life of God. This life is full of power, a power which is infinite and unrestricted by time and space. Yet if our heart is a problem, God's life will be seriously blocked. Should there be any problem in our conscience the life of God will doubtless be hindered. Should there be a problem in our mind or emotion or our will, again, God's life will be obstructed. Yes, God's life is placed within our spirit, but it needs to flow into all our inward parts. It will be blocked if any of our inward parts presents a problem.

It is a matter of fact that each one who by grace belongs to the Lord has God's life in him. This is positive and undeniable. That this

life of God in us is both alive and operative is also positive and undeniable: and having God's life in us, we should experience revelation, enlightenment, an inner voice, and an inner sensation. Even so, many of God's children are asking why they do not have revelation, enlightenment, inner voice and sensation. Is it because God's life is not actually in them? Or that God's life is not living in them? The answer is of course no. It is positive and undeniable that God's life is in us and is both alive and operative. We do not have revelation, enlightenment, inner voice and inner sensation because on our side the "heart" causes problems. Either our conscience becomes a problem due to our not dealing with what it condemns, or our mind is bewildered by cares, evil thoughts, arguments or doubts. If it is not a problem of the will such as our being headstrong or disobedient, it may be a problem of the emotion such as carnal desire or some natural inclination. A part of the heart must have become a problem or hindrance.

The life of God is put in us, and this life will issue forth from our spirit. Yet sometimes we do not allow it to pass through. Due to an obstacle raised by our conscience, mind, will or emotion, God's life is unable to "law" out from us. Let us always keep in mind that in expanding outwardly, the life of God must pass through the various parts of the heart. Any problem in any segment of the heart will block its operation

Two Conditions for Life's Operation

The law of life seeks to move out from our spirit that it may operate through our various inward parts. Oftentimes, however, it cannot pass through, as though striking a wall. This is because we have blocked it. In order to let the life operate freely, we must fulfill two conditions.

Obey Life's First Impulse

One of the conditions is that we should obey life's first impulse. It should be noted that the unregenerated has no inward feeling at all; only he who is born again possesses at least something of such an inward feeling.

Once a Christian physician said to a preacher, "Spiritual beginning and spiritual growth come from hunger and thirst. Many people feel neither hungry nor thirsty. How can we help them to feel so?" Replied the preacher. "You are a physician. You know that there is life in man. Unless he is dead he will more or less have the desire for food. How, then, can you increase his desire for food? You give him some medicine to stimulate him until his desire for food becomes normal. In the same way, the one who has some inward feeling must learn to obey such an impulse. If you obey this little feeling your hunger and thirst will increase a little. More obedience results in stronger hunger and thirst. As your inward feeling grows stronger, you obey a little more; and as you obey still further, your inward feeling increases that much more. More obedience means more inward feeling. Thus you immediately realize you are inwardly alive."

This is the way life will operate in us. It turns towards the emotional part of our heart, causing us to move towards God; next it turns to the mental part of our heart, drawing us to God; and then it turns to the volitional part, motivating us towards God even more. By such cycles of turnings, our spiritual life is increased and deepened and heightened. Therefore, we need to begin by *obeying the tiniest inward feeling*. As soon as we sense such an impulse, we must learn to obey. . . .

One thing very precious is the fact that if we overstep the bounds set by God or if our action does not agree with our inner life, we will immediately sense our being "forbidden of the Holy Spirit" (Acts

16.6) and that “the Spirit of Jesus suffer[s] [us] not” (Acts 16.7). By obeying the inner guidance in our goings and stayings time after time, we shall make progress in life. Let us repeat: we must obey life’s first impulse—even the tiniest of feelings—since obedience is an important condition for the operation of life.

Love God

The other condition is to love God: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength” (Mark 12.30). The word “mind” here is *dianoia* in the Greek. According to God’s word, to love God is related to the operation of life. According to the experience of many saints God first sows His life in them, then He stirs the emotion of their heart by love. If we study the Gospel of John we will see that it stresses love as well as faith. It not only states that “he that believeth on the Son hath eternal life” (3.36) but also asserts that “if a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (14.23). *By faith life is received; through love life is released.* Faith alone will let life in; love alone will let it out.

We must therefore allow this love to reach into our heart, making its way into the emotional, intellectual, and volitional parts of our heart. Let us lift up our heart and say: “My God, I will love You with my soul, I will love You with my understanding, I will love You with my strength.” Whoever says this truthfully will soon see that his thought is changed, his speech is changed, his conduct is changed—all within and without him is changed. And why? Because there is the “story of love” within him. Oh, what God expects of us today is that our heart may be touched by Him; that our soul, our understanding, and our strength may all be touched by Him. “But whensoever it [the heart] shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away” (2 Cor. 3.16). As the heart turns to the Lord, there shall come

enlightenment, inner voice and inward feeling. . . .

When the life of God operates in us there will be two effects: one is the effect of death, the other is the effect of resurrection. The effect of death takes away the sickness, whereas the effect of resurrection restores health. The first element of the Lord's cross is death, its second element is resurrection. We are told in Romans 6 that these two are the strongest and most effective elements of the life of Christ. Now what is the cross? It is this, that when your heart is touched by God you offer yourself into God's hand in order that His life may operate in you. And as it operates, there is an element which puts you to death. This effect of death takes away from you all which is undesired—that which rebels against God, that which is contrary to life, and that which is contradictory to the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, there is also a living element, which causes you to live. The effect of this life is to enable you to live out all the riches of the Godhead, and so filling you with light, joy and peace. . . .

“Christ Be Formed” and “Transformed” and “Like Him”

As the law of life operates freely in us life will increase to the degree of having Christ formed in us (Gal. 4.19). In the measure that Christ is gradually being formed in us, in that same measure are we increasingly transformed (2 Cor. 3.18); and the goal of transformation is to be like Him (1 John 3.2). Christ formed in us is inseparable from the operation of God's life in us. To the degree that the life of God works in us to that degree is Christ being formed in us and to that degree is there the amount of our transformation. As our inside is filled with the life of Christ our outside is able to live out and manifest Christ. This is what is meant in Romans 8.29 by “to be conformed to the image of his Son.” It is both Paul's pursuit and experience (Phil. 3.10, 1.20). It should be the calling as well as the practical experience of all children of God today. For us to be wholly like Him will of course have to wait until He shall manifest himself

(1 John 3.2), that is to say, at the day of “the redemption of our body” (Eph. 1.14, 4.30, especially Rom. 8.23). . . .

God Is God in the Law of Life

The life of God works steadily in us towards an immense objective. “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Heb. 8.10c). This word reveals the heart of God. It unveils the purpose of God from eternity to eternity. God is to be our God in the law of life, and so are we to be His people in the law of life. This is a tremendous fact. . . .

All who know God as God will learn to be men. For in the fall we were tempted to be gods, but in deliverance we are ready to be humans. The principle of the garden of Eden is ever that by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil “ye shall be as gods” (Gen. 3.5 mg.); while the principle of Calvary is to restore us to the position of man. For this reason, we will surely take the proper place of man if we know God as God. . . .

Having put His laws into our mind and having written them on our heart, God will be our God in the law of life and we will be His people. The second half of Hebrews 8.10 closely follows the first half. It does not say that God will be our God on the throne; rather, it asserts that in the law of life God shall be our God and we shall be His people. The relation between us and God and God and us is in the fellowship of life. We cannot touch God if we are not living according to the law of life. Only as we live in the law of life can we be God’s people and can God be our God. In order to draw near to Him—to serve and to worship Him—we must be in the law of life. . . .

Even so, the New Covenant does not end at this point. The word of God continues by stating that “they shall not teach every man his

fellow-citizen, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest of them” (Heb. 8.11). This would signify a deeper knowledge of God, a knowing God himself. By the Holy Spirit God will bring His redeemed people to *the* spiritual peak of knowing His very own Self. Putting His laws in our mind and writing them on our heart is but God’s *procedure* by which to arrive at the *deeper goal*, that of *knowing His own Self*. It is true that to fellowship with God is an end in itself, yet at the same time fellowship is also God’s means to reach a *deeper end*, which is the *full knowledge of God*. Let us know assuredly that His purpose is to incorporate himself in us, that He may be one with us in life. Achieving this characteristic of the New Covenant depends upon the degree to which we attain this purpose of knowing God himself in the law of life. . . .

The Teaching of the Anointing

Let us again read Hebrews 8.11: “They shall not teach every man his fellow-citizen, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest of them” (the “shall not” here is very emphatic in the original Greek: it may be translated “definitely not”). What is said here coincides with the word in 1 John 2.27: “As for you, the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye *need not* that any one teach you; but as *his anointing teacheth you concerning all things*, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him.”

Why does one who has God’s life need no one else to teach him? It is because the anointing of the Lord abides in him and shall teach him in all things. This is most practical. When God says “need not,” it means just that! The Lord’s anointing always abides in us. Sometimes His grace is so immense that we can hardly believe. Therefore God’s word continues with: “and is true, and is no lie.” Never let us doubt the word of God because of our own abnormal

spiritual condition. What our God has said is one with what He will accomplish. We must believe His word. Then will we praise and thank Him.

The Anointing Is in the Spirit's Intuition

Intuition is where the Anointing teaches us. "As for you," writes John, "the anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but as his anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in him." In very clear fashion, this passage has described the way the Anointing is to teach us. The Holy Spirit dwells in our spirit, and the Anointing is in the spirit's intuition. The Anointing teaches us concerning all things. This means that the Holy Spirit will teach us in the spirit's intuition, giving our spirit a sense similar to the physical feeling experienced when the body is anointed with oil. As our spirit receives such a sensation we know at once what the Holy Spirit is speaking to us.

Just here we should be aware of the difference between "knowing" and "understanding." Knowing is in the spirit while understanding is in the mind. We come to know a thing through the spirit's intuition, and our mind is then enlightened to understand what the intuition has known. In the spirit's intuition we know the persuasion of the Holy Spirit; in the soul's mind we understand the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Anointing is independent of any human help. It expresses its idea sovereignly. It operates in the spirit, causing the intuition of man's spirit to know its thought. Such a knowing in the spirit's intuition is called revelation in the Bible. Revelation is nothing but the unveiling by the Holy Spirit of the true character of a thing to our spirit so that we may clearly know it. This kind of knowledge is much deeper than the understanding of the mind.

Since the anointing of the Lord abides in us and teaches us concerning all things, we have no need for people to teach us. This Anointing will teach us in all things by the operation of intuition. The Holy Spirit will express His thought through the spirit's intuition because the latter has a kind of ability to know what the Holy Spirit means by His action. We therefore need only follow the dictate of intuition—and not inquire of other people nor even of ourselves—if we wish to do the will of God.*

The anointing of the Lord will teach us concerning all things. At no time will He ever fail to teach us concerning anything. Our responsibility lies in nothing else than to be taught. . . .

Repeat Outside

In reading the epistles in the New Testament we may see how the many teachings and instructions that are there are *repetitive* in nature. They are there because of problems in the church. Often we read “Are you ignorant” or “Know ye not” (such as in Rom. 6.3,16; 1 Cor. 3.16, 5.6, 6.2,3,9,15,16,19; James 4.4). “Are you ignorant” means you have already heard and known but you deliberately ignore it and let it pass away. God says “Are you ignorant” by means of the Bible. Yet the Bible is not to be a substitute for the speaking of the inner Anointing; it merely repeats what the Anointing has already spoken in you.

Because of our abnormal spiritual state due to our neglecting the inward teaching, the Lord sends His servants to us again and again to

* Yet the author acknowledges that there is a place for outward instruction as a complement to (but never a substitute for) the inward teaching, and that there is also a need to check the inner Anointing against the word of God. These two points he makes clear below in the two later sections of this Chapter entitled, respectively, “Repeat Outside” and “The Scriptures Check Our Inward Sensation.”—*Translator*

repeat outwardly with the word of the Bible what the Anointing has already spoken in us. Since the Lord's anointing has already taught us within, why do we not learn to hear from within? Let us understand that the inward teaching and the outward instruction are complementary to each other, though the outward can never substitute for the inward. The inward words are living and full of life. Therefore, this characteristic of the New Covenant needs to be highly esteemed by each one who belongs to God.

Here we would like to briefly remind some brothers and sisters of one point. Today in helping other people, do not legislate or hand down ten commandments to them, nor instruct them with our subjective do's and don'ts. We should not act like Old Testament seers, telling individuals what God's will is for each of them. For in the New Testament, there are prophets to the church but none to individuals. New Testament prophets can only point out God's will in principle; they should never try to declare God's will to each individual. This is because all of us who belong to the Lord should learn to receive the teaching of the Anointing within us. Otherwise, there would be no New Covenant. We may only confirm or repeat what God has already said or taught in men; else where would the New Covenant be? Most certainly we need to humbly receive the instructions of those who teach us in the Lord; even so, whatever we do receive must also be taught by the Anointing within us. Only thus shall we have the New Covenant. Let us ever keep in mind that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3.6b). . . .

Let us reiterate that the teaching of the Anointing in us is most real. We have not overstated the case at all in saying we need not that anyone teach us, because the law of life is operating in us. Indeed, the Bible in fact says so. Yet on the other hand we must guard against deception or any extreme, for unquestionably we need the word of the Scriptures as a check on our inward sensation.

The Scriptures Check Our Inward Sensation

Since the Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of truth” and that He is to guide us “into all the truth” (John 14.17, 16.13), our inward sensation, if it is of the Holy Spirit, will undoubtedly agree with what Holy Scripture says. In case our inward sensation disagrees with the word of God, such sensation must be inaccurate. We should know that just as the inner sensation is *living*, so the outer Bible is *accurate*. The word of the Bible is accurate and certain but not necessarily living by itself. The inward sensation may be living but sometimes is neither accurate nor certain. Similarly, a train with its locomotive has steam power, yet it must have tracks. A train cannot move on tracks without a locomotive, but neither can it, with its locomotive, run without tracks. It either will not run at all or will run disastrously. The Bible shows us that in coming out of Egypt the children of Israel had before them as their guide the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. When our spiritual condition is normal we are as though walking under blue sky and bright sun. But our spiritual condition does not always remain constant. The Bible also says that “thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path” (Ps. 119.105). Were there no dark night there would be no need of lamp or light. When we are bright inwardly, our inner sensation is clear and sure; but when we are inwardly dark, our inner sensation tends to be confused and flickering; and so there is the need to check with the word of the Scriptures. Life plus truth becomes real and steady power. We must walk on this lasting path of both life *and* truth. Every thought and judgment of ours needs to have checked against it the word of the Bible. This will help us to walk straight ahead without turning to the left or right.

—BC 2-4, 14-15, 25-6, 37-8, 40-5, 51-5, 60-2, 72-3, 91-8, 103-7,
114-5, 122, 127-8, 131-2, 135-6, 140-1, 143-6

12

Authority and Submission

God's Throne Established on Authority

The acts of God issue from His throne, and His throne is established on His authority. All things are created through God's authority and all physical laws of the universe are maintained by His authority. Hence the Bible expresses it as "upholding all things by the word of His power, which means upholding all things by the word of the power of His authority. For God's authority represents God himself whereas His power stands only for His act. Sin against power is more easily forgiven than sin against authority, because the latter is a sin against God himself. God alone is authority in all things; all the authorities of the earth are instituted by God. Authority is a tremendous thing in the universe—nothing overshadows it. It is therefore imperative for us who desire to serve God to know the authority of God. . . .

Authority, the Controversy of the Universe

The controversy of the universe is centered on who shall have the authority, and our conflict with Satan is the direct result of our attributing authority to God. To maintain God's authority we must be subject to it with all our hearts. It is absolutely necessary for us to meet God's authority and to possess a basic knowledge of what it is.

Before he knew authority Paul tried to wipe out the church; after he had met the Lord on the Damascus road he saw that it was hard for the feet (human power) to kick against the goads (God's authority). He immediately fell to the ground and acknowledged Jesus as Lord. After that, he was able to submit to the directions given him by Ananias in the city of Damascus, for Paul had met God's authority. At the moment he was saved he knew God's

authority as well as God's salvation.

How could Paul, being a clever and capable person, listen to the words of Ananias—an unknown little brother mentioned only once in the Bible—if he had not met the authority of God? Had he not encountered authority on the road to Damascus he could never have been subject to that obscure little brother in the city. This shows us that whoever has met authority deals purely with authority and not with man. Let us not see the man but only the authority vested in him. We do not obey man but God's authority in that man. Otherwise, how can we ever learn what authority is? We are on the wrong road if we meet man first before we obey authority. The opposite is the right way. Then we will not mind who the man is.

God has purposed to manifest His authority to the world through the church. God's authority can be seen in the coordination of the various members of the body of Christ.

God uses His utmost power to maintain His authority; therefore His authority is the hardest thing to come up against. We who are so self-righteous and yet so blind need once in our life to encounter God's authority so that we may be broken unto submission and so begin to learn obedience to the authority of God. Before a man can subject himself to God's delegated authority he must first meet God's inherent authority.

Obedience to God's Will—the Greatest Demand of the Bible

The greatest of God's demands on man is not for him to bear the cross, to serve, make offerings, or deny himself. The greatest demand is for him to obey. God ordered Saul to attack the Amalekites and destroy them utterly (1 Sam. 15). Yet after his victory Saul spared Agag, king of the Amalekites, along with the best of the sheep and oxen and the fatted beasts and lambs and all that was good. Saul

would not devote them to destruction; he argued that these were spared to sacrifice to God. But Samuel said to him: “Behold, obedience is better than sacrifice, attention than the fat of rams” (verse 15.22 Darby). The sacrifices mentioned here were sweet-savor offerings—having nothing to do with sin, for sin-offering was never called an offering of sweet-savor. They were offered for God’s acceptance and satisfaction. Why did Samuel say that “obedience is better than sacrifice”? Because even in sacrifice there can be the element of self-will. Obedience alone is absolutely honoring to God, for it alone takes God’s will as its center.

For authority to be expressed there must be subjection. If there is to be subjection, self needs to be excluded; but according to one’s self-life, subjection is not possible. This is only possible when one lives in the Spirit. It is the highest expression of God’s will. . . .

As God’s servants, the first thing we should meet is authority. To touch authority is as practical as touching salvation, but it is a deeper lesson. Before we can work for God we must be overturned by His authority. Our entire relationship with God is regulated by whether or not we have met authority. If we have, then we shall encounter authority everywhere, and being thus restrained by God we can begin to be used by Him. . . .

Christians Should Obey Authority

There is no authority except from God; all authorities have been instituted by Him. By tracing all authorities back to their source we invariably end up with God. God is above all authorities, and all authorities are under Him. In touching God’s authority we touch God himself. God’s work basically is done not by power but by authority. He upholds all things by the powerful word of His authority, even as He created them by the same word. His word of command is authority. We cannot say how God’s authority works; nevertheless,

we know that He accomplishes everything by it.

A beloved servant of a centurion was sick. The centurion knew he was both under authority and in authority over others. So he asked the Lord to but say a word, believing the work of healing would thus be done—for are not all authorities in the Lord’s hand? He believed in the Lord’s authority. No wonder our Lord commended him for his great faith: “Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Matt. 8.10). Touching God’s authority is the same as meeting God. Today the universe is full of authorities set up by God. All the laws of the universe are established by God. Everything is under His authority. Whenever a person sins against God’s authority he sins against God. All Christians must therefore learn to obey authority. . . .

No Unity of Body Without Authority of Head

God is working towards recovering the oneness of the body. But for this to be accomplished there must first be the life of the Head, followed next by the authority of the Head. Without the life of the Head there can be no body. Without the authority of the Head there can be no unity of the body. To maintain the oneness of the body we must let the life of the Head rule.

God wishes us to obey His delegated authorities as well as himself. All the members of the body should be subject to one another. When this is so, the body is one with itself and with the Head. As the authority of the Head prevails, the will of God is done. Thus does the church become the kingdom of God. . . .

Philippians 2.5-7 forms one section and verses 8-11, another. In these two sections our Lord is seen as having humbled himself twice: first He emptied himself in His divinity, and then He humbled himself in His humanity. By the time He came to this world, the Lord

had so emptied himself of the glory, power, status, and form of His divinity that no one then living, other than by revelation, knew Him nor acknowledged Him as God. They treated Him as a man, as an ordinary person of this world. As the Son He willingly submits to the Father's authority and declares that "the Father is greater than I" (John 14.28). Thus there is perfect harmony in the Godhead. Gladly the Father takes the place of the Head, and the Son responds with obedience. God becomes the emblem of authority, while Christ assumes the symbol of obedience.

For we men to be obedient it should be simple, because all we need is but a little humility. For Christ to be obedient, however, is not so simple a matter. It is much harder for Him to be obedient than for Him to create the heavens and the earth. Why? Because He has to empty himself of all the glory and power of His divinity and take the form of a slave before He is even qualified to obey. Hence obedience is initiated by the Son of God.

The Son originally shared the same glory and authority with the Father. But when He came to the world He on the one hand forsook authority and on the other hand took up obedience. He willingly took the place of a slave, accepting the human limitation of time and space. He humbled himself further and became obedient unto death. Obedience within the Godhead is the most wonderful sight in the whole universe. Since Christ was obedient unto death—suffering a most painful and shameful death on the cross—God has highly exalted Him. God exalts whoever humbles himself. This is a divine principle.

To Be Filled with Christ Is to Be Filled with Obedience

Since the Lord has initiated obedience, the Father has become the Head of Christ. Now because both authority and obedience have been instituted by God, it is natural for those who know God and

Christ to obey. But those who know not God and Christ know neither authority nor obedience. Christ is the principle of obedience. He who accepts Christ accepts the principle of obedience. Hence a person who is filled with Christ must be one who is also filled with obedience. . . .

Learning Obedience through Suffering

It is told in Hebrews 5.8 that Christ “learned obedience through what He suffered.” Suffering called forth obedience from the Lord. Please note here that He did not *bring* obedience to this earth; He *learned* it—and He did so through suffering.

When we meet suffering we then learn obedience. Such obedience is real. Our usefulness is not determined by whether or not we have suffered, but by how much obedience we have learned through that suffering. The obedient ones alone are useful to God. As long as our heart is not softened, suffering will not leave us. Our way lies in many sufferings; the easy-goers and pleasure-lovers are useless before God. Let us therefore learn to obey in suffering. . . .

Those who are set up by God are to exercise authority for Him. Since all governing authorities are ordained and instituted by God, they are meant to be obeyed. If we would indeed learn how to obey God, we would then have no trouble recognizing on whom God’s authority rests. But if we know only God’s direct authority, we may possibly violate more than half of His authority. Upon how many lives can we identify the authority of God? Is there any room for us to choose between God’s direct authority and His delegated authority? No, we must be subject to delegated authority as well as to God’s direct authority, for “there is no authority except from God.”

As to earthly authorities, Paul not only exhorts positively towards subjection but also warns negatively against resistance. He who

resists the authorities resists God's own command; he who rejects God's delegated authorities rejects God's own authority. Authority, according to the Bible, is characterized by a unique nature: there is no authority except from God. He who resists authority resists God, and those who resist will incur judgment. There is no possibility of rebellion without judgment. The consequence of resisting authority is death. Man has no choice in the matter of authority. . .

Be Fearlessly Subject to Delegated Authority

What a risk God has taken in instituting authorities! What a loss God will incur if the delegated authorities He institutes misrepresent Him! Yet, undaunted, God has set up these authorities. It is much easier for us to fearlessly obey authorities than for God to institute them. Can we not then obey them without apprehension since God himself has not been afraid to entrust authority to men? Even as God has boldly established authorities, so let us courageously obey them. If anything should be amiss, the fault does not lie with us but with the authorities, for the Lord declares: "Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers" (Rom. 13.1). . . .

Authority Finds Its Fullest Expression in the Body

The fullest expression of God's authority is found in the body of Christ, His church. Though God has established the procedure of authority in this world, none of those relationships (rulers and people, parents and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants) can give authority its fullest expression. Because the many governing authorities on earth are all institutional, there is always the possibility of the *appearance* of subordination without there being the real subjection of heart. There is no way to detect whether the people are following an order of the ruler from their hearts or merely rendering lip-service. It is equally difficult to tell whether the children are hearkening to their parents whole-heartedly or not. Hence subjection

to authority cannot be typified by the way children are subject to their parents, servants to their masters, or people to their rulers. Though God's authority cannot be established without subjection, neither can it be if the subjection is not from the heart. Then again, all these instances of subjection lie within the scope of human relationships; consequently they are temporal and are subject to separation. So it is clear that absolute and perfect subjection cannot be found in them.

Only the relationship between Christ and the church can fully express both authority and obedience. For God has not called the church to be an institution; He has ordained her to be the body of Christ. We often think of the church as a gathering of believers with the same faith or as a meeting of loving hearts, but God looks at her differently. She stands not only for the same faith and united love but even more so as one body.

The church is the body of Christ, while Christ is the Head of the church. The relationships of parents and children, masters and servants, and even husbands and wives may all be severed, but the physical head and its body are inseparable; they are forever one. In like manner, Christ and the church too can never be sundered apart. The authority and obedience found in Christ and the church are of such a perfect nature that they surpass all other expressions of authority and obedience. .

For the Body to Obey the Head Is Most Natural and Agreeable

God has provided that the head and the body should share one life and one nature. It is therefore most natural for the body to obey the head. Indeed, in such a relationship disobedience would be strange. For example, it is normal for the hand to be raised at the instruction of the head; should the hand fail to respond, something would be wrong! In like manner, the Spirit of life which God has given us is

one and the same as that which the Lord has; so is the nature of our life the same as His. Thus, there is no possibility of discord and disobedience. . . .

Yet right here lies the common fault of God's children. We need to recognize in other members the authority of the Head. The function of each member is limited; the eye is to see, the hand is to work, and the foot is to walk; we must therefore learn to accept the functions of the other members. We ought not refuse the function of any member. If the foot should reject the hand, it is the same as rejecting the Head. But if we accept the authority of a member, it is the same as accepting the authority of the Head. By way of fellowship all other members can be my authority. Although the function of the hand of the physical body is tremendous, it has to accept the function of the feet when it comes to walking. The hand cannot feel color, so it needs to accept the authority of the eye. The function of each member constitutes its authority.

The Riches of Christ Is Authority

It is impossible to make each member a whole body; we must each learn to stand in the position of being a member and of accepting the workings of the other members. What others see and hear is reckoned as my seeing and hearing. To accept the workings of other members is to accept the riches of the Head. No member can afford to be independent, since each is but a member in the body; whatever the other members do is taken as the doing of all the members and hence the doing of the body. . . .

We often misunderstand authority as something which oppresses us, hurts us, and troubles us. God does not have such a concept. He uses authority to replenish our lack. His motive in instituting authority is to bestow His riches on us and to supply the need of the weak. He would not have you wait for decades and pass through

many dark and painful days before you are able to see by yourself. By that time you might have led many into darkness. Indeed, you would become the blind leading the blind. What damage would God suffer through you! No, He first works in the life of another, and works thoroughly, so that He may give that person to you as an authority above you for you to learn obedience and to possess what you have never possessed before. This man's wealth becomes your wealth. Should you overlook this divine procedure, though you may live for fifty years, you may still lag far behind the attainment of that person.

The way God grants His grace to us is twofold: sometimes, though rarely, He grants grace to us directly; mostly He gives His riches to us indirectly—that is, God puts above you the brothers and sisters in the church who are more advanced spiritually so that you may accept their judgment as your judgment. This will then enable you to possess their wealth without you yourself having to go through their painful experiences. God has deposited much grace in the church; but He dispenses to each member some grace in particular, just as each star has its own particular glory. Hence authority brings in the riches of the church. The wealth of each member is the wealth of all. To rebel is to choose the way of poverty. To resist authority is to reject the means to grace and richness. . . .

In the past both authority and obedience were objective, that is, an outward subjection to an outside power. Today authority has become a living thing, something inward. Authority and obedience meet each other in the body of Christ. Instantly both turn subjective and the two are merged into one. Herein is the highest expression of God's authority. Authority and obedience reach their consummation in the body. Let us be built up here; otherwise, there is no way. The place where we meet authority is in the body. The Head (the source of authority) and the members (each with its function, ministering to each other as delegated authority as well as being obedient to

authority) are all in the church. If we fail to acknowledge authority here, there is no way. . . .

Difficulties in the Church Often Derive from Slanderous Words

Speaking inadvertently is largely responsible for the breaking of the unity of the church and the losing of power. Probably most difficulties in the church today are due primarily to slanderous words; only a minor part of the difficulties are real problems. In fact, most of the troubles in this world have been created through lies. If in the church we can stop slandering we will have eliminated the major part of our difficulties. How we need to confess our sins before God and ask for His forgiveness. All our words of reviling must be carefully and thoroughly terminated before God. “Doth the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter?” (James 3.11) There ought not come from the same lips loving words and slanderous words. May God set a watch over our lips, and not only over our lips but also over our heart, that we be delivered from rebellious thoughts and reviling words. May reviling words forevermore depart from us. . . .

“I Am the Lord Your God”—This Is the Reason

In Leviticus 18-22, each time God orders the people of Israel to do certain things, He interpolates a phrase: “I am the Lord your God.” This is not even prefixed with the preposition “for.” It means “I so speak because I am the Lord your God. I do not need to give any reason. I, the Lord, am the reason.” If you see this you will never be able to live by reason any more. You will say to God: “Whereas in the past I lived by thought and reason, now I bow and worship You; whatever You have done, because it is You who have done it, is sufficient for me.” After Paul fell on the road to Damascus his reasonings were all cast aside. The question he asked was, “What shall I do, Lord?” He instantly put himself in subjection to the Lord.

No one who knows God will argue, for reason is judged and set aside by the light.

To argue with God implies that God needs to get our consent for all He does. This is utmost folly. When God acts He is under no obligation to tell us the reason, because His ways are higher than our ways. If we bring God down to reasonings we will lose Him because we make Him one of us. In reasonings we shall not have worship. As soon as obedience is absent, worship is lost. By judging God with our reason we set ourselves up as gods. Where, then, is the difference between the potter and the clay? Does the potter need to ask the consent of the clay in his work? May the glorious appearing of the Lord put an end to all our reasoning's. . . .

