

International Training for Elders and Responsible Ones

October 2023

GENERAL SUBJECT:

**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD'S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**

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**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD'S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**
(Thursday—First Morning Session)

Message One

**Living and Serving according to
the Heavenly Vision of God's Economy**

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Eph. 1:4-5; 3:2, 9; 5:26-27;
Heb. 2:10-11; 1 Thes. 5:23; Acts 26:18-19

- I. The one thing, the unique thing, that should be focused on, stressed, and ministered in the Lord's recovery is the heavenly vision of the eternal economy of God; the central subject of the Bible is the economy of God, and the entire Bible is concerned with the economy of God—1 Tim. 1:3-4; Eph. 1:10; 3:2, 8-9, 16-19; Acts 26:18-19:**
- A. "God's economy and plan is to make Himself man and to make us, His created beings, 'God' so that He is 'man-ized' and we are 'God-ized'" (*A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing*, pp. 51-52).
 - B. God's eternal economy is for Him to become man that man might become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead for the building up of the Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem—John 1:1, 14; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Rev. 4:5; 5:6; 21:2, 10-11.
 - C. Today we can be in one accord because we have only one vision, the vision of the eternal economy of God—Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 1:9-10; Jer. 32:39.
- II. Our becoming God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead was initiated by God the Father in eternity past by His choosing us to be holy, predestinating us unto sonship; the divine sanctification for the divine sonship is the center of the divine economy and the central thought of the revelation in the New Testament—Eph. 1:4-5:**
- A. To be sanctified is to be made holy, which is to be separated unto God and saturated with God as the Holy One, the One who is different, distinct, from everything that is common—1 Pet. 1:15-16; Eph. 1:4-5.
 - B. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy in order for us to become God in nature (v. 4); God is the only One who is holy; for us to be holy we need God in His holy nature dispensed into us, and this holy nature becomes the holy element with which the Holy Spirit sanctifies us (2 Pet. 1:4; Heb. 12:14).
 - C. He predestinated us unto sonship even before we were created in order for us to become God in life (Eph. 1:5); for us to become sons of God, we must be born of God by the dispensing of God's life into our being (John 1:12-13; 3:6; 1 John 5:11-12):
 - 1. Ephesians 1:4-5 reveals that God chose us to be holy for the purpose of our being made sons of God; to be made holy is the process, the procedure, whereas to be sons of God is the aim, the goal, so that our whole being, including our body (Rom. 8:23), may be "sonized" by God (Rev. 21:2, 9-11).
 - 2. Hebrews 2:10-11 reveals that the resurrected Christ as the Captain, the Author, of God's salvation is leading many sons into glory by sanctifying them.
 - 3. The divine sanctification is the holding line in the carrying out of the divine economy to sonize us divinely, making us sons of God that we may become the same as God in

His life and in His nature (but not in His Godhead), so that we may be God's expression; hence, God's sanctification is the divine sonizing.

4. We say that sanctification is the holding line because every step of God's work with us is to make us holy; the carrying out of the eternal economy of God is by the Spirit's sanctification—1 Thes. 5:23; John 17:17; Eph. 5:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:3b; Heb. 12:4-14; Rom. 8:28-29; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thes. 5:19; Rev. 2:7a; Psalms 73:16-17, 25-26; Rev. 21:2, 10.

III. The divine, dispositional sanctification is carried out by Christ as the life-giving, sanctifying, and speaking Spirit—1 Cor. 15:45b; 1 Thes. 5:23; Eph. 5:26:

- A. Christ as the life-giving Spirit sanctifies the church by cleansing her according to the washing of the water in the word; according to the divine concept, water in Ephesians 5:26 refers to the flowing life of God, typified by flowing water (Exodus 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4; John 7:37-39; Rev. 7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17); we are now in such a washing process in order that the church may be holy and without blemish.
- B. The Greek word for *washing* in Ephesians 5:26 is literally "laver"; in the Old Testament the priests used the laver to wash away their earthly defilement (Exodus 30:18-21); day by day, morning and evening, we need to come to the Bible and be cleansed by the laver of the water in the word.
- C. Paul uses the Greek word *rhema* when he speaks of the word with its washing process (Eph. 5:26); *logos* is God's Word objectively recorded in the Bible; *rhema* is the word of God spoken to us on a specific occasion (Mark 14:72; Luke 1:35-38; 5:5; 24:1-8).
- D. As the life-giving Spirit, Christ is the speaking Spirit; whatever He speaks is the word that washes us; this does not refer to *logos*, the constant word, but to *rhema*, which denotes an instant word, the word that the Lord presently speaks to us—Matthew 4:4; John 6:63; Rev. 2:7; 22:17a; cf. Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:14-15; Acts 28:25-31.
- E. The *rhema* reveals something to us personally and directly; it shows us what we need to deal with and what we need to be cleansed from (the laver of bronze was a mirror that could reflect and expose—Exodus 38:8); the important thing for each one of us is this—is God speaking His word to me today?—Rev. 2:7; 1 Samuel 3:1, 21; Amos 3:7.
- F. One thing that we always treasure is that the Lord still speaks to us personally and directly today; true growth in life depends upon our receiving the word directly from God; only His speaking in us has true spiritual value—Hebrews 3:7-11, 15; 4:7; Psalm 95:7-8.
- G. The central point of our prayers should be our longing for the Lord's speaking, which enables us to fulfill the goal of His eternal economy according to His heart's desire to have His divine sonship—Luke 1:38; 10:38-42; Eph. 1:5.
- H. In a very practical sense, the Lord's presence is one with His speaking; whenever He speaks, we realize His presence within us; Christ's speaking is the very presence of the life-giving Spirit—cf. Exodus 33:12-17; Hebrews 11:8.
- I. The speaking of the indwelling Christ as the life-giving Spirit within us is the cleansing water that deposits a new element into us to replace the old element in our nature and disposition; this metabolic cleansing causes a genuine and inward change in life, which is the reality of dispositional sanctification and transformation.

IV. Acts 26:18 reveals the contents of our divine commission to serve according to the heavenly vision of God's economy; we need to pray over these contents, asking the Lord to make them our experience and reality so that we can bring others into this experience and reality:

- A. “To open their eyes”—v. 18:
 - 1. We need to continually pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation to understand and to see more and more of Christ, the Body of Christ, and the divine dispensing for the divine economy—Eph. 1:17; 3:5; cf. Rev. 4:6; 3:17; Matt. 6:6.
 - 2. We cannot go on without new knowledge of the Lord and a new vision of Him—Acts 26:16; Phil. 3:8b, 10a, 13; cf. Deut. 4:25.
 - 3. Our commission is to “enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is”—Eph. 3:9.
- B. “To turn them from darkness to light”—Acts 26:18:
 - 1. Light is the presence of God; we need to be people who are full of light—Isa. 2:5; 1 John 1:5; Luke 11:34-36.
 - 2. The enjoyment of Christ as our God-given portion is “in the light”—Col. 1:12; John 8:12; 1:4; Psalms 119:105, 130; Matt. 5:14; Rev. 1:20.
 - 3. We need to be luminaries in the world, holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:14-16); we need to tell out the virtues of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).
- C. “To turn them...from the authority of Satan to God”—Acts 26:18:
 - 1. The highest point in our spiritual experience is to have a clear sky with the throne above it; to have the throne above a clear sky is to give the Lord the preeminence in our being and the highest and most prominent position in our life—Ezek. 1:22, 26; Col. 1:18; cf. Ezek. 14:3.
 - 2. If we are under a clear sky with the throne above it, genuine authority will be with us to bring others under God’s authority—2 Cor. 10:4-5, 8; 13:3, 10.
 - 3. Our uttermost love for the Lord qualifies, perfects, and equips us to speak for the Lord with His authority—cf. John 21:15, 17.
- D. “That they may receive forgiveness of sins”—Acts 26:18:
 - 1. We need to go to the Lord to receive a thorough forgiveness of all our sins—1 John 1:7, 9.
 - 2. David begged God to blot out his transgressions, wash him thoroughly from his iniquity, and cleanse him from his sin—Psalms 51:1-2, 7, 9:
 - a. Like David we need to stay in the presence of God to have a thorough and genuine repentance and confession to receive a full forgiveness from God.
 - b. If we confess our sins to receive God’s forgiveness, we will have the gladness of God’s salvation and be sustained with a willing spirit; then we can teach transgressors His ways, and sinners will turn back to Him—vv. 12-13.
- E. “That they may receive...an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me”; this inheritance is the Triune God Himself with all He has, all He has done, and all He will do for His redeemed people—Acts 26:18:
 - 1. The Triune God is embodied in the all-inclusive Christ, who is the portion allotted to the saints as their inheritance—Col. 2:9; 1:12.
 - 2. We enjoy the pneumatic Christ as the pledge of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14) “among those,” that is, among those in the church life (cf. 2 Tim. 2:22).
 - 3. We need to bring people into the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ in the church life so that they may enjoy Christ as we do and be sanctified dispositionally with the holy nature of God through the exercise of their spirit—Heb. 2:10-11; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 4:13.

V. Our being sanctified for the divine sonship ultimately consummates in the New Jerusalem as the holy city (Rev. 21:2, 10) and the aggregate of the divine

sonship (v. 7); this is the ultimate consummation of God becoming a man in the flesh that man might become God in the Spirit to gain a great, corporate God-man (vv. 3, 22) for the corporate expression, the glory, of the Triune God (vv. 11, 23).

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE LORD'S APPEARING MAKING SAUL A WITNESS

Acts 26 is also set against the background of the Jewish religion. In verse 17 the Lord said that He would deliver Saul from the people to whom He would send him. The word *people* in this verse does not refer to mankind but to the Jewish people, the religious people. In the Jewish religion there was a young man named Saul who had a strong will and who was faithful to that traditional religion. He was very zealous for the religion and tradition of his forefathers. While he was on the way to damage the church, doing his best to persecute it, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and knocked him to the ground. Saul asked, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute" (v. 15). The background here is not that of paganism but of the typical religion. Saul was zealous for God according to the traditional religion, but he was persecuting the church of Christ and opposing God's economy. Although he was so zealous for God, he did not realize that he was part of the greatest deviation from the central line of God's revelation.

After Saul had been knocked down, the Lord called him, saying, "Rise up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me and of the things in which I will appear to you" (v. 16). Often the Lord knocks us down and then tells us to rise up. At these times the Lord may say, "Don't lie there—rise up. If you rise up, I will make you a minister and a witness, not a religionist. I will make you a witness of what you have seen." The Lord seemed to be telling Saul, "You have seen Me speaking to you from the heavens. Now go and witness to people of this. Witness to the priests, the elders, and the scribes. Formerly, you said that I was killed and buried, but now you must witness to the fact that I have been resurrected and am now living in the heavens."

In verse 16 the Lord told Saul that he would be a witness both of the things in which he had seen Him and of the things in which the Lord would appear to him. The Lord said that He would reveal other things to Saul, not in the way of teaching but by means of His appearing. In whatever the Lord appeared to Saul, Saul was to witness of that to the people. This is not a teaching, a doctrine, or a religion; it is absolutely a revelation of Jesus. All that the apostle Paul later ministered was something in which the Lord had appeared to him. He was not taught by the Lord; rather, he had revelation that came from the Lord's appearing. After his experience on the way to Damascus, Saul could say, "I have seen the living Jesus in the heavens. I will go tell people what I have seen. My seeing comes from the appearing of this living Lord. He charged me to minister those things in which He has ministered to me, and He even promised to appear to me again and again. Every time He appears, I see something. Then I go out and witness to people about what I have seen." Being a witness is not a matter of teaching and knowledge but of appearing and vision. The things in which the Lord appears to us are the things that we must minister to others.

THE LORD'S CHARGE

In Acts 26:18 the Lord charged Saul "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." This is the work that you young people should do today. Do not preach the traditional gospel of Christianity. Rather, open the eyes of this generation that they may turn from darkness to light. The first thing we must do is to help others to see. In order to do this, we ourselves must have the vision and see the heavenly things. We must see the things concerning Christ, not by being taught but by having Christ appear to us. After you have seen the vision, you need

to contact people, telling them that Jesus has appeared to you and that you have seen Him. Do not preach the low, traditional gospel. Many who have received this poor gospel are still blind and in darkness. Do not teach people religion—open their eyes that they may turn from darkness and Satan to light and God. By turning in this way, they will be released from the evil power of darkness, which is the authority of Satan, to God. As a result, they will receive forgiveness of sins and a portion among those who are sanctified. All the saved and forgiven ones are saints, and all the saints have a portion (Col. 1:12). According to Colossians, the portion of the saints is simply Christ Himself. Christ has been allotted to us, and we all share a portion in Him. What is our portion? It is neither the heavens nor the earth but Christ. Thus, Christ is the common portion of all the saints. Unbelievers do not have a positive portion. Their portion—the lake of fire—is negative. Our portion—Christ—will consummate in the New Jerusalem. Those who turn from Satan to God will not have a portion individually but corporately and collectively with all the saints. This means that they will have a portion among those who are members of the church life. We cannot have such a portion alone; we can only have it among the saints, among those who are sanctified by faith.

THE FULL GOSPEL

In Acts 26:18 the full gospel is presented. The complete, perfect, whole gospel is found here: to open people's eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, be sanctified by faith, and enjoy the common portion of the saints to have the church life. In this one verse there are seven points: (1) to open people's eyes, (2) to turn them from darkness to light, (3) to turn them from the authority of Satan to God, (4) to help them receive forgiveness of sins, (5) to help them to be sanctified by faith, (6) that they may have a common portion among the saints, and (7) be in the church life. Have you ever heard such a gospel? This is the gospel that the young people must preach to this generation. Do not preach the poor gospel about going to heaven—preach the uplifted gospel revealed in Acts 26:18.

THE NEED FOR PRAYER

It is quite easy to point out all the seven facets of the gospel found in this verse. But now you need to go to the Lord and pray, saying, "Lord, open my eyes. I don't need knowledge, Lord. I need my eyes to be opened. Lord, turn me from anything dark. I don't want to remain in darkness. Lord, turn me from darkness to light." This is spiritual reality. When we are in it, people will realize it when we contact them. You also need to pray, "Lord, turn me from the authority, the dominion, of Satan to Yourself. I must be a person who is absolutely in God. God is my sphere, my realm, my kingdom. I must be in God." If you pray like this, you will become another person. I can assure you that you will be different. If necessary, even fast and pray about these matters, saying, "Lord, I want to have my eyes opened like they have never been opened before. I don't want to be opaque. I want to have eyes like the four living creatures in the book of Revelation." The living creatures have eyes everywhere, without and within. We need to be like this. Then when we contact people, they will realize that we are crystal clear. We are not opaque like others are. Others may be good, ethical, religious, moral, and even scriptural, but they are opaque. When people contact us, they must immediately sense that we are crystal clear. This is not preaching—this is witnessing. We must be this kind of person.

We also need to pray, "Lord, grant me a full and thorough forgiveness of all my sins. I want to have a clearance of sins from the top to the bottom. I would leave nothing that has not been dealt with. Lord, I also want to be fully sanctified. I don't want to be merely a forgiven person but also a sanctified person. Then I will be able to enjoy my portion, the all-inclusive Christ." Day by day we enjoy Christ as our portion, not in an individualistic way but by enjoying Him among the saints. Who and where are the saints? They are those who are sanctified in the church. The saints are the church. When we get into the church, we get among the saints. Oh, how we must pray over these seven matters! Pray desperately to the Lord, saying, "Lord, I want to experience the gospel that You revealed to Paul as mentioned in Acts 26:18. I want to experience this full, complete, perfect, and thorough gospel." This gospel covers

not only God's kingdom but also Satan's kingdom. It includes the rich Christ as our portion and all the saints as the corporate Body, the church of Christ. How we need to experience this gospel!

If we experience the whole gospel, we shall not merely be a preacher—we shall be a witness. I can guarantee you that whenever you pray this way, the Lord Jesus will appear to you, and His appearing will give you a vision. Then you will see certain things. In all these chapters we need to see a vision. I cannot give you anything. We all must touch the throne of grace. Does the Lord still need to knock you down? Are you that stubborn? There is no need to be so stubborn. Rather, we should say, "Lord, I'm here. You don't need to knock me down. Lord, I'm here touching Your throne of grace. Open my eyes and turn me thoroughly from all darkness to light. Turn me from the authority of Satan to God, and grant me a thorough forgiveness of all my sinfulness. O Lord, sanctify me that I may enjoy You as my portion among the saints in the local churches."

PAUL'S RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND THE LORD'S APPEARING

In Galatians 1:11-16 we also see the religious background of the revelation of Christ in Paul's experience. In Galatians 1:13 and 14 Paul says that he persecuted the church of God and advanced in Judaism, being more abundantly a zealot for the traditions of his fathers. In these verses Paul seems to be saying, "You know of my conduct. I was exceedingly zealous in the religion of my fathers, surpassing many of my equals. As far as religion was concerned, I was on top. I even persecuted the church, doing my best to lay it waste and to oppose God's economy. But one day the very God who separated me from my mother's womb was pleased to reveal His Son in me." All we need is this revelation, this vision.

I am concerned for many of you because our situation today is exactly the same as that in the ancient times. We all have been influenced by the background of Christianity. I am fearful that as you do a work among the young people, you may carry it out in a religious way. When you preach, you may preach the traditional gospel of Christianity. In these days we all must see something. We should no longer bring old traditional Christianity into our gospel preaching. Rather, we must cast away the old things and say, "Lord, show me something by appearing to me. Lord, You appeared to Paul, and he saw something, and You told him that You would show him more through Your appearing to him. Lord, appear to me so that in Your appearing I may see something and then tell people of what I have seen." It is not adequate simply to read this chapter. You must pray to the Lord. I can assure you that if you go to Him, He will be open. He is in the heavens, but to Him heaven is the same as earth, for He is everywhere. While Saul of Tarsus was going his way, the Lord Jesus, who was in the heavens, appeared to him. Today the Lord is open to us all. Simply come to Him, saying, "Lord, I have never heard such a gospel before. Lord, open my eyes and turn me from all other things to Yourself." I assure you that if you pray this way, He will appear to you immediately. In His appearing, you will see something. This appearing will make you a witness. Then, as you contact other young people, you will not merely be a preacher but a witness.

You will be a witness telling people of what you have seen in the presence of the living Lord. It pleased God to reveal His Son to us that we might preach Him. Our preaching must be the issue of what we have seen. We do not preach doctrine; we minister and witness of what we have seen in His appearing.

GRACE GIVEN TO LESS THAN THE LEAST

In Ephesians 3:8 Paul says, "To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel." Probably we all hold the concept that the apostle Paul was a specially selected one. But here he says that he was less than the least of all saints. If one who is less than the least can have such a vision, then certainly all of us can have the same thing. Do not say, "I am not an apostle, especially not the apostle Paul. Thus, I could never see as much as he did." Paul said that he was less than all of us. Paul said this because he had opposed God's economy. In Paul's understanding, the one who opposed the most was the smallest and

the least. Since he was the most opposing, he became even less than the least. Peter, John, Andrew, and Matthew were with the Lord Jesus, but Paul was far away. No one else opposed Christ and the church as much as Paul did. Therefore, this one who was the farthest away and the most opposing became the least and smallest one. In Ephesians 3 Paul seemed to be saying, "Dear brothers in Ephesus, don't you realize that I was once far, far away? None of you was as far away from Christ as I was. Because I was the farthest away, I am less than the least of all the saints."

