# International Training
for Elders and Responsible Ones

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**GENERAL SUBJECT:**
**LOVING THE LORD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER**
**FOR THE ORGANIC BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH**
**AS THE BODY OF CHRIST**

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LOVING THE LORD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER
FOR THE ORGANIC BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH
AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message One
Loving the Lord and Loving One Another—
the Most Excellent Way for Us to Be Anything
and Do Anything for the Organic Building Up
of the Church as the Body of Christ

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 8:1b; 12:31b; 13:1, 4-8, 13; 14:1, 3, 4b; John 21:15-17; Gal. 6:2-3

I. Paul commended the Thessalonians by telling them that “your faith grows exceedingly and the love of each one of you all to one another is increasing”—2 Thes. 1:3:
   A. To believe in the Lord is to receive Him as life, and to love the Lord is to enjoy the very person whom we have received; faith is given to us by God so that by it we may receive Christ as our life; love issues out of such a wonderful faith and enables us to live out all the riches of the Triune God in Christ as our life—2 Pet. 1:1; Heb. 12:1-2a; 2 Cor. 4:13; Gal. 5:6; John 1:12-13; 21:15-17; Col. 3:4.
   B. To the apostle Paul the grace of the Lord “superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:14); through faith we receive the Lord (John 1:12), and through love we enjoy the Lord whom we have received (14:21, 23; 21:15-17).
   C. In this wonderful faith and by this super-excellent love of the Triune God, we should love Him and all those who belong to Him; only in this way can we become, in the current of the church’s degradation, the overcomers whom the Lord is calling and desiring to obtain in Revelation 2 and 3.

II. The Lord’s recovery is a recovery of loving the Lord Jesus with the first love, the best love, and of loving one another for the building up of the organic Body of Christ, which is the building up of the New Jerusalem as the goal of God’s eternal economy—Eph. 4:15-16; Rev. 2:4-5:
   A. The Christ whom we love is the church-loving Christ; when we love Him, we will love the church as He does—Eph. 5:25.
   B. The degradation of the church begins with our leaving the first love toward the Lord; to love the Lord with the first love, the best love, is to give the Lord the preeminence, the first place, in all things, being constrained by His love to regard and take Him as everything in our life—Rev. 2:4-5; Col. 1:18b; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Mark 12:30; Psa. 73:25-26.
   C. The very life that we received when we believed in the Lord Jesus is a person, and the only way to apply and enjoy this person is by loving Him with the first love; since the Lord Jesus as our life is a person, we need a new contact with Him to enjoy His present presence at this very moment and day by day—John 11:25; 14:5-6; 1 Tim. 1:14; John 14:21, 23; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Rev. 2:4-7; Col. 1:18b; Rom. 6:4; 7:6; Hymns, #559.
   D. We must be persons who are flooded with and carried away by the love of Christ; the divine love should be like the rushing tide of great waters toward us, impelling us to live to Him and love Him to the uttermost beyond our own control—2 Cor. 5:14.
E. In order to love the Lord to the uttermost, we need to be those who desire and seek to dwell in the house of God all the days of our life to behold His beauty (loveliness, pleasantness, delightedness) and to inquire of God in His temple; to inquire of God is to check with God about everything in our daily life—Psa. 27:4.