We may perceive whether or not one has met authority by observing whether his words, reasonings, and thoughts have been duly dealt with. Once one encounters God's authority his tongue dare not freely wiggle, his reasonings and, deeper still, his thoughts can no longer be loosely expressed. Ordinarily man has numerous thoughts, all fortified with many reasonings. But there must come a day when God's authority overthrows all the strongholds of reasoning which Satan has erected and recaptures all a man's thoughts so as to make him a willing slave of God. Whereupon he no longer thinks independently of Christ; he is wholly obedient to Him. This is full deliverance.

One who has not met authority often aspires to be God's counselor. Such a person does not have his thoughts recaptured by God. Wherever he goes, his first thought is how to improve the situation there. His thoughts have never been disciplined, hence his reasonings are so many and so unceasing. We must allow the Lord to do a cutting work in us, to cut to the very depth of our thoughts until they are all taken captive by God. Thereafter we will recognize God's authority and will not dare to freely reason or counsel. . . .

Testimony of the Kingdom Brought In through Obedience

God does not look at how fervently we preach the gospel or how willingly we suffer for Him; He looks to see how obedient we are. God's kingdom begins when there is an absolute obedience to God—no voicing of opinion, no presenting of reasonings, no murmuring, no reviling. For this glorious day God has waited since the creation of the world. Although God has His firstborn Son who is the first-fruit of obedience, He is waiting for His many sons to be like the Firstborn. Wherever there is a church on this earth which truly obeys God's authority, there is the testimony of the kingdom and there Satan is defeated. Satan is not afraid of our work so long as we act on the principle of rebellion. He only laughs in secret when we do things according to our own thoughts. . . .

Submission Is Absolute, but Obedience Is Relative

Submission is a matter of attitude, while obedience is a matter of conduct. Peter and John answered the Jewish religious council: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye" (Acts 4.19). Their spirit was not rebellious, since they still submitted to those who were in authority. Obedience, however, cannot be absolute. Some authorities must be obeyed; while others should not be, especially in matters which touch upon Christian fundamentals—such as believing the Lord, preaching the gospel, and so forth. Children may make suggestions to their parents, yet they must not show an insubmissive attitude. Submission ought to be absolute. Sometimes obedience is submission, whereas at other times an inability to obey may still be submission. Even when making a suggestion, we should maintain an attitude of submission. . . .

When delegated authority (men who represent God's authority) and direct authority (God himself) are in conflict, one can render

submission but not obedience to the delegated authority. Let us summarize this under three points:

1. Obedience is related to conduct: it is relative. Submission is related to heart attitude: it is absolute.

2. God alone receives unqualified obedience without measure; any person lower than God can only receive qualified obedience.

3. Should the delegated authority issue an order clearly contradicting God's command, he will be given submission but not obedience. We should submit to the *person* who has received delegated authority from God, but we should disobey the order which offends God. . . .

Indispensable Signs Accompanying the Obedient

How can we judge whether a person is obedient to authority? By the following signs:

1. A person who has known authority will naturally try to find authority wherever he goes. The church is the place where obedience can be learned, since there is not really such a thing as obedience in this world. Only Christians can obey, and they too must learn to obey—not outwardly, but from the heart. Yet once this lesson of obedience has been learned, the Christian will look for and find authority everywhere.

2. A person who has met God's authority is soft and tender. He has been melted and is not able to be hard. He is afraid of being wrong and thus he is soft.

3. A person who has truly met authority never likes to be in authority. He has neither the thought nor the interest to become one in authority. He does not take delight in giving counsel, nor does he

take pleasure in controlling others. The truly obedient is always in fear of making an error. But alas, how many there are who still aspire to be God’s counselors. Only those who do not know authority are those who wish to be authorities.

4. A person who has contacted authority keeps his mouth closed. He is under restraint. He dare not speak carelessly because there is in him a sense of authority.

5. A person who has touched authority is sensitive to each act of lawlessness and rebellion around him. He sees how the principle of lawlessness has filled the earth and even the church. Only those who have experienced authority can lead others into obedience. Brothers and sisters must learn to obey authority; otherwise the church will not have any testimony on earth. . . .

There is no one who is fit to be God’s delegated authority unless he himself first knows how to be under authority. No one can know how to exercise authority until his own rebellion has been dealt with. God’s children are not a heap of yarn or a mixed multitude. If there is no testimony of authority, there is no church nor work. This poses a serious problem. It is essential that we learn to be subject to one another and subject to delegated authorities.

Three Requirements for a Delegated Authority

Beyond a personal knowledge of authority and a life lived under authority, God’s delegated authority needs to fulfill the three following principal requirements:

1. *He must know that all authority comes from God.* Every person who is called to be a delegated authority should remember that “there is no authority except from God; and those that exist are set up by God” (Rom. 13.1 Darby). He himself is not the authority, nor can

anyone make of himself an authority. His opinions, ideas and thoughts are no better than those of others. They are utterly worthless. Only what comes from God constitutes authority and commands man's obedience. A delegated authority is to represent God's authority, never to assume that he too has authority. . . .

For one to be in authority does not depend on his having ideas and thoughts; rather does it hinge on knowing the will of God. The measure of one's knowledge of God's will is the measure of his delegated authority. God establishes a person to be His delegated authority entirely on the basis of that person's knowledge of God's will. It has nothing at all to do with having many ideas, strong opinions, or noble thoughts. Indeed, such persons who are strong in themselves are greatly to be feared in the church. . . .

2. *He must deny himself.* Until one knows the will of God he should keep his mouth shut. He should not exercise authority carelessly. He who is to represent God must learn on the positive side what God's authority is and on the negative side how to deny himself. Neither God nor the brothers and sisters will treasure your thoughts. Probably you yourself are the only one in the whole world who considers your opinion as the best. Persons with many opinions, ideas, and subjective thoughts are to be feared. They like to be counselors to all. They seize upon every opportunity to press their ideas on others. God can never use a person so full of opinions, ideas, and thoughts as the one to represent His authority. For example, who would ever employ a spendthrift to keep his accounts? To do so would be to invite acute suffering. Nor will God engage a man of many opinions to be His delegated authority lest He too should suffer damage.

Unless we are completely broken by the Lord we are not qualified to be God's delegated authority. God calls us to *represent* His authority, not to *substitute* His authority. God is sovereign in His

personality and position. His will is His. He never consults with man nor does He allow anyone to be His counselor. Consequently, one who represents authority must not be a subjective person. . . .

3. *He must constantly keep in fellowship with the Lord.* Those who are God's delegated authority need to maintain close fellowship with God. There must be not only communication but also communion.

Anyone who offers opinions freely and speaks in the name of the Lord carelessly is far away from God. He who mentions God's name casually only proves his remoteness from God. Those who are near to God have a godly fear; they know how defiling it is to carelessly express their own opinions.

Communion, therefore, is another principal requirement for one in authority. The nearer one is to the Lord, the clearer he sees his own faults. Having been brought face to face with God, he dare not thereafter speak with such firmness. He has no confidence in his flesh; he begins to be afraid lest he err. On the other hand, those who speak casually expose themselves as being far from God. . . .

Authority is representative in nature, not inherent. It means that one must live before God, learning, and being wounded so as not to project oneself into it. One should never be so mistaken to consider oneself the authority. God alone has authority; no one else possesses it. When God's authority flows to me, it can then flow through me to others. What makes me different from others is God, not myself.

Hence we must learn to fear God and refrain from doing anything carelessly. We should confess that we are no different from other brothers and sisters. Since God has so arranged that today I should learn to be His delegated authority, I must live in His presence, commune with Him continuously, and seek to know His mind. Unless I have seen something there with God, I have nothing to say

here to men. . . .

Never Try to Establish One's Own Authority

Authority is established by God; therefore no delegated authority need try to secure his authority. Do not insist that others listen to you. If they err, let them err; if they do not submit, let them be insubordinate; if they insist on going their own way, let them go. A delegated authority ought not strive with men. Why should I demand a hearing if I am not God's established authority? On the other hand, if I *am* set up by God, need I fear lest men not submit? Whoever refuses to hear me, disobeys God. It is not needful for me to force people to listen. God is my support, why then should I fear? We should never say so much as one word on behalf of our authority; rather, let us give people their liberty. The more God entrusts to us, the more liberty we grant to people. Those who are thirsty after the Lord will come to us. It is most defiling to speak on behalf of our own authority or to try to establish authority ourselves. . . .

This is life out of death. Only those who have passed through death and come out in resurrection are recognized by God as His servants. The touchstone of ministry is resurrection. No one may point to his position; it must be of God's choice. After God made Aaron's rod sprout, bud, and bear fruit, and the other leaders had all seen it, they had nothing more to say.

Authority, then, does not come by striving. It is set up by God. It depends not on a position of leadership but on the experience of death and resurrection. Men are chosen to exercise spiritual authority not because they are different from the rest but on the basis of grace, election, and resurrection. It requires great darkness and blindness to be proud! As far as we are concerned, though we might deposit our rods for a lifetime they would still not sprout. The difficulty in this present day is that so few fall on their faces acknowledging that they

are no different from the others. . . .

Authority is of God, not of us. We are merely stewards of His authority. Such an insight makes us fit to be delegated authorities. Whenever we attempt to exercise authority as if it were our own, we are immediately dispossessed of any authority whatsoever. The dried rod can only dispense death. Where resurrection is, there is authority, because authority rests in resurrection and not in the natural. Since all we have is what is natural, we have no authority except in the Lord. . . .

Nothing is more serious nor regarded more severely than for a delegated authority to do wrongly. Every time we execute authority we must ask to be united with God. If a mistake is made let us swiftly separate it from God lest we incur His judgment. Before we decide anything, let us seek to know His mind. Only after ascertaining His mind may we do it in His name. Moses could not claim that what he had done at the waters of Meribah was done in the Lord's name. Let us not be foolish, but let us learn to fear and tremble before God. Do not render judgment carelessly; rather, control your spirit and your mouth, especially at the time of provocation. The more one knows God, the less he is careless. There are some times when one may receive forgiveness after having fallen into God's governmental hand, but this does not always happen. The government of God ought not be offended. Let us be clear about it. . . .

Authority Comes from Ministry, Ministry from Resurrection

A person's authority is based on his ministry, and his ministry is in turn based on resurrection. If there is no resurrection there can be no ministry; and if there is no ministry, there is no authority. Aaron's ministry came from resurrection; without that, he could not serve at all. God has never set up as an authority anyone who is without

ministry.

Today authority is not a matter of position. Where spiritual ministry is lacking, there can be no positional authority. Whoever has spiritual service before God has authority before men. This means that one's spiritual ministry gives him authority among God's children. Who, then, can fight for this authority, for there is no way to strive for ministry. Just as ministry is distributed by the Lord, so authority is also decided by Him.

All authority is based on ministry. Aaron possessed authority because he had service before God. His censer could atone for the people and cause the plague to cease, whereas the censers of the two hundred fifty leaders were cursed by God. The rebellion in Numbers 16 was directed not only against authority but also against ministry. Aaron was in authority for he possessed ministry. No one's authority can exceed his ministry.

We should not attempt to outdo the authority of our ministry. Our attitude must always be that we dare not occupy ourselves with things too great and too marvelous for us (see Ps. 131.1). Let us learn instead to be faithful before God according to our portion. Many brothers mistakenly imagine that they can take up authority at random, not knowing that the authority which comes from ministry never lords it over God's children. One's authority before men is equal to one's ministry before God. The measure of ministry determines the proportion of authority. If authority exceeds ministry it becomes positional, and is therefore no longer spiritual.

If a delegated authority errs, God will come to judge. The highest principle in God's government is His own vindication. Since God is willing to give His name to us and allows us to use it—just as someone trusts his seal to us for us to use—then He must exonerate himself if we misrepresent Him. He will tell the people that the fault is not His but ours. . . .

All who are used by God to be in authority must have the spirit of David. Let no one defend himself nor speak for himself. Learn to wait and to be humble before God. He who knows how to obey best is he who is best qualified to be in authority. The lower one prostrates himself before God the quicker the Lord will vindicate him. . . .

Authority Is Not Lording Over but Humbly Serving

The Lord continued His teaching on the matter of authority. He called His disciples together and instructed them about future things in glory. He said that, among the Gentiles, men seek for authority in order that they may rule over others. It is good for us to seek for the future glory, but we ought not have the thought of ruling or lording it over God's children. To do so would cause us to fall into the state of the Gentiles. To exercise authority and to rule are the desires of the Gentiles. Such a spirit must be driven from the church. Those whom the Lord uses are the ones who know the Lord's cup and the Lord's baptism. As we drink the cup and receive the baptism we will naturally have authority. It is a most ugly thing if we seek to rule over men externally. We must drive this spirit of the Gentiles out from us. Else we are unfit to lead others. . . .

To Be Great, One Must Be a Servant

The authority whom God appoints must have a spiritual background—he must drink the cup, that is, absolutely obey God's will; and he must receive the baptism, that is, accept death in order to release life. He must also not have any intention of exercising authority; on the contrary, he must be prepared to serve as the servant and slave of all. In other words, he possesses spiritual ground on the one hand and the spirit of humility on the other. Because he does not seek to be authority God can use him as one. It is irrelevant to talk about authority if the cup is not drunk and the baptism not

received. To one who is truly humble and considers himself unfit for anything except to be servant of all, to that one the Lord announces that he may be great.

The condition for authority is consequently a sense of incompetency and unworthiness. From the Bible we can conclude that God has never used a proud soul. The moment a person becomes proud, at that moment he is laid aside by God. His hidden pride sooner or later will be revealed through his words, for words do not cease to leak out. At the future judgment seat of God even the humble will be greatly surprised. And if that be true, how much more shall be the horror of the proud on that day! We must sense our incompetency, because God only uses the useless. Polite diplomacy is not the thing here; rather is it having a sincere sense that we are but unprofitable servants. Though we have tended the flock and tilled the field, yet in coming back we still acknowledge ourselves as unprofitable servants. We do not forget to stand on the ground of a servant. God never entrusts His authority to the self-righteous and the self-competent. Let us reject pride, learn to be humble and gentle, and never speak for ourselves. Let us learn to know ourselves in the light of God. . . .

Authority Is Based on Sanctification

Authority has its foundation in sanctification. Without sanctification there can be no authority. If you wish to live with the crowd you cannot be an authority. You cannot represent God if you maintain a very liberal and loose communication with the people. The higher the authority the greater the separation. God is the highest authority; consequently He is above all. Let us learn to be sanctified from things unclean or common. The Lord Jesus may do whatsoever He likes, but for the sake of His disciples He sanctifies himself. He steps aside and stands on the side of holiness.

May we heartily desire to please God too and thus seek after deeper sanctification. It means we will be distinguished from the common, although not separated from God's children as though we were holier than they. The more we are sanctified and are subject to the authority of God the more we may be delegated authorities. If those in authority in the church fail, how can obedience be maintained? Unless this matter of authority is solved the church will always be chaotic.

He who is in authority does not grasp authority; he serves God, is willing to pay the price, and seeks not excitement. To be in authority requires one to climb high, to not fear loneliness, and to be sanctified. May we be those who lay our all on the altar so that God's authority may be restored. This is the way of the Lord in His church.

—SA 10, 12-15, 24, 50, 69-70, 76-8, 80-3, 91, 97-8, 101-2, 105,
107-10, 118, 142, 145, 151-3, 167, 174-6, 185

13

The Second Coming of Christ

We must not only look back to the cross but also look forward to the Lord's return.

The grace of God which has brought salvation to us is to enable us to wait for the glorious appearing of the Lord. We should therefore serve the living God on the one hand and wait for the Lord's return on the other. Though we yet live on this earth, we break bread to remember the Lord till He comes. Though we lay stress on service as to how we need to fulfill the priestly ministry, we nevertheless know that such service on earth will not continue forever. One day we shall become the bride of the Lamb. All the objectives of the believers are not earthly. However much we may emphasize the local church, even that will not last on earth. We are looking and waiting for the Lord's return. The calling of God for us is not earthly, but heavenly. In sum, God has not called us to build permanently on earth. . . .

We are not out to change the world; rather, we are called out to be those who are unto the Lord. We entertain no hope of this earth, nor do we anticipate anything from the world. At His first coming, the Lord delivers us from sin and grants us the life of God that we may commune with God. This, however, is only half of the work. Though the question of sin is solved, the problem of death yet remains. The dominion of sin in man's life is over, but the kingdom of Satan still lingers. The power of death is broken, nevertheless our mortal bodies may yet die. Although we are saved, we continue to live in this corrupt environment. The holier the life, the deeper the feeling over the defilement of this world. The salvation which we now experience is but half the story, because the Lord Jesus—though He has saved us—has not yet changed the world.

The World

The second coming of the Lord is to change the world. He will not only give us enjoyment within but also allow us to enjoy the environment without because He will change the environment on earth. Many people are interested in social problems. They argue: "The salvation of the Lord saves only individuals but leaves the world full of inequality. Even the lower animals suffer so much. All the things in the world serve as enticements to men to sin. Though individuals may be saved, what about all these negative social conditions?"

As to this matter of waiting for the Lord's second coming, there appear to be two different concepts held among Christians. On the one hand, some believers are set on improving the world, but unfortunately they end up being defiled by it instead. On the other hand, others say that our responsibility is to rescue people out, and that the improvement of this world must wait till the Lord's return.

The Bible is not lax with respect to these matters. God has not said that so long as sinners are saved and are assured of going to heaven that that is enough. The Bible entertains no such thought. For heaven is not a matter of individual salvation; there is also the matter of the new heaven and new earth, which comes when and only when all who are ordained to eternal life have believed in the Lord. The Bible does have the salvation of society or the salvation of the world in view, but this work will be completed only with the second coming of the Lord. Today the church is commissioned to preach the gospel that individuals within the world may be saved, and yet the Lord has not forgotten the world. We are called today to rescue people out of the world, and not to change the world itself. This world has absolutely no hope whatsoever. All the problems on earth will only be solved at the Lord's return. . . .

At His first coming, the Lord's gospel solves my personal

problem of sin; but at His second coming, He shall solve all the problems on earth. What the Lord Jesus does today is mainly on a personal basis, not on institutional ground. It awaits His second coming for all the problems on earth to be solved by means of His government. Today we are men of unclean lips dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips (Is. 6.5); but in the future we shall be clean men standing among a clean people. It is absolutely impossible for man to establish love through hatred. Any human attempts to establish peace and prosperity today are subject to human error and can possibly lead to indescribable sufferings of mankind as a consequence. But when the Lord shall come, all will be perfectly established. How significant indeed is the second coming of the Lord.

The Lord Is Coming

Our calling is heavenly, and it is not for the purpose of changing this piece of earth. Nothing is permanent with us, nothing is indispensable. According to the Lord's arrangement, it is equally good for us to have or not to have. Everything will be fine if He comes. We live for His sake, and we wait for His return. At His coming our salvation shall be completed. Not only I personally shall be changed, even the environment shall be changed. Today we speak of coming out of the world and being not of the world; at that day, we need not say such words anymore. Nothing really matters much today, even the most spiritual work for the Lord is not *permanently* needed. Our one and only hope is to await the Lord's return. How can we be deeply rooted on earth? Does not the word of God test us all the time? The Lord is at the doors (see Matt. 24.33). Let us wait for His coming.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins, 25.1-13

This parable may be divided into seven parts: (1) the ten virgins going forth to meet the bridegroom (v.1); (2) the two different classes of virgins (vv.2-4); (3) their history or process (vv.5-7); (4) the discovery of a lack (vv.8-9); (5) the distinction (v.10); (6) the request of the foolish (vv.11-12); and (7) the lesson (v.13).

v.1 “Then” refers to the time of *parousia*. “The kingdom of heaven” and not the church is in view here. The kingdom of heaven is the sphere of the righteousness of God, the realm in which God rules and reigns.

“Virgins” refer to Christians; and “bridegroom” to the Lord.

“Ten” in the Scriptures is a number which, as we shall see below, denotes the greater part of the whole. There are altogether four numbers in the Bible which represent perfection: “three” (the perfection of God); “seven” (the perfection of time, temporary perfection); “ten” (the perfection of man); and “twelve” (the perfection of the ages, eternal perfection). In Revelation 21 everything noted there is twelve—gates, pearls, the names of the apostles, the tribes of Israel, the precious stones, the height of the wall [144=(12²)]. Before this chapter 21, all is seven in the Book of Revelation. But commencing with the new heaven and new earth (the subject of chapter 21), all is twelve. Three is the number of God and four is the number of man. Three *plus* four is seven (God’s number plus man’s number), which is yet separable and hence represents temporary perfection. Three *multiplied* by four is twelve (God’s number multiplied by man’s number), which is inseparable and therefore stands for eternal perfection. Ten is a little short of the perfect number of twelve. By adding two to it, the result will become the number of eternal perfection: in this connection let us see that in Matthew 24, the two women grinding at the mill represent the living believers; while in chapter 25 the ten virgins represent the dead

believers (“they all slumbered and slept”—v.5).

In the Bible there is the usage of the number twelve in both Greek and Hebrew as often being ten plus two: ten being the majority number and two the residual number. For example: ten brothers and two brothers (Gen. 42.3-4); ten spies and Joshua with Caleb (Num. 14.37-38); the prophet Ahijah rent his new garment into twelve pieces and gave them away by distributing ten pieces and two pieces (1 Kings 11.29-31); and the controversy between the ten disciples and the two disciples (Matt. 20.24).

“Virgins”—In a parable, the matter of virginity cannot be taken literally. The virgins instead represent us who are recreated in Christ. They point more to the idea of our being hidden ones than to the idea of chastity, for married women may also be chaste. The term “virgins” cannot be applied to either the Jews or the unbelievers; only Christians can adopt this term. The one purpose of these virgins is to go forth with their lamps to meet the bridegroom.

“Lamp” in the Bible may mean several things: (1) the word of the Lord (Ps. 119.105); (2) the word of prophecy (2 Peter 1.19); and (3) the outward testimony of the Christian (Matt. 5.14-16). It does not say “candle” here since a candle burns its own wax to give light, whereas oil is poured into a lamp from the outside in order for it to shed light. So the outward declaration of the Christian ought to be a going forth to meet the bridegroom. Just as in the breaking of bread, we not only remember the finished work of the Lord but also remember that the day of His coming is near.

vv.2-4 Two classes of virgins. Many commentators take the five foolish virgins to be the unsaved, yet there are so many ironclad evidences to overturn such an interpretation that we will mention only fifteen of them, which serve also as important proofs that these foolish virgins are saved ones:

(1) These five foolish ones are virgins. Even through verse 11, they are still termed virgins. Throughout the parable the Lord never called this matter into question; on the contrary, He continually recognized this as a fact.

(2) There are lights in their lamps (v.8). These lights sustained them up to midnight and the time of their lamps “going out” (not even that they had “gone out”), showing that the lights are not yet extinguished. And hence these virgins have “good works” and they “glorify [their] Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5.16) due to the indwelling Holy Spirit in them, except that now their lights are going out.

(3) They all go forth to meet the bridegroom. The unsaved will never be able to go out to meet the bridegroom. Will bandits ever light their torches and go forth to meet the government troops?

(4) “But at midnight there is a cry, . . . Come ye forth to meet him”—The cry is to all the ten virgins. The archangel surely will not call mistakenly nor the Lord use any word incorrectly.

(5) Oil in their lamps, even though it is granted that there is no oil in the vessels. Oil signifies the Holy Spirit, and hence these foolish virgins must be saved ones.

(6) “Then all those virgins arose” (v.7). It refers to but one resurrection common to all ten. For note that a thousand years shall separate the resurrection of the saved from that of the unsaved.

(7) The five wise virgins go in with the bridegroom (v.10); afterward come also the foolish virgins (v.11). They all are raptured to the air, except that the latter five cannot attend the marriage feast.

(8) The difference between the five wise and five foolish virgins lies in their conduct, not in their nature—since all of them are virgins

with no divergence of true or false, the only distinction being between being wise or foolish. To be foolish does not mean to not be saved.

(9) Due to the tarrying of the bridegroom (v.5), the lamps of the foolish are going out. If the bridegroom does not tarry, these may be just as qualified as the wise ones to enter.

(10) These five foolish are virgins from the beginning to the end (v.11).

(11) “Buy for yourselves” (v.9). To the unsaved, it cannot be a matter of “buying” but one of “asking” since grace is freely given. Only to the saved can the word be “buy”—which means paying a price.

(12) If the five foolish are unsaved, then according to this interpretation it would seem that they are being given another opportunity to be saved after they die, because the wise virgins counsel them to go and buy oil.

(13) If the five foolish are unsaved, would the five wise say, “Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you”? If these foolish are truly unsaved, these five wise cannot make any excuse but must pay any cost to help; for how can they stand by and do nothing for the perishing?

(14) “Watch therefore,” says the Lord (v.13). To be watchful requires life. If the five foolish are not saved, they cannot be exhorted to watch but must be urged to repent.

(15) In contrast to the parable of the gospel feast told of in Matthew 22, which is directed towards the lost, this parable is spoken to the disciples. Matthew 22 is concerned with the question of being saved or perishing, but this is not the concern of Matthew 25.

Whoever is bound and cast out in the parable of Matthew 22 is totally helpless, but the foolish virgins who are barred are still quite free. The earlier parable relates to the gain or loss of the king, while the latter story pertains to that of the virgins. The one refers to the glory of the king; the other reflects upon the welfare of the virgins.

In interpreting the Scriptures believers today devote themselves almost entirely to the problem of whether saved or unsaved, not realizing that there is the equally important question of the kingdom after once being saved.

The wise and the foolish differ not in nature, only in conduct. There is one place in the New Testament that can prove this point, and for this we must consult Matthew 7.24-26. The wise man is he who does the words of the Lord, while the foolish man is one who does not obey them. The rock stands for the words of the Lord, but the sand signifies the ideas of man. To build upon the rock is to do everything according to God's word; to build upon the sand is to do things according to one's own ideas. "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9.10). It is therefore wise to be simple before God and foolish to rebel against Him. To say "perhaps" or "according to my own opinion" is really being foolish. To do what God says may look like utter foolishness to man but it is real wisdom to God.

Only in two points do the two classes of virgins differ: (1) the wise ones carry oil in their vessels while the foolish do not; and (2) the wise virgins go in to the marriage feast whereas the foolish ones are rejected. Their similarities are many, such as they *all* (1) are virgins, (2) have lamps (the appearance), (3) they bear light (the conduct which glorifies God), (4) have oil (the Holy Spirit), (5) go forth to meet the bridegroom (waiting), (6) sleep, (7) hear the midnight cry, (8) arise (resurrection), and (9) trim their lamps (prepare oil). Yet however numerous are their similarities and

seemingly limited are their differences, the consequences for each group are far, far apart. What care must we therefore exercise! Whatever may be the cause, that will be the effect. Today's difference will produce tomorrow's divergence. The glory or shame in the age to come is decided today.

“Took no oil with them”—That is to say, the foolish prepared no oil apart from what was already in the lamp. The wise have extra oil in their vessels. Oil in the *lamp* speaks of the Holy Spirit who dwells in every regenerated person. A Christian, a beginner, has the indwelling Holy Spirit (see Eze. 36.26-27, Eph. 1.13). “The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, searching all his innermost parts” (Prov. 20.27). “If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8.9). “Know ye not as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? unless indeed ye be reprobates” (2 Cor. 13.5). “Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he gave us” (1 John 3.24). “Hereby we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4.13). The Lord therefore dwells in us by His Spirit.

But oil in the *vessel* means more than the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; it speaks of being *filled* with the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Holy Spirit is received at the time of regeneration, but the filling of the Holy Spirit comes through continual seeking following the moment of regeneration. Each believer has the Holy Spirit, yet not all have the fullness of the Holy Spirit. A vessel is something other than the lamp. Yet this is not the emphasis here. Since oil is a liquid, it has to be contained in a vessel. God's will is for us to be filled to the full, not just having oil in the lamp. In order to realize this, neither trimming nor decorating the lamp will be a good way, for God looks for extra oil in the vessel. Yet the believer's attention is usually drawn to the outward appearance of the lamp. The less oil one has, the more assiduously he takes care of the appearance. Nevertheless, trimming can never be a substitute for the oil.

We imagine that receiving oil once is enough, but God desires us to receive it twice. The second time is different from the first, in that at the first instance God gives freely whereas at the second instance He demands a price to be paid. If anyone refuses to pay the price—denying himself and seeking earnestly—he will not be given the oil again. So let us be alert. People may not be able to detect whether or not we have the oil twice over; and we may indeed get by without any trouble today, but on that future day we will be found out. Are we willing to pay the price? To be filled with the Holy Spirit is the condition for rapture. Just as a balloon filled with helium will ascend heavenward, so will those who are filled with the Holy Spirit be caught up. Let us therefore pay the price in providing oil in the vessel, or else we will be those like the foolish virgins.

vv.5-7 These verses form the third part of the parable and narrate the history of these virgins. Spiritual foolishness may not be readily discerned in the world, but the tarrying of the Lord is the acid test. At the beginning, both the wise and the foolish receive the same light. And the latter may therefore ridicule the former for being cumbered about with carrying extra oil. Oh how many are fit to be raptured at first but render themselves unfit later on! This is due to the delay of the Lord. Indeed, it is the evil servant who thinks that the Lord will delay His return; just the opposite, though, is the foolish virgin who imagines that the Lord will come earlier! The parable of the evil servant teaches believers to be ready to meet the Lord today, while the parable of the ten virgins instructs us to be prepared for any unexpected delay of the Lord's return. Should the Lord tarry for 56 more years, will you still be ready to meet Him? Be careful lest your lamp can only burn till midnight but not after midnight. If you set your lamp to burn only till midnight, the Lord may tarry until after that hour. Do not despise the testing of the Lord. The usefulness of the oil in the vessel is revealed in the Lord's tarrying. So that what is being emphasized here is not the initial burning but whether there is extra oil in the vessel for longer burning.