Anyone who is closer to Christ than Paul was is greater than he. Since we are all close to Christ, we are more than qualified to receive the vision and get the revelation. If the one farthest away from Christ could receive the revelation of Jesus Christ, then why could we not receive it also? We should be encouraged by this. Do not be disappointed. I am familiar with the subtlety of the enemy. When I was young, I excused myself, saying that the verses in Ephesians 3 were wonderful, but they were only for the apostle Paul, not for me. Since I did not care for these verses, I missed the grace. But one day I woke up and saw Ephesians 3:8, and I believed it. I jumped up, shouting, "Hallelujah! I am bigger than Paul. To one less than I, grace was given. If he could receive this grace, then why can't I? I'm more qualified than he was." I can testify that since that day the vision has always been with me. If we saw this, we would all be like the apostle Paul. I am not saying that you should presume to claim your apostleship. No, what I mean is that as far as qualification goes, we all are greater than Paul. Thus, we must pray, "Lord, whether I understand it or not, Ephesians 3:8 says that Paul was less than I am. If grace was given to him, then, Lord, You must also give this grace to me. Standing on Ephesians 3:8, I claim the grace."

We need this grace in order to see and enjoy all the riches of Christ. We must go to the Lord, the source of the heavenly vision, and see something. There is no other way except to pray. If you pray, you will be different, and the Lord will have a way. Many eyes will be opened, and many young people will turn from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God and will enjoy forgiveness, sanctification, and the common portion among all the saints in the proper church life. Ephesians 3 indicates that the riches of Christ are for the producing of the church. Therefore, in this portion of the Word we have Christ with all His riches and the church as God's instrument to shame His enemies, the principalities and powers, and through which God will make known the manifold wisdom of His economy. Pray-read all the verses mentioned in this chapter in a serious, weighty way. Say, "Lord, I mean business with You. You have given grace to one who is less than I, and now You must give grace to me. Lord, I mean it. Lord, cause us all to experience the riches of the unlimited Christ and to have the church life that comes out of this enjoyment." If you pray like this, something will happen. The Lord is real, living, present, practical, and available. If you mean business with Him, He will mean business with you. I know what I am talking about.

Do not follow the trend of today's Christianity. Rather, forget about it. We have a new, heavenly trend. In Revelation we have the seven local churches. If you will pray-read all these verses and live in them and witness according to them, the issue will be the local churches. In the local churches we have the practical church life. The enemy, Satan, hates the Spirit because the Spirit is the reality of Christ. Today Christ is realized as the Spirit, but some are fighting against this, saying that it is heresy to teach that Christ is the Spirit. Moreover, Satan also hates the local church and causes some to rise up against it. Most Christians only care for the universal church, but to have only the universal church is to have a vanity fair. While most Christians care for the universal church, they insist on perpetuating the denominations and free groups. Due to this, there is no local church. Instead, there is the vanity fair of the so-called universal church and all the denominations and groups. Where is the church? It can exist only when the saints realize that all Christians in a particular locality must be one. This is the local church.

Are you young people burning today? If you are, then I challenge you to pray with all these verses. If you pray, something will come out, and you will see the vision of the full gospel and become a witness of what you see of the Lord to today's young generation. You all must fellowship about this

chapter and pray about it both individually and corporately until you are transfused by the Lord with such a heavenly vision and are burdened for the Lord's move among today's young generation to bring a number of them into the Lord's testimony. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975–1976*, vol. 3, "Young People's Training," pp. 308-316)

**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD'S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**
(Thursday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two
The Gospel of the Glory of the Blessed God

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 1:11; Acts 7:2, 55; 2 Cor. 4:3-4, 6; John 12:31

- I. Glory is an attribute of God; glory is the expression of God, God expressed in splendor—Exo. 40:34; Acts 7:55; 2 Pet. 1:3; Rev. 21:11.**
- II. The glory of God is intrinsically related to the economy of God—Eph. 1:6, 10, 12, 14; 3:21; 5:27:**
 - A. The Triune God is a God of glory—Acts 7:2; Eph. 1:17; 3:14, 16; 1 Cor. 2:8; 2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 4:14.
 - B. Man was created by God in His image in order that man would express Him in glory—Gen. 1:26; Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6.
 - C. God created us as vessels unto honor, prepared unto glory; we were predestinated in His sovereignty to be His vessels to express what He is in glory—Rom. 9:21, 23.
 - D. Through the gospel of the glory of Christ, God has called us by and into His eternal glory—2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; 1 Thes. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3.
- III. “The god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them”—2 Cor. 4:4:**
 - A. The god of this age is Satan, the deceiver, the ruler of the present age—John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph. 2:2:
 - 1. In addition to his kingdom, Satan, the devil, has his own religion; he is not merely the ruler of this world but also the god of this age—Matt. 12:26; John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4.
 - 2. *The ruler of this world* refers to Satan's rule over people; *the god of this age* refers to the worship that he receives from people today—John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4.
 - 3. Nearly all people today, whether primitive or highly cultured, have been blinded by the god of this age—v. 4.
 - B. If we drop our concepts and turn our heart to the Lord, the veils will be taken away, the god of this age will have no ground in our being, and the gospel of the glory of God will shine in our hearts—vv. 4, 6.
- IV. The glory of God is involved with Christ's incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and coming again:**
 - A. The Word became flesh, and the glory of His divinity was concealed within the shell of His humanity, yet the disciples beheld His glory—John 1:14; Matt. 17:2.
 - B. In His life and work the Lord Jesus did not seek His own glory but the glory of the One who sent Him—John 7:18; 8:50, 54.
 - C. The glory of Christ's divinity was released through the breaking of the shell of His humanity by His death—12:23-24.
 - D. Christ was glorified by His resurrection—Luke 24:26; John 7:39; 17:5; Acts 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:21.
 - E. Christ was glorified in His ascension; the Lord Jesus is a model of a person who has

“crossed the river” and entered into God’s glory, where He is crowned with glory and honor—Heb. 2:9-10; 6:19-20; 9:24.

- F. The Lord as the Son of Man will come in the glory of the Father—Matt. 16:27; Luke 21:27.
- G. In the New Jerusalem for eternity, Christ, the Lamb as the lamp, will shine with God as the light to illuminate the New Jerusalem with the glory of God, which glory is the expression of the divine light—Rev. 21:11, 23; 22:5.

V. Christ is the image of God and the effulgence of His glory; hence, the gospel of Christ is the gospel of His glory that illuminates and shines forth—Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Rev. 6:2:

- A. The gospel of the glory of Christ is the gospel of the glory of the blessed God—1 Tim. 1:11:
 - 1. The expression *the gospel of the glory of the blessed God* refers to God’s economy in 1 Timothy 1:4.
 - 2. The gospel with which the apostle Paul was entrusted is the effulgence of the glory of the blessed God—Heb. 1:3; Rom. 1:25; 9:5.
 - 3. By dispensing God’s life and nature in Christ into God’s chosen people, this gospel shines forth God’s glory, in which God is blessed among His people—2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3, 6, 12, 14.
- B. The gospel is the gospel of the glory of Christ, which illuminates, radiates, and shines in our hearts—2 Cor. 4:4, 6:
 - 1. God’s shining in our hearts results in the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that is, in the enlightenment that causes us to know the glory of God in the gospel of Christ—vv. 4, 6.
 - 2. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 *God, image, Christ, glory, gospel, and illumination* are all in apposition, referring to the same wonderful person; God is the image, the image is Christ, Christ is the glory, the glory is the gospel, and the gospel is the illumination.
 - 3. The illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God is in the face of Jesus Christ; this means that the gospel of the glory of Christ is a lovely person in whose face we can see the glory of God—vv. 4, 6; Matt. 17:2.
 - 4. The glory of God manifested in the face of Jesus Christ is the God of glory expressed through Jesus Christ, who is the effulgence of the glory of God; to know Him is to know the God of glory—Acts 7:2; Heb. 1:3.

VI. God shines in our hearts that we may shine on others so that they may have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ—the knowledge of Christ, who expresses and declares God—Phil. 2:15; John 1:18:

- A. The gospel of the glory of Christ shines into us, and then it shines out from within us—Matt. 5:16.
- B. In our preaching of the gospel, there should be an illumination; we need to shine forth the gospel of the glory of Christ from within us—Phil. 2:15.
- C. In proclaiming the gospel of the glory of Christ, we should not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, who is the content of the gospel—2 Cor. 4:5.
- D. Those who receive the gospel of the glory of Christ through our shining will have Christ as the precious treasure dispensed into them; then, like us, they will be earthen vessels containing this priceless treasure—vv. 4, 6-7.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

The Shining of the Gospel of the Glory of Christ

Their Gospel Veiled in the Perishing Ones

In 2 Corinthians 4:3 Paul goes on to say, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in those who are perishing.” In some the gospel is veiled by old concepts, especially the concept concerning the law (3:14-15). In principle, anything such as philosophy, religion, or cultural traditions that hinders people from apprehending the gospel of Christ is a veil. Hence, the preaching of Christ must unveil them, just as in photography the cover is removed from the lens in order to take a picture.

Paul’s word in 4:3 implies that the gospel preached by the apostles should not be veiled. There is no reason for it to be veiled. But if it is veiled, it is veiled in those who are perishing, that is, in those for whom the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ is out of death unto death.

In verse 4 Paul continues, “In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.” The god of this age is Satan, the deceiver, the ruler of this present age. He dominates today’s world and hunts for man’s worship by blinding his mind and his thoughts. In this verse *blinded* means to veil a person’s understanding. Furthermore, *the thoughts* here denote “the understanding” or “the mind.”

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

What Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:4 is a kind of spiritual photography. We are like cameras with a lens and a shutter. When the shutter is pressed, there is a way for the light with the object, the figure, the image, to shine into the camera and be impressed on the film. The light brings the figure to the film and forms an image on it. However, if the lens of the camera is covered, there is no way for the light to shine into the camera. Sometimes when we preach the gospel to others, they are like a camera with the lens covered. The light cannot shine into them. Praise the Lord that, by His mercy and grace, the satanic cover has been removed from our minds! We have not only an unveiled face but also an uncovered mind.

The unveiled face in 3:18 is the uncovered mind in chapter 4. According to Paul’s concept, these two things are one. To have an unveiled face, therefore, is to have an uncovered mind. It is to be like a camera open to the shining of light.

As light shines into us, it brings in the image of Christ. This illumination shines into our spirit through our mind. Our spirit can be compared to the film. When the shining comes into us through our open mind, it reaches our spirit and brings the figure of Christ, the image of God, into us. In the church we are practicing such a spiritual and heavenly photography.

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

Not Preaching Themselves but Christ Jesus as Lord

Verse 5 says, “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.” *For* explains why the apostles’ gospel, which is the gospel of the glory of Christ, should not have been veiled, for they do not preach, exalt, themselves but Christ Jesus as Lord of all, and they conducted themselves as the believers’ slaves for Jesus’ sake.

Christ Jesus as Lord comprises Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever (Rom. 9:5), the eternal Word incarnated to be a man (John 1:14), Jesus crucified as a man to be our Savior (Acts 4:10-12) and resurrected to be the Son of God (13:33), and Christ exalted to be the Lord (2:36), even the Lord of all men (10:36; Rom. 10:12; John 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:3), who is the image of God, the effulgence of God’s

glory (Heb. 1:3). This is the very content of the gospel. Hence, the gospel is the gospel of the glory of Christ, which illuminates, radiates, and shines in the heart of man. If man's heart is not veiled with anything or blinded by Satan, the god of this age, man can see the illumination of the gospel.

The word *slaves* in 2 Corinthians 4:5 is in contrast with *Lord*. The apostles exalted Christ as Lord but considered themselves merely slaves to serve the believers. They were slaves not only to Christ but to the believers as well.

God Shining in Their Hearts

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

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

Our hearts in 2 Corinthians 4:6 denotes the hearts of the apostles. They represent all the believers of the new covenant.

The illumination here, which refers to the shining of God's light on others out from those whose hearts have been enlightened by God, corresponds with the manifestation in verse 2 and is the same as the shining in Matthew 5:16 and Philippians 2:15. God shines in our hearts that we may shine on others so that they may have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that is, the knowledge of Christ, who expresses and declares God (John 1:18).

The face of Jesus Christ is in comparison with the face of Moses (2 Cor. 3:7). The glory of the gospel in the face of Jesus Christ is much superior to the glory of the law in the face of Moses. The glory of the gospel shines in the face of One through whom grace and reality came, issuing in righteousness and life (vv. 8-9). The glory of the law shone in the face of one through whom the law was given (John 1:17), resulting in condemnation and death (2 Cor. 3:7, 9). The shining of God in our hearts is to illumine us that we may know not the glory on Moses' face but the glory in Christ's face. It is to enlighten us so that we may know not the law of Moses of the old covenant but the gospel of Christ of the new covenant. The glory of God manifested in the face of Jesus Christ is the God of glory expressed through Jesus Christ, and it is Jesus Christ who is the effulgence of the glory of God (Heb. 1:3). To know Him is to know the God of glory.

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

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

Only when we have such direct, personal, and intimate contact with the Lord do we have the inner shining. This is just as true of us as it is of an unbeliever coming to the Lord for the first time. If we would have the Lord's shining once again, we need to have intimate contact with the Lord. Whenever we call on the Lord in a dear, intimate way, we are before His face, and the shining of God is in our heart. In this way the apostles received the inner shining. Then they shined out what they had received. This was their way of conducting themselves for the shining of the glory of the gospel of Christ. The power for this shining is that spoken of in 2 Corinthians 4:7. (*Life-study of 2 Corinthians*, second edition, pp. 77-82)

**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**
(Thursday—Evening Session)

Message Three
The Full Knowledge of the Truth

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 2:4, 7; 3:15; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:15, 25; 3:7; Titus 1:1

I. The Lord’s recovery is the recovery of the light of the truth—1 John 1:5-6:

- A. Truth is the shining of light, the expression of the divine light—John 8:12, 32; 1 John 1:5-6:
 - 1. Truth is the issue of light—John 1:4, 7, 9; 3:21; 8:32.
 - 2. Knowledge without light is doctrine, but knowledge full of light is truth—1 John 1:5-6; 4:6.
- B. The truths as revealed in the Scriptures have been lost, missed, misunderstood, misinterpreted, and wrongly applied throughout the ages—John 17:17:
 - 1. The goal of the Lord’s recovery is to recover the reality, life, livingness, strength, power, and impact of the matters revealed in the Bible.
 - 2. The truth in the Lord’s recovery is the consummation of the truth of the past nineteen centuries—2 Tim. 2:2.
- C. We need to have the truth wrought into us and constituted into our being—1 John 1:8; 2:4; 2 John 1-2; 3 John 3-4:
 - 1. To be constituted with the truth is to have the intrinsic element of the divine revelation wrought into us to become our constituent, our intrinsic being, our organic constitution.
 - 2. There is the desperate need of the living truth to produce the church, to help the church to exist, and to build up the church—1 Tim. 3:15.
 - 3. The solid truth that is constituted into us becomes in us a constant and longterm nourishment—4:6.
 - 4. If the truth is wrought into us and constituted into our being, we will be able to protect the interests of the riches of God’s divinity and the attainments of His consummation—Rev. 21:12a, 17.
 - 5. The Lord’s word, the truth, is in the Bible, but the Bible needs the proper interpretation—2 Tim. 2:15.
 - 6. We need to pay the price to learn the truth—Prov. 23:23.
 - 7. The truth is absolute in itself, and we must be absolute for the truth—2 John 1-2, 4; 3 John 3-4, 7-8.

II. God desires that we “all...come to the full knowledge of the truth”—1 Tim. 2:4:

- A. The Lord’s recovery is to recover the full knowledge of the truth—v. 7; 4:3:
 - 1. The degradation of the church issued from the neglect of the truth.
 - 2. The Lord’s recovery today is the full recovery of the divine truths in the holy Word—John 1:14, 17; 8:32.
- B. Paul was an apostle not only according to the faith but also according to the full knowledge of the truth—1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 1:1:
 - 1. Faith is to receive all God has planned for us, all God has done for us, and all God has given to us—1 Tim. 1:4; 2:7.
 - 2. In the books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul emphasizes the need of the believers to come to

- the full knowledge of the truth—1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7.
3. The full knowledge of the truth is a thorough apprehension of the truth, a full acknowledgement of the reality of all the spiritual and divine things that we have received through faith—1 Tim. 4:3.
- C. All the believers need to come to and be in the full knowledge of the truth—v. 3:
1. Every believer has the capacity to come to the full knowledge of the truth—2:4.
 2. To have the full knowledge of the truth is to fully know the truth; knowing the truth in this way is a safeguard.
- D. All the believers need to know, experience, and be absolute for the subjective truths—John 8:32; 14:6:
1. The truths in the Bible have both an objective aspect and a subjective aspect—Rom. 8:34, 10; Col. 3:1; 1:27.
 2. The objective truths are for the subjective truths, and the subjective truths are for the producing of the church—2 John 1, 4; 3 John 3-4, 7-9a.
 3. The Lord desires to recover the subjective truths in the Holy Scriptures—the subjective aspect of the truth concerning the Triune God and the church—John 1:14; 14:16-20; 1 Tim. 6:15-16; 2 Tim. 4:22; 3:15-16.
 4. The Gospel of John is a book on the subjective truths for the producing of the church—4:14; 6:57; 14:16-17, 20; 3:15-16.
 5. The subjective truths are linked to the Spirit and life and are constituted with Spirit and life—Rom. 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:6:
 - a. The Spirit and life are the substance of the subjective truths; without the Spirit and life we do not have the subjective truths.
 - b. When we live by the Spirit and life, we have the experience of the subjective truths—Rom. 8:2, 4, 14.
 - c. The church life is an issue of our experience of the subjective truths; when we experience the subjective truths, the church is spontaneously produced—vv. 10-11; 12:4-5; 16:1, 4-5; 1 Cor. 1:9, 30; 15:45b; 6:17; 1:2; 12:27.
- E. We need to fully know and be absolute for the highest truth—Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4; 12:4-5:
1. The highest truth is that in Christ God became man to make man God in life, nature, constitution, and expression but not in the Godhead so that the redeeming God and the redeemed man can be united, mingled, and incorporated together to become one entity—John 1:12-14; 14:20; Rev. 21:2, 10-11.
 2. The high peak of the divine revelation—the “diamond” in the “box” of the Bible—is the revelation that in Christ God has become man in order that man might become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead—2 Sam. 7:12-14a; Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4; Eph. 3:17a.
 3. God became man through incarnation, man becomes God through regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification—John 3:5-6; 1:12-13; Rom. 6:19, 22; 12:2; 8:29-30.
 4. It is only by God’s becoming man to make man God that the Body of Christ can be produced and built up; this is the high peak of the divine revelation given to us by God—v. 3; 1:3-4; 8:14-16; 12:4-5.
- F. The standard of the Lord’s recovery depends upon the standard of the truth we put out; the truths will be the measure and the standard—John 18:37.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

ADVANCING IN THE DEEPER AND HIGHER TRUTHS

The brothers who are going out as the gospel team in these days have set up a good example.