III. Among the co-workers, the elders, the responsible ones, and everyone in the vital groups, love must prevail—1 Cor. 12:31b; 13:4-8, 13:
A. We have been regenerated to be God’s species, God’s kind (John 1:12-13), and God is love (1 John 4:8, 16); since we become God in His life and nature but not in the Godhead, we also should love; this means that we do not merely love others but that we are love itself.
B. We must keep ourselves in the love of God and be constrained by the love of Christ to lay down our lives on behalf of the brothers—Jude 19-21; 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:14-16; 4:7-21.
C. God first loved us in that He infused us with His love and generated within us the love with which we love Him and the brothers (vv. 19-21); to abide in God is to live a life in which we love others habitually with the love that is God Himself, that He may be expressed in us—vv. 16-17; Hymns, #546 and #547.
D. We need to beware of ambition and pride:
1. Whether or not we will be useful in the Lord’s hands for the long run and whether or not we will bring in the blessing for a lasting time does not depend on what we can do but on how pure our heart is; we need to have a pure heart, purified from any form of subtle ambition in intention, purpose, motive, and action in the Lord’s recovery—Matt. 5:8.
2. Pride means destruction, and to be proud is to be a top fool; humility saves us from all kinds of destruction and invites God’s grace—James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5.
3. We should never hunt to be the first in any work for the Lord (3 John 9); rivalry in the Lord’s work is not only a sign of ambition but also a sign of pride; referring to our capacity, success, perfection, and virtue is a careless form of pride (Luke 17:10; Phil. 1:15; Gal. 5:25-26).
4. Thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think is another form of pride (Rom. 12:3); self-boasting, self-exaltation, self-glorification, self-will, self-justification, self-righteousness, and lusting after vainglory are all ugly and base expressions of pride (Gal. 5:25-26).
5. Wanting to be great and not to be a servant and wanting to be the first and not to be a slave are also a sign of pride—Matt. 20:26-27.
6. We should pray for one another, have an intimate concern for one another, cherish and nourish one another, and always cover one another, speak well of one another, and never expose one another’s failures and defects (2 Cor. 7:2-3; Eph. 1:15-16; Philem. 4; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; cf. Matt. 24:49); we need to forgive one another and seek to be forgiven by one another (Col. 3:12-15).
7. On the one hand, we should have a clear sight over the people for whom we care with much discernment, and on the other hand, we should be blind spiritually—Isa. 11:1-4a.
8. We should not speak reviling words; to revile is to rebuke or criticize harshly or abusively; to revile is to assail someone with abusive language; to revile is not only to rebuke someone but also to sharply wound him and stamp him with open rudeness or contempt arising from arrogance—Gal. 5:14-15, 25-26:
   a. Revilers are ones who beat their fellow slaves, which means that they habitually mistreat fellow believers; revilers will not inherit the kingdom of God—Matt. 24:45-51; 1 Cor. 6:9-10.
   b. Those who take in reviling words bear the same responsibility as those who speak
reviling words; in order for the church to maintain the oneness, the brothers and sisters must withstand reviling words—v. 10; cf. Num. 6:6.

c. The consciousness of sin comes from knowing God; in the same way, the consciousness of reviling words comes from the knowledge of the Body; reviling words are opposed to the testimony of the Body—1 Cor. 1:10.

IV. Love is the most excellent way for us to be anything or do anything for the building up of the church as the organic Body of Christ—12:31b—13:8a:

A. The love described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 is the expression of the divine life (vv. 4-8a); furthermore, the fact that love is the fruit of the Spirit indicates that the substance of love must be the Spirit (Gal. 5:22); if we do not have love, our speaking is like that of sounding brass and a clanging cymbal, which give sounds without life (1 Cor. 13:1; 14:1, 3, 4b, 12, 31; 2 Cor. 3:6).

B. Love is not jealous, is not provoked, does not take account of evil, covers all things, endures all things, survives everything, and is the greatest—1 Cor. 13:4-8, 13.

C. We should be like God in our love for others, loving people without any discrimination (Matt. 5:43-48); the first one saved by Christ through His crucifixion was not a gentleman, but a criminal, a robber, sentenced to death; this is very meaningful (27:38; Luke 23:42-43).

D. The law of the Spirit of life is the law of Christ as the law of love—Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2-3.

E. The law of love must be substantiated by the law of the Spirit of life so that we may be able to bear one another’s burdens (v. 2; Rom. 8:2); but if we are filled with pride, we will be unable to bear others’ burdens because we deceive ourselves by thinking that we are something when we are nothing (Gal. 6:3).

F. When the law of love is activated within us, we automatically and spontaneously will be shepherds who have the loving and forgiving heart of our Father God and the shepherding and seeking spirit of our Savior Christ—John 21:15-17; Luke 15:3-7.