The bridegroom, of course, is the Lord.

“Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept”—Since this is a parable, it naturally should be interpreted spiritually. Sleep in the Scriptures may convey either one of two meanings: (1) a falling away spiritually (see Rom. 13.11-14, 1 Thess. 5.6); or (2) death (see 1 Thess. 4.13, John 11.11-14). It cannot mean a spiritual falling away because (a) the wise virgins fall asleep as well as the foolish; (b) the sleep here is unimportant since the wise are not evilly affected by it; (c) the Lord does not reprimand them for their sleep, instead He completely ignores the fact; and (d) we should notice the lesson to be gained from verse 13 wherein the Lord is found teaching His hearers to watch just as the wise virgins had done. In view of these observations, therefore, the sleep mentioned here cannot have reference to a spiritual falling away but instead signifies physical death.

“But at midnight there is a cry”—Some say this refers to the renewed interest in the study of prophecy and the preaching of the second coming which occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This may sound attractive, but unfortunately in the parable none of the ten virgins awakens on her own accord. They do not awaken through any initiative of their own but must be awakened by the action of the bridegroom himself. Hence the sounding of the midnight cry must yet await its fulfillment at the time of the voice of the archangel and the sound of the trump of God as mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4.16 and 1 Corinthians 15.52. The voice of the archangel is for the purpose of waking people up, and the sounding of the trumpet of God serves to gather people together. So that in the parable, those who hear (all ten virgins) stand for all the dead believers.

“Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him”—Since the two sides (that is, the bridegroom and the virgins) are both coming

together, they will accordingly meet in the air.

“Then all those virgins arose”—This proves that all dead Christians are resurrected together. Here the virgins seem to have time to talk things over; but according to 1 Corinthians 15.52 the event all happens in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—so that there is no opportunity left to make conversation. Let us understand that what we have here is a parable, and there frequently is portrayed in parables an element of time which actually does not exist. For example, in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20.1-16), a contention is mentioned as arising between the Lord and those who labor earliest but are paid last. Such contending with the Lord is in fact impossible. The same thing happens in the parable of the marriage feast as told in Matthew 22.1-14. Consequently, when we study parables we should concentrate on their teachings and not so much on the details.

vv.8-9 The fourth part of this parable is the discovery of lack in the five foolish ones. They discover their lack of oil because of the tarrying of the bridegroom (v.5a). His tarrying is for the purpose of testing the wise and the foolish. The foolish virgins no doubt deemed the five wise ones to have encumbered themselves unnecessarily in carrying oil in vessels, but now they too find the need for oil, and so they ask the wise virgins for it. The *gift* of the Holy Spirit may be imparted (see Acts 8.17, 19.6; 1 Tim. 4.14; 2 Tim. 1.6), but the *fullness* of the Holy Spirit cannot be transferred. It is not enough simply to ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. There is absolutely no way to share other people’s oil, not even with parents, brothers and sisters, or close relations. One’s spiritual fullness can come only from paying the price himself. Counterfeit spirituality may pass for real today, but it cannot pass the test on *that* day. To be filled with the Holy Spirit requires fellowship with the Lord and costly pursuit of Him. No matter how long we may be in company with spiritual people, we will not automatically share in their oil. *Light* may be

borrowed, but *oil* cannot.

“Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you”—In other words, there can be no help since help in *this* situation is impossible. The Lord does permit a certain kind of holy selfishness here. Although we should always be sympathetic toward others, can *we* afford to be foolish because *others* are? Should we not rather keep a definite amount of sacred holiness for the Lord? “There will not be enough for us and you”—It will mean loss to both; and moreover, the other party will not be helped at all.

“And buy for yourselves”—This injunction signifies a great deal of truth: (1) At least there is still the possibility and the opportunity to buy oil at that time. Yet please notice that this does not refer to one more opportunity being given to the resurrected dead to be saved, because the resurrection of the unsaved does not occur at that time.

(2) This injunction does suggest, however, that the oil of the wise ones was originally secured with a price. The indolent will not be filled with the Holy Spirit.

(3) To be filled with the Holy Spirit requires paying a price. It has to be bought, not to be begged for. Also, one needs to know what to buy. Who would go to a department store to buy, and when asked what he wants would not know what to buy? Nevertheless, a great number of Christians are like that because (a) they do not realize the necessity for buying oil, (b) they do not know the price, and (c) they do not wish to pay the price.

Believers today do not understand how essential it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The oil in the lamp is not sufficient to burn after midnight; only the oil in the vessel is sufficient enough. Most Christians, having received the New Covenant, know only new desires but not new power. It is most painful to have a new desire without the power to fulfill it. This proves the need to be filled with

the Holy Spirit. Since there is need, there is reason for paying the price. Before one builds a tower he should first sit down and count the cost, and before he goes to war he should first take counsel as to how many soldiers he would commit to the fight (see Luke 14.25-35).

Many are frightened away by the heavy cost, not considering how essential is the oil. The price each pays will vary. Some may have to forsake something. One thing is certain, which is, that oil cannot be bought without paying a price. It is not freely obtained, neither is it obtained for personal interest but for the glory of God and for His work. How many there are who like to adorn themselves with gifts and power, yet God does not give these to exalt men. People may know what price they have to pay, but they ought to know that a price must be paid. Obviously, dealing with sin is a prerequisite. If sin is not dealt with, who can talk about paying a price? Yet to confess sin is not the paying of any price since this is minimally what one and all ought to do anyway; for let us understand that even the five foolish virgins have dealt with sin too.

(4) Pay the price—a matter of paying the right price for the right merchandise. The measure of the price paid will determine the amount of oil obtained. Let us see that the cross and the Holy Spirit are inseparable. Let the slaying of Jesus be manifested in your body (see 2 Cor. 4.8-11), for the cross will create in you an empty space for the power of the New Covenant to fill. The fullness according to the New Covenant is a fact more than it is a matter of consciousness—just as the heartbeat is a fact, although it may not always be felt. God’s only begotten Son is freely given, but the oil in the vessel must be bought.

There are four things cited in the Bible which must be bought:

(a) “Buy the truth” (Prov. 23.23). In order to know the truth, one must be determined to practice the truth and to seek earnestly after it.

(b) “Buy . . . gold refined by fire” (Rev. 3.18). Such buying of refined gold and white garments and eye-salve is not action for the unsaved to take, because God cannot ask the unsaved to buy. Laodicea is, after all, a church. “Gold refined by fire” signifies that faith which has gone through trial and has been proven undefeated. It is the faith which overcomes environment (see 1 Peter 1.7). God allows you to go through a trial in order to show His love to you, and also for him to be glorified before Satan (such as in the case of job).

(c) “Buy . . . white garments” (Rev. 3.18)—There are two kinds of white garments spoken of in the Book of Revelation: (1) those white garments we received before God, which garments are the Lord Jesus himself. We are clothed with Christ, and thus are we cleansed. Whoever does not have this white garment is not saved. (2) those white garments we wear before God, which represent the righteousnesses of the saints (Rev. 19.8 Darby) that are the result of the operation of the Spirit of the Lord within us. Whoever does not have this white garment is naked before God and will not be rewarded.

(d) “Buy . . . eyesalve” (Rev. 3.18)—This is the revelation of the Holy Spirit, without which no one really sees.

(5) Such an injunction here in verse 9 hints at the fact that oil must be bought. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is not something you can decide. Sooner or later you must be filled with the Holy Spirit. Do not think that those who are like the five wise have gone to an extreme. One day God will force you to go to such an “extreme”: for Ephesians 5.18 *is* a command.

(6) “Go ye rather to them that sell”—Where will they be able to buy this oil? We can only take it as signifying that they must pay a price for obtaining their extra oil.

(7) The injunction in verse 9 touches upon this question too: How

can there be suffering after resurrection? Such notion that there is no suffering after resurrection is erroneous. For all who shall suffer in the lake of fire will have themselves been resurrected too. Some people are resurrected to enjoy life, while others are resurrected to suffer eternal death. If a person has not been able to control his temper while living, his death will not automatically change him. For let us realize that the lusts, pride, and selfishness of the rich man spoken of in Luke's parable remain with him in Hades (16.19-31). Therefore, after the virgins arise they all are found trimming their lamps. Yet the statement—"Our lamps are going out"—made by the five foolish virgins (v.8) indicates that the lamps will not be completely extinguished. God gives us life that is once and forever. Although in the Christian's experience of the Holy Spirit there are many times when it looks as if his lamp is going out, nevertheless the Holy Spirit will never leave us: He will not leave, even in the face of our unfaithfulness.

v.10 The fifth part of the parable deals with the separation. "And while they went away to buy"—Oil these foolish ones must have; but while they go away to buy, the Lord arrives; and only those who are ready go in with Him to the marriage feast. Hence the whole problem is whether one is ready. Yet they do not cease to be virgins because they are not ready; for many are true Christians, but few are ready ones.

"Went in with him to the marriage feast" (see also Rev. 19.7,9). The bride is the New Jerusalem, which includes all who are chosen to be united with God—both those of the Old Testament time and of the New Testament dispensation. The bride mentioned in Revelation 19 emerges *before* the millennial kingdom, whereas the bride spoken of in Revelation 21 appears *after* the kingdom. There is thus a gap of a thousand years. Since one becomes a bride but once, it is evident that the marriage feast extends over a period of a thousand years.

“Marriage feast”—This means to be with the bridegroom and to rejoice together. Such joy is very special, and therefore Revelation 19 says how “blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (v.9). The “blessed” mentioned in Revelation 20.6, though, has relationship to the matter of reigning and appears to be the same supping and reigning as is described in Revelation 3.20-21. Altogether, there are seven times in Revelation when the word “blessed” is proclaimed.

Why does Matthew 25 not speak of the bride? For the simple reason that the bride is corporate, whereas the virgins here in the parable are seen as individuals. The bride cannot be viewed as five and five.

“And the door was shut”—It is the door of the kingdom, the entrance into the joy of feasting with the bridegroom.

vv.11-12 The request of the foolish virgins forms the sixth part of the parable. Now they have come back from buying oil. Keep in mind that both the five wise and the five foolish are virgins, all ten having oil in their lamps, all going out to meet the bridegroom, all falling asleep while waiting, and all rising and trimming their lamps after having heard the cry, Behold, the bridegroom! Now, both parties have oil in their vessels, with the only difference being one of time. Recall how once the Lord had chided the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, saying, “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” (Luke 24.25) Recall also how He had likewise admonished Thomas, saying, “Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed’ (John 20.29). The matter of quickness or slowness is of great importance. Do we not know that all who will suffer in the lake of fire will have to believe sometime, only they have believed too late? “Look therefore carefully how ye walk, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are

evil” (Eph. 5.15-16). The foolish do not redeem the time, but the wise ones do. The latter are filled with the Holy Spirit. Let us realize that we must all some day be filled with the Holy Spirit. Then why not now? Why have this experience come afterwards?

“I know you not”—Will the Lord ever say to the saved that He does not know them? However, we need to examine this answer of our Lord’s very carefully:

(1) “But he answered and said”—The word “but” shows that the answer is unusual and out of all expectation. In Luke 15.22 the same word indicates how totally unthought-of, un hoped-for, and unexpected by the prodigal son were the father’s words to his servants. The word “but” here proves that the “know not” is not an ordinary not knowing.

(2) The Lord knows all who are saved (2 Tim. 2.19, Gal. 4.9, John 10.14). Two Greek words are used for “know” in the New Testament: *ginosko* and *oida*. The former signifies an objective knowledge while the latter signifies a subjective and deeper knowledge. Now *oida* is the Greek word employed here by the Lord.

(3) How is *oida* used in the Scriptures? It is recognizably employed to mean approve, commend, endorse, or applaud. What follows are a few examples from the New Testament which illustrate the use of this Greek word. In each example, the verb “to know” or “to not know” is *oida* or its variant. “In the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not” (John 1.26). In this situation, of course, the Jews know (*ginosko*) the Lord, but they do not really know (*oida*) Him because they do not love Him. “I knew him not” (John 1.31). Since John and the Lord Jesus are cousins, the Baptist certainly knows Jesus objectively (*ginosko*) but not subjectively (*oida*)—that is to say, John does not know Him deeply. “Ye know neither me, nor my Father” (John 8.19). Though the Jews know (*ginosko*) the Lord quite well externally, they do not approve of Him nor do they receive Him.

“I know you not whence ye are” (spoken twice in Luke 13.22-30). Here the Lord speaks of the situation in the kingdom. Some who have eaten and drunk with the Lord and have also heard Him teaching in their streets doubtless know objectively (*ginosko*) the Lord well, yet they are referred to by the Lord as “workers of iniquity”—a phrase which in the original is worded as “workers of unrighteousness”—that is to say, those who do not walk according to rule. “Ye know the house of Stephanas” (1 Cor. 16.15). The Corinthian believers know deeply (*oida*) and not just know objectively (*ginosko*) the house of Stephanas. Hence from all these examples we learn that *oida* is subjective knowing of a person, which implies a sense of trust.

(4) “Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10.33; cf. also Luke 12.9). These two instances of the word “deny” have reference to things in the kingdom. Secret Christians will not perish, yet neither will they be approved by the Lord in the kingdom. “Deny” (*arneomai*) is to not know (in the *oida* sense of not knowing) (see Matt. 26.70). It is to contradict, refute, or overturn.

(5) There are similar examples of this matter of knowing and not knowing in the Old Testament, as for instance in 1 Samuel 3.7 (“Now Samuel did not yet know Jehovah”) wherein Samuel had indeed *objectively* known Jehovah, but he had yet to know the Lord in a subjective way.

(6) The reward of the kingdom is based purely on righteousness. For the Lord to deny has about it the flavor of righteousness. Just as a judge must ask the name of the offender even if the latter is his own son, so the denial here in Matthew 25.12 (“I know you not”) refers to the action and not to the person. It means the Lord cannot accept or approve.

v.13 The lesson in this final part of the parable is “watch”—The

Lord commands us to be watchful; He does not urge us here to be regenerated and be saved. The “they that were ready” in verse 10 are those who have watched. Thus, “ready” and “watch” are joined into one. To be “ready” means that there is no unfinished business, and one is therefore ready to be reckoned with daily. To “watch” means to so live as to be always ready for the coming of the Lord. We believers should daily be prepared for reckoning. The Lord may come at any time. The five foolish virgins were ready and watching at the beginning, but alas, they did not continue on. The word “ready” here is concerned with self as to whether or not there is anything left undone. The word “watch” on the other hand has its direction towards the Lord; it signifies a waiting to meet Him at any time. To be ready and watchful and waiting, we need the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It will not do if we depend on ourselves, for very soon we will be weakened and become foolish. But if we are filled with the Holy Spirit we will spontaneously bear fruit to the glory of God.

He who is truly watchful often feels he is not yet entirely ready. He does not trust in his own self. This is true humility.

Yet what does it avail if we have such prophecy but are not watchful? Will it not be tragic if we have prophetic knowledge and still suffer loss in the future? Be ready, for the Lord only looks into our lamp and light. Be watchful, because we do not know the day nor the hour. For if we knew, we would have no need to be watchful.

In chapters 24 and 25, five times we are told that no one knows the day of the coming of the Lord. Such intense repetition signifies extreme importance. How unreliable is the concept of our all being raptured after the Great Tribulation; for if that were indeed the case, we would be able to compute most accurately the day of His coming: we would need only to count three years and a half after the image of the beast has been placed in the temple. Yet the reason why the Lord

does not inform us of the date is because He wants us to be watchful.

—KKH 345-61

14

Consecration

We ought to know the purpose of God in creating us and in redeeming us. He wishes for us to manifest the life of His Son and share in His Son's glory. Even before the foundation of the world, God has purposed one purpose, which is to say, that He wants to have many sons just as He has the only begotten Son. And thus it states in Romans 8.29: "whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn *among many brethren*." Why has God done such things? Because He had foreordained us to be conformed to the image of His Son. This is the eternal purpose of God. He purchases and redeems us that He may possess us.

Yet God uses two means to possess us: one is on His side, the other is on our side. *On His side*, God sent His Son to die for us, to buy us back. According to the right of purchase, we are His bondslaves. Thank the Lord, He has bought us. God once said to Abraham, "He that is born in the house, and he that is bought with money, must needs be circumcised" (Gen. 17.13). Hallelujah, we are not only born of God we are also bought by Him.

We are bought by God and thus belong to Him, yet He sets us free. Although according to the right of redemption we belong to God, He nonetheless will not force us into service. He will let us go if we desire to serve mammon, the world, the belly, or other idols. For the moment God is inactive: He is waiting for us to move: till one day we say *on our side*: "O God, I am Your bondslave not only because You have bought me, but also because I will gladly serve You." A verse in Romans 6 unveils a most precious principle concerning consecration. We become God's bondslaves not only for the reason that He has bought us, but also for the reason "that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are

whom ye obey” (v.16a).

Here, then, are the two means by which God possesses us. On the one side, we are His bondslaves because He has bought us; on the other side, we willingly and gladly present ourselves to Him as His bondslaves. As regards law, we become God’s bondslaves on the day He purchased and redeemed us. As regards experience, we become His bondslaves on the day we offer up ourselves to Him. From the viewpoint of right and ownership, we are God’s bondslaves on the day we were redeemed. From the viewpoint of practice, we are truly His bondslaves on the day when we voluntarily and gladly give ourselves over to Him.

Consequently, no one will ever be ignorant about his being a bondslave of God, for in order to be His bondslave, the believer will always need to voluntarily present himself. Such consecration is totally one’s own choice and initiative. Hence the offerer will know what he is doing. God will not coerce a person to serve Him. And that is why Paul, knowing the heart of God, does not force, he only “beseeches” (see Rom. 12.1a). God delights to see His people offer themselves willingly to Him. . . .

The Results of Consecration

What are the results of consecration? One is given in Romans 6, and the other is given in Romans 12. Many do not realize the difference in results, but there is a great difference between these two. In Romans 6, consecration benefits us in that it causes us to bear fruit unto sanctification. In Romans 12, consecration profits God in that His will shall be done. The result of consecration in Romans 6 is that “being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification” (v.22). Day by day, you may live a victorious life. The result of consecration in Romans 12, however, is “that ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will

of God” (v.2c).

You should not conclude that with your letting go, believing, and praising, this is enough. There is a final act, which is to put yourself into God’s hands that He may manifest His holiness through your body. In the past, you had no strength to consecrate; now having crossed the threshold of victory, you are able to offer up yourself. Please recall that previously you had no way to place yourself in God’s hands; now, though, it is no longer a question of ability but a matter of your will. In the earlier days, you *could* not; presently, it is that you *will* not. . . .

Chapter 6 has in view personal sanctification, whereas chapter 12 has in view the matter of the Lord’s work. Both chapter 6 and chapter 12 speak of the matter of sanctification or holiness. What is sanctification? It means a being set apart to be used exclusively by a particular person. Formerly, persons and affairs and things could touch me because I was for my own self; now, though, I am wholly for God.

—LW 144-5, 154-5

The word of God seldom touches directly on the subject of consecration. In the New Testament we have Romans 6 and 12; in the Old Testament, Exodus 28 and 29 and Leviticus 8. The New Testament refers to presenting our bodies and the members of our body to God, while the Old Testament deals exclusively with the setting apart for holy service of Aaron and his family. These are the only passages in the entire Bible where consecration is directly mentioned. We do not know why the word of God touches so little on this first Christian experience of service. But we do know that it is therefore imperative that we understand clearly what little the Bible does directly teach.

The Bases of Consecration

Let us search the New Testament first. There we find how the children of God are constrained by love to live unto the Lord who died and rose again for them (2 Cor. 5.14). The word “constrained” means to be tightly held or to be surrounded so that one cannot escape. When a person is moved by love, he will experience such a sensation. Love will bind him and thus he is helpless.

Love, therefore, is the basis of consecration. No one can consecrate himself without sensing the love of the Lord. He has to see the Lord’s love before he can ever consecrate his life. It is futile to talk about consecration if the love of the Lord is not seen. Having seen the Lord’s love, consecration will be the inevitable consequence.

However, consecration is also based on right or divine prerogative. This is the truth we find in 1 Corinthians 6.19-20. “Or know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have from God? and ye are not your own; for you have been bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body.” Today among Christians this matter of being bought with a price may not be clearly understood. But to the Corinthians at the time of the Roman Empire, it was perfectly clear. Why? Because at that time they had human markets. Just as one could go to the market to buy chicken or duck, so one could buy human beings in the human market. The only difference was that whereas food prices were more or less established, in the human market the price of each soul was established by bidding at auction. Whoever bid the highest price got the man, and whoever owned the slave had absolute power over him. Paul uses this metaphor to show us what our Lord has done for us and how He gave His life as the ransom to purchase us back to God. The Lord paid a great price—even His own life. And today, because of this work of redemption, we give up our rights and forfeit our

sovereignty. We are no longer our own, for we belong to the Lord; therefore we must glorify God in our bodies. We are bought with a price, even the blood of the cross. Since we are bought, we become His by right, by divine prerogative.

On the one hand, for the sake of love we choose to serve Him; and on the other hand, by right we are not our own. We must follow Him; we cannot do otherwise. According to the right of redemption, we are His; and according to the love which redemption generates in us, we must live for Him. One basis for consecration is legal right and the other basis is responsive love. Consecration is thus based on the love which surpasses human feeling as well as on right according to law. For these two reasons, we cannot but belong to the Lord.

Young believers should thoroughly understand this. You are bought back by the Lord. You are like a slave whom the Lord purchased with the highest bid. Hence for you to be a free person is totally out of the question. Christ, the Son of God has bought you not with silver and gold, but with His precious blood. Herein is love; such love ought to constrain all the young ones not to live for themselves from this day forward.

The Real Meaning of Consecration

We should know that being constrained by love is not yet consecration; nor is seeing the Lord's right yet true consecration. After one has been constrained by love and has seen the Lord's prerogative, he needs to do something additional. This extra step puts him in the position of consecration. Being constrained by the Lord's love and knowing that he has been purchased, he quietly sets himself apart from everything in order to be wholly the Lord's. This is the consecration depicted in the Old Testament. It is the acceptance of a holy office, the office of serving the Lord. "O Lord, being loved, what else can I do than to separate myself from everything that I may

serve You? Hereafter no one may use my hands or feet or mouth or ears, for these my two hands are to do Your works, my two feet to walk in Your way, my mouth to sing Your praise, and my ears to listen to Your voice.” This is consecration.

Suppose you purchase a slave and bring him home. At the door of your house, the man kneels and does you homage, saying, “Master, you have bought me. Today I gladly hearken to your words.” For you to have purchased him is one thing, but his kneeling before you and proclaiming his desire to serve you is something else. Because you have purchased him, he acknowledges your right. But because you have loved him even though he is such a man, he proclaims himself wholly yours. This alone is consecration. Consecration is more than love, more than purchasing; *it is the action which follows love and purchasing*. Henceforth the one who consecrates himself is separated from everything in this world, from all his former masters. Hereafter he will do nothing but what his Master commands. He restricts himself to doing only the things of that one Master. This is what consecration really means. . . .

One thing is clear: men do not choose to consecrate themselves to God; it is God who chooses men to be consecrated to Him. All who consider themselves as doing a favor for God by forsaking all to serve Him are actually strangers to consecration. Let them beat a hasty retreat, for they are not the chosen. No one who thinks of service as rendering God a favor and an honor is a chosen one. Who can set himself apart to do the Lord’s work? It is God who favors us to have a part in His exclusive work. It is God who gives glory and beauty to us. The Old Testament priest wore two garments, one for glory and one for beauty. In consecration, God clothes us with glory and with beauty. It is God who selects us to serve Him. Let us boastingly declare what a Lord we have. This is what consecration is.

May we realize that consecration means we are chosen for the

honor of serving God. Consecration is God granting us glory. We should kneel and pray: "Thank God that I may have a part in His service. Yes, there are many things in the world, but in this one thing I am really privileged to participate." In consecration, we are being exalted; we are not making a sacrifice. Indeed, we do sacrifice, but there is not the consciousness of making any sacrifice. Consecration demands the highest sacrifice, yet it is filled with the sense of glory and not with the awareness of sacrifice.

The Way of Consecration

Take a closer look at Leviticus 8. There are four things to be offered: a bullock of sin-offering; two rams, one of burnt-offering, the other of consecration; and a basket of unleavened bread for a wave-offering.

This is a clear picture of the way of consecration. The first problem which faces one who is to be consecrated to God is atonement. The matter of atonement is a big one, so it requires a big animal, a bullock to solve it. Whoever is to be consecrated must be saved, must belong to the Lord. This, being the foundation of consecration, is a tremendous work and therefore requires a big sacrifice like a bullock to accomplish it.

What follows are the two rams: one as a burnt-offering to be burnt, the other as a consecration-offering to enable Aaron to serve God hereafter. A burnt-offering has to be wholly burnt. The priests are not allowed to eat of its flesh since every part of it must be burnt. Hence it is a step further than the sin-offering. The sin-offering merely solves the problem of our sins, but the burnt-offering gives us acceptance before God. The Lord Jesus bore our sins on the cross; this is the atoning work of our Lord. He rent the veil of the temple in His death, rent it from top to bottom so that He might bring us to the Holiest of all; this is the burnt-offering. Both offerings start at the

same place, both beginning with sinners. But sin-offering only atones our sins, while burnt-offering brings sinners to God for acceptance. So burnt-offering makes us accepted in the beloved Son. It goes further than sin-offering, for it speaks of the fragrance of the Lord Jesus in God's presence and hence His acceptance by the Father. Today by offering up a burnt-offering, we too are accepted. Thus we have negatively the forgiveness of sin through the sin-offering, and positively our acceptance in the Lord Jesus.

After the slaying of the first ram, the second ram was slain. The blood of the second ram was put upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron and his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot. This was called the offering of consecration and was not completely burnt as the burnt-offering ram was. This ram's blood was first put on the tip of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the great toe of the right foot of the person consecrated. This means that according to the acceptance which Christ has before God, I now stand in the position of a servant who hearkens to God's voice, does His will, and walks in His path. Hereafter my ears, my hands, and my feet belong exclusively to God. Since I have been accepted in Christ, I present my whole being to the Lord.

Where the mark of blood is, there is the ground of God's prerogative. Where the sign of blood is, there is the call of love. The blood both testifies that I am purchased by the Lord and bears witness that He has loved me. The blood here is the price which Christ paid for my redemption and it is also the love of which the New Testament speaks. The ram has been slain, so I offer up my whole being. Thus I become a living sacrifice, for blood is upon me. Though I am alive, yet have I been wholly consecrated. I have presented myself as a living sacrifice to God.

Note especially the wave-offering which follows the killing of the

second ram. The putting of blood on the tip of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the great toe of the right foot of the one to be consecrated is still a preparation for consecration. Consecration comes when Moses

took the fat, and the fat tail, and all the fat that was upon the inwards, and the caul of the liver, and the two kidneys, and their fat, and the right thigh (or shoulder): and out of the basket of unleavened bread, that was before Jehovah, he took one unleavened cake, and one cake of oiled bread, and one wafer, and placed them on the fat, and upon the right thigh: and he put the whole upon the hands of Aaron, and upon the hands of his sons, and waved them for a wave-offering before Jehovah. And Moses took them from off their hands, and burnt them on the altar upon the burnt-offering: they were a consecration for a sweet savor: it was an offering made by fire unto Jehovah. (Lev. 8.25-28)

All who study typology agree that the shoulder and the bread represent two different aspects of the Lord Jesus. Shoulder is where strength is. The shoulder of the ram shows us the divine character of the Lord Jesus just as the fat points to the glory of God. Bread reveals His humanity. He is an unleavened, spotless, perfect man. He is full of the Holy Spirit, most sensitive and most tender. His inward feeling and spiritual sense are exceedingly fine. He is not rude but gentle, like a thin cake or wafer which can be broken by a mere touch. These were put in Aaron's hands to be waved before God. First Aaron's hands were filled and then the things from his hands were burnt on the burnt-offering. This is called consecration.

Let us add here a little explanation. In Hebrew the word, "consecration," actually means, "to fill the hands." The hands were at first empty, but then they are filled. At the time that Aaron's hands were filled, that was the time of his consecration. His hands were so full that he could not hold anything else; this is consecration. In his hands he held the shoulder and fat of the ram and the unleavened bread; this too is consecration. To be fully occupied with the divinity as well as the humanity of the Lord, with the divine strength and the

unleavened life of the Lord, with the Holy Spirit and with the Lord's sensitivity—this is the time of consecration.

God called Aaron and his family to serve Him as priests. But Aaron could not come imprudently. He must have his sins solved and he himself must be accepted in Christ. His hands must do God's bidding, his feet must walk God's way, and his ears must hear God's word. Further, his hands, being the highest expression of service, needed to be filled with Christ. Only then was he consecrated. What then is consecration? It is simply doing what Paul urged: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service." We need to come to the Lord and see that there is only one way for us to spend our life, and that is, to serve God. We have no other way but that of serving God.

In order to serve God, I present my whole body. Hereafter no one can borrow my ears to listen to another's voice, or my hands to do another's bidding, or my feet to walk another's path. Aside from the Lord, no one can use me anymore. I am here for the service of God. My whole body is devoted to His service. I have handed myself over like a sacrifice; I am wholly devoted to Him. I even take a further step: I have my two hands filled with Christ (here the ears, hands and feet are joined in one); I wave and I heave what are in my hands. This action is called consecration.