These brothers are going out, not to preach a shallow gospel but rather to preach the higher gospel, even to preach the Triune God to people. The entire situation of Christians has remained in shallowness for centuries. To continue in that is easy, but for us to go out to preach the gospel with the deeper truths is somewhat of an uphill battle. The shallow things could never stir up people's attention. Especially in such a leading country as this, people are tired of listening to the old shallow things. Due to this, many preachers tried their best to create stories and illustrations to stir up people's interest. Actually, not much reality of the bequests of the New Testament is preached as the glad tidings. But now, the brothers going out have preached the riches of the bequests of the New Testament. It is no wonder that so many love to hear this. Thank the Lord for this.

What I desire to see is not just some brothers going out as a team to preach these deeper things but that all the elders would rise up to learn the deeper things and to teach the deeper things. I assure you, you will see the result. You will labor less and reap more. When you sow the rich seed, your harvest surely will be rich. If you sow the poor seed, regardless of how much you labor, the harvest eventually will not be that rich because what you sow is poor. Do not take the easy way or go the shortcut way. It is wise to take the proper way. Today in the Lord's recovery the proper way is to care for these deeper truths.

The deeper truths in 1 Corinthians do not include Christ as our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. These items are all mentioned in chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians (v. 30). In chapter 2 Paul speaks of "the depths of God" (v. 10). Surely in the following chapters there are things deeper than righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. For instance, 6:17 tells us that we can be joined to the Lord as one spirit. How deep this is! Years ago I read quite a few books on Christ being our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. Probably even in the first year after being born again, I read books of this kind, but I never read a book telling people that they could be one spirit with the Lord. Then in chapter 7 Paul says, "I give my opinion" (v. 25). It seems that this is very shallow, yet in this chapter a deeper truth is conveyed. Even in giving his opinion, eventually in the last verse of the chapter, he says, "I think that I also have the Spirit of God" (v. 40). Could you explain the truth that is here? How could giving one's opinion be having the Spirit of God? This is a deeper truth. Even the headship taught in chapter 11 is much deeper than righteousness. Could you explain how God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman (v. 3)? This is also a deeper truth.

This book of deeper truths also contains a lot of shallow things, such as lawsuits, fornication, and idol worship. I read books concerning these things, but very few books have come out that tell us all these deeper things. In chapter 10 is the table of the Lord, and in chapter 11 is the Lord's supper. There is a difference between these two things. How could you have the fellowship of the blood of Christ by taking the cup of wine? How could you have the very fellowship with all the saints by partaking of the bread? This is much deeper than Christ being our righteousness. Then, going on further, you have the deeper truth concerning Christ becoming a life-giving Spirit (15:45). Who understands this? Who today is teaching that we can live in resurrection?

Furthermore, because the Christians lack a view of the deeper truths, they interpreted chapters 12 and 14 in a very shallow way. If you have the view of the deeper truths, you can see that what Paul is talking about in these two chapters is not that shallow. Could you tell me what the difference is between the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge (12:8)? These are the first two aspects of the manifestation of the Spirit. The two highest aspects of the manifestation of the Spirit are the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. The third one is faith, the fourth is healing, the fifth is miracles or works of power, the next is the discernment of spirits, and the last are tongues and their interpretation. The first two are the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge, and the last two are tongues and interpretation of tongues (vv. 8-10). Could you explain why Paul puts tongues and interpretation of tongues as the last two items and why he exalts the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge to be on the top? To speak in tongues is a shallow thing, but to give a word of wisdom or a word of

knowledge is much deeper. Of course, this knowledge is not the knowledge of science or of politics but the knowledge of God's New Testament economy. To speak the word of wisdom, you need a lot of experience of the all-inclusive Christ. This is why we may be able to speak in tongues and practice so-called healings, but we cannot speak the word of wisdom or the word of knowledge, because this is much higher and much deeper. It is easy to be an elementary student in kindergarten, but to be one in graduate school is not that easy. To speak the word of wisdom and to speak the word of knowledge is like being in graduate school.

The word of wisdom is the word concerning Christ as the deeper things of God predestined by God for our portion (1:24, 30; 2:6-10). The word of knowledge is the word that imparts a general knowledge of things concerning God and the Lord (8:1-7). The word of wisdom is mainly of our spirit through revelation; the word of knowledge is mainly of our understanding through teaching. The former is deeper than the latter. However, both of them, not the speaking in tongues nor any other miraculous gift, are listed as the first and topmost aspects of the manifestation of the Spirit, because both are the most profitable ministries or services for the edification of the saints and the building up of the church to carry out God's operation.

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul says, "Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation" (v. 26). In chapters 12 and 14 Paul was trying his best to uplift the Corinthians from their low estate to a higher one. The Corinthians were too low and too shallow (3:2-3). In these days, in the Lord's recovery, we should try to leave our kindergarten state. Why would we not go further and higher? We surely need to advance.

The problem with the Corinthians was the same as that with the Hebrews. In Hebrews, as I mentioned already, Paul says clearly that we need to advance, to leave the word of the beginning of Christ (6:1). According to the entire book of Hebrews, the word of the beginning of Christ concerns Christ's earthly ministry. Although we may consider His conception or His incarnation so deep, Paul says that is something at the beginning. You have to go higher from the earth to the heavens, from the good word of God to the word of righteousness, from the word as milk to the word as solid food. Paul says clearly that milk is for infants and that solid food is for the mature ones (5:13-14). Whether we are the infants or the mature ones depends upon what kind of food we take. If you still take milk, you are just an infant. Are we still in that stage, not able to take any solid food? We should have left that stage already.

Therefore, we must advance. Learn of the brothers on the gospel team to forsake the shallow gospel, and learn to preach the high gospel. When I was giving messages on the river crossers in the Hebrews training, I said that today there is a need for a group of people to go out to preach these things recorded in Hebrews as the high gospel (*Life-study of Hebrews*, msg. 14). Paul says that he was commissioned to announce the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel to the Gentiles (Eph. 3:8). He did not preach the shallow things concerning heaven and hell. He preached the unsearchable riches of Christ not only as truths to the believers but as the gospel to the Gentiles.

"LET US GO ON"

Brothers, this is my burden—let us go on. W. H. Griffith Thomas published a book on Hebrews with the title *Let Us Go On*, and Andrew Murray published a book on Hebrews entitled *The Holy of Holies*. My burden is just to fellowship with you and beg you to go on, not just from the outer court to the Holy Place but even from the Holy Place to the Holy of Holies. Let us go on. We need to advance. In our ordinary, regular meetings all these deeper things should be taught, not the shallow things.

Since 1962 some have mostly been remaining for twenty-three years in the same things. Merely to be teaching people the things around the altar, the cross of Christ, is still too shallow. We need to go on to the deeper truths of our very God who is triune, to get into His foremost and highest attribute, that is, His Divine Trinity. His Divine Trinity is much higher than His power, His love, or even His life. We need to learn of His trinity, the Godhead, how the Father is embodied in the Son, how the Son is realized as the Spirit, and how such a Spirit is the realization of the Son and also the ultimate

consummation of the processed Triune God. We need to learn these things, not only for our knowledge but also for our enjoyment. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14). If you would enjoy this benediction, surely you must know the Divine Trinity, the Godhead.

Christians today are shallow because they would not pay the price to labor adequately. These riches are all here in the Bible, just like gold in a mine, but nearly no one would labor to dig them out. Just to buy a few pieces of gold is not our job. Our job is to dig the gold mine. We are to do the mining work. This is the Lord’s recovery. I hope, brothers, that in your localities you would not repeat the old things. We should learn to go on, to learn the things in the heavenlies, and to learn to speak these higher and deeper things. The book of Revelation, for example, has never been opened up to the Lord’s children as it is today. This is now an absolutely transparent book to us. All the points have been covered in the Life-study messages and the footnotes of the Recovery Version. If you want to know them, you can go to the printed pages, and you will get them. This will require your time. To dig out the gold is not that easy. I would encourage all of us to go on in this way. Otherwise, the Lord would not have much of a way to go on; we will delay Him, retain Him, hold Him back. Some of us even repeat the things we taught twenty-three years ago. What we are teaching holds people back. In education if you hold even a problem student in the same grade for a couple of years, he will be spoiled. You even have to encourage the problem student to go to the next grade. We should go further. Let us go on. There is real hope for us to go on in His recovery. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1985, vol. 3, “Elders’ Training, Book 5: Fellowship concerning the Lord’s Up-to-date Move,”* pp. 370-375)

**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD'S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**
(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message Four
A Proper Prayer Life for a Proper Church Life

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 2:1-4, 8; Exo. 28:29-30; 31:1-3; Col. 4:2

I. “I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men; on behalf of kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of our Savior God”—1 Tim. 2:1-3:

- A. After speaking of God's economy and after charging Timothy to war the good warfare for God's economy (1:3-4, 18), Paul indicates that a prayer ministry is the prerequisite for the administrating and shepherding of a local church (2:1-3, 8).
- B. A prerequisite for having a proper church life in the Lord's recovery today is to have a prayer life; a proper church is a praying church; all in the Lord's recovery must be prayerful and stand against the sin of prayerlessness—1 Sam. 12:23.
- C. The elders in the church must take up Paul's charge to “first of all” pray (1 Tim. 2:1); those who take the lead in the churches must have a prayer life; if we exercise ourselves to have a prayer life, the church will be living and uplifted.
- D. Instead of talking so much and even instead of working so much, we should pray more; only after we have prayed for a matter thoroughly should we make a decision concerning it, not by ourselves independently, but in oneness with the Lord and according to His leading.
- E. The Greek word for *intercessions* denotes an approaching of God in a personal and confiding manner, that is, an intervening, an interfering, before God in others' affairs for their benefit.
- F. “Recently, my activity was limited for a time so that I could rest and care for my health. When I heard about certain needs, I prayed for them. Perhaps the Lord limited me that He might impress me with the fact that prayer is more important than work. May we all learn the lesson that the way to have a good church life is to pray. This is crucial. If our talking is turned into praying, the church in our locality will be transformed”—*Life-study of I Timothy*, second edition, p. 28.
- G. We should pray on behalf of all men because God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth; our prayer is required for the carrying out of God's desire—1 Tim. 2:4.
- H. “I desire therefore that men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and reasoning”—v. 8:
 - 1. Hands symbolize our doings; hence, holy hands signify a holy living, a living that is pious and that belongs to God; such a holy life strengthens our prayer life.
 - 2. If our hands are not holy, our living is not holy and is not for God; we then have no supporting strength to pray, no holy hands to lift up in prayer.
 - 3. Wrath and reasoning kill our prayer; wrath is of our emotion, and reasoning is of our mind.
 - 4. To have a prayer life and pray unceasingly, our emotion and mind must be regulated to be in a normal condition, under the control of the Spirit in our spirit.

II. In order to be infused with the instruction of God to care for the church, the elders must have much and thorough prayer so that they can enter into the reality of “reading the saints,” just as the high priest in the Old Testament read the stones on the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim in the presence of God—Exo. 28:29-30:

- A. After the Urim and the Thummim were put into the breastplate, it became not only a memorial but also a breastplate of judgment—v. 30:
 - 1. *Urim* means “lights,” “illuminators”—v. 30:
 - a. The Urim was an illuminator inserted into the breastplate under the twelve stones; it had the capacity to contain oil for burning, and the fire used to burn the oil came from the altar.
 - b. The Urim had twelve illuminators, one to illuminate each of the twelve transparent precious stones on the breastplate so that they could shine with light (David Baron).
 - c. The Urim typifies Christ as lights, illuminators (John 8:12; Luke 1:78-79), shining through the Spirit (the oil) and the cross (the fire from the altar).
 - 2. *Thummim* means “perfecters,” “completers”—Exo. 28:30:
 - a. The names on the twelve stones on the breastplate contained only eighteen of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet; the remaining four letters were put on the Thummim, making it the perfecter and completer (David Baron).
 - b. By the shining of the Urim on the individual precious stones and by the darkening of the stones, the full alphabet of twenty-two letters could be used to spell out words and sentences.
 - c. The Thummim typifies Christ as the perfecter and completer (Heb. 12:2); thus, He is the spiritual alphabet for both inscribing and completing (cf. Rev. 22:13a).
 - d. Together, the Urim and the Thummim typify Christ as God’s witness, God’s testimony (3:14), as the means for God to speak to His people (Heb. 1:2).
 - e. In the New Testament, the reality of the Urim and the Thummim is the mingled spirit—the unveiling Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, indwelling our receiving spirit, our regenerated human spirit—Rom. 8:4, 14, 16; Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10.
- B. According to the Old Testament, the Urim and the Thummim added to the breastplate were a means for God to speak to His people to indicate to them His leading; thus, we may say that the breastplate of judgment is a “breastplate of leading”—Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; Josh. 7:16-21; 1 Sam. 23:6, 9-12; 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65.
- C. In spiritual experience, in order to know God’s leading we must judge whatever is of the flesh, the self, the old man, and the world; the fact that God’s speaking as His leading was through the breastplate signifies that God makes His leading known to His people through the church.
- D. The breastplate of judgment for God’s leading was like a heavenly, divine, and spiritual typewriter, and His way of speaking through the breastplate with the Urim and the Thummim is the opposite of what we would expect:
 - 1. God speaks not through the stones that are shining but through the stones that become dark; this means that God speaks through negative situations; because the Lord’s speaking by the breastplate of judgment is through negative situations, that speaking is a judgment.
 - 2. Normally the twelve stones in the breastplate were under the shining of the Urim; suddenly a piece inscribed with a certain name would become dark; this darkening of a

particular stone was God's instant speaking:

- a. Paul's Epistles and the seven epistles of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 2—3) were all written according to this principle; they were written according to the negative situation of the churches, not according to the positive things found in the churches.
 - b. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians according to his reading of the negative situation at Corinth, but although his writing was based on the negative things, in this Epistle he ministered positive things—the riches of Christ—to the church—cf. 1:9.
 - c. The saints in Corinth became the letters used by Paul in the spiritual typesetting of his Epistle; in the same way, in a local church the leading ones need to seek the Lord's guidance by reading the actual situation and condition of the saints.
 - d. The problem among Christians today is that because there is so much darkness, there is no way for God to expose the darkness; in order for the darkness to be made known, there must first be the shining of the light; God speaks through things that become negative in the midst of the shining of the light—cf. Eph. 5:8-9.
 - e. By reading the negative situations in this way, we come to know God's leading, His judgment; then in our locality we will know what God wants us to do, and we should then follow His leading.
- E. The breastplate is the building up of the Body life and the means for us to know God's will concerning His people; by much and thorough prayer, we can experience the reality of the breastplate; then we will receive the Lord's judgment of what we have to do or what we must not do; we will know the Lord's way, and the whole church will go on according to the judgment given by the Lord.
- F. The elders need not only the Bible and the Holy Spirit but also the brothers and sisters as the alphabet; this means that they need to bear the brothers and sisters before God and read the condition of every brother and sister before God; in this way the elders' meeting will become the watchtower of the church, and the elders will know what God wants them to do and what God's present will is in the church life.

III. The leading ones, those who minister the word in the church, should take the lead to have a prayer life; they need to “persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving”—Col. 4:2; Acts 6:4:

- A. Whether the church is living and fresh and enriched depends on this one thing—that we are being filled continuously with the Spirit; in order to be filled continuously with the Spirit, we need to be those who are willing, empty, and praying—Phil. 2:13; Matt. 5:3, 8; Luke 1:53; Eph. 5:18.
- B. The wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill for the noble work of building up the church must be God Himself as the Spirit to us; only the Spirit of God can build His own dwelling place through us—Exo. 31:1-3; Zech. 4:6.
- C. Because the elders are short of prayer, they are short of the Spirit; it is when we are fully condemned in our prayer under the shining of the light of the Lord's indwelling presence that we receive wisdom and the real understanding of the Lord concerning the situation, concerning people, and concerning the church.
- D. If all the saints in all the churches persevere in prayer, the recovery will be greatly enriched and uplifted; furthermore, the saints will enjoy the Lord, His presence, and His instant and constant anointing; all day long they will enjoy the smile of the Lord's face, and the living person of Christ will become their experience and enjoyment.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT THROUGH PRAYER

“Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying, See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom and with understanding and with knowledge and with all kinds of workmanship, to fashion skillful designs, to work in gold and in silver and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for setting and in the carving of wood, to work in all kinds of workmanship. And now, I Myself have appointed with him Oholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and in the heart of all who are wise in heart I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded you” (Exo. 31:1-6).

These verses, which we covered in a recent life-study on Exodus, have a good point for us to consider. I would especially like to talk about verse 3.

THE NEED TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The elders or the leading ones in the church responsibility are those most in need of the constant infilling of the Spirit of God. No need to say to build the New Testament church, even to build the Old Testament tabernacle, the record in Exodus stresses strongly the infilling of the Spirit of God. Yes, there is a difference between the New and the Old Testaments, yet in the reality of God’s economy there is no difference. What we need today, they needed in ancient times.

THE SPIRIT—GOD REACHING US

Actually, the tabernacle was designed by God Himself. Yet—here is a basic principle—the tabernacle was not built by Him directly. It was built by His people who were filled with Him, that is, with His Spirit.

The Spirit of God is God Himself. Do not think of God as in the heavens and sending His Spirit down to earth to enter into the designers to do the work. It was not that way. Whenever God reached man, He was the Spirit. Even today what is the Spirit of God? It is God reaching us. When He reaches us, the very reaching God is the Spirit.

THE BURDEN

What I would like to share with you brothers is this: To take the lead in the church life requires the infilling of God Himself. We need the infilling of the Triune God. As you know, the Spirit today is much, much richer than the Spirit of God in Old Testament times; but the principle is the same.

A WILLING HEART

You may say that in the case of Bezalel and Oholiab, God initiated the matter of filling them with Himself. It may be so, but I have a doubt. I believe these two dear ones had a seeking heart. When they learned that God was going to have a dwelling place built on this earth, I believe that they began to have a heart to seek for wisdom to design what would be needed. No doubt Moses saw every part while he was on the mountain; the Bible says that God showed him the pattern (Exo. 25:40; Heb. 8:5). He saw the things, and he took down a record of the measurements. Even Moses himself, strange to say, did not have the wisdom to design what he had seen, what he had been charged with. It was Bezalel and Oholiab who received the wisdom to make the designs. I think their designs must have been checked by Moses. He must have said, “Yes, that’s it! That’s the same as I saw on the mount.”

The two of them, I believe, began to have a heart of willingness to work for God’s dwelling place and therefore sought the wisdom to design what was needed. In principle, it is the same today in the church life. If you do not have a heart to seek after the Lord’s mind, to pick up the burden for the church life, God has no way to initiate anything with you. God’s initiation begins with your willingness.

This is why 1 Timothy 3:1 says, “If anyone aspires to the overseership, he desires a good work.” This aspiring is no doubt the initiation God has worked out within you.

ABANDONING YOUR NATURAL CAPABILITY

But suppose you are Bezalel: you have the willingness to do something for God's building, but you must realize that your natural capability has to be altogether abandoned. Your willingness is worthwhile, but your ability is worthless. God treasures your willingness, which He initiated, but your capability—what you can do, what you know—in God's estimation means nothing. If you will reject your ability, this abandonment will give God the ground to come in and fill you. First you need the willingness; then God needs your openness.