Therefore consecration means that having been touched by the Lord's love and having seen the Lord's right, I come to God and beg to serve Him. I come on my own accord, not because I am called. I pray: "O God, I now belong to the Lord, for I am bought by Him. Formerly I was under the table hoping to eat of the crumbs that fell down, but hereafter, O God, do not let me serve You under the table. Once I received grace like a dog, but now I cannot serve You at the door as a dog. I today choose to serve You. I know I am accepted in

Christ. May I not be permitted to have a little part in Your service? I ask for Your mercy that I may be allowed to serve You. You did not pass over me but You saved me. Now I request of You once again, do not pass me by but let me be among the many who serve You.”

Thus we come to the Lord and are accepted. Thus have we laid everything before Him to be for His use. Romans 12 tells us our whole bodies must be presented; this coincides with the ears, hands and feet of the Old Testament. So now the Old and the New Testament join in one.

The Aim of Consecration

Consecration aims not at preaching or working for God, but in serving God. The word “service” in the original bears the sense of “waiting on,” that is, waiting on God in order to serve Him. Consecration does not necessarily involve incessant labor, for its aim is to wait upon God. If He wishes us to stand, we stand; if He wants us to wait, we wait; and if He desires us to run, we run. This is the true meaning of “waiting on” Him. . . .

—ALS 54-64

In Romans 6.12,13 we read: “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey the lusts thereof: neither present your members unto sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” The operative word here is “present” and this occurs five times in the chapter, in verses 13, 16 and 19.*

*Two Greek verbs *paristano* and *paristemi* are translated in these verses by “present” in the R.V. where the A V has “yield.” *Paristemi* occurs frequently with this meaning, e.g. in

Many have taken this word “present” to imply consecration without looking carefully into its content. Of course that is what it does mean, but not in the sense in which we so often understand it. It is not the consecration of our “old man” with his instincts and resources, his natural wisdom, strength and other gifts, to the Lord for him to use.

This will be at once clear from verse 13. Note there the clause “as alive from the dead.” Paul says, “Present yourselves unto God, as alive from the dead.” This defines for us the point at which consecration begins. For what is here referred to is not the consecration of anything belonging to the old creation, but only of that which has passed through death to resurrection. The “presenting” spoken of is the outcome of my knowing my old man to be crucified. Knowing, reckoning, presenting to God: that is the divine order.

When I really know I am crucified with Him, then spontaneously I reckon myself dead (verses 6 and 11); and when I know that I am raised with Him from the dead, then likewise I reckon myself “alive unto God in Christ Jesus” (verses 9 and 11), for both the death and the resurrection side of the Cross are to be accepted by faith. When this point is reached, giving myself to Him follows. In resurrection He is the source of my life—indeed He *is* my life; so I cannot but present everything to Him, for all is His not mine. But without passing through death I have nothing to consecrate, nor is there anything God can accept, for He has condemned all that is of the old creation to the Cross. Death has cut off all that *cannot* be consecrated to him, and resurrection alone has made consecration possible.

Rom. 12.1, 2 Cor. 11.2, Col. 1.22,28, and in Luke 2.22 where it is used of the presenting of the infant Jesus to God in the Temple. Both words have an active sense, for which the R.V. translation “present” is greatly to be preferred. “Yield” contains a passive idea of “surrender” that has colored much evangelical thought, but which is not in keeping with the context here in Romans. —Ed. [of NCL]

Presenting myself to God means that henceforth I consider my whole life as belonging to Him.

Let us observe that this “presenting” relates to the members of my body—that body which, as we saw earlier, is now unemployed in respect of sin. “Present yourselves . . . and your members,” says Paul, and again: “Present your members” (Rom. 6.13,19). God requires of me that I now regard all my members, all my faculties, as belonging wholly to Him.

It is a great thing when I discover I am no longer my own but His. If the ten shillings in my pocket belong to me, then I have full authority over them. But if they belong to another who has committed them to me in trust, then I cannot buy what I please with them, and I dare not lose them. Real Christian life begins with knowing this. How many of us know that, because Christ is risen, we are therefore alive “unto God” *and not unto ourselves*? How many of us dare not use our time or money or talents as we would, because we realize they are the Lord’s, not ours? How many of us have such a strong sense that we belong to Another that we dare not squander a shilling of our money, or an hour of our time, or any of our mental or physical powers? . . .

Separated unto the Lord

What is holiness? Many people think we become holy by the eradication of something evil within. No, we become holy by being separated unto God. In Old Testament times, it was when a man was chosen by God to be altogether His that he was publicly anointed with oil and was then said to be “sanctified.” Thereafter he was regarded as *set apart* to God. In the same manner even animals or material things—a lamb, or the gold of the temple—could be sanctified, not by the eradication of anything evil in them, but by being thus rescued exclusively to the Lord. “Holiness” in the Hebrew

sense meant something thus set apart, and all true holiness is holiness “to the Lord” (Ex. 28.36). I gave myself over wholly to Christ: that is holiness.

Presenting myself to God implies a recognition that I am altogether His. This giving of myself is a definite thing, just as definite as reckoning. There must be a day in my life when I pass out of my own hands into His, and from that day forward I belong to Him and no longer to myself. That does not mean that I consecrate myself to be a preacher or a missionary. Alas, many people are missionaries not because they have truly consecrated themselves to God but because, in the sense of which we are speaking, they have *not* consecrated themselves to Him. They have “consecrated” (as they would put it) something altogether different, namely, their own uncrucified natural faculties to the doing of His work; but that is not true consecration. Then to what are we to be consecrated? Not to Christian work, but *to the will of God, to be and to do whatever He requires . . .*

How good it is to have the consciousness that we belong to the Lord and are not our own. There is nothing more precious in the world. It is that which brings the awareness of His continual presence, and the reason is obvious. I must first have the sense of God’s possession of me before I can have the sense of His presence with me. When once His ownership is established, then I dare do nothing in my own interests, for I am His exclusive property. “Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey?” (Rom. 6.16) The word here rendered “servant” really signifies a bondservant, a slave. This word is used several times in the second half of Romans 6. What is the difference between a servant and a slave? A servant may serve another, but the ownership does not pass to that other. If he likes his master he can serve him, but if he does not like him he can give in his notice and seek another master. Not so is it with the slave. He is

not only the servant of another but he is the possession of another. How did I become the slave of the Lord? On His part He bought me, and on my part I presented myself to Him. By right of redemption I am Gods property, but if I would be His slave I must willingly give myself to Him, for He will never compel me to do so.

—NCL 99-103, 105-6

15

Faith

Faith Substantiates God's Fact

Hebrews 11.1 speaks of the significance of faith. It is the only verse in the entire Bible which gives us a definition of faith: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen.” In other Bible versions there are a number of other renderings that have been given for the word translated here as “assurance,” since this is a most difficult word to translate from the original Greek into English. To be probably the most accurate, this word should be translated as “the giving of substance to”^{*} or “substantiation, which thus means that faith is the ability to substantiate a thing as factual. For example, in this hall where we are meeting, we have before us the shape of the lamp, the color of the wall, and the sound of the organ. How do we substantiate the shape and color and sound to make them real to us? That which can substantiate the existence of color is none other than our two eyes. Suppose there were a picture here also with beautiful colors such as green and red and yellow. These beautiful colors would need the eyes to make them real. If there were no eye, then however beautiful these colors are, nothing could make them real in our own personal experience. By the same token, though the sound of the organ is pleasant, it takes ears to show forth its reality. To one who is deaf, there is no way to substantiate the realness of the music. Neither the eyes nor the touch of the hand can substantiate the sound; only the ears can substantiate the sound and make it enjoyable. Then, too, the shape of a thing may be square, round, plane, triangular or curved; its fact is only to be known either by the touch of the hand or by the sight of the eye. So that the existence of a thing is one matter

^{*}Which is the *marginal* rendering of the ASV (1901), the Bible version primarily used throughout this present volume.—*Translator*

while the substantiating of it is quite another. There are numerous things in the physical world, but every one of them needs some ability to prove its reality. In the spiritual realm, this ability is what faith is.

Here is a painting with a beautiful scenery of hill, water, flowers and trees. With your eyes you can make real the beauty as well as the existence of that painting. Suppose a man is born blind and he has never seen any color. You try to tell him of the red in the painting, and he will ask what is red color? You say there is green color also, but he says what is green? All you can say to him is that what is red is red color and what is green is green color. Though the painting exists, the blind man cannot enjoy its beauty.

Here is a sister who plays the piano well. Whoever has ears and knows music can appreciate what this sister plays. But he who is deaf and is a stranger to music will not be able to prove the sweetness of the music. Now our faith is just like that. All the facts of God are real and true, but faith alone can verify them. For “faith is the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11.1 Darby).

The blind person cannot see the beautiful scenery in a painting. Nevertheless, his inability to see can in no way disprove the existence of the painting. For its existence is a fact, whether a person sees it or not. Its beautiful colors remain unchanged. The question is, can the person be benefited by the painting? He who has eyes is pleased with the painting and is benefited by it. It is the same in the spiritual realm. That the Lord shed His blood and died on the cross for mankind is a fact. Nevertheless, only those who have faith are able to prove this fact and be benefited by it. To those who do not believe, the death of the Lord on the cross may indeed be factual, yet they will not be able to experience it and benefit by it.

Have you now seen the significance of faith? We need faith to

prove a spiritual matter just as we need eyes, ears and hands to prove physical matters. In all spiritual affairs, it takes the element of faith to substantiate them. For instance, the Lord is head and we are the members of His body. This union is a fact which cannot be torn asunder. So is the fact of the Lord being the vine and we being the branches. By believing it, we will be benefited by it. Some may say the Lord *is* the vine and they *are* the branches, but they have no experience of spiritual sap nor life nor fruit-bearing. This is because they do not have faith.

What is faith? Faith is not mental apprehension. It is seeing the fact and proving it. You have heard that Christ died on the cross and shed His blood for the remission of sins; and so you say that Christ died on the cross and shed his blood for the remission of sins. You have heard that the Lord is the vine and we are the branches; therefore, you too say that the Lord is the vine and we are the branches. You have heard that the Lord Jesus is your life and He lives in you; whereupon, you too say that the Lord Jesus is your life and lives in you. Nevertheless, you are not able to prove these facts and make them real in experience because you lack faith. In just the same way, you may have let go of yourself because you realize your inability and uselessness. Yet this is but the negative side of victory. You need, positively, to prove Christ by an act of faith—by believing. Is it not most wonderful that in one minute, nay, in one *second*, all the facts which Christ has accomplished can be proven and demonstrated in your life? Such is the substantiating by faith.

How do you know a painting is beautiful? Because you have seen it with your physical eyes. How do you know the riches of Christ? Because you have seen with your spiritual eyes. In the letter to the Colossians, God declares that “in him [Christ] ye are made full” (2.9). But how do you know you are made full in Christ? Because you have seen it with the eye of faith. As you look at yourself, you know you are not complete at all. Even so, are you nonetheless able to declare

you are complete in Christ? With the eye of *faith* you can. The Lord has given you His riches, grace upon grace. Do you have them? It is not whether you have them in your mind, but whether you *believe* them in your heart.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1.3). We indeed profess to believe that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus; nonetheless, where are these blessings? The entire question revolves around the matter of faith, believing that the word of God is true.

The great failure of a Christian is unbelief. Believe, and the fact is proven. See with faith and the fact is substantiated in experience. . . .

Faith Is Not Hoping

All who are merely hoping may not have believed. If you ask a person whether he has overcome, and his answer is that he *hopes* to overcome, you know for sure that he does not have faith, even as you know a person does not have faith if he says he *hopes* to be saved. Some here are expecting all the time that the Lord will deliver them and cause them to overcome. Some here are praying continuously to the Lord asking for victory. Some are waiting a long while for the Lord to give them victory. Some may even claim that they have yielded and believed, but they are waiting to see if it works. It will never work if people wait to see whether or not it is effective, for faith is not hoping. . . .

Faith Is Not Feeling

Some may not be hoping, praying or waiting; they may instead be on the lookout for feeling. One sister told me that although she had already yielded and had believed that the Lord was living in her, she

dared not say she had overcome, because from the day she had accepted the victory of the Lord right up to the present moment, she had not felt anything. Let me emphasize the truth that faith is purely believing: it has no regard for feeling. Feeling may be useful in certain other things, but in knowing the Lord it is absolutely useless and untrustworthy. The hand can only touch and feel cold or hot, but it cannot see a painting. In spiritual matters, faith, and not feeling, is what is required to prove them. Victory is based on believing God's word. Because God has said so, so it is—and not because during these days you feel especially strong or joyful. Victory rests on one word of God. . . .

Genuine Faith Believes in God's Word Alone

What is genuine faith? Genuine faith believes in the word of God exclusively, it is not believing in one's own experience, feeling, or dark environment. If environment and experience coincide with God's word, we praise and thank the Lord. But if these disagree with His word, then the word of God alone stands true. Whatever is contrary to God's word is false. Satan may insinuate to you, saying: How can you say you have victory? Where is your victory since you are as corrupt and weak as you were before? But you can counter him with this: "Indeed, I am still I, I will never change, but God says Christ is my holiness, my life and my victory." Though Satan suggests that you are still corrupt and weak, God's word remains true. Whatever the enemy whispers to you is false; only the word of the Lord is true!

—LW 84-7, 90-1, 102

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen" (Heb. 11.1), and "the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4.18). I think we all know that Hebrews 11.1 is the only definition of faith in the New Testament, or indeed in the

Scriptures. It is important that we should really understand that definition. You are familiar with the common English translation of these words, describing faith as “the substance of things hoped for” (AV). However, the word in the Greek has in it the sense of an action and not just of some thing, a “substance, and I confess I have personally spent a number of years trying to find a correct word to translate this. But the New Translation of J.N. Darby is especially good in regard to this word: “Faith is the *substantiating* of things hoped for.” That is much better. It implies the making of them real in experience.

How do we “substantiate” something? We are doing so every day. We cannot live in the world without doing so. Do you know the difference between substance and “substantiating”? A substance is an object, something before me. “Substantiating” means that I have a certain power or faculty that makes that substance to be real to me. Let us take a simple illustration. By means of our senses we can take things of the world of nature and transfer them into our consciousness so that we can appreciate them. Sight and hearing, for example, are two of my faculties which substantiate to me the world of light and sound. We have colors: red, yellow, green, blue, violet; and these colors are real things. But if I shut my eyes, then to me the color is no longer real; it is simply nothing—to me. With my faculty of sight, however, I possess the power to “substantiate”, and by that power, yellow becomes yellow *to me*. It is not only that the color is there, but I have the power to “substantiate” it. I have the power to make that color true to me and to give it reality in my consciousness. That is the meaning of “substantiating.”

If I am blind I cannot distinguish color, or if I lack the faculty of hearing I cannot enjoy music. Yet music and color are in fact *real* things, and their reality is unaffected by whether or not I am able to appreciate them. Now we are considering here the things which, though they are not seen, are eternal and therefore real. Of course we

cannot substantiate divine things with any of our natural senses; but there is one faculty which can substantiate the “things hoped for”, the things of Christ, and that is faith. Faith makes the *real* things to become real *in my experience*. Faith “substantiates” *to me* the things of Christ. Hundreds of thousands of people are reading Romans 6.6: “Our old man was crucified with him.” To faith it is true; to doubt, or to mere mental assent apart from spiritual illumination, it is not true.

Let us remember again that we are dealing here not with promises but with facts. The promises of God are revealed to us by his Spirit that we may lay hold of them; but facts are facts, and they remain facts whether we believe them or not. If we do not believe the facts of the Cross they still remain as real as ever, but they are valueless to us. It does not need faith to make these things real in themselves, but faith can “substantiate” them and make them real in our experience.

—NCL 73-5

Definitions

“Fact” is God’s promises, God’s redemption, God’s work, and God’s gift.

“Faith” is how people believe in God, trusting in His work and redemption, and drawing upon His promises. Faith is a working attitude and a process which translates God’s fact into man’s experience.

“Experience” is living a believer’s normal life through faith in God. It is expressing the life of Christ in the believer’s daily walk. It is proving the success and victory of Christ by demonstrating practically the fact of God. . . .

—BTC 38-9

Faith

Faith is a principle of our Christian walk. Faith is governed by two rules that are represented by a gate and a way. All who are familiar with spiritual experience know that faith is composed of “believe” and “trust.” There is a difference between the *act* of faith and the *attitude* of faith. To believe once and for all is what we call passing through a crisis, but to trust continuously afterwards is what we call making progress. Exercising a single-minded act of faith is entering the gate, but maintaining an attitude of faith thereafter is walking in the way. In order for a Christian to truly believe in God in a particular matter, he must with singleness of heart first exercise an act of faith by which he truly believes in God before he can ever walk the way of faith. In entering the gate of faith he crosses a threshold of doubt, and thus with single-heartedness he receives from God a promise. This is passing through the gate or going through a crisis. Please remember that believers must first enter through such a gate of faith, and then they may advance in the walk of faith by maintaining an attitude of faith.

Many people speculate that they can trust God by maintaining an attitude of faith without ever crossing the threshold of faith by means of a single-minded act of faith. They do not know that without entering the gate there is absolutely no possibility of their walking in the way. Without going through a crisis there can be no opportunity for making progress. It is imperative that there be a clear break with the past and a definite acceptance of the testimony of God. This is entering the gate; otherwise, there can never be any spiritual advancement. Hence in the area of faith, first enter the gate, then walk along the way. . . .

Let all of us remember that if we expect to walk in the way of obedience, we must pass through the crisis of consecration; Whether we are brothers or sisters, we will make no spiritual progress without

consecration. It is imperative that we be disarmed by God. We should not dream of walking in the way of obedience if we have never walked through the gate of obedience. When we are redeemed, we no doubt belong to God. But beginning from the moment of our consecration we shall *experience* that we really do belong to Him. . . .

Our having objective fact but not having the corresponding subjective experience approaches the realm of idealism without eliciting any favor from heaven. On the objective side, Christ has done it all; so He must be trusted wholeheartedly. On the subjective side, the Holy Spirit will do the work; and therefore He must be obeyed absolutely. All spiritual experiences commence with our believing what Christ has accomplished, and they conclude with our obeying what the Holy Spirit commands us to do. What Christ has accomplished gives us the position; what the Holy Spirit commands causes us to have experience. What Christ has accomplished is fact that must be received; what the Holy Spirit leads us into is principle which requires our obedience. All spiritual experiences begin from the objective; there is no exception to the rule. The anchor of faith must be cast upon the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Christ.

—BCL 4-5, 17, 36-7

Now it is just here that this issue of faith enters into the picture. Faith is composed of two basic principles: (1) To cease from man's own work, and (2) to wait for God to work. Ordinarily we consider faith as trusting, depending and waiting for God to work; not realizing that there is the prerequisite of ceasing our own work first. To cease from man's own work is reckoned as a work of faith. Waiting for God to work happens in the believer's heart, hence it is invisible; but ceasing from one's own work is external, therefore it may sometimes be seen. The greater work of faith is manifested in

the believer ceasing from his own work rather than in waiting for God to work for him.

The importance of such a step cannot be overemphasized. For God is never willing to mix His own work in with the work of man's flesh. What God requires of the believer is to cease from all that is of his own self, including his idea and strength. No doubt God is pleased to be trusted and relied upon by the believer. But how is such faith in God expressed? By being still and completely resting from one's self. This is the first step in the work of faith. . . .

See how wise is our God! For if faith were something we ourselves had and it came out from us, why, we would then become its master. Whenever we wanted to do a particular thing, we would only need to believe and we would have God to work it out for us. But this is not so. Faith is something given by God. Before He gives us faith, we just cannot believe. Many of us Christians share in the experience of frequently finding no way to enter into rest because we simply are unable to manufacture faith. Then suddenly God gives faith (sometimes it comes through one or two scripture passages; sometimes it comes after prayer when we know intuitively the will of God), and our heart immediately calms down and enters into rest, as if a kind of assurance has been given to us that God will do the work. Such faith comes naturally without the need of struggling, anxiety, and exercise. As soon as God grants faith, the believer instantly exhibits the work of faith, which is rest without worrying. Whatever is humanly manufactured is not faith, and therefore does not give rest.

A word of cautionary discernment is necessary at this point. For what has been mentioned above does not mean that now we have no other responsibility but to wait for faith to come. Faith actually may be divided into two kinds: the special and the ordinary. Special faith is given to us by God concerning some particular matter, thus

enabling us to believe that God will accomplish it for us. Such special faith does not happen on every occasion.

Ordinary faith is the faith which an experienced believer *always* has towards God. It is not directed at a particular matter, but rather towards *all* matters. Such faith assumes the believing attitude that *whatever* God does is *right*. Failure or success is all within the perfect will of God. Although we have special faith only occasionally, we ought to have ordinary faith towards all things which come our way, believing our God can do no wrong, trusting that everything is in His hands, and acknowledging He knows what is best for us, whether suffering or success. We should have this ordinary faith at all times. Even when special things happen, we must not lose this kind of faith.

In any case, whatever kind of faith it may be, it must be manifested in work. This is to say, that it must give the believing one rest from laboring with his natural strength to help God.

—SJ 138, 141-2

16

The Priesthood of Believers

The History of the Priests

From the book of Genesis on, God has had His priests. Melchizedek was God's first priest. During the time of Abraham, Melchizedek had already separated himself for the service of God. From Melchizedek till after the nation of Israel was established, there were always priests.

When the Lord Jesus was on earth and even after His departure, the priesthood continued. And after His ascension, the Bible shows us that the Lord Jesus became a priest before God. In other words, He is in heaven ministering fully unto God.

The priesthood continues on throughout the dispensation of the church. After that, those who have part in the first resurrection will be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him for a thousand years (Rev. 20.6). Thus, in the millennial kingdom, God's children will continue being priests of God and of Christ. They will be kings to the world and priests to God. The nature of the priesthood will remain unchanged, for the priests will still serve God.

Even when the new heavens and the new earth come, the priesthood will not fade away. In New Jerusalem all God's children and all God's servants will do nothing but serve Him.

Here is a most wonderful thing: the priesthood commenced with Melchizedek—who is without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life—and it continues on through the millennium. Its service extends to the eternity to come.

The Kingdom of Priests

Although at first only Melchizedek was priest, the purpose of God is for all His people to be priests—not just a few of them.

After the Israelites came out of Egypt and to Mount Sinai, God spoke to them through Moses, saying, “Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation” (Ex. 19.6). Why does it say a *kingdom* of priests? For one reason only: that the whole nation should be priests. Not one person in the country was to be just an ordinary person; all were priests. This is God’s purpose.

When God chose Israel to be His people, He set this one purpose before them: their nation was to be different from all the other nations because theirs was to be a kingdom of priests. All the people in the kingdom were to be priests. Every person’s occupation was to serve God. God delights to choose people to serve Him; He likes to have them occupied with His business on earth.

At Mount Sinai God informed the people of Israel that He would set them up as a kingdom of priests. This is truly a beautiful thing. We call Great Britain a naval country, the United States of America a gold country, China a nation of etiquette, and India a philosophical nation, but here we find a nation which is called a kingdom of priests. In this nation everyone is a priest, the men as well as the women, the adults as well as the children. They do nothing but serve God. This becomes their sole profession. Is it not wonderful? . . .

Let us take special note here: After this incident of the golden calf, God immediately informed Moses that hereafter the nation of Israel could not be a kingdom of priests. Though this was not explicitly stated, yet it was implicitly understood, for henceforth God gave the privilege of being priests to the tribe of Levi alone. That which was originally intended for the whole nation of Israel was now given to the house of Aaron of the tribe of Levi.

From that time on, there existed two classes of people of God: one class was the people of God and the other class was the priests of God. God's original design was to make every one of His people a priest. He did not intend to divide them into people and priests. The whole kingdom would be priests. God's people and God's priests would be one and the same. Who were God's people? Who were God's priests? Whoever was one of God's people was also God's priest and whoever was God's priest was one of God's people. But, due to the fact that so many loved the world and succumbed to human affection and forsook faithfulness to the Lord and worshiped idols, God was forced to take the measure of dividing His priests from His people. If any person does not love the Lord more than father, mother, wife, children, brother, sister, and all, he is unfit to be a disciple of the Lord. Alas, too many do not pay the price and fulfill the conditions.

At first there was a kingdom of priests, but now there was a tribe of priests. What was originally intended to be for a nation was now realized in a family. The priesthood was confined to a family instead of a nation. In the tribe of Levi, God's people and God's priests were one—that is, God's people were God's priests. But the other eleven tribes, though they were God's people, could not be God's priests. This was indeed a most serious matter. And is it not still a matter of deep seriousness if a person believes on the Lord and yet fails to function as a priest? . . .

The Priesthood Changed

For about fifteen hundred years, from Moses till Christ, the people of God were not able to present themselves directly to God. Only one family was chosen to be priests. In order to approach God, every person must pass through them. If anyone dared to draw near to God by himself, he would be smitten to death. During that period, the function of the priest was of tremendous importance. How noble the

priesthood was! How great! But then, suddenly, the New Covenant came and under it men could be saved and redeemed directly. Suddenly we hear the word, “Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2.5).

Peter tells us that Christ is the foundation of the church. He is the stone rejected by the builders that has become the head of the corner. Through Him, we too have become living stones to be joined and built together to be both a spiritual temple and God’s holy priesthood. The voice from heaven informs us that all saved ones are God’s priests. All who have become living stones and are related to the spiritual temple are the priests of God.

All of a sudden, the promise which had been laid aside for fifteen hundred years was again taken up by God. What the Israelites lost, the church gained. Universal priesthood was lost to Israel, but today, with the New Covenant, the voice from heaven comes to tell us that all saved ones are priests.

“And he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father” (Rev. 1.6). Originally, the whole nation of Israel were priests but they soon disqualified themselves. The church, however, is today a kingdom of priests. What the Israelites lost after worshiping the golden calf is now fully gained by the church through the Lord Jesus. All who are in the church are priests. God’s destined kingdom of priests is thus wholly realized.

What is meant by the church being a kingdom of priests or by all in the church being priests? This simply implies that the occupation of all who have received God’s grace is one: to serve God. As I have said before to the young people, the occupation of a medical doctor who has believed in the Lord is not medicine, of a nurse is not nursing, of a teacher is not teaching, of a farmer is not farming, of a businessman is not business. Remember, when you became a

Christian, your profession underwent a complete change. All Christians have only one profession and that is, to serve God. From now on, I am God's priest. Outwardly I may be busily occupied in various things, but inwardly I am before God, serving Him. Everything is done with this as the spiritual objective.

All Christians, then, are engaged in one occupation—serving God. He who is a physician should not aspire to fame; rather, his practice as a doctor should serve only to sustain his physical life. His real profession now is that he is a priest before God. The same applies to a professor. He should not seek for renown, to be an outstanding professor; he should seek to be a good priest of God. His teaching becomes an avocation; his main vocation is to serve God. So this same service should govern Christians of all professions—laborers, farmers, whatever. Their one and only profession, in fact, is to serve God.

From the day you become a Christian, you should lay aside your ambitions and plans. You should not seek to be an outstanding person in your particular field. As a Christian, you should have only one ambition, that of Paul's—to be well-pleasing to the Lord (2 Cor. 5.9). You should have no other ambition than this. Any worldly future you might once have had is smashed forever. Now you must be prepared to be one who serves the Lord. . . .

Sometimes people have the idea that they elevate God by offering their service to Him! Over the past decades, I have many times observed revival meetings where people were begged to serve God. Other times people gave a little money as if they were doing a special favor for God. And sometimes people offered their services to God, but in that same way of doing a favor. For a man to give up a little position in the world seems to imply how much God is being honored by the service of such a one. Let me tell you, this is blindness. This is folly. And this is darkness.

Because God in heaven has called us to be priests, we should crawl on our knees and bow before Him, for we have received such great glory. God has honored us. Is there anything that anyone in this world can offer to God? Yet, it is our greatest glory that God is willing to accept what we offer. For such as we to be privileged to serve God is glory indeed. This truly is grace! This most surely is the gospel! The gospel not only saves us through the Lord Jesus, but also enables us to serve God. How great is this gospel.

The Priesthood Affirmed

Today the church no longer has a restricted priesthood but a universal priesthood. The nation of Israel failed once; the church cannot afford to fail again. Because the Israelites failed, God's people and God's priests were separated; but in the church there must not be such a separation. In the church God's people are God's priests. If there are people, there are priests. There are as many priests as there are brothers and sisters. Every one of us must draw near to God and offer spiritual sacrifices. All should offer the sacrifice of praise, all should take part in spiritual matters. This is not a selective ministry, for all are to serve God. Unless all are involved, it is not the church. . . .

Let us, then, get rid of the intermediary class. The best way to abolish it is for everyone to be in that class! We should kneel before the Lord and say, "Lord, I am willing to serve you. I am willing to be a priest." . . .

The Service of the Priests

To be a Christian is to be a priest. Do not expect anyone to be a priest for you. You yourself are to so function. Since we have no intermediary class among us, no one will substitute himself for you in spiritual things. Let there not be a special class of such workers

created in our midst.

If God is gracious to us, we will naturally find all brothers and sisters functioning in the church. All will preach the gospel, all will serve God. The more prevailing the priesthood is, the better the church. If the priesthood is not universal, we have failed God; we have not walked uprightly.

For such as we, who are poor, weak, blind, and crippled, to be accepted by the Lord to be priests is unquestionably our glory. In the Old Testament times, such people could not function as priests. All who were disabled, lame, or with blemishes were barred from service. But today we—the base, the unclean, the dark, and the disabled—are called by God to be priests. Oh, He is Lord! As I have said, I only want to crawl to Him and kneel before Him and tell Him, “Lord, I am happy to serve You, I am glad to be Your servant. That I may come to You is evidence that You have lifted me.” Let me tell you, to be a priest is to draw near to God. To be a priest is to have no distance between you and God. To be a priest is to be able to enter directly into His presence. To be a priest means you do not need to wait for help. To be a priest means you can touch God.

If some day the brothers and sisters in every place are found serving God, then in truth will the kingdom of God have come. It will be a kingdom of priests, for all the people will be priests. I look toward this event as a most glorious thing. May we pay whatever price is needed for us to serve God. May we deal with all idols. The Levites paid the price by disregarding their personal affection. Such people are worthy to have the priesthood.

—LOA 175-7, 179-86, 189-90

17

Resurrection

Let us recognize that the purpose of God in creating Adam is not simply in His having made him a living soul by having breathed into a piece of fashioned clay. No, this is very inadequate. Man does not yet have the life of God. He has the *created* life all right, but he does not possess the *uncreated* life. He is bound by time and space. He is created to a certain point, but falls short of arriving at God's full design. For this reason, since the time of Adam, God has been working towards obtaining a man in full accordance with His plan. We notice that throughout the entire Old Testament period—ever since the time of Genesis 3 in fact—God had worked incessantly in the lives of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joshua, Samuel, David, and others for the sake of accomplishing what He had originally designed. We also perceive how God had actually apprehended those men and was able to finish His work in them. So far as God's purpose in these men is concerned, we may say that they were apprehended by God. But so far as the man whom God designed to obtain in His eternal plan, none of them was sufficient. All these men reached a certain point but then stopped short of the goal.

But then came the New Testament era. The Son of God came to be a man: the Word became flesh. And this is the man whom God had always longed to have. The man whom He had planned to complete is now found. This man is none other than Christ Jesus. Let us always remember that Christ is the man whom God had continually expected through those many years. Christ is the complete man—God's representative man and the typical man.

Nevertheless, while the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth there was restriction to His manhood. Though He was very different from the rest of the people on earth in that He had the divine nature and was a

complete man, yet so far as the matter of power was concerned Christ suffered the limitation of a man in that He was restricted by time and space. When the four men brought a man sick of the palsy to see the Lord Jesus, they had to uncover the roof where He was in order to reach His presence (Mark 2.3,4). When the woman who had an issue of blood wished to touch Him, she had to press through the throng before she could do so (Mark 5.25-31). On the other hand, our Lord commended a Roman centurion on his great faith because he answered, "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed" (Matt. 8.8). This man knew that he did not need to press through to the Lord's side in order to touch Him, because he recognized the unlimited side of the Lord. Yet so far as the human side of the Lord Jesus went, what He manifested while on earth was rather straitened in character. This does not imply that there was any imperfection in His personality; it only refers to the fact of a restriction in the release of power. He could not have been more perfect in personality, nonetheless, the manifestation of His power does seem to have been somewhat restricted. But after He died and was resurrected the Lord Jesus did arrive at the peak of completeness.

What is resurrection? Resurrection is the fact that God has gotten a man—the kind of man which He had long expected. While our Lord Jesus Christ was on earth He was a perfect man, nevertheless this perfect man was somewhat circumscribed. The man whom God had desired from the foundation of the world is not to be so confined. What God looked for was resurrection. In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, Christ transcends all limitations. Thereafter nothing can restrict Him anymore. While He lived on earth Christ had the possibility of death. But after His resurrection death could no longer touch Him. Death and the possibility of death are both destroyed by Him. His word to the apostle John long after His resurrection is: "I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1.18). He will never die again since the possibility of death is destroyed by Him.

Men can no more crucify Him; this possibility of death no longer exists. Now this is called resurrection.

Resurrection means that the man whom God in eternity sought to obtain is now found in our Lord! “Thou art my beloved Son, *this day have I begotten thee,*” says God. *This announcement does not refer to Bethlehem; rather, it points to resurrection.* When Christ was born in Bethlehem God was not able to make this announcement; after Christ is resurrected, however, God can publicly say so (see Acts 13.33). Let us therefore remember that even though the Lord Jesus was perfect in nature, character, and conduct while living on earth, He was nonetheless restricted until resurrected. Afterwards, however, all limitations were gone. And thus resurrection signifies that here is a man who has broken through all the limitations of man. The man whom God was always seeking to find is at last found on the day Christ was raised from the dead. . . .

Resurrection is the power of God: “According to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all . . . not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph. 1.19-21). After His resurrection the Lord sits at the right hand of the Father, far above all. He is far above every name that is named. He is far above all in this world as well as in the world to come. The man whom God had planned to have but had failed to apprehend since the foundation of the world is now found in the Lord Jesus after His resurrection. What God looked forward to possess was a man who would be like Him. Before this became factual, He had not gotten whom He had planned for. The God who is is indeed far above all, but He also wants a man to be far above all. Until there is a man who is far above all, God’s purpose is not fulfilled. After our Lord was raised from the dead He was received to the Father’s right side. Not only the restriction of death is abolished, but all other limitations are overcome. And God has now

obtained the man of His plan.

We need to see that the Lord Jesus came to be a representative man. His life on earth for thirty-odd years is representative, and so is His life after resurrection representative in nature. What He represents on earth during those thirty and more years is the moral standard of man—or more accurately, God’s moral demand on man. What He expresses to His disciples in the forty days after His resurrection is the power God will give us. So that on the one hand the Lord Jesus represents God’s ideal man who reflects the proper moral and spiritual conditions which God requires of man. Should He have come to this world and not died for us nor atoned for our sins, the Lord by so coming would have condemned us because we have all come short of the glory of God. He alone is a man who has the glory of God and who has satisfied God’s glory. He is the ideal person. By comparison, we are all sinners and are all unqualified, because He is the moral standard for every one of us. On the other hand, after His resurrection the Lord Jesus represents even more the ideal man of God. We have already commented that when God said “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” it did not refer to the birth at Bethlehem but to resurrection. On that very same day the Lord Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, “Go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God” (John 20.17). This indicates to us that our becoming sons of God also commences at resurrection

What does the Holy Spirit do on earth today? He communicates the risen Christ to men. If anyone should say he knows the Holy Spirit but not resurrection we will answer that this is impossible. For today this Christ transcends all space, time, death, and every limitation. The Holy Spirit is that Spirit who has raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. The power of the Holy Spirit is therefore the power of resurrection. Wherever the work of the Holy Spirit is, there is the manifestation of the power of resurrection. Where the Holy

Spirit is, there is resurrection.

—GL 99-102, 107-8, 111

18

Revelation

What Is Necessary for Revelation

Two things are necessary for revelation:
(1) light from God, and (2) opened eyes.

The reason why many do not see is not because there is no light. The difficulty is that our eyes are blind, not that God is withholding light. Lack of revelation is due to blind eyes. We think we are all right. We think we know and understand. Hence, it is no wonder that we get no light.

In very identical circumstances some people will see more and others less because their inward eyes are not the same. Those who are not conscious of need or think that there is not much wrong suffer loss as a consequence. . . .

The *only* condition (and I say it again and again, and cannot say it strongly enough), the only condition for seeing is the cross. We go round and round in our own thoughts, wisdom and ideas; but human wisdom has no part at all in spiritual things. It does not enter in; it is entirely excluded. It is the cross that makes us see. When the cross operates we see. The cross is not a doctrine but an experience. It is possible to talk much about the doctrine of the cross and to know a lot about it in our heads and yet for the cross never to have touched our lives. Some of us are humble because we are in darkness. Yet our humility is from ourselves and is simply dead works. We hear humility spoken of, and so we produce a humility. Instead of seeing, instead of having light and being dealt with by the cross, we think we have to *do* something about it.

In the Scriptures we read of many who met God and were cast down. They were struck down by the light of God and were done for.

But there are many today who throw themselves down instead of being cast down by the light. They act it out. They *produce* something which has not come from God. If God indeed meets with us, if His light slays us, it is something quite apart from ourselves, and the time and circumstances are not under our control. There are some who seek to produce something, who try to do it themselves; they choose the way and the time and place. It is all useless, however, and absolutely of no value. This all has to be got rid of before God can do anything.

If we have once had a fundamental seeing, then we will *go on* seeing. There will be an open heaven.

—WG 65-7

What Is a Revelation?

The scripture we have been considering continues thus: “And there is not a creature unapparent before him; but all things are naked and laid bare to his eyes, with whom we have to do.” Here the Lord gives us the standard or criterion for dividing. What constitutes a revelation by the Holy Spirit? How much must we see before it is a revelation? Heb. 4.13 can help us answer this. *Revelation enables us to see what God sees*. All things are naked and laid bare before Him. Any covering is upon our own eyes, not God’s. When God opens our eyes that we may know the intent of our heart, and the deepest thought within us in the measure that He himself knows us—this is revelation. As we are naked and laid bare before Him, so are we before ourselves as we receive revelation. This is revelation: for us to be allowed to see what our Lord sees.

Should God be merciful to us and grant us even a small measure of revelation, so that we can see ourselves as we are seen by Him, we shall immediately be smitten to the ground. We need not try to be

humble. Those who live in the light cannot be proud. It is only while dwelling in darkness that we can be proud. Outside of God's light men can be arrogant and haughty; but under the revelation of the light they can only prostrate themselves before Him. . . .

The Amazing Work of Slaying through Enlightenment

Having considered the disciplinary working of the Holy Spirit, now let us see how He employs another means to deal with our outward man. Besides discipline there will be enlightenment. Sometimes these two are used simultaneously, sometimes alternately. At times the discipline is shown in circumstances aimed at leveling our outstanding feature; at other times God graciously shines upon us to enlighten us. The flesh, as we know, lives hidden in darkness. Many works of the flesh are allowed to exist because they are not recognized by us as such. Once His light reveals the flesh to us we tremble, not daring to move. . . .

Discipline Compared with Revelation

Let us next compare the discipline and the revelation of the Holy Spirit. The discipline of the Holy Spirit is usually a slower process, repeated time and again perhaps for years before the point at issue is finally dealt with. (Incidentally, this discipline of the Holy Spirit oftentimes exists without any supply of ministry.) Not so with the revelation of the Holy Spirit. This often comes swiftly, within a few days or possibly a few minutes. Under the light of God you will see in a very little time your true condition and how useless you are. Then too, revelation frequently comes through the supply of God's word. That is why the revelation of the Holy Spirit multiplies when the church is strong and the ministry of the word of God is rich.

19

Redemption and Salvation

Christ's Redemption Realizes God's Double Purpose

Before the foundation of the world the Father and the Son held a council, the result of which was that the Son was to come to the world as a man for the sake of accomplishing the work of redemption. Hence redemption was not God's contingent measure but on the contrary was an action which had been foreplanned. Moreover, we can see from this that it is not a case of Christ coming to the world to be a man after the likeness of Adam, for it must be noted that Adam was created after the image of Christ. Genesis 1.26 lays down the plan of God, while Genesis 1.27 describes God's execution of the plan. Verse 26 says "let us" plan, verse 27 is its execution: "created man in his own image"; verse 26 reveals the council of the Godhead, verse 27 tells of the creation of man in the image of the Son. Only the *Son* in the Godhead has an image. Accordingly, Adam was created after the image of Christ. Adam is "a figure of him [Christ] that was to come" (Rom. 5.14). The coming of Christ to this world was not an emergency act; it came out of the foreordained plan of God. Even before the foundation of the world, Christ was anointed. Christ is a universal man who is not restricted by time and space. He was the Anointed before the foundation of the world, and He is the Christ who fills the universe. The Four Gospels view Christ as the universal man.

The first event in the redemption of Christ is His birth. In becoming a man He steps down from the position of the Creator to the place of the created. By taking upon himself the body of the created He is able to die for man and for all things. With Bethlehem there can be Calvary. With the manger there can and will be the cross.

(1) The redemption of Christ is to reconcile all things to God. Since all things were created in Christ (Col. 1.16), God is able to deal with all things when He deals with Christ. In Christ, therefore, all things have been dealt with by God. Just as Levi paid tithes when still in the loins of Abraham (Heb. 7.9,10), so all things tasted death in Christ (Heb. 2.9 reads: “. . . so that by the grace of God he should taste death for every *thing*”—Darby). On the cross He reconciles all things to God (Col. 1.20). The scope of the redemption of Christ reaches not only to mankind but to all things as well. All things—they not having sinned—need not be redeemed but need simply to be reconciled.

(2) The redemption of Christ imparts His life to man. In the work of redemption Christ not only reconciles all things to God but also gives life to man that the latter might be like Him. This is the release of His life. While He was on earth His divine life was imprisoned within His physical body and thus was greatly restricted. While He was in Jerusalem He could not be in Galilee. His death, though, sets His imprisoned life free.

The grain of wheat mentioned in John 12.24 is God's only begotten Son. The life of the wheat is hidden inside the husk. If it does not fall into the ground and die, it abides alone. But if it dies, the husk is decomposed and the inner life is liberated so as to bear many grains. Each one of the many grains resembles the first grain. Yet it can also be said that each one of the grains is in that one grain. Christ dies to beget us. Before death He is the only begotten Son. After resurrection He becomes the firstborn Son among many sons. By the resurrection of Christ God begets us and gives us His life. . . .

(1) *The redemption of Christ solves the problem of Satan's rebellion.* It is not just the cross of Christ that overcomes Satan; it is His blood. Satan well knew that if he could inject his poison into the first married pair, this poison would propagate itself in all who would

be born by them. Consequently, Satan and our forefathers committed spiritual fornication by which the lying poison of sin entered the soul of our forefathers. Since the soul life is in the blood (see Lev. 17.11 mg.), therefore this sinful human life has been reproduced throughout the generations (“he made of one blood every nation of men”—Acts 17.26 Stephens’ *Greek Text*, 1550). The sinful poison injected into the first couple has flowed into our life through the blood.

The blood of Christ contains no poison. It is the precious blood and is incorruptible. On the cross He bore the sins of many and poured out all His blood in death. When Christ was raised from the dead He had no blood. After His resurrection He has bones and flesh but no blood, “because he poured out his soul unto death” (Is. 53.12). In Christ our blood has already been poured out. Hence Satan has no more ground of operation in our lives. The blood of Christ has destroyed and finished Satan and all who are his.

(2) *The redemption of Christ also resolves the problem of the sin of man.* Our sins require the death of Christ. His substitutionary death dismisses our criminal case before God. His representative death delivers us from the dominion of sin. . . .

The Purpose of Redemption

The purpose of the redemption of Christ is to make us a people for His own possession (Titus 2.14) that we might be a living sacrifice to Him (Rom. 12.1): living and dying for Him (Rom. 14.7-9, 2 Cor. 5.15) and serving as the Temple of the Holy Spirit to glorify God (1 Cor. 6.19,20)—so that Christ might be magnified in us whether by life or by death, because for us to live is Christ (Phil. 1.20,21).

The aim of redemption is to let Christ have the preeminence in all things. In order to have this first place in all things, Christ must first have the preeminence in us. And why? Because we are the firstfruits

of all creation (cf. James 1.18). After *we* are in subjection to Christ, all *other* things will follow in subjection. The cross works in our lives to enable God to realize this aim in us. Is it not the cross that decreases us and increases Christ? The cross seeks out for Christ the place of preeminence. God uses the cross, which in turn works through circumstances to dig deeply into our lives so as to make us know Christ and be filled with Him for the sake of obtaining for Him the preeminence in us. The redemption of Christ is to realize God's plan which was laid before the foundation of the world so that Christ might have the first place in all things. How we need to disregard our personal gain or loss and to regard God's foreordained will in order for Christ to have the preeminence in all things. As we see the Messiah, we will cast away the waterpot in our hand! (see John 4) When we see Christ we will forsake all things!

—GP 22-7

But we must always view redemption as an interruption, an “emergency” measure, made necessary by a catastrophic break in the straight line of the purpose of God.* Redemption is big enough, wonderful enough, to occupy a very large place in our vision, but God is saying that we should not make redemption to be everything, *as though man were created to be redeemed*. The Fall is indeed a tragic dip downwards in that line of purpose, and the atonement a blessed recovery whereby our sins are blotted out and we are restored; but when it is accomplished there yet remains a work to be done to bring us into possession of that which Adam never possessed, and to give God what His heart most desires. For God has never

*Redemption is to be viewed as an emergency measure in relation to God's eternal *purpose*, but it cannot be viewed that way in relation to His eternal *plan*. See again the first page of the present chapter's excerpts from Nee where the author addresses the matter of the foreordained plan of God.—*Translator*

forsaken the purpose which is represented by the straight line. Adam was never in possession of the life of God as presented in the tree of life. But because of the one work of the Lord Jesus in His death and resurrection (and we must emphasize again that it is all one work) His life was released to become ours by faith, and we have received more than Adam ever possessed. The very purpose of God is brought within reach of fulfillment in us by our receiving Christ as our life.

—NCL 212-3

The Bible divides the matter of salvation into three periods. The first period is the past when God saved us from the penalty of sin which is hell. The second period is the present in which God is saving us from the power of sin. The third period is the future when God will save us from the presence of sin to enter the kingdom and to reign with Christ. Let me illustrate each of them with a pertinent verse:

(1) “Who [God] *saved* us, and called us. . .” (2 Tim. 1.9). This is the past experience which everyone who believes has had.

(2) “Wherefore also [Christ] is able to save to the *uttermost* them that draw near unto God through him. . .” (Heb. 7.25). This is present salvation which we may obtain today.

(3) “So Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, *unto salvation*” (Heb. 9.28). This is future and complete salvation.

—BCL 42

20

To one who does the work of the Lord, his personal life matters much with respect to his work. What he is in his character, habit and conduct is essential to his being used of God. This is something to which we need to pay close attention. It speaks of the formation of our nature and the cultivation of our habit. It is more than merely having an experience before God, it involves the forming of character. The Lord has to create a new character in us. In many areas of life we need to be exercised before the Lord until there be developed in us new habits. These things have more to do with our outward man for it is there that we are re-created so as to be fit for the Master's use.

Naturally, all this will necessitate the grace and the mercy of God. Nothing is completed on any day. Yet with sufficient light and adequate word from the Lord, all that is of ourselves and which is unfit will be withered and discontinued under the light, while at the same time a new character will be given us in resurrection, through God's mercy. The few qualities which we shall mention hereafter have been drawn from the experiences and understanding of a number of brothers and sisters who have faithfully served God for many years. If any of these fundamental qualities is missing in a worker, the work of God shall surely suffer.

Able to Listen

The first quality to be mentioned is the ability to listen. One who does the work of the Lord must possess in his personal life the habit of being a good listener. This is not just listening obediently but listening with understanding as well. It is a great need in the personal life of a worker. No one can do good work if he is always talking and

never listening. A person whose mouth goes on continually like firecrackers that crack one after another is useless in God's hand. No workman of God can be always talking. For how can he discern the problem of the person he is conversing with if he is speaking all the time. He is absolutely useless in helping people. When a person comes to you wishing to talk, you must learn how to listen before God. As he speaks, you need to be able to decipher three different kinds of words: (1) the words spoken, (2) those unspoken, and (3) those hidden within his spirit. . . .

How may we hear and understand? *First, we must not be subjective.* Let us be aware that the chief reason for not hearing and understanding other people's words is because of subjectiveness. A subjective person is unable to know what others are saying. In the event you have a preconceived idea or a subjective opinion about a certain thing or person, you will not be able to hear what is said to you. For you are filled with your own thought on the matter or person in question. So firmly is your opinion lodged in you that another's idea cannot have room for consideration. . . .

Second, we must not be absent-minded. Many brothers and sisters are undisciplined in their thought life. Their mind is constantly revolving about with never-ending thoughts. They think of this and think of that; their mind is always full of different ideas. And thus, there is no way for other people's thought, as expressed by their words, to penetrate into their mind. Their brain is never at rest. They are so occupied with their own ideas that they are not able to accept and consider another's thought. In view of this, our mind must be disciplined if we wish to listen to what people say. For when a mind revolves like a wheel, nothing else can get in. When a workman of the Lord listens to another brother or sister, his own mind needs to be stilled. Not only must his will not be subjective; his mind must be still as well. We must learn to think what another thinks and to hear what another says, even to hear the thought within the words.

Otherwise, we are of very little usefulness.

Third, we must be sensible to others' feeling. Here is another basic requirement to being a good listener, which is, that as we listen, we need to touch that person's feeling. In order to reach an understanding, we must enter into the other's feeling as we listen to his words. Suppose a person is in deep sorrow and distress, but your own spirit is carefree and jolly. In that case, though you may hear a great deal, nevertheless, nothing registers. This is because your feeling is not in harmony with his feeling. And as a consequence, you cannot comprehend what has happened to him. So that one whose emotion has not been disciplined cannot enter into another's emotion. Unless a person has been dealt with before God, he cannot sing hallelujah at people's joy nor shed tears at their sorrow; and accordingly, he is unable to hear what they say.

How can we enter into the feelings of other people? We must keep our emotion sufficiently neutral. The one who comes before you has his own feeling, and unless your own feeling is neutral you have no ability to feel what he feels. You will be so busily occupied with what you yourself feel that you will be totally unable to know and to enter into how he feels. For the sake of the Lord, we become servants to all the brethren. We give them not only our time and our energy but also our feeling and emotion. This is truly a very weighty matter. In addition to helping people in their affairs, we also enter into their feelings by keeping our own feelings and emotions free. And since our own feelings are free and thus at their disposal, we may easily enter into the feelings of others. This is the meaning of how our Lord Jesus Christ, having been tempted and tested and tried in all things, is able to sympathize with us fully (see Heb. 4.15; cf. 2.18). . . .

For this reason, the fundamental condition of divine work is to know the cross. He who does not know the cross is useless in the Lord's work. Without the experiential knowledge of Calvary, one is,

without exception, a subjective person. If one does not know the cross, his own thoughts will flow ceaselessly like a river. If one does not know the cross, he can only live in his own feeling. Consequently, it is imperative that we know the cross. There is for us no easy way or shortcut. We must have this basic dealing before God, without which we have no spiritual usefulness. Learn to look for the Lord's merciful dealing with us so that we are delivered from being subjective, from absentminded woolgathering, and from being insensitive to others' feeling. A workman needs to open himself up to receive people's problems. And by so doing he shall be able to know the words spoken or unspoken, and even their very spirit. . . .

. . . What is essential to a worker is not how much knowledge he has but rather what kind of person he is. Because we have nothing, instrument-wise, but our own self, God will use us as a person to measure other people. But if we are not right, we cannot be used by God. Today we are not using a physical instrument to examine people. It would be much simpler if there were such a physical instrument by which to examine or measure other people spiritually. A thermometer, for example, can easily measure body temperature. But in the Lord's work, that thermometer is we ourselves. You and I as a person must test out other people's state and condition. Consequently, what kind of person we are as God's instrument is of extreme importance. If we are a wrong or bad instrument, nothing can be accomplished, since there is no way for God to use us in dealing with other people. To be a good listener, therefore, is exceedingly essential as a first step towards being an effective workman for the Lord. . . .

There is a mistaken idea abroad among Christians. They often think that as long as a worker can speak, all is well. On the contrary, all is *not* well. In order to do the work of God it is not only a matter of speaking, it is also a matter of the spirit. We need to discern the manifold problems among brothers and sisters and know how to lead

them. Can we help them if we are insensitive and dark within, so that we are unable to perceive their actual condition? . . .

Must Love All Mankind

Those who work the work of the Lord must not only love the brethren but also love *all* mankind. “Whoso mocketh the poor”, said Solomon, “reproacheth his Maker” (Prov. 17.5a). All men are created by God; therefore all are to be loved. If a worker does not have sufficient love for the brethren, or if he has the love of the brethren but no love for mankind in general, he is not qualified to serve God. For loving men or showing love to men is an essential quality to have in God’s service. All who view people with annoyance and despise them are definitely unfit to be the Lord’s servants.

We ought to see that though all men have fallen, they are nonetheless the object of the redemption of our Lord Jesus inasmuch as they were all created by God. In spite of their hardness of heart, the Holy Spirit still convicts them. The Lord Jesus came to this earth; He came to be a man. Like the rest of mankind, He grew up gradually from birth to maturity. For God intends to set up on earth a Model Man, a Representative Man—one upon whom rests all the purposes of God. After the ascension of the Lord Jesus, the church came into being, and yet the church is but the formation of a new man. The whole plan of redemption is to exalt and glorify man.

One day when we come to a deeper understanding of the word of God, we shall find the term “man” more palatable than even the term “the children of God.” For we shall realize that God’s preordained plan and election is to obtain a glorious man. As we gradually perceive the place of man in God’s plan as constituting the focus of His counsel, and when we truly see God humbling himself to be a man, we shall be impressed with the preciousness of man. While our

Lord Jesus was on earth He declared that “the Son of man also came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10.45). The word the Lord says here is so plain: the Son of man comes to serve men. The Son of God becomes the Son of man on earth in order to serve men. Thus are we shown the attitude of the Lord Jesus towards mankind. . . .

Man is to be loved, hence the Lord comes to serve as the Son of *man*, not as the Son of *God*. He first serves, first loves, *then* gives His life for many. First love, then sacrifice. When you go among people, you cannot preach the sacrifice of the Lord if you do not have love. Do not think that before you can love a person you are to preach to him until that person becomes a brother. Not so. Unless you can appreciate the fact that all human beings are created by God, you really are not in the right spirit to preach sacrificial love to them. We must first *love* men before we can *lead* them to accept the Lord. We should never wait until they have accepted Christ and become brothers and sisters before we begin to love them. . . .

If our heart is opened by God to see that we are fellow-men, our attitude towards all mankind will be completely changed. We shall feel the preciousness and loveliness of all people. Let me clearly state that it is absolutely essential for you to see the dearness of man in the eyes of God because man is created by Him according to His image. In God’s heart all human beings today remain as those who are originally created in His image. And consequently, you must be a person who loves all people before you can go into their midst and serve them with the gospel. Let us see the loveliness and value of human beings before God. . . .

Therefore, in order to serve the Lord well, you must learn to be interested in people. Without such an interest, you can do little. For even if you do serve, what is done will be very limited inasmuch as your heart is too small in capacity to embrace so many people. Not

until your interest in humanity grows and your heart is increasingly enlarged can you understand the meaning of redemption and appreciate the value of man in God's economy. Without this enlargement it is totally unthinkable that such narrow-minded persons as we are can contemplate so great a work. How can we save souls if we do not love them?!? It is impossible to save souls without loving them first. Only when this basic problem is solved can many other problems concerning human beings be resolved. No human lack of knowledge should hinder your love; no hardness of heart should block your love. With love in your heart that has been enlarged, you will not despise anyone; and as a consequence, you shall be brought by God to stand together with your fellow-men. . . .

Unless we humble ourselves to the lowest point, we cannot serve God. We must be so humble that we never harbor any superiority consciousness. No brother or sister may despise a person disadvantaged in terms of education, economic level or social class. In God's creation, redemption and plan, this latter person has the same destiny as anyone else. Only in one thing may we be different, and that is, that, unlike the unbeliever, we know the Lord. Oh, do let us see that many of our attitudes may be wrong. Our whole being, whether in our attitudes, feelings or thoughts, needs to be transformed. We must come to realize that *all* people are equal before God. For if our Lord could come humbly to this earth for them all, can we not also humble ourselves for them? Never make any distinction because of intelligence or any other human factor. . . .

Have a Mind to Suffer

Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm ye yourselves also with the same mind . . . (1 Peter 4.1)

All who serve God need to possess an additional characteristic—that of having a mind to suffer (see 1 Peter 4.1). This too is most essential. . . .

What, then, is the meaning of the suffering for the saint which we find in the Bible? In the Scriptures we find that to suffer is a path which we deliberately choose to take before the Lord. This is to say that the Lord has indeed provided us with days of abundant grace; but today, for the sake of being God's servants and serving Him, we instead choose this way of suffering. In short, this path is a selected way. It is not unlike what the three mighty men of David did who could have easily followed their leader and lived on peacefully, but once learning of David's longing to taste water from the well by the gate of his home village of Bethlehem, they jeopardized their lives by breaking through the host of the Philistine army to draw water out of that very well (see 2 Sam. 23.14-17). Hence to suffer is something chosen by us; it is not ordained. We *choose* before God to suffer. We are willing to do so for the sake of serving the Lord. According to God's providence, we may not have to suffer many pains; yet because we desire to serve Him, we gladly choose a path which differs from the common one. And this is what is meant by having a mind to suffer. To arm ourselves with such a mind is a basic characteristic of any person who would wish to serve God. Without this willingness, we will not be able to serve well in anything. Lacking this, our service will be very superficial.

Yet, let it be clearly known here that being willing to suffer is not the same thing as suffering itself. It simply means that before God I have a desire of being willing to endure hardship, difficulty or trial for the Lord. I am prepared to do so and will gladly do so for Him. And this is having the mind to suffer. Whoever has this mind may not in fact suffer, yet in his mind and heart he has committed himself to do so gladly for the Lord. . . .

Having the *mind* to suffer speaks of my *readiness* before God to suffer. I am willing to go through trial, and I choose the path of hardship. It is *up to the Lord* whether or not to *put* suffering in my path, but on *my part* I am *always prepared* to suffer. Thus when His

providential change comes and trial falls upon me, I will not be surprised but rather feel that this is what I should go through in the first place. In the event I can only accept God's *favorable* arrangement and am unable to endure any trial, then as soon as the circumstances shift in the latter direction, I am broken and my work for the Lord ceases. Now this is a clear indication that I do not have the mind to suffer. . . .

How much of a mind to suffer must we possess? The demand of the Scriptures is: "faithful unto death" (Rev. 2.10c). In other words, we must be able to endure anything, even death itself. We are not advocating extremes here. Yet having the mind to suffer is never moderately defined in God's word. If moderation is called for in the case of some of you workers because of excess, then let the Lord, the church or the more matured brethren temper your excess. But so far as you are concerned, you must give your *all*. How can you ever serve if *you* temper yourself? There is no way for you to work. A person who looks upon his own life as precious and loving and who always holds his life in his own hand is very limited in the work of God. Every one of us who would be in God's service must be prepared to be faithful unto death. This is the only path we can travel. It goes without saying that the Lord will not ask you to die because of your faithfulness. Nonetheless, the preserving of our life is up to the Lord and is not a matter for our concern. Should the Lord so order, that is His business. On our side, we must always be ready to lay down our life. No matter how painful, we must learn to endure. . . .