According to my observation, some of the elders by the Lord's mercy have had the willingness. But in the eldership they brought in their capability, their knowledge, their education, and their strength. This damages the entire job. On the one hand, willingness is really valuable; but on the other hand, the natural capability must be discounted, even entirely abandoned.

THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

When Moses was young, he had the willingness to be used by God to do something for his people, who were under the tyranny of Pharaoh. Moses' willingness was initiated by God, perhaps while he was still a teenager. But when he grew up, he went out and by his own hand killed an Egyptian. He acted from his own ability. God could not use him. Why? He had the willingness, but he did not have the openness. God, as we all know, spent forty years to empty or unload him, until he was fully deprived by God and was absolutely empty. He became just a shepherd in the wilderness, thinking he did not know anything and could not do anything. But God came in. God came in to give the unique vision. As you know, he saw a bush burning but not consumed. That bush was Moses. The vision meant that God would use him but that He would not burn the fire with Moses' fuel. Whatever you have, God will not use.

EMPTYING YOURSELF

God will use only you, not what you have or can do. Therefore, you must empty yourself. To empty yourself means to have an absolute openness to God. The real openness to God means emptiness. You may say that you are open, but you are filled. A jar may be open, but it may be filled with sand. You may say that you are open to the Lord. You may be open, but you are not empty. There has never been an unloading. What part of you needs to be unloaded? Your capability, your knowledge, your wisdom, your education. It is only when you are empty that God can come in to fill you. When God fills you, it is His Spirit who fills you.

We in the leadership of the church life do have the willingness. There is no problem with this point. The problem is that we are not emptied and therefore cannot be filled with the Triune God as the filling Spirit today. The problem is our education, our knowledge, our experience. Some of you have been in the leadership for over fifteen years; you have had many experiences. But even real experiences of the church life have to be emptied out. Every day, all the time, you and I in the leadership of the churches need to be freshly filled with the Triune God.

Do you believe that the Spirit of God filled Bezalel and Oholiab just once for all? I believe that all the time, every minute, they were being filled. In other words, they were really one with God. God cannot build His dwelling place by Himself; He can do it only through willing and empty vessels. Whether the church is living and fresh and enriched depends on this one thing: that we are being filled continuously with the Triune God. For this, dear brothers, we need first the willingness and second the emptiness.

PRAYING CONTINUOUSLY

The third thing that we need is the instant, constant prayer. We must pray. If we are able to do things, we do not need to pray much. We have confidence, we have knowledge, we have a way, we have ability, we have strength: we are certain we can handle the situation. We need to empty ourselves, knowing that whatever we can do is not counted; it is not only rejected but even condemned by God. Whatever the old man can do is condemned by God. We have to realize this. Then we will see our need of God and will pray constantly and instantly.

SETTING AN EXAMPLE

Elders in the church are not a special class; they do not have a special rank. They are normal believers. They are not leaders, but they take the lead. They are patterns of all believers. In organized Christianity, in both Catholicism and Protestantism, bishops are considered to be of extraordinary rank; then elders and deacons are considered to be of lower rank. Such ranking is wrong. But this kind of human thought may have invaded us already; we may have in our understanding the thought that we have the rank of elders, that we are a special class. No! Elders are just normal believers; they simply set a pattern for the rest of the believers to follow.

Thus, when the Bible tells us that all believers should pray unceasingly (1 Thes. 5:17), the elders should set an example. All that the New Testament charges the believers to do, the elders should do. Not all believers can fulfill all the charges, but the elders should. Since you are taking the lead, you should carry out all that is commanded by God; all believers may not be able to do this, but you should.

WILLING, EMPTY, PRAYING

Do not think that your teaching in itself will help others. Nor can I trust in my teaching to help you. If you are short of willingness, short of emptiness, short of prayer, I cannot help you. Nor can you be of help to others. We all need these three things. We should pray, "Lord, by Your mercy I am willing. In Your grace I am empty. I am open to You with utter emptiness. I do not want to hold on to anything of my past experiences. I want to be fresh." All the time, unceasingly, pray to be filled with Him. Then you will experience wisdom, understanding, and knowledge coming to you like a tide. You will be under the flooding of divine wisdom, divine understanding, and divine knowledge. You will know how to contact the saints with the divine nature, how to supply them with Christ, how to build them up with the redemption of Christ and with God's judgment. You will also have an inner ability to build up the saints in transformation and in the church life; not just to build them in character but to build them up as a dwelling place for God.

If talks like this are to be of help, they only avail when you are willing and empty and praying. If you are short of this constant prayer, I assure you that you will be very poor in the leadership. To be rich in the leadership, we need a willingness, an emptiness, and continuous prayer.

MANY THINGS TO BE DROPPED

We have brought many things into the leadership that we need to get rid of. The longer we have been in the leadership, the more of these things we unconsciously have. Yet we do not realize that those things need to be condemned. If, however, we are willing to bear responsibility for the building of God's dwelling place, and if we open to the Lord with complete emptiness and pray continuously, God will surely fill us up. Then we will discover all these things, and we will be enabled to let them go. We need a further, wider, deeper evacuation.

One of these things, which you have picked up through the years and which you must drop, is the way you are related to others. Your fellowship with the saints is not even. You have your choice, your preference: you like to fellowship with this one, and you avoid having fellowship with that one. Thus, your fellowship is biased, unhealthy, not genuine. Your personal taste, your personal preference, is hidden there. That is honey, which in typology was not to be added to the meal offering (Lev. 2:11). Sooner or later it will corrupt your leadership or the church life. What is needed is salt (v. 13).

In a doctrinal way it is easy to understand these things, but in practice it is only as you are open with complete emptiness to the Lord and praying continuously, that you will recognize how much honey you have brought in. You must put an end to that. Then you will know how much salt you need to add, and you will be able by exercising in a strong way to add the right amount of salt. Then your leadership will be pure, or purified, and there will be no corruption in it. Teaching cannot help much with this; only the very God who fills you can do this work.

I believe we have all had some experience of this. Whenever we have been emptied and are in a prayerful spirit, if we stand up in the church meeting, we are aware, and all the other saints are also

aware, that we are living, fresh, and rich. Other times we may stand up and share a lot, but the congregation has the feeling that it is from the old man, that it is empty. When we contact others, we may speak the same word, talk about the same point, but sometimes there is a result, and other times it is lifeless. It is when we are willing and empty and continuously praying that we have the wisdom to work in the divine nature and to minister to the needy ones the very Christ they need, not just to minister in a general way.

FELLOWSHIP OR DISCUSSION?

When the elders come together, they should pray, not just discuss things. You like to call it fellowship, but maybe it is only a discussion. The elders need to pray: to pray their mind, their different understandings, into the oneness. Rightly speaking, you should pray yourselves into the spirit. When you are praying in the spirit, you have one mind; you are in oneness. Whenever you meet together, you should pray yourselves into the spirit.

Even in shepherding, in visiting either the unsaved or the saints, we should be constantly in prayer. We have all experienced that if we pray continuously, when we go, we do not speak what we thought we would. We find ourselves saying things we had no intention to say; what we say is new. By being in continuous prayer, our spirit is released, and we will find that we speak from our spirit.

SHORT OF PRAYER—SHORT OF THE SPIRIT

The crucial lack is this continuous prayer on the part of all the elders, whatever the locality. You are short of prayer, so you are short of the Spirit. It is when you are fully condemned in your prayer that you receive wisdom and the real understanding of the Lord concerning the situation, concerning people, and concerning the church.

The Christian life is a life of prayer. Elders are not extraordinary Christians. To be a proper elder is to be a normal Christian. Many Christians are abnormal. Thus, the elders should set up a normal pattern, giving the saints a normal lead. In this way the church can be built up. Try to practice this, looking to the Lord for His mercy and grace. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1983, vol. 1, "Practical Talks to the Elders," pp. 71-77*)

**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**
(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

**How to Conduct Ourselves in the House of God—
Exercising Ourselves unto Godliness**

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:15a, 16a; 4:7b-8; 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:7; 4:22; Titus 1:1

- I. “I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God”—1 Tim. 3:15a:**
- A. What Paul ministered to Timothy was entirely concerning how to conduct himself in the church—1:3-5, 18-19.
 - B. The way to conduct ourselves in the church is by becoming one who loves the Word of God—3:15a; cf. John 6:63, 68.
 - C. Respecting the headship of Christ and bearing the truth are two governing principles that we must follow in order to know how to conduct ourselves in the church life—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15.
 - D. In order to properly conduct ourselves in the house of God, the church, we need to take care of the healthy teaching—2 Tim. 4:3-4.
 - E. We must live and act in our spirit so that in the church God can be manifested as the living God—John 4:23-24; 1 Cor. 6:17; 1 Tim. 3:15-16.
- II. “Confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness”—v. 16a:**
- A. The important word *godliness* is used nine times in 1 and 2 Timothy—1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3, 5-6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5.
 - B. Godliness is a mystery because it is real and living yet invisible—1 Tim. 3:16a; 6:11.
 - C. The full knowledge of the truth is according to godliness—Titus 1:1.
 - D. The truth, the reality, of God’s eternal economy is according to godliness, which is God manifested in man—v. 1; 1 Tim. 3:16a.
 - E. Godliness is godlikeness, being like God, expressing God—Col. 1:15; 3:10.
 - F. Godliness is not merely an outward matter; the word *manifested* in 1 Timothy 3:16 indicates that godliness is an inward life with an outward expression.
 - G. As believers in Christ, we should pursue godliness; to pursue godliness is to live a daily life that manifests God—6:11.
 - H. In order for God to be manifested in the flesh, godliness needs to be expressed in our whole living—1 John 3:2; 2:28.
 - I. God’s economy is God coming into us, and godliness is God going out of us—1 Tim. 1:4; 3:16a:
 - 1. The Christian life is simply God coming in and God going out—John 4:14; 7:29.
 - 2. Because godliness is the expression of God, the Christian life should be a life that expresses God and bears God’s likeness in all things—Heb. 1:3; 2 Cor. 3:18.
 - 3. First Timothy 2:2 says that we need to lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness; even in small things, we need to lead a life in all godliness, everywhere and in everything.
 - 4. Our church life, our daily life, and our family life are simply God coming in and God going out all day—2 Cor. 13:14; 3:18.
 - J. The church of the living God is the ultimate mystery of godliness because the proper church

life is the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh—1 Tim. 3:15-16; Col. 1:15.

III. “Exercise yourself unto godliness”—1 Tim. 4:7b:

- A. The way to conduct ourselves in the church life is to exercise ourselves unto godliness—3:15a; 4:7b; 2:2.
- B. We all have to exercise our spirit because the mystery of God is with our spirit—Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 2 Tim. 4:22.
- C. Our Christian life is a life of godliness, which comes out of God’s dispensing of Himself into us; this depends upon our spirit being fully exercised—2 Cor. 13:14; 2 Tim. 4:22; Philem. 25.
- D. We need to build up the habit of exercising our spirit—1 Tim. 4:7b; 1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 2:22:
 - 1. A godly life issuing from God’s dispensing depends upon the exercise of our spirit—1 Tim. 4:7b; John 4:23-24.
 - 2. If we do not exercise our spirit strongly to cooperate with the Lord, God cannot dispense Himself into us—2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4, 9.
- E. The word *exercise* implies forcing—1 Tim. 4:7b:
 - 1. To exercise is always a forced matter.
 - 2. Whenever we are in a hard situation, we have to force ourselves to exercise our spirit—cf. Rom. 8:28.
 - 3. If we Christians want to be strong and grow in the Lord, we must force ourselves to use our spirit—2 Tim. 4:22; Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10; Rom. 8:16.
- F. To exercise our spirit is to set our mind on the spirit—v. 6; Mal. 2:15-16:
 - 1. When we set our mind on the spirit, we have the inner sense of life and peace, the sense of strength, satisfaction, rest, release, liveliness, watering, brightness, and comfort.
 - 2. When we set our mind on the flesh, we have the inner sense of death, the sense of weakness, emptiness, uneasiness, restlessness, depression, dryness, darkness, and pain.
 - 3. Our Christian life is not according to the standard of right and wrong but according to the spirit, and we know the spirit by the inner sense of life and peace—Rom. 8:6, 16; 9:1; 2 Cor. 13:14.
- G. To exercise our spirit is to discern our spirit from our soul—Heb. 4:12:
 - 1. We should always be on the alert to discern and deny anything that is not of the spirit but of the soul, the self—Matt. 16:25; cf. Luke 9:25.
 - 2. All the time we need to keep our spirit separate from our soul—Heb. 4:12; 1 Thes. 5:23.
 - 3. The enemy’s strategy is always to mix our spirit with our soul.
 - 4. Whatever we are, whatever we have, and whatever we do must be in the spirit; everything that God is to us is in our spirit—2 Tim. 4:22.
- H. In order to prove that the exercise unto godliness is the exercise of the spirit, we need to go to 2 Timothy, where Paul says that God has given us a spirit that is strong, loving, and sober; such a spirit is with a strong will, a loving emotion, and a sober mind—1:7:
 - 1. The word *spirit* in 2 Timothy 1:7 denotes our human spirit, regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit—John 3:6; Rom. 8:16.
 - 2. To fan into flame the gift of God is related to our regenerated spirit—2 Tim. 1:6.
 - 3. *Of power* refers to our will, *of love* to our emotion, and *of sobermindedness* to our mind—v. 7.
- I. To exercise ourselves unto godliness is to exercise our spirit to live Christ in our daily life for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 4:7b; Eph. 2:20-22; 4:12, 16; 1 Cor. 14:4, 12.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE EXERCISE OF OUR SPIRIT

Now that we have seen something concerning the human spirit, we need to go on to see the exercise of our spirit.

OUR SPIRIT BEING THE LAMP OF THE LORD, SEARCHING ALL OUR INWARD PARTS

Proverbs 20:27 says that our spirit is the lamp of the Lord, searching all our inward parts. This shows that within man there is something of God, and this is man's spirit to be God's lamp. Of course, in the lamp is the light, so here the implication is very meaningful. Within man there is such a lamp, but the lamp needs the light, and the light is God. What man has is just an empty lamp. The lamp needs the light to shine. This shows that God as the light has something in man as His vessel to contain Him and to express Him, just as the lamp contains the light and expresses it.

The second point we have to stress is that this lamp of God, which is our spirit, searches all our inward parts. No doubt, this is altogether the inward searching, not the outward rebuking or instruction. We should help the saints realize how significant the human spirit is. Proverbs 20:27 can be used to impress the saints so that they can see how man's spirit is so close to God and is something of God within man. This is a strong point. The human spirit is God's vessel to contain God and to express God. Every lamp serves these two purposes. The lamp serves to contain the light and to express it. Then it works. When it works, it enlightens, it shines, and it searches.

OUR SPIRIT BEING THE HIDDEN MAN OF THE HEART

First Peter 3:4 reveals that our spirit is the hidden man of our heart. The hidden man is a meek and quiet spirit. When our spirit is meek and quiet, it is hidden. First Peter 3:4 indicates that every part of our being may be considered as a man. Our physical body is our outward man, our soul is our expressed, manifested man, and our spirit is our hidden man.

According to 1 Peter 3, the most beautiful part of our being, the prettiest adornment, in the sight of God is a meek and quiet spirit. This is the hidden man of the heart. This point shows that our spirit is the deepest part of our being. So if we are going to be pretty in the eyes of God, we have to be pretty from the depths of our being. We should not be pretty just outwardly, in a physical way. We have to be pretty inwardly, in the hidden man. This man is hidden from the eyes of man, but it is not hidden from the eyes of God, because such a hidden man, that is, a meek and quiet spirit, is pretty in the eyes of God.

We have to point out that 1 Peter 3:4, on the one hand, says something about the hidden man but, on the other hand, refers to it as being in the sight of God. This means that this meek and quiet spirit is hidden in our heart from human eyes, but it is not hidden in the sight of God. God sees it. So this is the real beauty that a godly person should have.

OUR REGENERATED SPIRIT BEING OUR INNER MAN

We have to help the saints realize that our human spirit is the lamp of God, serving God with a purpose. Furthermore, this spirit is a beautiful, hidden man in the sight of God. Also, when our spirit is regenerated, it becomes the inner man (Eph. 3:16). The sense of the word *inner* is stronger than the sense of the word *hidden*. The hidden man is one that is not manifested, but the inner man can be very active and aggressive. According to Ephesians 3, the inner man must be very active and very aggressive to live the Lord out. After the inner man is strengthened, Christ has the way to make His home in our heart. This indicates that the inner man is not just something hidden, meek, and quiet but is something very living, active, and aggressive so that Christ may use it for Himself to make His home in our heart.

According to the Bible, I believe the above three points are the basic description of what our spirit is. Our spirit is the lamp of the Lord, a pretty, hidden man in God's eyes, and the inner man, living, active, and aggressive for the Lord to fulfill His purpose. These three points help us to know what our

spirit is.

OUR SPIRIT NEEDING TO BE STIRRED UP

Beginning from this point, we need to see what our spirit should do. Ezra 1:1 says that the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia. Then verse 5 says that God stirred up the spirit of a remnant of Israelites to go up to build His house in Jerusalem. Our spirit needs to be stirred up for God's interest (cf. Exo. 35:21). We should not wait for others to stir up our spirit. Instead, we should stir up our spirit by exercising our spirit (cf. 2 Tim. 1:6-7). On the one hand, the Lord is the One who stirs our spirit up, but we should not be passive. We ourselves have to cooperate with the Lord to stir up our spirit.

OUR SPIRIT NEEDING TO BE BURNING

Our spirit needs to be burning. Romans 12:11 charges us to be burning in spirit, and Acts 18:25 tells us that Apollos was fervent, burning, in spirit.

OUR SPIRIT INDWELT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT NEEDING TO BE THE FACULTY OF OUR PRAYER

Prayer is the way to exercise our spirit, but many Christians do not pray with their spirit. They pray by using merely their mouth and their mentality with their emotion. They do not use their spirit when they pray. If one person asks another person to do something for him, he might simply open up his mouth according to his mentality and his emotion without exercising his spirit. Many Christians today pray to the Lord in exactly the same way. They do not use their spirit.

In the past we prayed many times without exercising our spirit, but Ephesians 6:18 says that we need to pray at every time in our spirit. We need to use our spirit as the faculty of prayer. We cannot hear things by exercising our eyes or smell things by using our ears. We must use the proper faculty to hear and to smell. In the same way, we have to pray by exercising our spirit as the proper faculty of our prayer. The faculty for us to pray is not our mind or emotion but our spirit. The more we stress this, the better. Many saints and young ones among us need to learn how to use their spirit in prayer.

A good illustration of using the spirit is when a person loses his temper. When he loses his temper and yells, he is not using his mind. At that point, he is in his real person, that is, his spirit. If we do not yell from our spirit, our yelling is a false performance. The real yelling surely comes out of our spirit. Of course, this is a negative example, because when one loses his temper, his spirit comes forth in a cruel and rude way. But in principle, we have to learn to use our spirit in prayer in the same way. Whenever we open up our mouth, we should exercise our spirit to utter something. Whenever we pray, we should pray in our spirit, using our spirit to say something to the Lord. Our spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit needs to be the faculty of our prayer.