Disciplining the Body

I do all things for the gospel's sake, that I may be a joint-partaker thereof. Know ye not that they that run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? Even so run; that ye may attain. And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible

crowns; but we are incorruptible. I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. (1 Cor. 9.23-27)

In this passage of Scripture, verse 23 reads in part: “I do all things for the gospel’s sake.” Paul indicates the way of those who would preach the gospel and serve God. In addition, verse 27 includes these words: “I buffet my body and bring it into bondage.” From this we can discern what is the basic demand required of a servant of God towards his own self. And in verses 24 to 27, Paul shows us how he himself buffets his own body to bring it into subjection.

At the very outset of our discussion we would wish to make clear that the buffeting of one’s body spoken of by Paul is not at all meant to signify a kind of asceticism. What Paul asserts here is something entirely different from the concept which some people embrace that posits the unbiblical notion that the body is an encumbrance and that only one’s emancipation from it can truly bring good news. In the thought of the ascetic, the body is deemed to be the root of all evils; and consequently, whoever would ill-treat his body would indeed be delivered from sin. Yet the Bible never regards the body as an encumbrance to be gotten rid of; it never teaches that the body is the source of evil. Quite the contrary, the Scriptures tell us in this very same letter that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (6.19). Our body is to be redeemed, and one day we shall have a glorious body. So that when—in paraphrasing Paul—we mention this matter of buffeting the body to bring it under control, we must never associate it with the misconception to be found in asceticism. For if we inject such a notion into our Christian faith we change the very character of Christianity. People may indeed commit sin by means of the body; and they can still sin however drastically they deal with their body; nevertheless, the body itself is not the source of sin.

Paul shows us in 1 Corinthians 9 that one who would be a

workman of God must solve a problem—that of his body. The opening words, “I do all things for the gospel’s sake” (v.23a), indicate that the ground the apostle takes is that of preaching the gospel. What must he do in order to preach the gospel? Verses 24-26 describe this which he must do. And in verse 27 he points out what he has done—namely, that he has buffeted his body and brought it into subjection. According to the original Greek, “buffet” literally signifies to bruise, to strike under the eye; hence, to beat the face black and blue. So that the meaning here is to subdue one’s body, as though beating it severely so as to make it one’s slave in obedience to him who would be a minister of the gospel. This does not, however, imply using one’s hands literally to pummel or beat his physical body. It is not at all to be construed as “severity to the body” that is mentioned negatively by Paul in Colossians 2.23. Rather, it is an exercise or discipline that is done so that Paul might not, “after [he had] preached to others, . . . be [himself] rejected” or disqualified. . . .

. . . You should *take care* of your body; nevertheless, you must also *control* it. . . .

Be Diligent and Not Slothful

The personal life of a worker for God is often determinative of his work. On this pathway of divine service we see a number of young brothers being raised up and made quite useful. From the outset they cause you to feel that here are some good seeds that will eventually blossom forth and bear fruit. But we also see some others who are very self-conceited and self-reliant, and within not too many days thereafter they fall by the wayside. They are not only useless, they in addition greatly disgrace the name of the Lord. For the path they take is so broad that it could not be any broader. Then, too, we see some more people who at the beginning do not show any great promise, but towards the end they manifest more and more their value to God.

You may wish to know what explains all this. We would frankly answer that everyone who would be used by God possesses some fundamental features in constitution and character. And with these fundamental characteristics he may become useful; without them, he will be useless in the pathway of service. A person may be good in many other respects, but if he lacks these basic features of which we have been speaking, he is unable to perform a work well even though he may have the heart to serve. We have never witnessed a worker who, having no control over his body, ever does the work of God. We do not know how this lack may affect other endeavors, but on the pathway of God's service we have never seen it work. Neither have we seen any person who, not capable of listening, is able to serve God. All who would serve the Lord must possess these and other basic characteristics. God in His mercy encourages them and builds them up in these fundamental features of constitution and character so as to enable them to serve well.

Serving God is not so simple a matter. The outward man needs to be broken, as well as to be built up. If you as a person are unfit, that is to say, if you are careless and indulgent in many things, you will not be able to do the work of God. Many are unable to serve well, not because they are lacking in technique or knowledge but because they have one or more problems in their personal character. The failure of many is to be found right here. Hence we must learn to let God deal with us thoroughly in many areas of our lives. Let us never despise the cultivation of these positive basic character traits. Without our permitting the Holy Spirit to transform our character, it can be anticipated that we shall produce little fruit in our undertakings. None of the training in these basic traits can be overlooked. . . .

*He that received the one went away and digged in the earth,
and hid his lord's money. . . . And he also that had received the*

one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own. But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter; thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest. Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath the ten talents. . . . And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness . . . (Matt. 25.18-30)

This passage of Scripture shows us that diligence is also a basic requirement of the Lord's workman. Our Lord Jesus plainly points out to us the two fundamental flaws in the character of this servant: one, that he is "wicked", and the other, that he is "slothful." He is wicked because he accuses his lord of being a hard man, reaping where he has not sowed and gathering where he has not scattered. The other flaw about this servant is that he is slothful. When he buries the talent in the earth, what his heart meditates is "wicked", but what his hand does is "slothful." He imagines in his heart the kind of master his lord is. His thought is evil in content. And in burying the talent in the earth, he does not do what he ought to do. Such action reveals none other trait than that of slothfulness. Let us acknowledge here that laziness constitutes the major problem for many people. . . .

The central implication of the meaning of slothfulness is to postpone as long as possible or to do as slowly as permissible. One day's work can be dragged out over ten days or even weeks or months. To do a thing sluggishly is to have the trait of slothfulness. This is in fact what Matthew 20.3,6 calls "standing idle" or "standing around"; or what in Philippians 3.1 is termed as being "irksome." In the case of some brothers and sisters, whenever anything is laid upon them, and even so slight a thing, they are of so lazy a disposition that they consider this to be burdensome for them. They sigh deeply as

though a heavy load has been placed upon their shoulders. Not so with Paul. It is not an easy thing for this apostle to write from prison under a most difficult environment, but as he writes the letter to the Philippians, he exhorts the brethren, saying, “Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice” (4.4). Circumstantially speaking, he is in deep affliction; nonetheless, he says this: “To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not irksome” (3.1b). He is not slothful; on the contrary, he considers nothing too hard and does not know what laziness is. We learn from studying Paul’s life that people used of God are full of zeal, knowing neither idleness nor weariness.

Many brethren are of little usefulness in the service of God because they dislike work. They look for less work, and if they can, they will not work at all. They lack the character of diligence. To tell the truth, not only must we say that the slothful cannot be *God’s* servants, they cannot even be *man’s*. Many are disqualified as servants of God due to their laziness. They exalt themselves as so-called “servants of God,” acting as though they are beyond the direction of any man. None can exercise any control over them for they deem themselves to be *God’s* servants. Yet suppose their master is changed from God to someone else; it will then be that their worthlessness shall at once be manifested. For no earthly master would allow them to be so careless in managing his business. For this reason, our disposition must be exercised to such a degree that not only are we not bothered in serving but we even delight to serve. We will joyfully spend and be spent for the children of God. We love to be engaged in working. On the other hand, the lack of such a disposition makes us unfit to be the Lord’s servants. “These hands,” Paul once declared, “ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me” (Acts 20.34). Those two hands of his were so beautiful because they worked day and night without the slightest sign of slothfulness. Now it is such people as Paul who are truly the servants of God!

What is diligence? Diligence is a not being slothful, that is to say, a not being afraid to work. It is not hoping that things might go away but, rather, *seeking* for things to do. We should be aware that in the service of God, if we do not look for work to do, the result will be that we shall indeed be able to rest for a day or two. In the Lord's service, we must not be people who work only when it *comes* to us. Such an attitude reveals our sluggishness. A diligent person is never idle; he is continually searching for work to do. He is always studying, praying, waiting, and considering what service he can render. If we do only what comes our way, we shall soon find that there is less and less coming our way to do. In order to serve God, let us try to discover works to perform. Let us pray and wait more before the Lord. Let us be on the alert to find more and more works to do. This is the way of service. "My Father worketh even until now", observed the Lord Jesus, "and I work" (John 5.12). We must not change this into: "My Father *resteth* even until now, and I *rest*." Slothfulness is the one sure way to effect such a change. Yet our way must always be: "My Father *worketh* even until now, and I *work*." . . .

. . . Work is not measured by what is in our hand but by our lifting up the eyes and looking for service to render. God is moving in many ways and in many directions, and if we lift up our eyes we will discover them. You and I should lift up our eyes and look to see if there is any harvest and if the harvest is white. By searching and looking, we will in fact find works to do. How surprising that many stand idle as though there is no work to do! . . .

We must have this disposition of diligence. Whether we are in fact busily engaged is actually of secondary consideration; what is of *primary* importance is our having a diligent *disposition*. Before God, we ought to be those who diligently seek out work to do. This is not meant to imply, of course, that we must keep ourselves in a constant state of hustle and bustle, for that can only encumber us. To be

diligent simply means not to be fearful of work but to serve God zealously, always being fervent in spirit. Find work to do before God. This may not necessarily be manifested in action, but it certainly must be present in our disposition or character. In case our disposition is one of slothfulness, then we may indeed be busy for twelve hours in a single day, but we will not last long; for only those whose disposition is diligent and not slothful can alone be useful. . . .

A person who truly desires to serve the Lord ought to sense the greatness of his responsibility, the urgency of outside needs, as well as the shortness of his time and the limitedness of his lifespan. If we have this kind of consciousness we will be diligent and not slothful. The lack of such an awareness will make us unfruitful in God's work. This burden of the work of the Lord should press us to such a point that we have to work, even at times foregoing eating, sleeping and rest, thus finding the right path in God's service. Otherwise, if we consider rest as our basic and most essential requirement of life, we will not be able to accomplish anything in the work of God. . . .

Restrained in Speech

Many people should be greatly used by God; they should be powerful vessels in His hand. Yet they fail to be used by God; and even if they are used, they are not very effective vessels. One of the prime reasons is their lack of restraint in speech. Carelessness in this matter of speech is an opening through which the power of God may either flow out or leak away. . . .

. . . Once a believer's mouth proclaims the word of God, that mouth is forever the Lord's. Sadly, the power of many believers has leaked away through their speech. Some brothers have the potential of being greatly used of the Lord, but they utter many words not of God, and consequently their inner power leaks out while they are speaking. Keep well in mind that a fountain can send forth only one

kind of water. Once your mouth announces the word of God, you need to realize that henceforth you have no authority to say what is not of God. Your mouth is sanctified; it is holy. Anything which has once been consecrated is forever the Lord's. It ought not to be taken back. Thus we are shown the relationship between the Lord's word and our word. Your mouth is sanctified and you can only speak God's word. . . .

. . . There is another point that requires our special attention, which is, we must "not strive nor cry aloud." It was prophesied concerning the earthly life of our Lord Jesus that He would "not strive, nor cry aloud; neither [would] any one hear his voice in the streets" (Matt. 12.19). The apostle Paul wrote in a similar vein: "The Lord's servant must not strive" (2 Tim. 2.24a). No servant of God may strive or clamor. Clamoring is unseemly. The Lord's servant ought to so discipline himself that he will "not strive nor cry aloud." Crying aloud is a token of less power. It is at least an indication of having less control over oneself. As a servant of the Lord a person ought not to raise his voice so loud as to be heard by people in the next room. Our Lord Jesus has set for us an example in His not ever having had His voice heard in the streets. Such restraint is more than speaking no lie. Though our speech may be true and exact, we will neither strive nor clamor. Should a brother or a sister shout aloud, we who are self-disciplined will nonetheless keep silent on matters. We will control ourselves and control our voice even as our Lord Jesus did. Let us learn before God to bridle our mouth that we may not make noise or strive impetuously. This does not mean, however, that hereafter we must put on a stern face and tightly clamp our lips shut whenever we meet people. No, no; we need to be natural and converse naturally with people. Yet we shall have many difficulties in the work if we do not control our voice. We hope that all who serve the Lord will be more sensitive and tender and polite. Look at our Lord Jesus. How sensitive and tender He was while on earth. He neither strove nor cried aloud, nor was His voice heard in the streets.

God's servant ought to impress people as being a tender person. . . .

If we talk loosely, we will not be able to perceive the exactness of God's word. A careless disposition causes one to think inaccurately. He cannot be exact; therefore, he will allow to leak away the exact word of God. The Scriptures speak most truthfully. Every minute detail is exact. "One jot or one tittle," noted the Lord, "shall in no wise pass away from the law till all things be accomplished" (Matt. 5.18). The jots and tittles of each word which God uses are accentuated. They cannot be changed. And since God himself speaks with such exactitude, a servant of God must also speak in that manner. . . .

Be Stable

A man who is unstable is unreliable, and an unreliable person has no sense of responsibility. When he feels elated, he can do much; but when he feels low, he will go to sleep, thus evincing a lack of responsibility. A stable character is therefore a fundamental requirement. Only a person with a character like that may do the work of God. He will work whether he feels comfortable, elated, or depressed. He will work come rain or come shine. He is a stable person. But an unstable character is affected by many things, even by the weather. How can a work of the Lord be done by such a person as this? We need to have a strong spirit before God. . . .

Must Not Be Subjective

Subjectivity is another major problem among God's children. Especially when identified with the Lord's workmen, subjectivity can spoil God's work.

What is subjectivity? It is an insistence upon one's own opinion while refusing to accept the opinion of others. Before one even hears

people, his mind is already made up, so that after he has heard what another has said, he still insists on his own idea. This is called subjectivity. A subjective person finds it hard to accept the thoughts of others and is not easily corrected. He forms his idea from the outset and insists on it to the very end. Before the Lord has spoken, before any fact has been revealed, or before people have expressed their opinions, the subjective person has already come up with his own preconceived idea. Even after the Lord has spoken, the fact has been revealed or other people's opinions have been expressed, his preconceived notion remains unmoved. This is called subjectivity. The basic cause for this condition is man's unbroken self; consequently, he maintains a stiff prejudice which is not easily forsaken or corrected. . . .

Although the path a workman of the Lord travels needs to be straight and stable, his ideas and views should not be so fixed and immovable that he has little chance to learn and is of very little use in his lifetime. We must be stable in character on the one hand and yet not subjective in mind on the other. God's children need to learn not to be this way so that they may be easily moved by the Lord. The way to judge if one is subjective or not is to note whether he learns, and if so, how fast he does so. Is he able to learn spiritual things many times and all the time? That which obstructs the ability to learn is subjectivity.

To make progress in spiritual things we must be open to God—both our spirit, our heart, and our mind. To be open means not to be subjective. It is true that having the spirit open to God is something deeper than not being subjective. Nevertheless, the first and essential step is our not being subjective. As long as we are subjective, the door to revelation is locked. Not being subjective indicates that we are tender and teachable and able to be impressed. Many, however, are hard to be impressed by God. For them to receive any impression God must employ a whip, a rod, or even a

hammer to beat upon them. We need to learn the lesson that by the mere moving of God's eyes we instantly understand. Yet many people are like horses: unless there be bit and bridle or even a whip, there will be no understanding. This is called subjectivity.

God may strive with a subjective person, bring him to his end, and allow him to be badly beaten, yet he is struggling all the time and is not able to yield quickly to learn the necessary lesson. Oh, how many of God's children are not soft and gentle before Him. Instead, they are hard and stubborn. Such ones have great difficulty in God's work, for they learn little and therefore contribute little. This is a great loss. . . .

There must not be subjectivity in the work of the Lord. Never try to make everyone listen to you. Learn to be careful before the Lord. The more people listen to you, the greater becomes your responsibility. Even greater will be your responsibility if you should speak wrongly and they listen. If people are willing to hear you, and your way is not straight and your understanding of God's will is not clear, then this will be like the blind leading the blind—and both will fall into the pit! Do not think that the follower alone falls and that you as the leader can save yourself. You cannot talk and teach cheaply, because you as well as those whom you teach will fall into the pit. Learn, therefore, to fear the Lord. Be aware that the more people listen to you, the more you must speak the word of God with fear and trembling. If you are 120 percent sure before God, speak only 70 or 80 percent, for fear that you just may be wrong. The more easily you speak heavy words the less weight you have before God. The more you are self-confident, the less you are trustworthy. . . .

A subjective person . . . is unable to listen to other people, nor can he receive guidance from God. He has not learned anything, and the Lord cannot trust him with His work. If everything has already been decided, how can any seek out God's decision? The tender-hearted

and teachable alone may find God's decision. It takes our laying down of ourselves to know where the will of the Lord is. If the work of the Lord is given to a subjective person who has not learned to set aside his own opinion, way, idea, and doctrine, the church will soon be split. The dividing into sects is actually built on man's subjectivity. Many are able to do their own works, but they are not able to do God's work. They know *personal* ministry but not the ministry of the *body*. They have never met authority; therefore, they could never be delegated authority. Oh how many there are who from the beginning of their service to the present moment have never submitted to anyone else. Naturally, they cannot be set up by God to represent authority. . . .

A Right Attitude Towards Money

How pitiful and how shameful it is for a servant of God to be guided and controlled by mammon! It is truly shameful if instead of seeking guidance before God we allow money to direct our footsteps. Unless we are absolutely delivered from the love of money, we will find ourselves under bondage to it when we seek for guidance. Indeed, to even mention the matter of money before God in relation to guidance is itself superfluous and certainly most odious. If the God whom we believe in is living, we can go anywhere. If He is not living, we had better quit. What disgrace it is if we proclaim a living God and yet our way is governed by mammon! . . .

Let us look further into Paul's unique statement, "I seek not yours, but you." Each time you who are God's servants are in touch with brothers and sisters in the church, are you able to distinguish between "you" and "yours"? Do you seek for "them" or "theirs"? Suppose you could not have "theirs" because they had questioned your sincerity; would you still support them, edify them, and expect them to grow? Paul had sufficient grounds to reject the Corinthians, but he nonetheless continued to visit them, even doing so for the

third time. And why? Because he sought “them; not “theirs.” This is in fact one of the greatest temptations to the servants of God. Let us learn to do and to conduct ourselves even as Paul did.

—CGW 1-2, 8-11, 13-14, 16-17, 20, 25-31, 35-9, 48-9,
53-5, 71, 75-8, 80, 83, 87, 90-1, 97, 99, 107-8, 116, 145-6,
149-52, 161-3, 174, 195

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A serious error concerning prayer prevails in our common understanding, which is to say, that we often think of prayer as an outlet for expressing what *we* need—as our cry to God for help. We do not see that prayer is the asking of God to fulfill *His* needs. We ought to understand that God’s original thought is certainly not the letting of believers achieve their own aims through prayer, rather is it God accomplishing His purpose through the prayers of the believers. This is not meant to imply that Christians should never ask the Lord to supply their needs. It only is meant to indicate how we need first to understand the meaning and principles of prayer. . . .

True prayer is a real work. Praying according to God’s will and praying only for His will is indeed a self-denying work. Unless we are completely weaned from ourselves, having not the slightest interest of our own but living absolutely for the Lord and seeking only His glory, we will not like what He likes, nor seek what He seeks, nor pray what He wants us to pray. Without doubt, to work for God with no self-interest is very difficult; but to *pray* for Him without any self-interest is even harder. Even so, all who live for God must do this. . . .

When God works, He does so with specific law and definite principle. Even though He could do whatever pleases Him, yet he never acts carelessly. He always performs according to His determinate law and principle. Unquestionably He can transcend all these laws and principles, for He is God and is quite capable of acting according to His own pleasure. Nonetheless, we discover a most marvelous fact in the Bible; which is, that in spite of His exceeding greatness and His ability to operate according to His will, God ever acts along the line of the law or principle which He has laid

down. It seems as though He deliberately puts himself under the law to be controlled by His own law.

Now, then, what is the principle of God's working? God's working has a primal principle behind it, which is, that He wants man to pray, that He desires man to cooperate with Him through prayer.

There was once a Christian who well knew how to pray. He declared this, that all spiritual works include four steps: The first step is that God conceives a thought, which is His will: The second step is that God reveals this will to His children through the Holy Spirit, causing them to know that He has a will, a plan, a demand and expectation: The third step is that God's children return His will by praying to Him, for prayer is responding to God's will—if our heart is wholly one with His heart, we will naturally voice in our prayer what He intends to do: And the fourth step is that God will accomplish this very thing. . . .

How should we lay tracks for the will of God? The answer: "With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit" (Eph. 6.18). Our prayer should touch in many directions. We should pray constantly. Pray specific prayers as well as general ones. Many of our prayers are too thinly spread; there are too many holes by which Satan is given plenty of opportunities to slip in. Were our prayers well-rounded and tightly guarded, he would have no chance to do havoc. . . .

There is one particular secret about prayer that we should know about, which is, a praying three times to the Lord. This "thrice" is not limited to only three times, it may be many times. The Lord Jesus asked God three times in the garden of Gethsemane until His prayer was heard—at which point He stopped. Paul too prayed to God three times, and ceased praying after he was given God's word. Hence all prayers should heed the principle of thrice. This "thrice" does not

mean that we need only pray once, twice, and three times, and then stop. It simply signifies the fact that before we stop we must pray thoroughly until God hears us.

—LUP 8-10, 23-4, 32, 37

Therefore, be watchful: “watching thereunto in all perseverance.” Use prayer to protect your prayer. Surround your prayer with prayers. Before you do the work of prayer, petition God to enable you to pray without being hindered, that you may pray without feeling weak and sleepy, that you may pray with spirit and concentration, and that you may be protected by the Blood. Tell the Lord: “Lord, protect my prayer that I may concentrate and be powerful in it without being hindered by apparent natural weakness.” . . .

For our prayer to be truly effective, we must spread out our prayer like a net. What does this mean? It means we must pray with all prayers so that nothing is left out which should be prayed for. We will not allow anything to slip away. Without such a “prayer net” we will not be able to obtain good results. A person who knows how to pray knows how to pour out his heart desire completely before God. He will use all kinds of prayers to surround as with a net the thing he prays for so that the adversary can do absolutely nothing. Nowadays our prayers are too loose, they are not tight enough. Though we may use many words, our prayers are not well-rounded, thus providing the enemy loopholes through which to make his attack. But if our prayers are like spreading nets, the enemy will have no opening by which to get in. And thus shall our petitions before God be realized.

—BCL 83, 89

The Earth Governs Heaven

“Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth

shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 18.18). What is characteristic of this verse? The peculiar point here is that the action on earth precedes the action in heaven. Not that heaven binds first, but that the earth binds first; not that heaven looses first, but that the earth looses first. Since the earth has already bound it, heaven will also bind it; since the earth has loosed it, heaven will also loose it. The action of heaven is governed by the action on earth. All that contradicts God needs to be bound, and all that agrees with God needs to be loosed. Whatever the thing may be, whether it should be bound or loosed, such action of binding and loosing begins on earth. The action on earth precedes the action in heaven, for the earth governs heaven. . . .

“Thus saith Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: Ask me of the things that are to come; concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me” (Is. 45.11). This is a most amazing statement. Are we surprised? Concerning His sons and His work God says “Command ye me.” People dare not utter these three words—“Command ye me”—for how can man ever command God? All who know Him realize that no presumptuous word should ever be uttered before God. Yet He himself offers this word to us: “Concerning my sons and concerning the work of my hands, command ye me.” This is none other than earth governing heaven.

Now obviously this in no way can imply that we can force God to do what He will *not* do; not at all. Rather, it simply means that we may command Him to do what He *desires* to do. And this shall be the ground on which we stand. It is because we know God’s will that we may say to Him: “God, we want You to do this thing, we are determined that You do it, You cannot but do it.” And thus shall we have strong and powerful prayer. How we need to ask God to open our eyes that we may see how His work is done in this dispensation.

For during this present age all the works of God are done on this very ground: Heaven desires to do, but heaven will not act right away; it waits for the earth to do first, and then it will do it. Though earth stands second, it nevertheless is also first. Heaven will move only after earth has moved. For God wills to have the earth govern heaven. . . .

. . . In time, God's action is governed by man. By the man here, of course, we mean the church. During the period called time all of God's actions are governed by the church, because the church is to represent the man in the coming eternity. Today the church stands on earth for the will of God. If she is able to meet His will, God will not be restricted. But if she is unable to rise up to that will, God will be restricted. For God wills to do whatever He wants to do through the church. The church today takes in advance the ground which the man of eternity is to take. In the eternity to come, though man's will is still free, he nonetheless stands altogether on the side of God's eternal will. The church today stands on that future ground. Just as God shall be able in eternity to manifest himself through the New Jerusalem—the wife of the Lamb—so He is able now to manifest himself through the body of Christ. Although the church possesses a free will, she puts it in full subjection to the authority of God, as though apart from God's will there is not another free will. Whatever God wants to do, it shall be done. Because the church today places her will completely under God's will, God is able to act as though He is already in the eternity to come since there will not be a second will in the universe to oppose Him. This is the glory of God.

Herein do we see the position on which the church stands before God. Let us not relegate the church to the place where she is viewed as being merely a meeting. No, the church is a group of people who have been redeemed by the precious blood, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and have meanwhile committed themselves into God's hand, gladly accepting His will, gladly doing His will, and gladly standing

on the earth for Him to maintain His testimony.

We need to recognize that God's working today is along a definite line; it is in accordance with a specific law: namely, that for the sake of free will on earth, God refuses to use His own will to overwhelm man. Let us not at all be surprised at this fact. God is in heaven, yet all His movements on earth must first be decided and agreed upon by the will on earth. God will not ignore the will on earth, nor will He take it away and work independently. In all matters related to Him, God will not perform until He obtains the cooperation of the will on earth. Because earth desires it, God will then do it; because the earth so decides, God therefore acts. He must have man's will in harmony with His will. And such a harmony of wills constitutes God's greatest glory indeed!

Three Imposing Principles

We have already mentioned how God has His will concerning all things, but that He will do nothing by himself alone and independently. He will take action only after the free will on earth responds to His will. Were there only the will in heaven, God would make no move; the heavenly move will be accomplished on earth only when He is assured of the same will on earth. This is what we today call the ministry of the church. Believers need to realize that the ministry of the church does not consist merely of the preaching of the gospel—it most certainly does include this, let there be no mistake of that—but also the church's ministry includes the bringing down to the earth the will that is in heaven. But exactly how does the church bring this about? It is by praying on earth. Prayer is not a small, insignificant, non-essential thing as some would tend to think. Prayer is a work. The church says to Him, "God, we want Your will." This is called prayer. After the church knows the will of God, she opens her mouth to ask for it. This is prayer. If the church does not have this ministry, she is not of much use on earth.

1. Pronouncing the Will of God

“What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (v.18). Who are the “ye” here? They are the church, because in the preceding verse the Lord mentions the church. So that this is a continuation of verse 17. Therefore, the meaning of this verse 18 now before us is: that whatever things you the church shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever things you the church shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Here lies a most important principle: God works through the church today; He cannot do whatever He desires to do unless He does it through the church. This is a most sobering principle. Today God cannot do things by His own Self alone, because there is in existence another free will; without the cooperation of that will God is not able to do anything. The measure of the power of the church today determines the measure of the manifestation of the power of God. For His power is now revealed through the church. God has put himself in the church. If she is able to arrive at a high and great position, the manifestation of the power of God can also arrive at such a high and great position. If the church is unable to reach a high and great position, then God too cannot manifest His power in highness and greatness. . . .

What, then, is the prayer ministry of the church? It is God telling the church what He wishes to do so that the church on earth can then pray it out. Such prayer is not asking God to do what *we* want to do, but asking Him to do what *He* wants to do. Oh, let us see that the church is to declare on earth the will of God in heaven. The church is to pronounce on earth that this will of God is what she wants. In case she fails on this point, she will be of very little value in God’s hand. Even though she may do well in other matters, she is of little use to God if she is defective in this matter. The highest use of the church

to God is to allow His will to be done on earth.

2. Harmony in the Holy Spirit

We have seen how the church ought to bind what God wishes to bind and to loose what God wishes to loose. How, though, is the church actually to bind and to loose? “Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven” (verse 19). The preceding verse, verse 18, lays stress upon both the earth and heaven, but so does this verse. Verse 18 speaks of heaven binding or loosing whatever the earth binds or looses, but so too does verse 19, which says that the heavenly Father will do whatever the earth asks for. Please note that what the Lord Jesus emphasizes here is not simply an agreeing in the asking of any one thing, rather is it an agreeing on earth as touching *everything* whatever they shall ask. He does not mean to say that two persons agree on earth touching a certain thing and they then ask for it; no, the Lord Jesus is saying that if you agree on *everything*,* then whatever *particular* point you shall ask for, it shall be done for them of His Father who is in heaven. This is the oneness of the body, or may it be said, the oneness in the Holy Spirit.

If a person’s flesh has not been dealt with, he will consider himself a superman since, in his view, heaven must hear him. No, if you are not in the oneness of the Holy Spirit, nor are praying in the harmony of the Holy Spirit, just see whether heaven will hear you at all. You may pray, but heaven will not bind what you bind nor loose what you loose. For this is not something you are capable of doing by yourself. If you think you *can* do it alone, you plainly think

*The meaning here is not the *literal* concurrence on everything between two persons, but the harmony in the Holy Spirit as described by the author in the paragraphs that follow.—*Translator*

foolishly. For what the Lord declares is this: “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven.” This means should two of you be harmonious concerning any and every matter—being just as harmonious as is music—then whatever item you shall ask for, it shall be done for you by the heavenly Father. To pray such prayer requires the work of the Holy Spirit in the persons who pray. That is to say, I as one brother am brought by God to a place where I deny all my desires and will only what the Lord wants and another brother is likewise brought by the Holy Spirit to that place of denying all his desires and wanting only what the Lord wills. I and he, he and I, are both brought to a place where there is such harmony as is true in music. And then, whatever we shall ask, God in heaven will perform for us. . . .