OUR SPIRIT NEEDING TO BE THE MEANS OF OUR WORSHIP

According to John 4:24, our spirit needs to be the means of our worship. We need to worship God the Spirit in our spirit and with our spirit. Many saints come to the meeting to meet, but they do not come to worship. We may go through the formality of meeting without rendering the Lord the real worship that He desires. To worship is to exercise our spirit. Whenever we begin to exercise our spirit, the worship begins. We may think that our worship begins when we call a hymn or when we pray. But our worship actually begins when our spirit rises up and is exercised.

In other words, in a meeting we may sing a lot of hymns, yet without worship. Even we may read many verses of the Bible, yet without worship. We may even pray without worship. Many so-called Christian services have singing, the reading of the Bible, a sermon, and a benediction, all without the exercise of the spirit. There is no worship because no one exercises his spirit.

Our meetings need to be full of the exercise of the spirit. When we come together to meet, before singing, before praying, before reading, before doing anything, all of us should exercise our spirit. There should be such a worshipping spirit in all our meetings. Many times the elders exercise their

spirit to open the meeting. Then they stir up others' spirit. This is not the best situation. All the saints must rise up to exercise their spirit. We have to help the saints to realize that we need to use our spirit to worship. Our spirit needs to worship God directly apart from merely depending upon singing, reading, or praying in a formal way.

OUR SPIRIT NEEDING TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ENJOYING THE LORD

Our spirit needs to take the lead in enjoying the Lord. This is fully shown in Luke 1:46-47. In these verses Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has exulted in God my Savior." These two verses, no doubt, are describing the enjoyment of the Lord, and in the enjoyment of the Lord, our spirit has to take the lead. First, Mary's spirit exulted in God; then her soul magnified the Lord. Her praise to God issued from her spirit and was expressed through her soul. But today we mostly use our soul first. We must learn to directly use our spirit and let the soul be a follower of the spirit. Our spirit must take the lead aggressively in enjoying the Lord. Our spirit should subdue our soul to make the soul its follower.

OUR SPIRIT NEEDING TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE IN SPIRITUAL MINISTRY

First Corinthians 14:32 says, "The spirits of prophets are subject to prophets." In our spiritual ministry our spirit has to take the initiative. If our spirit is waiting, that means our spirit is dormant. On all occasions our spirit should take the initiative to minister something.

OUR SPIRIT KNOWING THE THINGS OF A MAN

To know the things of a man, we cannot depend upon our mind. To know a man, we need our spirit. First Corinthians 2:11a says that only the spirit of man can know the things of a man. If we do not know how to exercise our spirit, we cannot know people. To know people, we have to exercise our spirit. A person may come to us and speak something to us, but if we merely understand him with our mind according to his word, we will be cheated. We have to exercise our spirit to know his spirit and his intention behind his word.

PERCEIVING THINGS IN OUR SPIRIT

We also need to perceive things in our spirit (Mark 2:8a, KJV). To observe things according to our sight and understanding is not the real perceiving. The proper perceiving is to see through things and to know things thoroughly by exercising our spirit.

PURPOSING IN OUR SPIRIT

Paul purposed in his spirit (Acts 19:21a). We may think that to purpose or make a decision is always by using our will. But we must purpose and make decisions in our spirit. Then we are spiritual men.

JUDGING A PERSON IN OUR SPIRIT

First Corinthians 5 tells us that Paul judged a sinful one in the church in Corinth in his spirit (vv. 3-5a). We should not judge anyone superficially according to our feeling or understanding. We have to judge people in our spirit.

BEING A PERSON IN OUR SPIRIT

We need to be a person in our spirit. John says that he was in spirit on the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). To be a person in our spirit needs much exercise.

EXERCISING OUR SPIRIT BY DOING THE ABOVEMENTIONED THINGS

To exercise our spirit we have to do all the abovementioned things. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, 1979, vol. 1, "Basic Lessons on Life," pp. 590-595)

LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH

(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Six

A Good Minister of Christ

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 4:6-8, 15-16; Ezek. 3:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:10; Rom. 15:6; S. S. 4:11

- I. First Timothy 4:6 says, “If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed”:**
- A. A good minister of Christ is one who serves people with Christ, ministering Christ as Savior, life, life supply, and every positive thing to people.
 - B. If we would minister Christ to others, we ourselves must be nourished; a good minister of Christ does not merely teach others about Christ but ministers Christ into others as food—Matt. 4:4; Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 3:1-4; John 6:57, 63.
 - C. We need to lay before the saints the things with which we have been nourished by the Lord through the ministry; we need to present the saints with the riches, the groceries, the Lord has shown us from the Word; let us first be nourished ourselves and then minister this nourishment to all the people of God.
 - D. We need to minister the riches of Christ as spiritual food to others that they may be nourished and grow in life; the word of God is likened to milk and solid food, which are for nourishment—Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Pet. 2:2:
 - 1. The words of the faith are the words of the full gospel concerning God’s New Testament economy.
 - 2. The words of the good teaching are the sweet words that contain and convey the riches of Christ to nourish, edify, and strengthen His believers.
 - E. As members of the one Body of Christ, we should aspire to be good ministers of Christ who “speak the same thing” (1 Cor. 1:10) “with one accord” and “with one mouth” (Rom. 15:6):
 - 1. “We have to learn the high peaks of God’s present revelation and learn to speak these things...I would encourage all of us to pick up this high commission: to go out with...God’s up-to-date vision to move with God for His high peaks of the divine revelation that will consummate His eternal economy”—*The Triune God’s Revelation and His Move*, p. 98.
 - 2. The saints who have been raised up by the Lord’s up-to-date ministry have a taste for this ministry, and this taste is the controlling factor in the Lord’s recovery; those who have been raised up by this ministry will reject a taste that is contrary to it; this means that if you speak something contrary to the taste of the Lord’s recovery, your speaking will be rejected, and you will suffer loss—cf. Ps. 34:8; 1 Pet. 2:3.
- II. A good minister of Christ sacrifices himself and puts himself aside in order to keep the absoluteness of the truth; the truth cannot be entrusted to a person who walks according to his feelings; a man must stand on the side of the truth to oppose himself:**
- A. The condition of an individual has nothing to do with God’s truth; what you are personally cannot affect what God’s truth is, because the truth is like an immovable pillar—1 Tim. 3:15.

- B. Some people lower down the truth a little when they are wrong, and they lift up the truth a little when they are right; this means that they are like elevators, and the truth goes up and down with them; only those who have dealt with themselves are able to maintain the truth.
- C. If we can take the truth as the unique standard, and we have the courage to admit that we are wrong, new light will come to us; if we do not sacrifice the light, the light will uplift us; blessed are those who can go along with the truth.
- D. On the one hand, a man cannot preach the truth unless he has the experience; on the other hand, a person has to know that the truth has nothing to do with him; if a man is brought to a point that he can no longer withstand God's word, if he does not sacrifice the word, and if he finds the word condemning him, he will receive the light; this is the secret to receiving revelation.

III. A good minister of Christ, as a good steward of the varied grace of God, speaks oracles of God for the glorification of God, the expression of God (1 Pet. 4:10-11; Eph. 1:6); he does not seek his own glory to express himself (1 Thes. 2:6; John 5:41, 44) but continually exercises his spirit to reject the self, not preaching himself but exalting Christ as Lord and considering himself as a slave to serve the believers (2 Cor. 4:5; Lev. 14:9 and footnote 1; 1 Cor. 10:31; Isa. 43:7).

IV. A good minister of Christ ministers life and serves the saints according to the principle of the tree of life, not the principle of the tree of right and wrong (Gen. 2:9; John 10:10b; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:6; 4:10-12; 1 John 5:12, 16a); in his ministry he keeps the following principle and rule of conduct according to Paul's pattern in facing the problems in the church in Corinth—"We should concentrate on Him [Christ], not on any persons, things, or matters other than Him. We should focus on Him as our unique center appointed by God, that all the problems among the believers may be solved" (footnote 2 on 1 Cor. 1:9).

V. A good minister of Christ helps the saints to think the "one thing": the *one thing* in Philippians refers to the subjective knowledge, experience, and enjoyment of Christ; the *one thing* is the pursuing of Christ to gain Him, lay hold of Him, and possess Him—1:20-21; 2:2, 5; 3:7-14; 4:13.

VI. A good minister of Christ is like the Lord's loving seeker described in Song of Songs 4:11—"Your lips drip fresh honey, my bride;/Honey and milk are under your tongue"—cf. Exo. 3:8:

- A. Honey is sweet, and it restores the weak and stricken ones (Psa. 119:103); milk feeds the immature ones (1 Pet. 2:2).
- B. The sweetness of honey and the nourishing milk under the tongue of the Lord's loving seeker indicate that she has stored up the riches of the Lord as her spiritual food; she has stored so many riches within her that food seems to be under her tongue, and she can dispense this food to the needy ones at any time—Psa. 119:11; Col. 3:16.
- C. Her indwelling treasure of the Lord's sweet and nourishing words is not produced overnight; it comes from a long period of gathering, inward activity, and careful storage; this is the unique possession of one who is taught by God with the healthy words of the healthy teaching of God's economy—1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3.

VII. The revelations that the prophets received were the burdens that they received; without burden, there is no ministry of the word, no prophesying, for the building up of the church—Isa. 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; 15:1; Zech. 12:1; Mal. 1:1; Acts 6:4; 1 Cor. 14:4b:

- A. Our burden is to release God's revelation to man, and God's revelation is released through the words of revelation that God gives to us—2:11-16.
- B. When we minister the word of God, our concern must be whether we have God's speaking, not the topic of our speaking; in order to have God's speaking, the one who ministers the word must have a burden—Mal. 2:7; S. S. 8:13-14; Eph. 5:26-27.
- C. Those who minister the word must bear people's condition before God, sense their condition, and know what God wants to speak—Exo. 28:29-30.
- D. The greatest problem in the ministry of the word is not having a burden from the Lord; without a burden, all our activity will be dead and ineffective; with a burden, we will be living and flourishing:
 - 1. Having a burden deals with us the most; if there is a burden, the self decreases and is dealt with, because there are things that our burden will not allow us to do, and there are areas that will require our being dealt with before we can release our burden.
 - 2. If we serve according to obligation instead of serving with a burden, such service will cause us to lose the Lord's presence—Mal. 3:14; Deut. 4:25.
 - 3. Whenever our service becomes a matter of fulfilling an obligation, our service has already degraded.

VIII. In order to be a good minister of Christ, we must aspire to have the following organic characteristics:

- A. We must love the Lord to the uttermost to be filled with Him and overflow Him into others with the resurrected Christ as our authority—Psa. 18:1; 91:14; 97:10; 116:1-2; 119:140; John 21:15-17; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 John 4:16, 19; Num. 17:1-10; Matt. 19:26.
- B. We must maintain our victory in Christ by having a revived living and a labor in shepherding—Rev. 3:18-22; Hosea 6:1-3; Rom. 6:4; 7:6; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:1-4.
- C. We must abide in the fellowship with the Lord daily and hourly—1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14.
- D. We must be praying persons—Col. 4:2; Gen. 4:26; Lam. 3:55-56; Rom. 10:12-13.
- E. We must enjoy the Lord in the Word early in the morning to have a new start of each day—Psa. 119:147-148.
- F. We must walk by and according to our spirit, which is mingled with the divine Spirit—Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4, 16; 1 Cor. 6:17.
- G. We must live Christ for His magnification by the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ—Phil. 1:19.
- H. We must build up a habit of speaking Christ to all kinds of people daily in season and out of season—Acts 5:42; 8:4; 2 Tim. 4:2.
- I. We must be ones who deal with our sins thoroughly—1 John 1:7, 9; Psa. 51:1-9, 17.
- J. We must be filled with the essential Spirit inwardly and with the economical Spirit outwardly—Acts 13:52; Eph. 5:18; Acts 4:31, 8; 13:9.
- K. We must accumulate the experiences of Christ (Phil. 3:8-10, 12-14) and keep a rich storage of the Lord's word (Col. 3:16; Psa. 119:11, 15; John 8:31; 15:7; 1 John 2:14).

IX. Whenever we minister God's word, the primary thing is for us to exercise our spirit; a good minister of Christ builds up a habit of exercising his spirit unto godliness to live Christ in his daily life—1 Tim. 4:6-8, 15-16; 2 Tim. 1:6-7;

Rom. 1:9; 7:6; 12:11; John 4:23-24:

- A. We saved ones have the capital to live the Christian life and the church life; this capital is our God-given spirit—2 Tim. 1:6-7; 4:22.
- B. Godliness, a living that is the expression of God, is the issue of the divine dispensing for the divine economy, and this dispensing depends on the exercise of our spirit to live Christ in our daily life for the corporate manifestation of God in the church life—1 Tim. 1:3-4; 3:15-16; 4:7-8; 2 Tim. 1:6-7; *Hymns*, #493, stanza 5.
- C. The word *exercise* implies forcing; if we Christians want to be strong and want to grow in the Lord, we must force ourselves to use our spirit until we build up a strong habit of exercising our spirit—1 Tim. 4:7.
- D. We must exercise our spirit to employ and enjoy the entire blessed Trinity by praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ in the day of His victorious appearing so that we may become the totality of the eternal life, the New Jerusalem—Jude 19-21.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

A GOOD MINISTER OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 4:6-16

In 1 Timothy 4:6 Paul uses the expression *a good minister of Christ Jesus*. A minister of Christ is one who serves others with Christ, ministering Christ as Savior, life, life supply, and every positive thing to people. He differs from the teacher of the law and of other things (1:7, 3).

LAYING THESE THINGS BEFORE THE BROTHERS

A minister of Christ does not mainly denote a minister who belongs to Christ but a person who ministers Christ to others. He is one who serves people with Christ. For example, if we say that a man is a serving one of a particular meal, we do not mean, of course, that he belongs to the meal. We mean that he serves others with that meal. In like manner, although it is true that a minister of Christ belongs to Christ, the main thought here is that he serves others with Christ, ministering Christ to them. Not only does he belong to Christ, but he serves Christ to others.

In today's Christianity there are a great many ministers who belong to Christ, but very few of them minister Christ to others. To be a minister of Christ does not primarily mean to preach Christ, teach Christ, or tell others about Christ. The main significance of this term is ministering Christ to others.

Verse 6 of chapter 4 confirms this understanding of the expression *a good minister of Christ*. Here Paul says, "If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed." By *these things* Paul means all that he has covered thus far in this Epistle. Just as a steward lays different courses of food before guests at a dinner, so a good minister of Christ should lay "these things" before the believers. Furthermore, Paul's use of the term *being nourished* indicates that his concept is that of supplying life to others. It is significant that here Paul does not say "being taught" but "being nourished" with the words of the faith. If we would minister Christ to others, we ourselves must first be nourished. Being nourished with Christ, we will have Christ as food, as life supply, to minister to others. The words *being nourished* give us the ground to say that a good minister of Christ does not merely teach others about Christ but ministers Christ into others as food. Others should be able to testify of us that we have nourished them with Christ.

Throughout the years my aim in the ministry has been to nourish the saints. No doubt I have passed on a good deal of knowledge. But I can testify that in every message, I exercise my spirit not just to pass on knowledge but, while I am giving forth a certain kind of knowledge, to supply

something nourishing to the Lord's people. My desire is to minister the riches of Christ as food that the saints may be nourished. Recently, many have written me letters telling how they have been richly fed with Christ through the messages.

If you have a heart to care for others in the Lord's recovery, you should not give them mere teaching. Whenever you fellowship with others concerning Christ, you may give them some knowledge. But while you are teaching them, you need to exercise your spirit to minister spiritual food that they may be nourished. If you do this, you will be a good minister of Christ.

With Paul and Timothy we see an excellent pattern. As we have pointed out, Paul told Timothy to lay "these things before the brothers," referring to the things that he was writing in this Epistle. However, before Timothy could lay these things before others, he first had to feed on them himself. He had to digest them, assimilate them, and allow them to saturate his inner being. Then he would be able to lay them before the brothers. Today we should follow Timothy's example and lay before the saints the things with which we have been nourished by the Lord through the ministry. How wonderful the church life would be if we all did this! However, if we turn from the ministry and seek to produce something different, we may give place to different teachings. It was not Timothy's intention to teach anything different from what Paul taught. Rather, he would lay before the brothers what he had received from Paul.

At this point, I would like to say a word concerning my burden in putting out the Lifestudy messages. The aim of these messages is to produce groceries for the local churches. My burden is not mainly to "cook" these spiritual groceries; it is to produce them and supply them to the churches that every local church may be a well-stocked supermarket, filled with a variety of nourishing foods. If the leading ones in a local church lay before the saints the riches contained in the Life-studies, the saints will be abundantly nourished. I have received many letters testifying that this has happened.

It is a fact of history in the Lord's recovery that any church that follows the ministry is strong and blessed. But those churches that neglect the ministry and try instead to do something on their own have become a failure. However, in saying these things, I wish to make it very clear that I by no means insist that the churches or the saints read the Life-study messages. To repeat, my burden is to produce groceries. The churches and the saints are free either to use them or to disregard them. But if the saints cast away the nourishment found in these messages, I wonder what they will feed on. We are what we eat. If we eat the "groceries" produced in today's religion, we will be part of religion. Let me say in frankness and honesty that the leading ones need to take "these things" and lay them before the saints that they may be nourished.

Paul's expression *if you lay these things before the brothers* is very significant. We need to be impressed with the fact that this also is part of the Bible, the Word of God. I do not charge anyone to lay my words before the saints. It is not my practice to charge the churches to do anything. Representatives of hundreds of churches can testify that I do not charge them to do things. I do not even know many of the things that take place in the church in Anaheim, where I live. I am very glad that the elders take action regarding many things without letting me know. This is a strong proof that I am not a pope. Very much to the contrary, I am a little servant of the Lord, a farmer burdened to produce groceries for the saints. Far from charging the churches to do anything, I simply long that they feed on the spiritual riches the Lord has given us. Do not lay Witness Lee's teaching before the brothers. Instead, present them the riches, the groceries, that the Lord has shown us from the Word.

I am deeply burdened by the fact that many who love the Lord Jesus and seek Him have been deceived and frustrated. We must find a way to share with them the spiritual riches the Lord has provided us. Many who truly love the Lord are starving. We must take up the burden to supply them with food. We all need to be good ministers of Christ, serving others with His riches. Let us first be nourished ourselves and then minister this nourishment to all the people of God.

We would emphasize that being nourished is for the growth in life. This is a matter of life, and it differs from merely being taught, which is a matter of knowledge. To minister Christ to others requires

that we ourselves first be nourished with the words of life concerning Christ.

BEING NOURISHED

In verse 6 Paul specifically speaks of “being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching.” The words of the faith are the words of the full gospel concerning God’s New Testament economy. The focus of God’s economy is not the image in Daniel 2 or the four beasts in Daniel 7. If you want to see the focal point of God’s economy, study the books of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. We need to be nourished with the words of the faith, God’s economy, found in these books.

According to 1 Timothy 4:6, we should also be nourished with the good teaching which we have closely followed. The words of the good teaching are the sweet words that contain and convey the riches of Christ to nourish, edify, and strengthen His believers. Actually, the words of the faith and the words of the good teaching refer to the same thing. If we would teach others, we ourselves must first follow these words closely. Following them closely and being nourished with them, we will then be able to feed others. For example, if a mother does not know how to nourish herself properly, she will not know how to feed healthy food to her children. Through her own experience of being nourished, she will know what food is best for her children. This illustrates the fact that as good ministers of Christ, we must first be nourished ourselves with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which we have closely followed, and then we will be able to nourish others.

REFUSING PROFANE AND OLD-WOMANISH MYTHS

In verse 7 Paul goes on to say, “But the profane and old-womanish myths refuse, and exercise yourself unto godliness.” The Greek word for *profane* means “touching and being touched by worldliness, contrary to being holy.” If we would exercise ourselves unto godliness, we must refuse profane and old-womanish myths. Much of the teaching and preaching in Christianity today falls in the category of old-womanish myths. We should forget these myths and come back to the pure word of the Bible. In the so-called services among Christians today, there is a great deal of profane, secular, and worldly talk. People discuss politics and how to be successful in business. All of this is profane talk, comparable to old-womanish myths.

EXERCISING UNTO GODLINESS

Refusing the profane and old-womanish myths, we should exercise unto godliness. Such exercise is like gymnastics. The words *unto godliness* mean “with a view to godliness.” Godliness is Christ lived out of us to be the manifestation of God. Today this very Christ is the Spirit dwelling in our spirit (2 Cor. 3:17; Rom. 8:9-10; 2 Tim. 4:22). Hence, to exercise ourselves unto godliness is to exercise our spirit to live Christ in our daily life.

In 1 Timothy 4:7 Paul uses a Greek term referring to gymnastic exercise with respect to exercise unto godliness. We know from 3:16 that the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, is great. By our spirit with the indwelling Spirit, we must exercise ourselves unto this goal, unto the expression of God.

In 4:8 Paul continues, “For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come.” The words *a little* denote a few things, to a small part of our being, in contrast to *all things*. *All things* refers not only to one part of our being but to all parts—physical, psychological, and spiritual—both temporal and eternal. The promise of the present life, a life that is in this age, is like the promises in Matthew 6:33, John 16:33, Philippians 4:6-7, and 1 Peter 5:8-10. The promise of the coming life, a life that is in the next age and in eternity, is like those in 2 Peter 1:10-11; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:7, 17; and 21:6-7. A promise like that in Mark 10:29-30 is of both the present life and the coming life.

Once again, I would urge you to refuse all profane and old-womanish myths. Even talk about doctrines such as eternal security can be nothing more than an old-womanish myth. People may come to us after a meeting and say, “I have been to the meetings of the church a number of times. But I have

not yet heard a message on eternal security. What do you think about this?” Others may want to discuss the seventh-day Sabbath. This also is to talk of oldwomanish myths.

In applying the matter of old-womanish myths to the talk common among today’s Christians, I am following the principle established by Paul. Here in 1 Timothy the old-womanish myths probably refer to Jewish myths. Those with a background in Judaism were familiar with many myths. In the same principle, those who have spent years in Christianity also know many myths. Some come to us and ask about healing, speaking in tongues, prophesying, and even the lengthening of legs. I have known many persons who spoke in tongues but who did not exhibit godliness in their daily living. We must be a living testimony of those who refuse the old-womanish myths and who continually exercise themselves unto godliness.

It is of crucial importance that we exercise unto godliness. Inwardly, we need nourishment, and outwardly, we should have godliness. From within we should be nourished with Christ, and then we should have a living that is the expression of God. (*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, second edition, pp. 69-74)

THE FIRST PROBLEM—NOT HAVING A BURDEN

The greatest problem in the administration of the church and the ministry of the word is not having a burden or, we can say, not receiving a burden or not paying attention to a burden. It is possible for elders to administrate the church without a burden. Those who minister the word may also do so without a burden. The discharge of our burden when we minister the word does not depend on how well we speak. If our only desire is to speak well in order to touch people, our speaking will be without a burden. Likewise, an ability to administrate the church does not discharge one’s burden. It is not a matter of how well we can administrate but whether our administration is effective and can touch people.

For example, when people come to a meeting, there may be the need to release the word. We must seek the Lord concerning what we speak and concerning the issue of our speaking. It is not a matter of how well we speak, the logistics of our presentation, or whether the saints are touched; rather, it is a matter of what will be produced in the saints. If some are not yet saved, we should receive a burden to bear their souls by the Lord’s grace in order to sow the seed of salvation into them when we release the word. Our burden is salvation, not the release of a dynamic word. If they are saved but do not love the Lord, our burden should be for them to love the Lord. If they love the Lord but are not willing to give themselves to the Lord and receive His dealing, our burden should be for them to willingly give themselves to the Lord and be dealt with by Him. This is the ministry of the word with a burden.

Otherwise, our Lord’s Day message meeting may easily fall into the condition of the so-called Sunday service. Every week someone is assigned to release a message in order to maintain the meeting. After the meeting, everyone goes home, eats lunch, rests, and returns in the evening for the bread-breaking meeting. This is a Sunday service. In this situation those who minister the word must receive a burden. We need to know the condition of those who come to listen to a message. They might not have any feeling concerning their own condition, but we need to be clear and full of feeling concerning their condition. They may be able to sit and listen peacefully week after week, but we cannot speak peacefully week after week. We need to receive the burden to “disturb” and “trouble” them so that even if they come to the meeting peacefully, they will be inwardly disturbed when they leave.

If we are not concerned that our speaking does not produce any effect in those who listen, we do not have a burden. This situation indicates that those who speak and those who listen are in a routine. This is the condition of degraded Christianity where the congregation routinely listens to the pastor, and the pastor routinely preaches to the congregation year after year. This should not be our practice. The ministry of the word should enlighten those who hear. When we minister the word every Lord’s Day, we should “trouble” people to the extent that they have no peace. This is what it means to have a burden.

If the listeners are lukewarm, even though they may listen peacefully, those who minister the

word should not be at peace. They should go before the Lord, and let Him take away their peace, even to the point of losing sleep and not eating until they receive a burden from the Lord. Then their speaking will enable the Holy Spirit to work in the listeners. Only this kind of speaking is the speaking of God. Brothers who minister the word must have a burden, not merely doctrines, logic, and examples. Ministering the word in this way is intolerable; it is an offense to God, and it is a sin in His eyes.

Receiving the Burden to Speak God's Word in the Ministry of the Word

In Isaiah 13:1 the Chinese Union Version says that the prophets received inspiration when they spoke for God. The Hebrew word for *inspiration*, however, means "burden." Man needs to receive a burden. We cannot neglect this responsibility and think that God has not given us a burden. The Epistles of Paul clearly show that he received burdens. When someone in the church in Corinth committed the sin of fornication, Paul did not simply condemn the sin or stop praying for the one who sinned. He received a burden from God to bear a responsibility and commission for the church (1 Cor. 5:1-13). Paul did not preach doctrines in his Epistles; instead, he was burdened to fellowship concerning certain matters, so he was able to touch people's feelings.

There is a danger that the ministry of the word in the church in Taipei may become the same as the preaching of sermons in Sunday services. When we minister the word of God, our concern should be whether we have God's speaking, not the topic of our speaking. In order to have God's speaking, the one who ministers the word must have a burden. People may have a negative reaction or be stirred up when they hear a message that is spoken with a burden, but they cannot deny that it is God's speaking. This kind of message can help people and solve their problems. A message that sounds nice but is void of God's speaking cannot touch people, turn them inwardly, or satisfy those who are hungry and thirsty, because they are not the words that God wants to speak even if they are from the Bible.

Therefore, speaking should not be easy or cheap. We cannot speak simply because we have prepared a message. One who ministers the word should bear people's condition before God. He bears the responsibility of knowing their needs. He needs to sense their condition and know what God wants to speak. The help we have received from training cannot replace the burden that is within us. The danger is that the burden has been replaced so that we are short of revelation and spiritual burden.

Being Desperate for People's Situation to Preach the Effective Word

Fifty-two weeks a year there is a message meeting in the church in Taipei on the Lord's Day. Do the brothers who minister the word fast and pray before ministering the word? Of course, there is no regulation that requires the brothers to fast and pray, as this would be useless. The brothers need to understand that bearing the word of God is equal to bearing the souls of man. The saints come to the meetings week after week to listen to our speaking, so we must bear them. If there is no change in them after three months, we should not be at peace. This can be compared to a merchant who is unable to sleep peacefully when he has no business for two weeks and who is unable to eat when there is no profit after three months. He will be full of sorrow and concern.

Many brothers and sisters with businesses come to me. Although they simply sit without opening their mouths, I can sense the heavy burden within them and realize that they have encountered difficulties in their business. Are the brothers who speak sorrowful for the souls who have not changed in three months? A store owner who has no customers would be unable to continue working, considering everything to be fine. He would consider the situation and find a way to change the situation. How can those who minister the word continue as usual when there is no profit? We should not consider that it is sufficient merely to speak from the podium week after week.

When Brother Nee began his work in Foochow, he fasted and prayed every Saturday for the gospel meeting on the Lord's Day. He considered before the Lord what to speak and how to speak. He considered what word the sinners needed to hear. Since he fasted and prayed with a heavy burden, his words were always very effective and were later published as messages. Many who are used by the Lord bear a burden in their ministry of the word. When Peace Wang was young, she had a successful

revival work. She always knelt before the Lord and spent a long period of time weeping and grieving for sinners. Therefore, when she stood up to speak, her words were always living and operative.

Serving with a Burden

We have a good order in our service, but we are lacking in burden. Having a burden means that we have a goal that we must reach. If we have not reached our goal or are unable to produce the expected result, we should be concerned. If we are able to serve, even though there is no result, we do not have a burden. This attitude indicates a lack of burden. Our speaking should never fall into this. Hence, the brothers who minister the word must bear a heavy burden before the Lord, having no peace to rest or eat and even troubling others so that they also have no peace. This can be compared to the city of Jerusalem having no peace when the Lord Jesus was born (Matt. 2:1-18). Those who speak for the Lord must have a feeling to trouble the saints to the point that they have no peace inwardly. When they have no peace, we can have peace. The saints cannot love the world and love the Lord. They must not be lukewarm. Those who serve the Lord need to have this kind of burden.

Many serve as employees in a big company. They work a fixed number of hours every day and simply do the tasks that are assigned to them. They do not make big mistakes and are not concerned whether the company makes a profit. They are employees without a burden; they serve without a burden. If we make no profit on the first day of our business, we should be concerned about our livelihood. If the serving brothers, whether they serve in the children's work or the young people's work, have this kind of consciousness, they will succeed. Complaining that we fail because we are weak shows that we lack a burden. Every serving one must be burdened to the extent that he feels responsible if the work does not succeed. He should be like a businessman who thinks of his business even in his sleep.

Discerning between the Service of Responsibility and the Service of Burden

The elders in all the churches must come before the Lord to receive a burden and to see if all the home meetings in their localities are satisfactory. We must have a concern for the condition of the meetings. Are they strong or weak, living or dead, rich or poor? We cannot remain unchanged. Perhaps those responsible for the home meetings are at peace, but the elders should not be at peace. The elders should coordinate together and not act individualistically. They should bear a corporate burden to completely change the condition of the home meetings. They need to pray for the saints, even with tears, and seek the Lord for the proper words to speak to them. Then they should speak in the meetings according to their burden until the saints become uneasy within and are not content with their present situation.

Such a speaking by the elders is not according to arrangement but according to burden. The elders should have a burden; they should not merely bear responsibility. As elders, we should not simply fellowship and discuss the condition of the different home meetings, visit them, and give an evaluation report at the next elders' meeting. There is no burden in such a practice; it will be ineffective and not result in any profit. If we have a company with many employees, its yearly earnings will not be influenced by discussions, reports, and evaluations. These do not carry out the burden. If we have a real burden, we will set a goal for our yearly profit, work toward this goal, and be determined to reach it.

Both in the administration of the church and in the ministry of the word, the brothers are commendable in their bearing of responsibility. However, they lack a burden. Without a burden, all our activity will be dead and ineffective; with a burden, we will be living and flourishing. Such an outcome is not related to our method but to our person.

Serving with a Burden Causing the Self to Be Dealt With

Children will never be successful in their studies if they study only for their tests. If they have a burden, their studying will change. A brother may give a message merely out of obligation, because it is his turn to speak. However, giving messages is not a matter of obligation but of burden. We may

speak for half a year, but those who listen might not receive anything, and our speaking will be in vain. If we have a burden, our messages will not be ineffective. Our messages should “trouble” people so that they have no peace, and they are stirred up to love and serve the Lord. In this situation, our being will be touched by God. There is no need for the self to be dealt with if we give messages that are out of obligation. However, in giving a message out of a burden, our self must be dealt with.

Working from nine to six as an employee is a matter of obligation and does not require any dealing. However, we would work differently if we had our own business. Our laziness would be dealt with because we would rise earlier to work. The attitude of a waiter or clerk toward customers might not need to be dealt with. However, a person who owns his shop will adjust himself in order not to offend his customers. Instead of being dealt with, some brothers seem to have more problems because they serve out of obligation, not burden. If there is a burden, our self decreases and is dealt with. It will not increase, because there are things that our burden will not allow us to do, and there are areas that will require our being dealt with before we can release our burden. Hence, having a burden deals with us the most.

A young man who is not burdened with a family can be carefree in his living. However, after he is married and has children, he will know the meaning of being diligent and disciplined. A child can spend his parents’ money freely without self-control. But when he is older and lives on his own, his spending is budgeted. He will be more careful when he goes shopping. Spending his parents’ money was one thing, but spending his own money is a burden. It seems as if the brothers in the churches serve according to obligation as employees in a company. They do not seem to have much burden. Such service is dangerous and will cause us to lose the Lord’s presence.

Everyone Receiving a Burden and Serving the Lord according to Burden

Everyone who serves the Lord must receive a burden and have a burden. This also applies to the sisters even though they are not involved in the church administration or in giving messages. If the sisters fellowship together and visit people simply because it is time to do so, they are doing so out of obligation. The sisters should seek to know the result of their fellowship and visitation. They should know the condition of the sisters under their care. They should not say, “As long as the Lord works in them, they will be all right, but if the Lord does not work in them, there is nothing we can do.” We must receive a genuine burden.

Even though many sisters have the desire to serve the Lord, few have risen up to serve the Lord lately. The brothers, however, continue to serve as usual. We should sense that the situation with the sisters is not right and receive the burden to stir them up. We also need to study the result of our gospel preaching. We should consider why many remain unsaved even though there are so many sinners. Some brothers should rise up to receive the burden to preach the gospel until someone is saved. We must have a burden.

The problem is that we are gradually leaning toward responsibility in our service; we lack a burden. Since our prayers are mostly without burden, our prayer meetings are ineffective. If someone is saved when we preach the gospel, we thank and praise the Lord. If no one is saved, we are at peace. When we give messages, we are at peace even if there is no effect. The same applies to the administration of the church and visiting the brothers and sisters; we are at peace even if there is no result. Since this is our condition, our prayer is a prayer of obligation, not a prayer with burden. If we pray with a burden, our prayer meeting will be different. Some brothers and sisters will weep bitterly and mourn in prayer, feeling that they cannot go on in the same way. They will feel that the gospel preaching, the administration of the church, and the condition of their meeting are unsatisfactory. This kind of prayer is out of a burden.

Some say that it is easy to lose their burden after a period of time. However, those who have been shown mercy receive burdens continually. It is a serious problem if our burden disappears after we have worked for some time. However, a Christian can continue to work out of obligation even though he has

no burden, because his conscience will bother him if he stops working. Whenever our service becomes a matter of fulfilling an obligation, our service has already degraded. Genuine service is not a matter of obligation but a matter of burden; burden always goes beyond obligation. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, 1957, vol. 2, “The Administration of the Church and the Ministry of the Word,” pp. 233-240)

**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**
(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Seven
The Pattern of the Apostle Paul

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 1:16; 4:12; 1 Thes. 2:1-12

I. Paul was a pattern to the believers of living Christ, magnifying Christ, and ministering Christ as the Spirit in his spirit for the building up of the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 1:16; 4:12; Rom. 8:16; Phil. 1:19-21a, 25; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6:

- A. The Lord appeared to Paul to appoint him as a minister and a witness both of the things in which Paul had seen Him and of the things in which He would appear to Paul—Acts 26:16-19; cf. 1:8; 23:11; 20:20, 31:
 - 1. Paul lived a life that was fully dignified, with the highest standard of human virtues expressing the most excellent divine attributes, a life that resembled the one that the Lord Himself had lived on the earth years before—Eph. 4:20-21; Phil. 4:5-8, 11-13.
 - 2. The wonderful, excellent, and mysterious God-man, who lived in the Gospels, continued to live through Paul as one of His many members; Paul was a living witness of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and God-exalted Christ—Acts 1:8; Phil. 2:2, 5; 1:8; 2:13; Acts 27:22, 24-25; 28:3-9, see footnote 1 on v. 9.
- B. Paul took Christ as everything—as his living, pattern, goal, and secret—Phil. 1:19-21a; 2:5-16; 3:7-14; 4:11-13.
- C. Paul was infused with God to shine forth God in the ministry of the new covenant, which is the ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of righteousness, and the ministry of reconciliation—2 Cor. 3:18; 4:1; 3:6, 8-9; 5:18-20.
- D. Because Paul was a pattern to the believers (1 Tim. 1:16), he could charge Timothy to be a pattern “in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (4:12).
- E. Paul is our pattern in his being an ambassador of Christ (Eph. 6:20; 2 Cor. 5:18-20) with the following qualifications:
 - 1. He did not live by what he was or could do but by the immortal life, which is Christ Himself—v. 4; John 14:6; Col. 3:4; Gal. 2:20.
 - 2. He was determined to gain the honor of being well pleasing to Christ in all things—living Christ, growing Christ, expressing Christ, and propagating Christ in every respect—2 Cor. 5:9; Col. 1:10.
 - 3. He was constrained by the love of Christ to no longer live to himself but to live to the Lord; for us to live “to the Lord” means that we are under the Lord’s direction and control and that we want to fulfill His requirements, satisfy His desires, and complete what He intends—2 Cor. 5:14-15.
 - 4. He did not know others outwardly according to the flesh in the old creation but inwardly according to the spirit in the new creation—vv. 16-17; Gal. 6:15.
- F. Paul is our pattern by living and serving God in his regenerated spirit by the indwelling Christ, the life-giving Spirit, not in his soul by the power and ability of the soul; he was a spiritual man who sowed unto the Spirit to bear the fruit of the Spirit—Rom. 1:9; 7:6; 8:4, 16; Gal. 3:3; 5:16, 22-25; 6:8; 2 Cor. 4:5; 1 Cor. 2:15; 2 Cor. 2:13.
- G. Paul is our pattern in his being Body-conscious and Body-centered, doing everything in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body—Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:1-6, 15-16; Col. 2:19; Acts 28:13-15 and footnote 2 on v. 15.