Keep in mind that prayer is not the first thing to be done. Prayer only follows on the heels of harmony. If the church desires to have such a ministry of prayer on earth, each and every brother and sister must learn to deny the life of the flesh before the Lord, else the church will not be effective. The word which the Lord Jesus gives us here is most wonderful. He does not say that if you ask in His name the Father will hear you; nor does the Lord say that He will pray for them that the Father may answer. Instead, He declares: “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven.” Oh! If we really agree, the gate of heaven shall be opened! . . .

3. Are Gathered Together

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (v.20). Here is the third principle, and the most profound of them too. In verse 18 we have a principle, in verse 19 another principle, and verse 20 still another. The principle given in verse 20 is broader than that of verse 19. Why does verse 19 say

that “if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven”? The answer is given in verse 20: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Why is there such great power on earth? Why does praying in harmony have such tremendous effect? What gives the praying in harmony of two or three persons this much power? It is because whenever we are called to gather together in the name of the Lord the presence of the Lord himself is there. This is the cause of agreement. Verse 18 speaks of the relation between earth and heaven; verse 19, of the prayer of harmony on earth; verse 20, of the cause for such harmony. . . .

The church cannot obtain a greater authority on earth than the authority vested in the name of the Lord Jesus. In giving His name to the church the Lord Jesus has granted the greatest trust. For this name represents His very own Self. Saying anything in the name of the Lord Jesus becomes what the Lord Jesus himself says; doing anything in the name of the Lord Jesus becomes what the Lord himself does. Whatever is decided in His name is reckoned as decided by Him. The church has the authority to speak in the name of the Lord Jesus. What a trust God has given to the church! . . .

In the Bible can be found a kind of prayer which is the highest and the most spiritual, yet few people notice or offer up such utterance. What is it? It is “authoritative prayer.” We know prayer of praise, prayer of thanksgiving, prayer of asking, and prayer of intercession, but we know very little of prayer of authority. Authoritative prayer is that which occupies a most significant place in the Word. It signifies authority, even the command of authority.

Now if we desire to be men and women of prayer, we must learn this authoritative kind. It is the type of prayer which the Lord refers to in Matthew 18.18—“What things soever ye shall bind on earth

shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Here is loosing as well as binding prayer. The movement of heaven follows the movement of the earth. Heaven listens to the words on earth and acts on the earth’s command. Whatsoever is bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever is loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven. It is not an asking on earth but a binding on earth; it is not an asking on earth but a loosing on earth. And this is authoritative prayer.

Such an expression can be found in Isaiah 45.11 which runs: “Command ye me.” How do we dare to command God? Is not this too preposterous? too presumptuous? But this is what God himself says. Doubtless we should not in the least allow the flesh to come in here. Nevertheless we are hereby shown that there is a kind of commanding prayer. According to God’s viewpoint we may command Him. Such utterance needs to be learned specifically by all students of prayer. . . .

In our day where does such prayer of command find its origin with the Christian? It has its origin at the ascension of the Lord. Ascension is very much related to the Christian life. What is the relationship? Ascension gives us victory. Just as the death of Christ solves our old creation in Adam, and resurrection leads us into the new creation, so ascension gives us a new position in the face of Satan. This is not a new position before God, for such position is obtained by the resurrection of the Lord. Nonetheless, our new position before Satan is secured through the ascension of Christ.

Note these words from Ephesians: “And made him [Christ] to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and he put all things in subjection under his feet” (1.20-22a). When Christ ascends to heaven He opens a way to heaven, so that henceforth His

church may also ascend from earth to heaven. We know our spiritual foe dwells in the air; but today Christ is already ascended to heaven. A new way is therefore opened up from earth to heaven. This way was formerly blocked by Satan, but now Christ has opened it up. Christ is now far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. This is the current position of Christ. In other words, God has caused Satan and all his subordinates to be subject to Christ; yea, He has put all things in subjection under His feet.

The significance of ascension is quite different from that of death and resurrection. While the latter is wholly for the sake of redemption, the former is for warfare—namely, to execute what His death and resurrection have accomplished. Ascension makes manifest a new position. Thank God, for we are told that He has “raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2.6). . . .

“With all prayer and supplication praying at all seasons in the Spirit, and watching thereunto in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints, and on my behalf. . . .” (Eph. 6.18,19a). This is the prayer of spiritual warfare. This kind of prayer is different from the ordinary kind. The ordinary kind is praying from earth to heaven, but the kind of prayer here spoken of is a standing in the heavenly position and praying from heaven down to earth. Authoritative prayer begins in heaven and ends on earth. In short, authoritative prayer is a praying from heaven to earth.

All who know how to pray know what is meant by praying upward and what is meant by praying downward. If a person has never learned how to pray downward, he has yet to discover authoritative prayer. In spiritual warfare this kind of praying downward is exceedingly important. What is praying downward? It

is standing upon the heavenly position Christ has given us and using authority to resist all the works of Satan by commanding that whatever God has commanded must be done. Suppose, for example, that we are praying for a particular matter. After we have seen what the will of God is and have really ascertained what God has ordered, we should then not pray: “O God, I ask You to do this thing”; on the contrary, we should pray: “God, You must do this thing, it must be done in this way. God, this thing must so be accomplished.” This is commanding prayer—prayer of authority. . . .

What is authoritative prayer? Simply explained, it is the type of prayer mentioned in Mark 11. In order to see the truth clearly let us read verses 23 and 24 carefully. Verse 24 begins with “therefore”—a connective term. So that the words in verse 24 are joined to those in verse 23. Since verse 24 speaks about prayer, verse 23 must also refer to prayer. What appears strange here is that in verse 23 it does not seem like an ordinary prayer. It does not say to God: “O God, please take up this mountain and cast it into the sea.” What instead does it actually say? It reads there: “Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea.”

What would the type of prayer be which is so often formed in our mind? We think in praying to God that it should always be: “O God, will You please take up this mountain and cast it into the sea?” But the Lord is talking about something quite different. He does not exhort us to speak to God, He instructs us to speak to the mountain. Not a speaking to God, but a speaking directly to the mountain—“Be thou taken up and cast into the sea.” Lest we might not consider this as prayer, the Lord immediately explains in verse 24 that this is indeed prayer. Here is a word which is not directed to God, and yet it too is prayer. To speak to the mountain and command it to be cast into the sea is unquestionably a prayer. And this is authoritative in nature. For authoritative prayer is not asking God to do something but using God’s authority to deal directly with problems, to get rid of

all that needs to be eliminated. Such prayer needs to be learned by each and every overcomer. All who overcome must learn to speak to the mountain. . . .

The church is able to control hell by using authoritative prayer. Since Christ is far above all and the Head of the church, the church is well able to control evil spirits and all who belong to Satan. How could she ever exist on earth if she were not given the authority to control evil spirits—if the Lord has not given such authority to her? She lives because she has the authority over all Satanic forces. Those who are spiritual know we may use authoritative prayer against evil spirits. We may cast out demons in the name of the Lord; we may contain the secret activities of the evil spirits by prayer. . . .

Finally, a serious thing is in order here; which is, that we must ourselves be subject to the authority of God. Except we are in subjection to God's authority we cannot exercise authoritative prayer. We should be subject not only to God's authority positionally but also in our daily life and practices; otherwise we will not have authoritative prayer.

—PM 9, 11-12, 14-18, 22-6, 33-4, 76, 89-92, 94-7, 101, 107

God's overcomers must learn how to use the authority of Christ and pray authoritative prayer. Prayer in the Scriptures is not only an asking but even more so an expression of authority. Command with authority—such is prayer.

Hence God's overcomers must on the one hand be faithful in denying their own selves, the world, and Satan; but on the other hand know how to exercise the authority of Christ. We should (1) let God defeat us with the cross so that we may be defeated before God, and (2) defeat Satan by using the authority of Christ so that we may win the victory over Satan. Authoritative prayer is not petitioning, it is commanding; for there are *two* kinds of prayer: not only the prayer of

petition but also the prayer of command: “Command ye me” says Isaiah 45.11. We may command God to do things, and such is commanding prayer.

Commanding prayer commences at the ascension of Christ. The death and resurrection of Christ, as we have seen, resolves God’s four cardinal issues—so that His death concludes all that is in Adam, His resurrection gives us new ground, and His ascension makes us sit in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named: not only in this world but also in that which is to come. Ephesians 1 is a record of the ascension of Christ who ascended far above all rule and authority. Ephesians 2 tells of our sitting with Christ in the heavenly places. As Christ is far above all rule and authority, so we also are above all rule and authority.

Ephesians 1 tells us that the position of Christ is in the heavenly places. Chapter 2 tells us that our place in Christ is sitting with Him in the heavenly places. Chapter 6 tells us what we do in the heavenly places, even sitting there and praying—that is to say, exercising the authority of Christ and giving out commanding prayers. Ordinary prayer is a praying from earth to heaven. Commanding prayer is a praying from heaven to earth. The prayer in Matthew 6 is petitionary prayer, and hence is upward in direction. The prayer in Ephesians 6 is commanding prayer, and therefore it is downward. Thus we sit in the heavenly places and pour forth commanding prayer. “Amen” in Hebrew means “So be it” or “So it is”—this is command. At the beginning of any warfare Satan tries to unseat us from our heavenly position, which is one of victory. Warfare is a battle for position. Hence victory lies in occupying the right place. Being in Christ and sitting in the heavenly places alone gives authoritative prayer.

The “therefore” in Mark 11.24 shows us that verse 23 also deals with the subject of prayer. Yet nowhere in verse 23 are we told to

pray to God. Instead it simply says, “Say unto this mountain”—that is, it is a commanding the mountain. A not speaking to God is also prayer—authoritative prayer. It is not asking *God* to deal with the mountain, the latter of which represents things that hinder. Only with perfect faith may one speak to the *mountain*. Now perfect faith comes out of perfect knowledge of God’s will. And thus we command what God has already commanded; we decide on that which God has already decided. Due to the fact of fully knowing God’s will, such faith as this is possible.

—GP 73-5

22

. . . Once God had delivered His people from Egypt and had given them the Ten Commandments, we thereafter know why God indeed made man and what He wanted.

The Ten Commandments are precious, for they show us God's heart. It is not surprising that God wrote them twice. For the first time in about 2500 years He at last told man at Sinai what He had been after in creating him. Furthermore, God saw to it that the Book of Deuteronomy would repeat the record of His commands.

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me [or, besides me]” (Ex. 20.3). Deuteronomy adds to this first commandment these words: “Thou shalt fear [worship] Jehovah thy God, and him [only] shalt thou serve” (6.13; cf. this with Matt. 4.10). Hence, from this, man learns for the first time that God desires worship.

What is the meaning of worship? In Hebrew, the word means to kneel and worship. In Greek, it means to go forward and kiss His hand. In other words, to give everything to Him.

Many do not know the secret of worshipping God. The Lord, He is *God*. Jesus is *God*. This is very precious. God wants man to declare that He *is* God. The Lord taught the disciples to pray. The Lord's Prayer is connected with the Ten Commandments. In that prayer He told the disciples what God wanted: “Hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6.9b). What does God hope for first? What do Jesus' words here mean? “Hallowedness” or holiness means to be set apart for God. The name of God is hallowed, is holy. It belongs to God, and God's name can be used by God alone. This is the meaning of “hallowed be thy name.” Now, though, His name is being used by others. Now it has become general and common. But one day it will be specific and holy. Only Jehovah will be called God. Nothing else

will be called by that Name. God's demand of men is that they know Him as *God*. . . .

. . . Among the Old Testament books, Deuteronomy especially stresses this matter of worshipping God. Worship *God*; you cannot worship anything else. If you worship anything else you will die. If anyone worships idols he will be stoned to death. God does not permit the worship of ought else but himself. . . .

Since God's purpose is worship and Satan's purpose is also worship, what is the duty of us Christians? It is not enough just to know salvation. What is it that will satisfy God? Who will satisfy Him? Not those who are only able to pray or to preach, but those who are able to worship Him. We must put worship into everything we do. . . .

Satan fears the worship of God. Let us put worship first. Do you have difficulties? First worship God. Worship by the few today is giving God what He will one day have from all. The Church is the firstfruits of God's creatures (see James 1.18). What the world will one day give God, we first give Him. We do not wait till in the new heaven and new earth to worship. In this old heaven and old earth we worship today. At this time we want to give special worship to the Lord, for Satan is more and more getting worship for himself. If we are defeated in worship we shall be defeated in other things. . . .

. . . One of the greatest revelations of the New Testament occurred during the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, for a right understanding of this event can open our eyes to see what Satan's object has always been: man's worship of him. In our hearts we have something which God wants and which Satan also wants. What heaven wants, hell too wants. Heaven and hell fight for it—worship. Two thrones are at war. What are they fighting over? Worship. . . .

To know Him as Father is a personal relationship, but to know

Him as God is knowing His official and exalted standing in the universe. Many know Him as Father, but they do not know Him as God. What is worship? It is simply this: that I recognize that He is God and that I am but a man. When I see Him as Father, I am *saved*. When I see Him as God, I am finished and done with. For when we see Him as God, we can only fall down humbly and worship. The whole matter rests upon our seeing. Worship does not arise from the Blood—as precious as the Latter is; worship comes only from seeing. It does not come because we see doctrine. It is revelation. Praise and worship is something objective, thanksgiving is something subjective. *Know the Father* and the heart will be filled with joy. *Know God* and the heart will be filled with glory. Glory cannot be explained, but those who see God know what glory is. . . .

“Ascribe unto Jehovah the glory due unto his name; worship Jehovah in holy array” (Ps. 29.2). “But as for me, in the abundance of thy lovingkindness will I come into thy house: in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple” (Ps. 5.7). These two verses show us that there are two things needful in worship—holiness and fear. In holy splendor, worship God. No one who has seen God can allow sin or any unrighteousness in his life. When we appear before people, the first thing we think of is our dress. It is the same in our appearing before God. We must worship Him in the beauty of holiness. Those who live under the glory of God always say, “I am a sinner.”

Then there is the matter of the fear of God. One who sees God fears Him, for my God “is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12.29). So, fear Him. Everything that can be burned, He *will* burn. It is dangerous for those who do not know the work of the cross to meet God. But with all who have had drastic dealing by the cross, God cannot consume them, just as fire could not consume Daniel’s three God-devoted companions in the fiery furnace (see Daniel 3). If one has seen God, the fear of God is a natural thing.

What should we do, since God wants worship and Satan also wants worship? Let us worship *God*. The whole life of God's people should be a life of worship. Begin each day of life with worship.

Remember worship in all matters of life. The more we worship, the more reason we will have to worship Him. The more you know what eternity is, the more you will know what worship is. Never begin anything without first worshipping God. First give Him His portion. If the Church gives God His portion of worship in everything, it will eventually result in God's worship being established in the whole earth.

In the new heaven and the new earth all flesh shall worship God. Now, though, He does not receive worship of all, but only of those who *will* worship Him. Yes, we are not to look lightly upon work, prayer, and so forth; even so, let us esteem worship even more highly. Our note throughout our lives should be one of worship continually. . . .

True worship is when man stands in his position and God is in His. I as a man have limits, but God is unlimited. Every means is being used today to enlarge men's souls. This generation of men is special. Satan wants men who can do everything. For this particular reason, we must learn how to live by our spirit and ask the Lord to deliver us from the overbearing power of the soul. Whereas the spiritual are humble, the soulish are proud. . . .

How can man return to worship God? He who does not know the *Father* cannot worship *God*. The relationship between God and man is a general relationship, but that of the Father and man is an individual one. Because of salvation man can now worship God. It takes the disposition of a son to the Father to know his position as a man and to see the Godhead.

Truth [see John 4.24] —all that is not out of spirit is not truth.

Many use feeling to praise God. This is not truth. Even if we use thoughts to praise God, it is still not truth. . . .

It is impossible to only worship God, for the knowledge of God leads to the acceptance of His ways. On the one hand we want to know God. On the other hand we want to know His ways. And hence, we not only must worship God, we also must worship His ways.

By revelation we know God; by surrender we know His ways. No man can choose his own way. God decides His own ways of dealing with us. First, it is necessary for us to have revelation that we may see God's ways, since God works according to His pleasure. "I worship You, and I worship Your ways." True worship comes from revelation. If you cannot learn to worship God's ways, you will have no future in spiritual affairs. What are God's ways? That which God does in me, that is, in my body

What is worship? "I bow under the ways of God." *That* is worship. Many times God has to vindicate himself in His holiness and righteousness. Because we fall and sin, God's governmental hand must show itself plainly so that all may know that He has no part in our sin. No man can worship if he does not humbly bow beneath God's hand. Without submission to God we cannot worship His ways. "I adore Thy ways."

Finally, it should be noted that Job, being a perfect and an upright man, was one day suddenly stripped of *everything*. Everything was gone, even all his children. "Then Job arose, and rent his robe, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped; and he said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah" (Job 1.20-21). This was the very first thing Job did. He not only worshipped God for God himself, he also worshipped God for His ways. Here was a case where there was no vindication of God's holiness in view. It simply pleased God to

do this to His servant. And Job's reaction was: he bowed under the ways of God. There is no worship better than this of Job's. Let us therefore worship God under whatever circumstances He may allow.

—WG 7-8, 10, 13-14, 16-17, 23, 26, 29, 44

The Value of Praise

Praise is the greatest work God's children can ever do. It is the loftiest expression the saints can ever show. The highest manifestation of spiritual life is seen in men praising God.

Though the throne of God is the heart of the universe, it is nonetheless established on the praise of the children of God. God's name is exalted through praise. There is nothing a Christian can offer which surpasses praise.

Sacrifice is very important to God, yet "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination" (Prov. 21.27). Never, though, do we hear of praise as being abominable. There is abominable sacrifice but never abominable praise.

Prayer also occupies a very big place in the Bible, but we are told that "he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination" (Prov. 28.9). We have never read, however, of any praise being abominable. Is this not quite wonderful? David in his psalms says: "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray and moan aloud; and he will hear my voice" (Ps. 55.17 Darby); also, "Seven times a day do I praise thee, because of thy righteous ordinances" (Ps. 119.164). He prays three times a day, but praises seven times a day. As moved by the Holy Spirit, he acknowledges the significance of praise.

PRAISE IS ADDED TO PRIESTLY FUNCTIONS

One thing we know: all matters related to worship, the tabernacle, the sacrifices, and the priesthood are given in detail in the Book of Exodus. The pattern shown to Moses in the mount was not open to any addition or subtraction. All who know God know that Moses did not dare add any of his own ideas in building the tabernacle in the wilderness. Since the whole project was divine, no one was allowed to tamper with the pattern. Everything was done exactly according to God's command. Yet years later, David and Solomon seemed to make changes in the priesthood when they added something to the functions of the priests. They appointed a great number of people to the work of praising God. This change, though, was not rejected, but accepted, by God.

This may not surprise you; but if you know the Bible, you know for certain that no man may act carelessly before God. In the Old Testament, those who offered strange fire were burned to death. Even at the time of David, Uzzah was smitten to death for touching the falling ark because Israel used an ox cart to transport it. This was not in accordance with God's instructions. David ought to have known that he did not have the liberty to impose his own ideas into the things of God or into the service of God. Yet we also see him setting up people to praise God in the tabernacle. No fire came from God to burn them up, for this was not considered offering strange fire; neither was anyone smitten as Uzzah had been. This fact indicates that praise is acceptable to God. When praise was introduced into God's service, it was not rejected. Therefore let us remember: there can be abominable prayer and abominable sacrifice, but there is no abominable praise. The throne of the Lord is established on our praises. . . .

The Nature of Praise

Praise in its nature is a sacrifice. If suffering is incidental, then it would not be a part of the nature of praise. But we know suffering is

not accidental but planned by God. This means that praise derives its character from suffering and from darkness. Hence the writer to the Hebrews says: “Through him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips which make confession to his name” (Heb. 13.15).

Brethren, what is a sacrifice? It involves death and loss. He who sacrifices incurs loss. The bullock or the lamb used to be yours, used to be your possession and property. Today you bring it before God as a sacrifice; you suffer its loss. God wants men today to offer praise as if offering a sacrifice. In other words, He enables you to offer praises to Him by wounding you, grinding you, and cutting you deeply. God’s throne is established on praises. How will He obtain these praises?—by His children’s coming to Him, each bringing the sacrifice of praise. . . .

The Way to Victory

First we need to see that praise is a sacrifice. Then we shall see that it is also a way to victory. It is a very common strategy of Satan to attack God’s children in the area of prayer. Many brothers and sisters complain to me that they are so frequently under attack they cannot pray very well. We often read in spiritual books that what Satan fears most is God’s children in prayer, that he will flee when God’s children are on their knees. This is quite familiar to us. But what I would like to say today is, that what Satan attacks most furiously is not prayer, but praise.

I do not say Satan does not attack prayer. When a Christian starts to pray, Satan begins to attack. It is therefore relatively easy to talk with people, but quite difficult to pray. Indeed, Satan does attack prayer. However, he also assaults the praise of God’s children. If he could prevent all words of praise from rising up to God, he would gladly use all his strength to do so.

Do remember: whenever God's children are praising, Satan must flee. Prayer frequently is a battle, but praise is victory. Prayer is spiritual warfare; praise is the shout of triumph. For this reason praise is that which Satan hates most. He will exert all his strength to quench our praise whenever possible. The children of God act foolishly when they look at their environment or consider their feelings and then stop praising the Lord. If they really know God, they will see that even in the jail at Philippi there was a place for song. As Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God, all the doors of the prison opened (Acts 16.25-26). Prayer may not always open prison doors but praise does! . . .

Why is praise also triumph? Because when you pray, you are yet in the environment; but when you praise, you have risen above the environment. Whenever you are praying and pleading, you are involved in the thing you ask for. The more you plead, the more you are bound by that thing, for it is before you all the time. But if you are brought by God beyond the prison, beyond the stocks, beyond the shame and suffering, then you are able to raise your voice and sing praise to the name of God.

What prayer may fail to accomplish, praise can. This is a basic principle to be remembered. If you cannot pray, why not praise? The Lord has not only given us prayer but also praise that through it we may claim the victory. "But thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ" (2 Cor. 2.14). Whenever your spirit is pressed beyond measure so that you can hardly breathe, let alone pray, why do you not try to praise God? Pray when you are able to pray; but praise when you cannot pray.

We usually think that as long as a burden is heavy we should pray, and then when the prayer is over it is time to praise. Indeed, when a burden is heavy we should pray, yet sometimes it becomes so heavy that we are unable to do so. This, then, is the time to praise. Do not

wait until the burden is over before you start to praise. Rather, let us praise when the burden becomes too heavy. Frequently in facing difficult situations, our whole being seems paralyzed. We are perplexed as to what we should do. May I suggest that this is the time to learn to praise. Here is the very best opportunity. If you praise at this moment, the Spirit of God will begin to work to bring you to the place where all the doors open and every chain falls off. He who sings is free; though he be put to shame, being literally bound, he is still free and able to sing. Thus he transcends every situation; nothing—no person or thing—can cause him to be downhearted. . . .

Glorifies God

Finally, I wish to read with you one passage found in Psalm 50: “Whoso offereth the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifieth me” (v.23). The Lord is seeking our praises. Nothing glorifies God more than praise. We know that one day all prayer shall become a thing of the past, all works shall have passed away. Prophecy shall be gone, labors shall cease. But in that day, praise shall be increased far above that of today. It shall continue without end. Praise will never cease. In heaven, in our heavenly home, we shall praise more and learn more how to praise God. I believe it is best that we start to learn this most excellent lesson right here on earth.

—AT 109-11, 113, 115-8, 127-8

23

Spiritual Knowledge

From the experiences of our Lord and the apostle Paul we discover one principle: if anyone wishes to know God he must learn to have transactions with Him. In other words, he needs to deal with God and to be dealt with by God. Many Christians carelessly let difficulties or problems pass by without receiving dealings from God. They do not know why He sends them these difficulties. These people may read the Bible daily and seem to possess some knowledge and light, yet they are ignorant of the mind of God. Their knowledge is clearly insufficient. For this cause, beloved, we must deal with God and receive dealings from God; and then shall we truly know Him. . . .

If you have been dealt with by God and have come to a true knowledge of Him, you will know at what particular juncture another person cannot get through. You are able to help him because you have perhaps received dealings on this very matter for more than fifty times yourself. You do not speak to men about the Bible only; you speak to them of God. . . .

. . . There are tens of thousands of things that require God's touch today. How regrettable that up to the present we have overlooked so many things without ever having received God's dealings. If we learn to accept God's ways with us day by day, we shall know Him after a while. Many believers rush here and there to hear and to ask people, but they do not seek the Lord in themselves. No wonder they still do not know God after having been saved for many years. How pitiful is this condition! We ought to inquire of God what we should do with this or that matter. We should seek till we know God's will. We must not pray just once and stop. I repeat, If you pray only once it would be better for you to cease praying altogether. . . .

Dealings and Knowledge Are Inseparable

The most precious thing in our life on earth is to know God. In order to know Him we must receive His dealing in all things. We must receive His dealing in the matter of knowing His will as well as in the matter of prayer. We need to deal with environment as well as with sin. We shall ask for the meaning of everything which comes our way. Is there any demand of God? The slothful can never know Him. We know Him through prayer; we know Him through fellowship with Him. We ought to learn from Paul, how he prayed to the Lord not just once but twice and three times until the Lord spoke to him. We should also learn from our Lord, who in the garden of Gethsemane prayed: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." He prayed not once, but the second and the third time until He was clear in this matter. Let us also pray a first, a second, and a third time till we feel God's answer. Only in this way can we know God. . . .

One essential part of the Christian's spiritual life is to judge himself, reckoning his flesh as undependable and useless; for only then will he wholly trust in God by walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh. It may be said that without this self-judgment spiritual life is impossible. If we do not know ourselves, how can we judge ourselves, and wherein will we receive spiritual blessing? Not perceiving the corruption of the flesh as God would like us to see, we are totally unable to live a pure life in the Holy Spirit. Due to the lack of self-knowledge, we will unconsciously be filled with self-confidence, and so fail to comprehend what the Lord has said, that "apart from me ye can do nothing" (John 15.5). Although the Holy Spirit is given to help our infirmity, we fail to look for His help since we do not see our weakness. Consequently, we remain in weakness.

Furthermore, not knowing ourselves, we will be so self-conceited

as to deem ourselves superior. With the result that we will be filled with pride—that thing which is most abominable in the sight of God. Due to the same lack, we shall also have many deficiencies in our daily life: a number of duties will go unfulfilled, we will engage in some unrighteous transactions with people, an absence of love will emerge in certain areas, and there will be frequent manifestations of impulsiveness, anxiety, and enmity. Yet we are not aware of these things, and hence complacency can set in and further deterioration can result. It is impossible to estimate how much spiritual blessing we have lost since we do not comprehend how perfect and precious is the salvation of the Lord.

Self-knowledge is, then, the first condition for progress. For only those who know themselves would aspire for more excellent things, even God's best. Those who do not know themselves would not be filled with the Holy Spirit since in their hearts they are neither hungry nor thirsty. We conclude, therefore, that self-knowledge is absolutely imperative. . . .

Since the Bible does not advocate introspection, how can we have self-knowledge? Let us read two passages from the Psalms: "Examine me, O Jehovah, and prove me; try my heart and my mind" (26.2). "Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me. . . . (139.23,24) These two passages show us the right way to self-knowledge. If we desire to know our heart and mind, to know our thoughts whether there is any wicked way, we should not spend time in examining ourselves as to how we feel about our own selves; rather should we ask God to examine and search and try us that we may have an accurate knowledge of ourselves. Our self-knowledge comes not by our self-examination but by God examining us.

These passages tell us that if we need knowledge about ourselves *we must ask God to inform us of this knowledge*. This is the most

accurate knowledge, for God knows us better than we know ourselves, because all things are naked and laid open before Him. Even the secret recesses of our heart that are beyond our analysis and sensation are not hidden from Him. If we are granted His eyesight we will not be deceived but shall know our real condition.

God's knowledge of us alone is beyond any mistake. Do you know how God thinks of you? You consider yourself to be pretty good; but do you believe God thinks of you that way too? Or you may regard yourself to be quite bad; do you think God agrees with you? Hence do not reckon yourself good or bad according as you feel. Such knowledge is most inaccurate. Only God can tell whether you are really good or bad.

God does not want us to be introspective; yet not because He denies us self-knowledge or allows us to live carelessly, but because He realizes we will never know ourselves through introspection. What He judges as wrong we may consider as good; what He condemns as unclean we may deem as a negligible fault. He is pleased with our having the same viewpoint as His. He will therefore not have us follow our own undependable feeling and inaccurate judgment but He would have us get the mind of the Spirit that we may have His judgment as our judgment. . . .

When God's light comes, not only our good shall be made manifest as being no good, even our no good—that which we usually acknowledge as such—shall become exceedingly ugly. Oftentimes we are quite aware of our weakness in a certain matter. We ourselves feel it that way, we even tell people about it, and moreover we pray to God concerning it. Nevertheless we lack a deep conviction about this weakness of ours, and are not really convinced of its wickedness. Though we sense a weakness, we are nonetheless able to live on. Only after the light of God has dawned upon us will there be that confirmative view of our weakness and will there grow in us an

abhorrence towards it. We cannot live unless we are delivered. The distance between the self-knowledge gained through introspection and that which is gained in God's light is immeasurable. . . .

The light of God is the light of the judgment seat! Today we gain self-knowledge by God's light. By the light of the judgment seat we know and do His will. We should praise and thank God that we need not wait till that day to see God's light and to know how He will judge us, for we are able to see that light today—even now we may know what He will then condemn or approve. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us for the purpose of revealing to us God's light. We are therefore without excuse.