II. The best way to shepherd people, to cherish and nourish them, is to give them a proper pattern; Paul fed his spiritual children with his own living of Christ—1 Thes. 2:1-12; 2 Cor. 1:23—2:14; 11:28-29; 1 Cor. 9:22; Acts 20:28:

- A. Paul and his co-workers were a pattern of the glad tidings that they spread; “you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake”—1 Thes. 1:5b.
- B. In the church the most important thing is the person; the person is the way, and the person is the Lord’s work; what you are is what you do—John 5:19; 6:57; Phil. 1:19-26; Acts 20:18-35; Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33-37.
- C. We need to follow the pattern of the apostles to pay more attention to life than to work—John 12:24; 2 Cor. 4:12.
- D. The apostles not only preached the gospel but also lived it; their ministering of the gospel was not only by word but also by a life that displayed the power of God, a life in the Holy Spirit and in the assurance of faith—1 Thes. 1:5.
- E. The saints in Thessalonica became imitators of the apostles; this led them to follow the Lord, to take Him as their pattern, thus making them a pattern to all other believers—vv. 6-7.
- F. The apostle Paul stressed repeatedly the apostles’ entrance toward the believers; this shows that their manner of life played a great role in infusing the gospel into the new converts—vv. 5, 9; 2:1:
 - 1. The apostles were struggling and speaking the gospel to the Thessalonians in the boldness of God—v. 2.
 - 2. The apostles were free from deception, uncleanness, and guile—v. 3.
 - 3. The apostles were first tested and approved by God and then were entrusted by Him with the gospel; hence, their speaking, the preaching of the gospel, was not of themselves to please men but of God to please Him; God proved, examined, and tested their hearts continually—v. 4; Psa. 26:2; 139:23-24; 2 Cor. 1:12; 6:6; 7:3.
 - 4. The apostles were neither found with flattering speech nor with a pretext for covetousness—1 Thes. 2:5:
 - a. To have any pretext for covetousness is to peddle or adulterate the word of God—2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2.
 - b. It is also to pretend to be godly for the sake of gain—1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:3.
 - 5. The apostles did not seek glory from men—1 Thes. 2:6a:
 - a. To seek glory from men is a real temptation to every Christian worker; many have been devoured and spoiled by this matter—cf. 1 Sam. 15:12.
 - b. Lucifer became God’s adversary, Satan, because of glory-seeking; anyone who seeks glory from men is a follower of Satan—Ezek. 28:13-17; Isa. 14:12-15; Matt. 4:8-10.
 - c. How much we will be used by the Lord and how long our usefulness will last depend on whether we seek glory from men—cf. John 7:17-18; 5:39-44; 12:43; 2 Cor. 4:5.
 - 6. The apostles did not stand on their own authority or dignity as apostles of Christ—1 Thes. 2:6b:
 - a. To assert authority, dignity, or right in Christian work damages that work; the Lord Jesus, while on earth, gave up His dignity (John 13:4-5), and the apostle preferred not to use his right (1 Cor. 9:12).
 - b. If we follow this pattern, we will kill a deadly disease germ in the Body of Christ, the germ of assuming a position—Matt. 20:20-28.

7. The apostles cherished the believers and yearned over them as a nursing mother would cherish and yearn over her own children—1 Thes. 2:7-8; cf. Gal. 4:19; Isa. 49:14-15; 66:12-13:
 - a. To cherish people is to make them happy, to comfort them, to make them feel that you are pleasant to them, easy to be contacted in everything and in every way.
 - b. To cherish people in our natural humanity is not genuine; we must cherish people with the Lord's presence as the charming factor, as the reality of resurrection.
 - c. Cherishing includes nourishing; to nourish people is to feed them with the all-inclusive Christ in His full ministry of three stages—Eph. 5:29.
8. The apostles not only imparted the gospel of God to the Thessalonians; they also imparted their own souls—1 Thes. 2:8:
 - a. To live a clean and upright life (vv. 3-6, 10) and to love the new converts, even by giving our own souls to them (vv. 7-9, 11), are the prerequisites for infusing them with the gospel.
 - b. Paul was willing to spend not only what he had but also himself, his very being, on behalf of the saints—2 Cor. 12:15.
9. The apostles considered themselves as fathers in exhorting the believers to walk in a manner worthy of God, to have a walk that will enable them to enter into the kingdom of God and usher them into the glory of God—1 Thes. 2:11-12.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE APOSTLES' ENTRANCE

[First Thessalonians 2:1] says, "You yourselves know, brothers, our entrance toward you, that it has not been in vain." The apostle stresses repeatedly their entrance toward the believers (1:5, 9). This shows that their manner of life played a great role in infusing the gospel into the new converts. It was not only what the apostles said but also what they were.

The apostles came to the Thessalonians with the gospel in such a way that the Thessalonians were convinced. The apostles' entrance was not in vain. They were a pattern of how to believe in the Lord and follow Him. Because many came to believe in the Lord Jesus through the apostles, a church was raised up in less than a month. This happened not mainly as a result of preaching and teaching but through the kind of entrance the apostles had among the Thessalonians.

SPEAKING THE GOSPEL IN MUCH STRUGGLE

Verse 2 of chapter 2 continues, "But having suffered previously and having been outrageously treated, even as you know, in Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much struggle." In the preaching of the gospel, the apostles experienced God. They enjoyed Him as their boldness in the struggle for the gospel. They were bold not in themselves but in God, even after they had been outrageously treated by the Philippians. Suffering and persecution could not defeat them, because they were in the organic union with the Triune God. According to verse 2, they spoke the gospel of God in much struggle. This indicates that while they were preaching, they were fighting, because persecution was still going on. Hence, they were struggling and speaking the gospel to the Thessalonians in the boldness of God.

HONEST AND FAITHFUL

In verse 3 Paul says, "For our exhortation is not out of deception nor out of uncleanness nor in guile." *Deception* refers to the goal, *uncleanness* to the motive, and *guile* to the means. All three are of and by the subtle and deceiving devil. The word *exhortation* includes speaking, preaching, teaching, instructing, and entreating. Paul's exhorting was free from deception, uncleanness, and guile. The apostles were not greedy, and they had no intention of making a gain of anyone. Their coming to the

Thessalonians with the gospel was altogether honest and faithful.

APPROVED BY GOD

Verse 4 says, “But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who proves our hearts.” God’s entrusting depends on His approval, which comes out of His testing. The apostles were first tested and approved by God and then were entrusted by Him with the gospel. Hence, their speaking, the preaching of the gospel, was not of themselves to please men but of God to please Him. He proved, examined, and tested their hearts continually (Psa. 26:2; 139:23-24).

The word *approved* in 1 Thessalonians 2:4 implies being tested. God tested the apostles before He approved them. Based upon this approvedness, God entrusted them with the gospel. God did this in a careful way, for He knows our hearts.

According to our opinion, since God already knows everything, it is not necessary for Him to test us. Yes, before we were born, He already knew what kind of person we would be. Why, then, does God test us? God’s testing is not mainly for Himself; it is primarily for us. God knows us, but we do not know ourselves. Because we do not know ourselves adequately, we may think that we are upright, honest, and faithful. However, when we are put to the test, we will see what we really are and discover that in ourselves we are not honest, faithful, or trustworthy. God’s testing, therefore, proves us to ourselves. Only after God proves us in this way will we have approvedness.

I would encourage the young people not to have confidence in themselves, for they have not yet been tested. I have the assurance that God will use the young people. But God’s using of them will come after His testing of them. God cannot entrust anything to us until we have the approvedness that comes from His testing. God’s entrusting is based on our approvedness. But we cannot approve ourselves. Only after God has tested us will He grant us approvedness. Then He will entrust something to us and begin to use us.

It was in this way that God entrusted the apostles with the gospel. Because the apostles had been entrusted with the gospel, they spoke not as pleasing men but as pleasing God, who proves our hearts. Their speaking was based on God’s entrusting. Because He had entrusted them with the gospel, they spoke as pleasing God.

In verse 4 we see that we must be approved and then have something entrusted to us. Then we need to speak as pleasing God, the One who proves us. This indicates that we need to pass through testing, approving, and entrusting. Then we will have something to preach and teach.

NO FLATTERY OR PRETEXT

Verse 5 says, “For neither were we found at any time with flattering speech, even as you know, nor with a pretext for covetousness; God is witness.” The Greek word rendered “pretext” also means “pretense, cloak.” To have any pretext for covetousness is to peddle or adulterate the word of God (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2). It is also to pretend to be godly for the sake of gain (1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:3).

According to 1 Thessalonians 2:5, the apostles were never found with flattering speech. We all must avoid flattery, never speaking in a way to flatter others. In this verse Paul also says that the apostles did not have a pretext, a cloak, for covetousness. They did not have an evil motive that was covered in some way. Because they did not have any pretext or pretense, they did not peddle the word of God or adulterate it. To adulterate something is to mix it with an inferior material, for example, to mix gold with copper or wine with water, and then to sell it as if it were pure. Throughout the centuries many preachers and teachers have adulterated the word of God in this way. They preached under a pretext in order to make gain for themselves.

From verse 5 we learn to avoid flattery and a pretext for covetousness. In our Christian work we must give no place to such unclean things. No servant of the Lord should use flattery or have some kind of pretext for covetousness. May the Lord have mercy on us and purify us from all these things. May we be able to say that God is our witness that we do not speak words of flattery or have any pretext for

covetousness.

NOT SEEKING GLORY FROM MEN

In verse 6 Paul goes on to say, “Nor did we seek glory from men, neither from you nor from others, though we could have stood on our authority as apostles of Christ.” To seek glory from men is a real temptation to every Christian worker. Many have been devoured and spoiled by this matter.

The Greek words rendered “stood on our authority” also mean “asserted authority.” A literal translation would be “been able to be in weight,” that is, been burdensome (cf. v. 9; 1 Cor. 9:4-12). To assert authority, dignity, or right in Christian work damages that work. The Lord Jesus, while on earth, gave up His dignity (John 13:4-5), and the apostle preferred not to use his right (1 Cor. 9:12).

Apparently, seeking glory from men is not as evil as covetousness. However, it is more subtle. The fall of the archangel was due to the seeking of glory. He became God’s adversary because of his glory-seeking. Even though he was a leading angel with a very high position, he was still seeking glory. That was the cause of his fall. According to the New Testament, anyone who seeks glory from men is a follower of Satan. The seeking of glory is a trap spread by Satan to snare Christian workers. Therefore, it is very important that all Christian workers learn to avoid the snare of glory-seeking. However, not many have escaped this trap.

How much we will be used by the Lord and how long our usefulness will last depend on whether we seek glory from men. If we seek glory, our usefulness in the hand of the Lord is finished. The seeking of glory for the self always kills one’s usefulness. Therefore, may we all, especially the young, be warned never to seek glory in the Lord’s work.

NOT STANDING ON THEIR AUTHORITY

First Thessalonians 2:6 indicates clearly that the apostles did not stand on their authority as apostles of Christ. They did not assume any standing or authority. They had to forget that they were apostles and serve God’s people as slaves. They were not to remind others of the fact that they were apostles of Christ. Instead, they were to keep in mind that they were brothers serving believers. They were not to assume any standing or authority.

Those who are believers and also those who are not believers may consider the leading ones, the elders, or the apostles as dignitaries. However, in the local churches there are no dignitaries. Instead of being dignitaries, we are slaves serving one another. Nevertheless, I know of certain ones who did not assume anything when they did not have a position or title. But as soon as they were given a position, perhaps in a service group, they began to assume authority. This is shameful. We should learn of Paul never to stand on our authority or assert authority.

A sister whose husband is an elder should not assume authority because she is the wife of an elder. An elder’s wife is not the “First Lady.” She is simply a little sister serving the church. Furthermore, her husband is not a dignitary; he is a slave. As an elder, he has been appointed to serve the church as a slave. We all should have this attitude.

Paul’s statement, “We could have stood on our authority as apostles of Christ,” indicates that even in the early days there was the temptation of assuming authority. People were the same in Paul’s time as they are today. Then as well as now, there was the temptation to assume some kind of authority or standing. Paul, however, did not stand on his authority as an apostle in order to claim something for himself. By refusing to stand on his authority or assert authority, Paul is a good pattern for us all. If we follow this pattern, we will kill a deadly disease germ in the Body of Christ, the germ of assuming a position.

CHERISHING THE BELIEVERS

In verse 7 Paul says, “But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.” The Greek word rendered “nursing mother,” *trophos*, sometimes means “a mother”; hence, a nursing mother (cf. Gal. 4:19). Cherishing includes nourishing. Therefore, this word not only includes nourishing but also includes tender care.

Even though Paul was a brother, he considered himself a nursing mother. Surely, he had no thought of position, dignity, or authority. The thought of being a nursing mother is very different from the thought of authority or position. What position does a nursing mother have? What rank, dignity, or authority belongs to her? Her authority consists in nourishing and cherishing her children, in taking care of them in a tender way.

The word *cherish* is lovely, a word of utmost tenderness. Paul regarded himself as a cherishing one, not merely as one who served. He certainly did not control the believers. Neither did he merely serve them. Rather, he cherished them. His care for them was full of tenderness.

IMPARTING THEIR OWN SOULS

In 1 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul continues, “Yearning in this way over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us.” The word *yearning* indicates being affectionately fond of, affectionately desirous of, like a nursing mother affectionately interested in her child whom she nourishes and cherishes. This was what the apostles did with the new believers.

The apostles not only imparted the gospel of God to the Thessalonians; they also imparted their own souls. To live a clean and upright life as portrayed in verses 3 through 6 and 10, and to love the new converts, even by giving our own souls to them, as described in verses 7 through 9 and 11, are the prerequisites for infusing others with the salvation conveyed in the gospel that we preach.

Paul’s word in verse 8 about imparting their own souls to the Thessalonians can be compared to his word in 2 Corinthians 12 about being spent for the sake of the believers. Paul was willing not only to spend what he had but also to spend himself, his very being. The apostles were willing to impart what they were into the believers. This can be compared to a nursing mother giving herself to her child.

THE APOSTLES’ CONDUCT

First Thessalonians 2:9 says, “For you remember, brothers, our labor and hardship: While working night and day so as not to be burdensome to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.” The apostles did not want to be a burden on the Thessalonians. Therefore, they labored night and day in order to proclaim to them the gospel of God.

In verse 10 Paul continues, “You are witnesses, as well as God, how in a holy and righteous and blameless manner we conducted ourselves toward you who believe.” *Holy* refers to conduct toward God, *righteous* to conduct toward men, and *blameless* to conduct toward all—God, men, and Satan. In order to conduct himself in this way, Paul had to exercise strict control over himself. Verse 10 reveals that the apostles were those who practiced self-control.

A FATHER EXHORTING HIS CHILDREN

Verse 11 says, “Just as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father to his own children, exhorting you and consoling you and testifying.” The apostle was strong in stressing what or how they were (1:5), for what they were opened the way to bring the new converts into God’s full salvation.

In 2:11 Paul likens himself to a father exhorting his children. In cherishing the believers as their own children, the apostles considered themselves as nourishing mothers. In exhorting them, they considered themselves fathers.

WALKING IN A MANNER WORTHY OF GOD

Verse 12 says, “So that you might walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” God’s calling is according to His selection, and it follows His selection (1:4). As worshippers of idols (v. 9), the believers were in the kingdom of Satan (Matt. 12:26). Now, through the salvation in Christ they were called, and they have believed into the kingdom of God, which is the sphere in which they can worship and enjoy God under the divine ruling with the view of entering into God’s glory. God’s glory goes with His kingdom.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 Paul exhorts the believers to walk in a manner worthy of God. If he

himself had not walked in a manner worthy of God, how could he have exhorted others to do so? In this matter also, he set an example for the believers to follow.

Verse 12 indicates that walking in a manner worthy of God is related to entering into His kingdom and being ushered into His glory. The thought here, in contrast to that in verses 1 through 11, is quite deep. Here we have a matter often neglected by Christians. Not many believers are taught to have a Christian walk that will enable them to enter into the kingdom of God, a walk that will usher them into God's glory. Many Christians have never heard such a word. Nevertheless, this is included as part of Paul's teaching to young believers.

A GOOD PATTERN

First Thessalonians 2:1-12 shows us how we should conduct ourselves as a pattern for new believers. In order to be a proper pattern, we need to be pure in our motives, especially concerning money. Much of what is written in these verses is related to money, greed, and covetousness. If we are not pure concerning money, if we are not sincere, honest, and faithful regarding it, we may be among those who adulterate the word of God and peddle it. Furthermore, this motive may cause us to use flattery and to have a pretext for covetousness. All of these are serious matters. Therefore, if we would be a proper pattern for young saints, our greed must be dealt with, and money matters must be under our feet. We should never speak words of flattery, we should never have any pretext, and we should never seek glory for ourselves. Moreover, instead of trying to please man, we should do our best to please God. Then other believers will have a good pattern to follow.

If you consider the situation among believers today, you will realize that many Christians have no sense of direction. The reason for this lack of direction is that they do not have a proper pattern. We need to be a pattern to others and foster them, cherishing them as mothers and exhorting them as fathers to walk in a manner worthy of God. As we have pointed out in a foregoing message, to walk in a manner worthy of God is actually to live God. Only a life that lives God is worthy of God. When we live God, we walk in a manner worthy of Him. Such a walk will lead us into the kingdom and usher us into the glory of God. This is the goal of God's calling. God has called us to enter His kingdom and glory. (*Life-study of 1 Thessalonians*, second edition, pp. 95-103)

PRESENTING A PATTERN

To give the new believers and young ones a lot of teaching is not the proper way to take care of them. The proper way to foster them is to show them a pattern. By showing them a pattern, you water them, supply them, nourish them, and cherish them. This is fostering. If you find that your experience is somewhat lacking, point the new believers to different people in the Bible, for example, to ones such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and David in the Old Testament and Peter, John, Paul, and Timothy in the New Testament. We can present the lives of Bible characters in such a way as to foster the growth of the young ones.

If we give too much teaching to new ones and young ones, we will damage them. Every mother knows that one of the most important matters in the raising of children is proper feeding. Caring for children is ninety percent a matter of feeding and ten percent a matter of teaching. This also should be our practice in caring for new believers in the church. We must learn to have ninety percent feeding and ten percent teaching. Feeding involves the presenting of patterns either from the Bible or from church history. By reading the biographies of saints throughout the ages, we nourish ourselves and experience a kind of fostering. The point here is that the best way to feed others and foster them is to give them a proper pattern. If there is no pattern, there can be no fostering. Only by having a pattern can we feed others.