—SK 15, 19, 27, 43, 47-8, 55-6, 61-2, 80

The first work of the Holy Spirit in a believer after he is saved is to lead him to know himself so as to induce him to obey the will of God and to deny what comes from himself. He is to learn to trust in God completely. But how difficult this lesson is! To know one's self is to be deprived of glory; to deny one's self is to make oneself suffer. So that in reality a believer is not too eager to know himself and therefore he does not know himself that well; indeed, he will ignorantly deem himself as trustworthy. Now because of the believer's unwillingness to have such self-knowledge, the Holy Spirit is not able to reveal to him his true character in the sight of God. As a result, the Lord is forced to use some painful means to make a believer know himself. And the means most frequently used is to let the believer fail. . . .

Although the Lord hates "self" so much, the attitude of believers towards it is quite different. They delight in depending on self, cherishing self, and glorying in self. They are ignorant of their true self; and neither do they know how unclean and corrupt and weak the self is in God's eyes. They lack the divine insight into the matter. In

short, they do not know themselves. If in such a situation they should make much progress, experiencing an increasing number of successes and victories, their self life will be nourished and grow bigger and it will thus become harder to deny. Each time they do a good deed, they drift a step further from the life of God. A little more power of their own means a little more distance away from the Holy Spirit. More success results in more glory to self, hence prolonging the evil life of self. . . .

God has no other aim than to lead you to the end of yourself that you may know yourself. This is thus the explanation for why, when sometimes you have struggled to overcome, you nevertheless have failed. Oh how you cried, you strove, you fought, you pursued, you prayed, you worked and labored, you employed all kinds of means to overcome sin and reach holiness; yet you ended up in defeat. Although at times you did experience a little victory, such victory was only temporary. You tried your best to sustain it, but it flew away like a bird. You concluded that you were worse than all, and therefore you could not gain the victory. Such experiences find their meaning in the fact that God was leading you to know your own self. It is not because you were too corrupt to gain a victory; rather, it was because you were not corrupt enough in your own eyes to win the victory. You ought to recognize that it is you yourself who cried, it was you who struggled and fought, it was you yourself who prayed and pursued, that it was you who worked and labored. You were the one active, and it was all for your own self. . . .

How many tears are shed today not for the sake of sin, but for the sake of “self” that is incapable of reaching the expected goodness of a believer. Much seeking, prayers and faith appear to be directed towards God, yet within all these endeavors is most likely the anticipation of self-good. And hence God permits you to be defeated again and again so that you may see finally the utter corruption of the flesh. And once your weakness is proven by such defeats, it is hoped

by God that you may know your true self, forsake it and turn to trust in Him.

Each defeat ought to give you a little more knowledge of yourself. Each failure should show you a little more of your weakness. Each sin should make you expect less of yourself and make you more willing to forsake your self. Yet often every fall only brings in more struggle and fight. Self is increased in strength instead of it being decreased. How vain it is for anyone to confess with the lips and even cry out for help if he fails to accept the principle of the cross in judging self. . . .

God will let a believer fail until he willingly acknowledges, "I am sold under sin! There is no good in me!" Not till then will he know that except a power comes from outside, he is hopeless and helpless. But then he will cry out: "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" (7.24) When he really perceives how corrupt he is, he will then know and acknowledge that unless Christ rescues him he cannot overcome sin. . . .

In every sin we can see self at work. Although people today classify sins into an untold number of categories, yet inductively speaking there is but one basic sin: all the thoughts and deeds which are sins are related to "self" In other words, though the number of sins in the world is indeed astronomical, the principle behind every sin is simply one—whatever is for self. All sins are committed for the sake of the self. If the element of self is missing, there will be no sin. Let us examine this point a little more closely.

What is pride? Is it not an exalting of self? What is jealousy? Is not jealousy a fear of being supplanted? What is emulation? Nothing less than a striving to excel others. What is anger? Anger is reacting against the loss the self suffers. What is adultery? It is following self's passions and lusts. What is cowardice? Is it not a caring for self's weakness? Now it is impossible to mention every sin, but if we

were to examine all of them one by one, we would discover that the principle within each one is always the same: it is something that in some way is related to self. Wherever sin is, there is the activity of the self. And wherever self is active, there will be sin before God.

On the other hand, in examining the fruit of the Holy Spirit—which expresses Christian witness—we shall readily see the opposite: that they are none other than selfless acts. What is love? Love is loving others without thinking of self. What is joy? It is looking at God in spite of self. Patience is despising one's own hardship. Peace is disregarding one's loss. Gentleness is overlooking one's rights. Humility is forgetting one's merits. Temperance is the self under control. And faithfulness is self-restraint. As we examine every Christian virtue, we will discern that other than being delivered from self or being forgetful of self, a believer has no other virtue. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is determined by one principle alone: the losing of self totally. . . .

The Lord looks not at the good or evil of a thing. He looks instead to its source. He takes note by what power the thing is done. Apart from His own will, God is not satisfied with anything else. Apart from His own power, He is not interested in any other. Were it possible for a believer to do something better than the will of God, the latter would still condemn the action and consider the believer as having sinned.

Is it true that all your works and pursuits are according to God's will? Or are they simply your independent decision? Do your works originate with God? Or are they done according to your pleasure? All our independent actions, no matter how excellent or virtuous they may appear to be, are not acceptable to God. Everything done without clearly knowing the will of God is a sin in His eyes. Everything done without depending on Him is also sin. . . .

The meaning of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and

evil is none other than being active outside of God, seeking what is good according to one's thought, being in haste and unable to wait to obtain the knowledge which God has not yet given, and not trusting in the Lord but seeking advance in one's own way. These all can be summed up in one phrase: independence from God. And such was man's first sin. God is displeased with the man who departs from him and moves independently. For he wants man to trust in Him.

The purpose of the Lord in saving man as well as in creating him is for man to trust in God. And such is the meaning of the tree of life: simply put, it is *trust*. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat," said God to Adam; "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." Among all the trees whose fruit could be eaten, God especially mentioned the tree of life in stark contrast to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. "The tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." In taking note of God's mention particularly of the tree of life, we ought to realize that of all the edible trees this is the most important. This is what Adam should have eaten of first. Why is this so? . . .

The tree of life signifies the life of God, the *uncreated* life of God. Adam is a *created* being, and therefore he does not possess such uncreated life. Though at this point he is still without sin, he nevertheless is only natural since he has not received the holy life of God. The purpose of God is for Adam to choose the fruit of the tree of life with his own volition so that he might be related to God in divine life. And thus Adam would move from simply being created by God to his being born of Him as well. What God requires of Adam is simply for him to deny his created, natural life and be joined to Him in divine life, thus living daily by the life of God. Such is the meaning of the tree of life. The Lord wanted Adam to live by that life which was not his originally.

—MC 106-7, 109-10, 116-7, 130-1, 134-7

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Spiritual Reality

One thing which God's people should take note of is that every spiritual matter has its reality before God. If what we have touched is mere appearance and not reality, we shall find that it is of no spiritual value whatsoever. What, then, is spiritual reality? The reality of a spiritual thing is something spiritual, not material. Although spiritual reality is often expressed in words, those words, however many, are not the reality. Although spiritual reality needs to be disclosed in our lives, the set formalities of our lives are not reality. Although spiritual reality must be manifested in conduct, human-manufactured pretension is not reality.

What is spiritual reality? "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him," says the Lord, "must worship in spirit and truth." The word "truth" means "trueness" or "reality." The same applies to the following words: "Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth." "And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth." These all reveal that God is Spirit, therefore all that is related to God is in the Spirit. The Spirit of truth is the Spirit of reality. For this reason, spiritual reality must be in the Spirit. It is that which transcends man and matter. Only what is in the Holy Spirit is spiritually real, because all spiritual things are nurtured in the Holy Spirit. Once anything is outside the Holy Spirit, it turns into letters and forms which are dead. Spiritual things are real, living, and full of life only when they are in the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who guides us into all reality. Whatever may be entered into without the guidance of the Holy Spirit is definitely not spiritual reality. All which one can obtain merely by listening or thinking or being emotionally involved is not spiritually real. We must remember that the Holy Spirit is the Executor of all spiritual matters. What God does today is done in the Holy Spirit. Only what the Holy Spirit does is truly real.

Whatever is in the Holy Spirit is real. If anyone touches this reality he obtains life, for life and reality are joined together. Whoever desires to attend to spiritual life must stress spiritual reality. The one who has touched spiritual reality in the Holy Spirit will immediately respond with an amen in his heart whensoever he meets another who has also touched spiritual reality—and vice versa. This is what is meant by the words in Psalm 42.7, “Deep calleth unto deep.” It can be said that reality touches reality. . . .

Do you realize . . . that no one can ever perceive spiritual things with his eyes fixed on the material, that no one can ever think through to the spiritual with his brain? All spiritual matters have their realities. He who has touched reality questions no more. . . .

. . . On the night of His betrayal the Lord Jesus “took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and he gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins. But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine. . . .” (Matt. 26.26-29). Some view this from the physical standpoint, and hence they maintain that as the bread and the cup are being blessed the whole substance of the bread is converted into the body of the Lord and the whole substance of the fruit of the vine is changed into the blood of the Lord. Others view it from the rational approach, arguing that the bread and the wine have not been transubstantiated (as in the above case) but that they merely represent the body and the blood of the Lord.

Judging from the Lord’s own word, however, we see that He lays emphasis neither on transubstantiation nor on representation but on spiritual reality. Behind that which is eaten and drunk is the spiritual reality. Jesus says “this is my body”; He does not say “this represents my body.” And after He says “this is my blood of the covenant” the

Lord continues with, “I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine”—clearly indicating that the wine has neither been transubstantiated nor is representative of the blood. When the Lord speaks of the bread and of the cup, His whole emphasis is on that reality. In His eyes there is neither representation nor transubstantiation.

Paul articulates the same thing when he declares, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10.16) It is the bread, yet he acknowledges it as the body of Christ. It is the cup, yet he accepts it as the blood of Christ. In Paul’s eyes, there is neither representation nor transubstantiation, only spiritual reality. He further explains: “seeing that we being many, are one loaf, one body” (v.17 Darby). How could he say this unless he has touched spiritual reality?

When a person speaks, he utters either a fact or a parable—that which is couched in literal or in symbolic language. This is not so with Paul. “We who are many” is literal; “are one loaf is symbolical. He joins the literal and the symbolic in one sentence because to him both “we being many” and “are one loaf” are facts. The spiritual reality which he has touched is so factual that he is able to unite “we being many” with “are one loaf, one body.” He has transcended grammar and rhetoric. Here is one who really knows the Lord. When he takes up the bread He is truly in communion with the body of Christ; for he has forgotten the bread and is now in touch with the spiritual reality. When he takes up the cup he is indeed in communion with the blood of Christ, for he has forgotten the fruit of the vine and has touched the spiritual reality. Having touched spiritual reality, for him word or doctrine presents no problem. . . .

Let us mention one point on the practical side. We may ask what body life is. Body life is not brought in by acting in accordance with

a certain procedure. Only when you have touched spiritual reality can you touch the church; and then your actions become movements in the body rather than their standing as independent activities. For example: when you are about to take some action, it is not because you have fulfilled a required procedure—in inviting all the brothers and sisters to come and in consulting with them—that your action can be reckoned as body life. You are living out body life only when you have touched its reality while fellowshiping with brothers and sisters (whether many or few). If you have not contacted spiritual reality, then what is agreed upon unanimously by the whole assembly is only the opinion of the flesh. It is not in the least body life. Body life flows out of spiritual reality.

The case in Acts 15 demonstrates to us what body life is. For the purpose of solving the problem as to whether Gentiles must be circumcised, the apostles and elders gathered together for consultation. Finally, James arose and gave the judgment. This decision was of the Holy Spirit. Because when they wrote the circular letter they could say, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” (v.28). The judgment came from the Holy Spirit; it had touched spiritual reality. Though the word proceeded from the mouth of James, even so “the apostles and the elders, with the whole church,” said amen and agreed to the decision (v.22). This is body life. Body life is lived out when the reality is touched in the Holy Spirit. It is not by fulfilling a certain procedure but by touching reality that body life is truly practiced.

We ought to realize that all spiritual life and teaching has its reality before God. If one has not touched that reality—and no matter how well he may preach the doctrine—he produces nothing of spiritual value. If a person has not touched the reality of the church yet all the while talks about the church, he is in darkness, deceiving himself, and is full of pride. But for that person who has made contact with the spiritual reality, his life is practical and living

instead of being in letter and external.

A wonderful thing happens after you touch reality. Whenever you encounter someone who has not touched, or entered into, reality, you immediately sense it. You know he has not touched that reality because he is still following the mind, the law, the rule or regulation. Before God there is something which the Bible calls “true.” It is nothing other than “reality.” In relating to this trueness—this reality—one is delivered from doctrine, letter, human thoughts, and human ways. Be it baptism or breaking of bread or the church, there is a reality. Nothing is mere form, procedure, or doctrine. . . .

For this reason, unless there be revelation, men do not recognize who the Lord is, even if they may have eaten and drunk with Him or walked and stayed with Him. Without this revealed knowledge, all which is known of Him is but the external Christ, the historical Christ. This is termed a knowing of Christ after the flesh. Only the knowledge of Christ as Peter experienced through revelation is real and can be said to be apprehending Christ inwardly. . . .

Reality and Conduct

We ought to remember that there is a thing before God called reality. The difficulty with many Christians is that they try to manufacture it. They attempt to produce this reality before God. With the result that they copy or imitate. What God requires, though, is trueness—the real thing manifested in our lives. That which we do by ourselves is man-made, a counterfeit, and not the genuine thing. How very vain it is for man to act on the basis of doctrine, for all he has is nothing more than an outward conduct. He does not have the true article—the reality.

Because of this, we must learn to live before God according to what we verily are. We should ask Him to cause us to contact that

which is spiritually real. Sometimes we are close to being false simply because we know too much and act according to doctrines, instead of following the leading of Gods Spirit. Whenever we act on the basis of doctrine we are not touching reality. . . .

Spiritual discernment comes only after we ourselves have contacted the reality. The one who has not touched reality deceives two persons: himself, and the one who is spiritually in the same category. He cannot deceive those who know what is of the Holy Spirit and who live in the Holy Spirit. He has absolutely no way to deceive the church. He may consider himself spiritual, but for some unknown reason the church does not say amen. We know that whenever the church does not amen a person, it is time for that person to confess his sins. If brothers and sisters do not feel like saying amen, that person must have falsehood in him.

Some brothers and sisters trouble and burden the church not simply with their sins but also with their “good”—that which issues from themselves. Sin is easily recognized, but the “good” which proceeds from self is not so easily detected, though it is far from God and far from spiritual reality. It is a matter of great concern to behold how often Christians regard themselves as having come into some certain thing after they have labored over it, when in actuality they have not yet touched its spiritual reality. We believe that when one encounters reality, it will result in life; but when one does not encounter reality, it will end in death. One brother performs a particular act before God; he touches life and causes others to touch life. Another brother also takes a certain action; he feels he has done well; yet others do not meet life in him—and they are not edified. Instead of admiring his action, they reject it. It is because this brother’s conduct comes out of himself; and the consequence is death instead of life.

We must learn to live in the Holy Spirit, otherwise we may

exercise “good” conduct without touching the spiritual reality. What is meant by living in the Holy Spirit? It means not doing anything by or out from ourselves. Whatever is done by the self is of the flesh, and whatever is of the flesh is definitely not spiritual reality. Spiritual reality is spiritual, not fleshly. To put it simply, spiritual reality is what one touches by the Holy Spirit. The thing which that one so touches is living and real. The conduct of a Christian is not real if it is not in the Holy Spirit. His conduct can never be a substitute for the real thing before God. It can neither help others nor edify himself. May God be merciful to us that we may realize that to live in the Holy Spirit is to live in spiritual reality.

Supply and Reality

2 Corinthians 4 especially shows us how there is supply where there is reality. “Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body” (v.10). Where the dying of Jesus is exhibited, there is the manifestation of the life of Jesus. In other words, since the dying of Jesus is in us, the life of Jesus is also in us. This refers to those who know the dying of Jesus and in whom the life of Jesus is manifested.

“So then death worketh in us, but life in you” (v.12). In verse 10, Paul speaks of the manifestation of life; here in verse 12, he speaks of the supply of life. That which is manifested in us we call life, but that which is manifested in others we call supply. The source is the same, since all comes from the dying of Jesus. Consequently, preaching without reality is empty and useless, because it cannot supply the body of Christ. Only after the dying of Jesus has worked in us can the life of Jesus work in others. Hence this is more than a matter of preaching or working, but is a matter of the supply of life. . . .

Oftentimes spiritual reality is nothing more than terminology to us

for we have not yet entered into the reality of it. Only after we have entered in can we touch that which is real. Hence the question becomes, How can we enter into spiritual reality? “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth . . . He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you” (John 16.13-14). These two verses tell us that it is the Holy Spirit who declares truth to us and guides us into all of it.

Of all the works of the Holy Spirit, two are of prime importance; namely, the revelation of the Spirit, and the discipline of the Spirit. The first enables us to know and to see spiritual reality, while the second guides us into the experience of spiritual reality through environmental arrangements.

Revelation is the foundation of all spiritual progress. Without the revelation of the Holy Spirit, no matter how good one’s knowledge and how excellent one’s outward conduct, that Christian remains superficial before God and may never have advanced even one step forward. On the other hand, if one has a revelation of the Holy Spirit and yet lacks the additional discipline of the Holy Spirit, that Christian’s life is incomplete. We may say that the revelation of the Holy Spirit is the foundation while the discipline of the Holy Spirit is the construction. This does not mean that there is a period called the revelation of the Holy Spirit and then another period called the discipline of the Holy Spirit. The two are mingled. When He reveals, He also disciplines; and while He disciplines, He likewise reveals. For this reason, revelation does not embrace the whole of the Christian life unless it also includes discipline. . . .

“O God of my righteousness: in pressure thou hast enlarged me” (Ps. 4.1 Darby). God allowed David to fall into distress that He might lead him into enlargement. . . .

What is enlargement? The enlargement which the psalmist speaks of is when in distress you are brought by God into an enlarged place

to enjoy Him. Distress is not able to depress you. He who enjoys the company of the Fourth Person in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3.25) is he who enjoys God; and he who enjoys God is an enlarged person. The one who is cast into prison with his feet fast in the stocks and yet can pray and sing hymns to God (Acts 16.24-25) is he who enjoys God; such a one is certainly enlarged. A person shut behind prison bars but still enjoying the presence of the Lord must inevitably be an enlarged person.

The Holy Spirit aims at leading us to enlargement through distress; but, sad to say, sometimes we instead are overwhelmed by distress. We have seen the end or purpose of the Lord in the case of Job, of how the Lord is full of pity and merciful (James 5.11). Job indeed realized the end of the Lord, but some come to an end before the end of the Lord is reached! They are pressed by distress and fail to come into an enlarged place. As soon as they are tested, they murmur and accuse God of being unfair; consequently they are capsized by distress, never taking the opportunity of being brought into enlargement. . . .

Spiritual reality is trueness. It is the truth which sets us free. Oftentimes a Christian fails to touch trueness and falls into falsehood instead. He is deceived and bound by falsehood. He does not clearly see the true character of a thing; yet he considers himself clear. What he thinks and does is wrong, but he reckons himself to be most right. Such a condition we call "obsession." The obsessed person needs the light of God; otherwise he will not be able to come out of his obsession. Let us now see what obsession is.

Obsession is self-deception. 1 John 1.8 describes an obsessed person, declaring him to be self-deceived. If a person knows he has sinned but nevertheless tells others he has not, it is a lie. But if he has sinned and yet believes himself to have no sin, it is self-deception. A lie is committed when one knows in himself that he has sinned but he

tells others that he has not. An obsession is evident when one has sinned and yet he thinks so well of himself that he believes himself to be sinless as the Lord Jesus. A liar knows his sin but tries to deceive others. An obsessed person, though he himself has sin, believes and tells others that he has no sin. In other words, what deceives others is a lie while that which deceives oneself is an obsession.

The substance in a lie is the same as in an obsession, both being sin. But in a lie the person knows his sin in his conscience yet intends to deceive others by saying that he has not sinned, whereas in obsession he not only says he has no sin but also psychologically believes in his innocence. He who deceives people is a liar; he who deceives himself is obsessed. All the obsessed deceive themselves. They live in their imagination. Many of those who are proud are obsessed! The proud tend to conceive such thoughts of themselves as to literally believe that they are such as they imagine and to desire others also to believe them to be so.

Paul was once obsessed. When Stephen was stoned to death, Paul “was consenting to his death” (Acts 8.1a). He was completely obsessed within. When he wrote to the church in Philippi, he referred to his former history by saying, “as touching zeal, persecuting the church” (3.6). He thought he was serving God zealously in persecuting the church. He was not satisfied just to see people hurt; he asked the high priest for letters to Damascus to the synagogues that if he found any there who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9.1-2). He believed that in this way he could serve God with fervor. But was he right? His wish to serve God was right but his persecuting the church as a service to God was wrong. He was wrong, yet he believed himself right—this is called obsession.

Those whom the Lord refers to in John 16.2 were also the

obsessed. "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offereth service unto God." To fancy that killing the disciples of the Lord is serving God, this is obsession.

Obsession is a matter of the heart. When the obsessed does something wrong, his heart insists that he is right. If a person commits wrong and asserts he is right, he is lying. But if he commits wrong and yet affirms with his mouth and believes in his heart that he is right, he is obsessed. A liar is hard without but withered up within: the more confident outwardly the more empty inwardly he becomes. An obsessed person is hard both inside and outside, being confident both within and without; for even the conscience seems to justify it.

The situation of the obsessed is such that having done something wrong he nonetheless thinks and firmly believes the thing done to be right so that no one can tell him it is wrong. This is obsession. Further, the obsessed person imagines something which has not been, as though it actually were, and his imagination goes so far as to avow that others have definitely done it. Indeed, the more he dwells on it the more certain it becomes to him. This, too, is obsession. Sometimes Christians admire a certain thing and secretly long to attain to it. At first they feel somewhat uneasy about their wish, but as they keep on thinking in that direction they gradually and increasingly are convinced of the correctness and realness of this thing. They finally take it as a truth and propagate it as truth. This also is obsession. When people are so obsessed, it is rather difficult for them to be convinced of their error, even if somebody should show them from the word of God. This is because they can conscientiously (that is, according to conscience) say that they are right. . . .

For every obsession there is a cause. We will try to find out some

of the basic causes by looking closely through the Scriptures.

Love Darkness

People love darkness rather than light. This is a main cause for obsession. Such abnormal love reveals the straying of the heart, hence such ones are easily obsessed. In order to avoid difficulties and to save themselves from troubles, they dare not face the light but try to comfort themselves that they are right. Gradually they really believe they are right. Thus are they obsessed. The Jews rejected the Lord Jesus because they loved darkness rather than light (John 3.19). They had no light for they dwelt in darkness. They imagined that it was reasonable for them to hate and to reject the Lord Jesus. “If I had not done among them the works which none other did, said the Lord, “they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father” (John 15.24). Why? Because they were obsessed. They hated the Lord without a cause. We need to know that wherever there is darkness and no light, there are erroneous concepts, false confidence, and wrong judgment. There is an element of obsession in each and every error. The consequence of not loving the light is obsession.

Pride

Pride is also a major reason for obsession. “The pride of thy heart hath deceived thee” (Obadiah 3). This reveals that the greatest reason for self-deception is pride. Those who deceive themselves into obsession are probably all proud people. If a Christian sets his heart on vainglory and position before men, he may start to pretend to be what he is not in order to deceive people. Gradually he begins to deceive himself and to become obsessed. Once he becomes proud he can easily imagine himself as being something extraordinary. Slowly he will take what he fancies as the truth. Thus he falls into obsession. Brothers and sisters, never consider pride to be an insignificant sin,

for pride can easily propel us into obsession. Let us therefore learn to be humble.

Receive Not the Love of the Truth

Not receiving the love of the truth is another big cause behind obsession. It is shown in 2 Thessalonians that for those who “received not the love of the truth . . . God sendeth a working of error, that they should believe a lie” (2.10-11). This is indeed a most terrible aftermath. People are obsessed by believing lies. They believe things which are non-existent. Because of their not receiving the love of truth, they just naturally incline towards lies.

“Buy the truth, and sell it not, yea, wisdom, and instruction, and understanding” (Prov. 23.23). Truth needs to be bought, that is, a price must be paid. Blessed are we if our hearts are well prepared for the truth of God. We will love the truth and accept it whatever it may cost us. But oftentimes men do not have the love of the truth in them. They distort the truth and even discard it. Finally they actually believe it is not the truth. They proclaim as untrue what is the truth and preach as the truth what is untrue. They seem to do this with confidence. This definitely is obsession. . . .

Seek Not the Glory That Comes from the Only God

Not seeking the glory which comes from the only God is also a factor in obsession. “How can ye believe, who receive glory one of another, and the glory that cometh from the only God ye seek not?” asks the Lord Jesus (John 5.44). For the sake of coveting glory from men the Jews rejected the Lord and lost eternal life. How very lamentable! This inordinate love of glory from men inclined their hearts to a lie. As a consequence, they believed in falsehood. They became increasingly confident of themselves. They were none other than obsessed. . . .

“For with thee is the fountain of life: In thy light shall we see light” (Ps. 36.9). It is only by the light of God that we truly see light, that is, see the true character of a thing. The first light is that which enlightens, the second light is the true character which is seen. We need to live in the light of God if we wish to see the true character of a matter. . . .

Those who know themselves in the light of God know their own selves indeed. If we are not in God’s light we may sin without being conscious of how wicked our sin is, we may fall without being fully aware of how shameful our fall is. We may do a little good outwardly but how deceitful is our inward state. We may show gentleness outside, but who knows how hard we are inside. We may put on a spiritual form, but in our reality we are full of the flesh. When the light of God comes, the true character of these things shall be manifested. We will then see through ourselves; we will confess how blind we were before!

Herein is the difference between the Old and the New Testaments: in the Old Testament, people know right and wrong by outward law; in the New Testament, we know the true character of a thing by the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is possible that we see our fault through doctrine or teaching but even so we have yet to see our fault in the light of God. Knowing our fault through doctrine or teaching is superficial; perceiving our fault in God’s light alone is thorough. This is the meaning of seeing light in God’s light.

—SRO 5-10, 12-14, 20, 27-8, 30-2, 39-42, 47-50, 57-63

Spiritual reality has this outstanding characteristic, that it bears no mark of time. The time factor vanishes the instant you touch that reality. From the human point of view there is such a thing as prophecy, but from the divine viewpoint no such thing exists. “Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee” (Ps. 2.7). With God it is

always “this day.” Our Lord says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev. 22.13). He is both together, both at once. It is not that at one time He is first and at another time He is last. He is first and last simultaneously. Nor is it that having been Alpha for some time, He becomes Omega later on. To the contrary, He is Alpha and Omega from eternity to eternity. He is always first *and* last; and He is always Alpha *and* Omega. In the sight of man He is not Omega till He is manifested as Omega; but in the sight of God He is Omega now. With man, the past and the future are separate; with God they synchronize. The “I” of yesterday differs from the “I” of today; and the “I” of tomorrow differs further still. But “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, yea and for ever” (Heb. 13.8). God is the eternal “I Am.” It is here that the knowledge of God comes in.

Our Lord once said, “No one hath ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man, who is in heaven” (John 3.13). Note how these two different positions synchronize in Christ. There is no change of time or place with Him. Of God it is written: “the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning” (James 1.17). He is that in himself. He is that in His Christ: He is that in His Church. . . .

Spiritual progress is not a question of attaining to some abstract standard, not a question of pressing through to some far-off goal; it is wholly a question of seeing *God's* standard. Spiritual progress comes by finding out what you really are, not by trying to be what you hope to be. You will never reach that goal, however earnestly you strive. It is when you *see* you are dead that you die; it is when you *see* you are risen that you rise; it is when you *see* you are holy that you become holy. It is *seeing* the goal that determines the *pathway* to the goal. The goal is revealed by inward seeing, not by desiring or by working. There is only one possibility of spiritual progress, and that is by discovering God's *facts*. Our great need is just to *see* the truth as *God*

sees it—the truth concerning Christ, the truth concerning ourselves in Christ, and the truth concerning the Church, the Body of Christ. . . .

The Church is not a company of Christians working their way heavenward, but a company of Christians who are actually now citizens of heaven. Alas! Christianity in the experience of most Christians is an endeavor to be what they are not, and an endeavor to do what they cannot do. They are always struggling to not love the world because at heart they really love it. They are always trying to be humble because at heart they are still proud. This is the experience of so-called Christianity, but it is not the experience of the Church. The question of deliverance from the world or redemption from sin never arises in the Church, for the Church never had any connection with sin or with the world.

The Church existed before the foundation of the world and was never in the world, so she has never been touched by the Fall. Alas, the human mind cannot dissociate the thought of sin from the Church. But in the divine mind, there is no relationship between sin and the Church. The Church infinitely transcends all thought of sin: in fact, the Church is the most positive thing in the universe. The Church is Christ. The Church has no connection with sin, and consequently no connection with redemption. Anything that calls for redemption does not belong to the Church. As individual believers, because we were born of Adam, we need redemption. It is not the Church that is redeemed, but we sinners who are redeemed; and being redeemed, we become part of the Church. In our experience the Church exists after redemption, but in the sight of God the Church existed before redemption. Redemption relates to our standing in Adam; the Church relates to our standing in Christ. The Church is the One New Man where Christ is all and in all. The Church is Christ in corporate form.

The Church is not an organization, not something to be

understood and attained to; it is something to be seen. When we see the heavenly reality of the Church, then we see our heavenly nature and we know that our starting-point as Christians is not earth but heaven.

The Church is perfect, perfect beyond any possibility of improvement. Theologians often say: “That perfection is the *standing* (or position) of the Church; but her *state* is not so.” Yet in the sight of God there is no imperfection in the Church eternally. Why be bothered by the endless questions that relate to the old creation? They simply vanish when we see the reality of the Church. The Church is the sphere in which God exercises His authority on the earth; and today, even in the midst of a polluted universe, He has a sphere of unsullied purity for His abode.

—WG 69-71, 76-8