In the book of 1 Thessalonians Paul was not preaching himself. Rather, he was feeding his spiritual children with his own living of Christ. This means that Paul's way of living was used to feed his spiritual children. This was the reason he emphasized his coming to the Thessalonians, his preaching, his way of handling the word of God, and his manner of living. (*Life-study of 1*

Thessalonians, second edition, p. 108)

**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD'S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**
(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight

**The Function of the Church (1)
The House of the Living God and
the Pillar and Base of the Truth**

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Cor. 1:2; 3:16-17; 10:32; 11:16; Eph. 2:19, 21-22

- I. *The house of God modifies the church, and the pillar and base of the truth also modifies the church; the house of God and the pillar and base of the truth describe what the church is—1 Tim. 3:15.***
- II. The church is the house of God—1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16:**
- A. The expression *the church of God* indicates that the church is possessed by God and that the church has the nature of God and is constituted with the element of God—Acts 20:28; Gal. 1:13.
 - B. The church is *of* God because it is produced of God as the source and has God as its nature and essence, which are divine, universal, and eternal—1 Cor. 3:16-17.
 - C. The content of the church essentially is God Himself—10:32.
- III. The church of God is the house of the living God—1 Tim. 3:15:**
- A. The house of God is the household of God—Eph. 2:19:
 - 1. The dwelling place—the house—and the family—the household—are one entity—a group of called, regenerated ones indwelt by God Himself—1 Pet. 1:3; 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:16.
 - 2. Just as Christ is not separate from the members of His Body but dwells in them, the Father is not a separate member of His household but is in all the children—Rom. 8:16; 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 3:16.
 - 3. The house of God is organic in the divine life, organic in the divine nature, and organic in the Triune God—Eph. 4:18; 2 Pet. 1:4; Matt. 28:19.
 - 4. Because the church is organic, the church grows—Eph. 2:21.
 - B. In speaking of the church as the house of God, Paul refers to God as the living God—1 Tim. 3:15:
 - 1. The living God, who lives in the church, must be subjective to the church and not merely objective—1 Cor. 3:16.
 - 2. Because God is living, the church as the house of God is also living in Him, by Him, and with Him.
 - 3. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together.
 - C. As the house of God, the church is the dwelling place of God—the place where God can have His rest and put His trust—Eph. 2:22.
 - D. The church as the house of God—the Father's house—is the enlarged, universal, divine-human incorporation as the issue of Christ's being glorified by the Father with the divine glory—John 12:23; 13:31-32; 14:20.
- IV. The Lord wants His church to know Him as the truth and to receive and enjoy Him as life—1 John 1:1-2, 5-6; John 11:25; 14:6; 18:37b:**

- A. *Truth* means “reality,” denoting all the real things revealed in God’s Word, which are mainly Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 2:4; Col. 2:9, 19.
- B. The church is built with the divine life in Christ, a life that is indestructible, unconquerable, and able to withstand decline into death from any source—1 Tim. 1:16; 6:12, 19; 2 Tim. 1:1, 10; Titus 1:2; 3:7.
- C. Both the truth and the life are Christ Himself—John 14:6:
 - 1. Life is the inward and intrinsic element, and truth is the outward definition and explanation—1:4; 18:37b; 8:12, 32, 36; 17:17.
 - 2. The experience of the Lord as life is contained in the Lord as the truth; in order to experience the Lord as life, we must know the truth—14:6; 11:25; 8:32, 36.
- D. The content of the church should be the growth of Christ in us as truth and life—Col. 2:19; 3:4:
 - 1. Truth is the shining, the expression, of the divine light—John 8:12, 32, 36; 1 John 1:5-6.
 - 2. The standard of the truth should constantly be raised higher among all the churches in the Lord’s recovery—1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15.
 - 3. We need to grow in life, be saved in life, be filled with life, and reign in life—Eph. 4:13-16; Rom. 5:10, 17.

V. The church is the supporting pillar and the holding base of the truth—1 Tim. 3:15:

- A. The truth is the Triune God, having Christ as the embodiment, center, and expression, to produce the church as the Body of Christ, the house of God, and the kingdom of God—Col. 2:9; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; 1 Tim. 3:15; John 3:3, 5.
- B. *Truth* in 1 Timothy 3:15 refers to the real things revealed in the New Testament concerning Christ and the church according to God’s New Testament economy—Matt. 16:16, 18; Eph. 5:32:
 - 1. The church is the supporting pillar and holding base of all these realities.
 - 2. A local church should be such a building that holds, bears, and testifies the truth, the reality, of Christ and the church—2:22.
- C. The church bears Christ as the reality; the church testifies to the whole universe that Christ, and Christ alone, is the reality—John 1:14, 17; 14:6.
- D. As the pillar that bears the truth and the base that upholds the pillar, the church testifies the reality, the truth, of Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ—Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4.
- E. In order for the church to function as the pillar and base of the truth, we all need to arrive at the full knowledge of the truth—1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1.

VI. When every brother and sister is full of life and truth, the church will be strong as the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth; this is what is needed in the Lord’s recovery today—1 Tim. 3:15.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:14-16

First Timothy 3:14-16 is the most crucial portion in the four books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Paul has covered the matters of the different teachings, the economy of God, the need for the

leading ones to have a prayer life so that all the other brothers may follow, and the charge to the sisters to remain in faith, love, and holiness with sobriety. Furthermore, the elders have been established and the deacons have been appointed. A church that has all these characteristics is certainly wonderful. Now in 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul tells us that the church is the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. Then in verse 16 he goes on to declare, “And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.” In these verses Paul presents an extremely high standard for the church.

Among Christians today the standard of the church is far below God’s standard revealed in 3:15 and 16. In order to reach this standard, the church must have all the characteristics described in the first two and a half chapters of 1 Timothy. There must be no different teachings, and God’s economy must be practiced continually. The leading ones must have a prayer life, and all the other brothers must follow them to pray in every place. Furthermore, the sisters should remain in faith, love, and holiness with sobriety. Then the government of the church must be established with the two offices of elders and deacons. It is our expectation to practice this kind of church life. We praise the Lord that in His recovery we have seen such a church life at least to a certain extent. Whenever God’s standard for the church is attained as outlined in 1 Timothy, the church will function as the house of the living God and the pillar and base upholding the truth. This is also the great mystery of godliness, the manifestation of God in the flesh. Not only was the Lord Jesus the manifestation of God in the past; the church today should also be the manifestation of God. This is the goal, the aim, of these four Epistles written by Paul.

Even though Paul witnessed the beginning of the decline of the church, he was not disappointed or discouraged. Because he had both insight and foresight, he could be encouraged. He knew that some day and somehow the church would reach God’s standard. The majority of the believers may decline, but a small number at least would be chosen, preserved, and established to practice the church life according to the divine standard.

We in the Lord’s recovery can testify of the great difference between the recovery and today’s organized Christianity. Reconciliation between the two is impossible. All the saints should be encouraged that the situation in the Lord’s recovery is heading toward God’s standard. This standard is that the church should function as the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth, and as the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh. The church life today must be the manifestation of God in the flesh. When visitors, including those who have not yet believed in the Lord, come to the meetings and behold such a manifestation, they will no doubt be greatly surprised. They may say, “What is this? It is different from anything we have seen elsewhere. It is even different from the church services in religion.” Yes, the church is different; it is the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth, and the manifestation of God in the flesh. Every local church must reach this standard and continue according to it. There should be no decline; rather, we should maintain God’s standard until the glorious appearing of our Head, the Savior, Jesus Christ.

In 3:14 Paul says, “These things I write to you, hoping to come to you shortly.” By *these things* Paul means all that he has covered thus far in this Epistle. When he wrote this book, he was hoping to come shortly to see Timothy.

THE HOUSE OF THE LIVING GOD

Verse 15 continues, “But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.” The words *know how one ought to conduct himself* indicate that this book gives instructions concerning the way to take care of a local church.

According to Paul’s word in verse 15, the church is the house of God. The Greek word rendered “house” may also be translated “household.” The same word is used in 3:4, 5, and 12 (*houses*). The household, the family, of God is the house of God. The house and the household are one thing—the assembly that is composed of the believers (Eph. 2:19; Heb. 3:6). The reality of this house as the

dwelling place of the living God is in our spirit (Eph. 2:22). We must live and act in our spirit so that in this house God can be manifested as the living God.

As God's dwelling place, the church is both God's house and His household, His family. In the Old Testament, the temple and God's people, His family, were two separate things. But in the fulfillment in the New Testament, the dwelling place and the family are one. The family is God's dwelling place, and God's dwelling place is His family. As we have indicated, the Greek word for *house* may be translated either as "house" or "household." According to God's New Testament economy, God's family is His house. These are not two separate things; they are actually one. We are God's family and also His temple, His dwelling place.

In speaking of the church as the house of God, Paul specifically refers to God as the *living* God. The living God, who lives in the church, must be subjective to the church rather than objective. An idol in the heathen temple is lifeless. The God who not only lives but also acts, moves, and works in His living temple, the church, is living. Because He is living, the church too is living in Him, by Him, and with Him. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together. The living church is the house and the household of the living God. Hence, it becomes the manifestation of God in the flesh. (*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, second edition, pp. 53-56)

**LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD'S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH**
(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Nine

**The Function of the Church (2)
The Corporate Manifestation of God in the Flesh**

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:15-16; John 1:1, 14; Col. 2:9; 1 Cor. 6:17; 7:25, 40

I. God's manifestation was first in Christ as an individual expression in the flesh—1 Tim. 3:16; Col. 2:9; John 1:1, 14:

- A. The New Testament does not say that only the Son of God was incarnated; it reveals that God was manifested in the flesh—1 Tim. 3:15-16:
 - 1. God was manifested in the flesh not only as the Son but as the entire God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
 - 2. The entire God and not only God the Son was incarnated; hence, Christ in His incarnation was the entire God manifested in the flesh:
 - a. In His ministry in the stage of incarnation, Christ brought the infinite God into the finite man; in Christ, the infinite God and the finite man became one—John 8:58; 7:6; 12:24.
 - b. Through incarnation the divine incorporation—God in His Divine Trinity coinhering mutually and working together as one—was brought into humanity; Christ is therefore the incorporation of the Triune God with the tripartite man—14:10-11.
- B. The Word, who is God, became flesh—1:1, 14:
 - 1. *Became flesh* (v. 14) means in the likeness, in the fashion, of man—Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7-8.
 - 2. In the form of a man Christ appeared to people, yet He was God manifested in a man—2 Cor. 5:16.
 - 3. The God who the Word is, is not a partial God but the entire God—God the Son, God the Father, and God the Spirit.
 - 4. The Word is God's definition, explanation, and expression; hence, the Word who became flesh—God manifested in the flesh—is God's definition, explanation, and expression in the flesh—John 1:18.
- C. In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily—Col. 2:9:
 - 1. *All the fullness of the Godhead* refers to the entire Godhead, to the complete God.
 - 2. Since the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead must be the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.
 - 3. That all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that the Triune God is embodied in Him—John 14:10.
 - 4. As the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, Christ is not only the Son of God but also the entire God.

II. First Timothy 3:15-16 indicates that not only Christ Himself as the Head is the manifestation of God in the flesh but also that the church as the Body of Christ and the house of God is the manifestation of God in the flesh—the mystery of godliness:

- A. *Godliness* in verse 16 refers not only to piety but also to the living of God in the church, that is, God as life lived out in the church to be expressed:
 - 1. Both Christ and the church are the mystery of godliness, expressing God in the flesh.
 - 2. The church life is the expression of God; therefore, the mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church—1 Cor. 16; 14:24-25.
- B. God is manifested in the church—the house of God and the Body of Christ—as the enlarged corporate expression in the flesh—Eph. 2:19; 1:22-23:
 - 1. The manifestation of God in the flesh began with Christ when He was on earth—John 14:9.
 - 2. The manifestation of God in the flesh continues with the church, which is the increase, enlargement, and multiplication of the manifestation of God in the flesh—1 Tim. 3:15-16.
- C. When a church is taken care of according to what is written in 1 Timothy 1—3, the church will function as the house of the living God for His move on earth and as the pillar and base of the truth, bearing the reality of Christ and His Body—3:15.
- D. Such a church becomes the continuation of Christ’s manifestation of God in the flesh—Christ lived out of the church as the manifestation of God—Eph. 5:32.
- E. This is God manifested in the flesh in a wider way according to the New Testament principle of incarnation—1 Cor. 7:40; Gal. 2:20:
 - 1. The principle of incarnation is that God enters into man and mingles Himself with man to make man one with Himself; thus, God is in man, and man is in God—John 15:4-5.
 - 2. The principle of incarnation means that divinity is brought into humanity and works with humanity—1 Cor. 6:17; 7:40; 1 Tim. 4:1.
 - 3. The New Testament principle of incarnation is that, in Christ and through Christ, the divine life and nature are mingled with the human life and nature so that we and God may have one life and one living—1 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 2:20.
 - 4. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 7 in the principle of incarnation:
 - a. The principle in verse 10 is the same as that in Galatians 2:20: the principle of incarnation—two persons living as one person.
 - b. In verses 25 and 40 of 1 Corinthians 7 we see the spirituality of a person who is so one with the Lord and permeated with Him that even his opinion expresses the Lord’s mind.
 - c. If we are saturated with the Spirit, what we express will be our thought, but it will also be something of the Lord because we are one with Him—6:17.
- F. The great mystery of godliness is that God has become man so that man may become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead to produce a corporate God- man for the manifestation of God in the flesh—Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4; Eph. 4:24.
- G. Ultimately, God will be manifested in the New Jerusalem as the consummated corporate expression of the processed and consummated Triune God in the new heaven and new earth—Rev. 21:1-2, 10-11.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE PILLAR AND BASE OF THE TRUTH

Speaking metaphorically, Paul goes on to say [in 1 Timothy 3:15] that the church is “the pillar and base of the truth.” The pillar supports the building, and the base holds the pillar. The church is such a supporting pillar and holding base of the truth.

The truth here refers to the real things revealed in the New Testament concerning Christ and the church according to God’s New Testament economy. The church is the supporting pillar and holding base of all these realities. A local church should be such a building that holds, bears, and testifies the

truth, the reality, of Christ and the church.

The church as the house of the living God is both the pillar that bears the truth and the base that upholds the pillar. As we have pointed out, the truth is the reality and the contents of God's New Testament economy. This economy is composed of two mysteries: Christ as the mystery of God (Col. 2:2) and the church as the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4). Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, are the contents of the reality of God's New Testament economy.

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

First Timothy 3:16 begins with, "And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness." The conjunction *and* in verse 16 indicates that Paul has not finished speaking about the church in verse 15. Oh, the church is a great matter! It is the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth. Paul's use of the conjunction at the beginning of verse 16 indicates that the church is something even more than the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth. The church is also the mystery of godliness. The church is the house, the pillar and the base, and the mystery of godliness.

According to the context, *godliness* in verse 16 refers not only to piety but also to the living of God in the church, that is, God as life lived out in the church. This is the great mystery confessed universally by believers in Christ.

The church as the house of the living God and as the pillar and base of the truth is not so mysterious. But the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh certainly is a mystery. A mystery always goes beyond our understanding. It refers to something that cannot be explained. If we are able to explain a certain matter, it is not a mystery.

The church is not only the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth but also the mystery of godliness. *Godliness* refers to God expressed. What are we doing in the church life? We are expressing God. Human beings may not realize this adequately, but the angels recognize it and appreciate it. On the one hand, the good angels rejoice when they behold the expression of God in the church. On the other hand, the evil angels and the demons tremble in fear. They realize that eventually those in the church life will condemn them to the lake of fire.

When the Lord Jesus was born, a host of angels praised God (Luke 2:10-14). If the angels rejoiced at the birth of the Lord Jesus in Bethlehem, the city of David, will they not also rejoice to see God manifested in the church, which is Christ's increase and enlargement? Furthermore, when the Lord Jesus, living out God and manifesting Him on earth, confronted the demons, the demons cried out. In at least one case they begged the Lord Jesus not to send them into the abyss (8:31). If the demons trembled at the presence of the Lord Jesus, will they not also tremble at the manifestation of the living God in the church? No doubt when the church is living out God and manifesting Him, the demons and the evil angels will be terrified. Every local church must be a place where Christ is born anew in the saints. Furthermore, every local church must live out God in such a way that the devil's time is shortened. On the one hand, when the churches come up to God's standard, the angels will sing and rejoice; on the other hand, the demons and the evil angels will tremble.

According to unconfirmed historical accounts, the six lines of poetry in 1 Timothy 3:16 made up a song that the saints in the early church loved to sing. *He* refers to Christ, who was God manifested in the flesh as the mystery of godliness. The transition from *the mystery of godliness* to *He* implies that Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh is the mystery of godliness (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20). This mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church, and such a living is also the manifestation of God in the flesh.

The first part of 1 Timothy 3:16 speaks of a matter—the mystery of godliness. Hence, we would expect Paul to use the relative pronoun *which* to refer to *the mystery of godliness* as a matter. However, the fact that he says "He who" implies that the mystery of godliness is a person and not merely a matter. As we will see, this person is Christ as the Head with His Body.

Through incarnation and human living (John 1:1, 14), God was manifested in the flesh. *In the flesh* means "in the likeness, in the fashion, of man" (Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7-8). Christ appeared to people

in the form of man (2 Cor. 5:16), yet He was God manifested in man.

Christ was also “justified in the Spirit.” The Greek word for *justified* also means “vindicated.” The incarnated Christ in His human living was not only vindicated as the Son of God by the Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17; Rom. 1:3-4) but also justified, proved, and approved as right and righteous by the Spirit (Matt. 3:15-16; 4:1). He was manifested in the flesh but was vindicated and justified in the Spirit. He appeared in the flesh, but He lived in the Spirit (Luke 4:1, 14; Matt. 12:28) and offered Himself to God through the Spirit (Heb. 9:14). His transfiguration (Matt. 17:2) and His resurrection are both justifications in the Spirit. Furthermore, in resurrection He even became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17) to dwell and live in us (Rom. 8:9-10) for the manifestation of God in the flesh as the mystery of godliness. Hence, now we know Him and His members no longer according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:16). Since the manifestation of God in the flesh is justified in the Spirit, and the Spirit is one with our spirit (Rom. 8:16), we must live and behave in our spirit that this justification may be accomplished.

Paul also says “seen by angels.” Angels saw the incarnation, human living, and ascension of Christ (Luke 2:9-14; Matt. 4:11; Acts 1:10-11; Rev. 5:6, 11-12).

Christ was also preached among the nations. Christ as God’s manifestation in the flesh has been preached as the gospel among the nations, including the nation of Israel, from the day of Pentecost (Rom. 16:26; Eph. 3:8).

Furthermore, Christ has been “believed on in the world.” Christ as the embodiment of God in the flesh has been believed on, received as Savior and life, by people in the world (Acts 13:48).

Paul concludes 1 Timothy 3:16 with the phrase *taken up in glory*. This refers to Christ’s ascension into glory (Mark 16:19; Acts 1:9-11; 2:33; Phil. 2:9). According to the sequence of historical events, Christ’s ascension preceded His being preached among the nations. However, it is listed here as the last step in Christ’s being the manifestation of God in the flesh. This must indicate that the church too is taken up in glory. Hence, it implies that not only Christ Himself as the Head but also the church as the Body are the manifestation of God in the flesh. When a church is well taken care of according to the instructions given in the first two chapters of 1 Timothy, with the oversight of the episcopate and the service of the deacons fully established, as revealed in chapter 3, the church will function as the house and household of the living God for His move on the earth, and as the supporting pillar and holding base of the truth, bearing the divine reality of Christ and His Body as a testimony to the world. Then the church becomes the continuation of Christ as the manifestation of God in the flesh. This is the great mystery of godliness—Christ lived out of the church as the manifestation of God in the flesh!

I wish to emphasize the fact that although Christ was taken up in glory (Acts 1) before the preaching of Him began in Acts 2, Paul mentions this last, not only after the preaching but even after being believed on in the world. This indicates that “taken up in glory” may include not only the ascension of Christ but also the rapture of the church. The Head, Christ, was taken up before the preaching of Him began; however, the Body, the church, will be taken up only after Christ has been preached and believed on in the world. Therefore, in 1 Timothy 3:16 there is a definite indication that this verse refers not only to the Head as the manifestation of God in the flesh but also to the Body as the continuation of this manifestation. This is indeed logical, for how can a person’s head function in isolation from his body? The Head, Christ, has been taken up in glory, and the Body, the church, will also be taken up in glory. Both the Head and the Body are the mystery of godliness. This is the manifestation of God in the flesh. (*Life-study of 1 Timothy*, second edition, pp. 56-60)