G. When the law of love is activated within us, our labor in the Lord is a labor of love (1 Cor. 15:58; 1 Thes. 1:3) in which we “support the weak” (Acts 20:35) and “sustain the weak” (1 Thes. 5:14); the weak refers to those who are weak either in their spirit or soul or body, or are weak in faith (Rom. 14:1; 15:1).

H. The church life is a life of brotherly love (1 John 4:7-8; 2 John 5-6; John 15:12, 17; Rev. 3:7; Eph. 5:2; cf. Jude 12a), and the Body builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:16).

I. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”; we may listen to the messages of the ministry and become puffed up with mere knowledge—1 Cor. 8:1b; cf. 2 Cor. 3:6.

J. Our God-given, regenerated spirit is a spirit of love; we need a burning spirit of love to conquer the degradation of today’s church—2 Tim. 1:7.

K. As the branches of Christ, the true vine, we need to love one another in order to express the divine life in fruit-bearing—John 15:12-17.

V. John 21, a chapter on shepherding, is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John; after His resurrection the Lord shepherded Peter and commissioned him to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep; this is to incorporate the apostolic ministry with Christ’s heavenly ministry to take care of God’s flock, the church, which issues in the Body of Christ—vv. 15-17:

A. Peter was so impressed with this commission of the Lord that in his first book he tells the believers that they were like sheep being led astray, but they have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer (Christ) of their souls—1 Pet. 2:25.

B. He exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock of God among them so that when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, they will receive the unfading crown of glory (5:1-4); Peter’s word
indicates that the heavenly ministry of Christ is mainly to shepherd the church of God as His flock, which issues in His Body.

C. The main purpose and goal of the apostolic ministry incorporated with Christ’s heavenly ministry are to build up the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem for the accomplishment of the eternal economy of God.

VI. Psalms 22—24 are a group of psalms revealing Christ from His crucifixion to His kingship in the coming age; in Psalm 22 we see Christ’s death, His resurrection, and His many brothers produced in His resurrection to form His church; in Psalm 23 we see Christ as the Shepherd in His resurrection; and in Psalm 24 we see Christ as the coming King in His kingdom:

A. These three psalms show that between Christ’s death and resurrection in the past and Christ’s coming again as the King in His kingdom in the future is the enjoyment, experience, and expression of Christ as our pneumatic Shepherd in the present.

B. This reveals that shepherding is the bridge between Christ’s first coming and His second coming; in His heavenly ministry Christ is presently shepherding people, and if we participate in His wonderful shepherding, there will be a big revival, a new revival, in the Lord’s recovery to bring Christ back.

VII. In taking care of the churches and in shepherding the saints, what is needed is the intimate concern of a ministering life—2 Cor. 7:2-7; 12:15; Philem. 7, 12:

A. In shepherding the saints, it is possible that we may kill others; the reason for this killing, this fruitlessness, is the lack of intimate concern—cf. 2 Cor. 3:6:

1. The milk of the word of God, the life supply of Christ, should be used to nourish the new believers in Christ, not to “boil” them—1 Pet. 2:2; Exo. 23:19b.

2. If we have the ability to carry on a work but lack an intimate concern, our work will be fruitless; our heart must be enlarged to embrace all believers regardless of their condition—2 Cor. 6:10-11.

B. How fruitful we are, how much fruit we bear, does not depend on what we are able to do; it depends on whether we have an intimate concern.

C. A ministering life is a life that warms up others; if we would minister life to the saints, we must have a genuine concern for them, a concern that is emotional, deep, and intimate.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

FOLLOWING THE STEPS OF THE PROCESSED TRIUNE GOD IN SEEKING AND GAINING THE FALLEN PEOPLE

My burden in this chapter is that we have to learn of the apostles, the elders, and even the Triune God. We have to follow the steps of the processed Triune God in His seeking and gaining fallen people. Luke 15 records that the Pharisees and scribes criticized the Lord by saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (v. 2). Then the Lord told three wonderful parables, which unveil the saving love of the Triune God toward sinners.

The Son as the Shepherd Seeking the One Lost Sheep

The Son as the shepherd would leave the ninety-nine to seek the one lost sheep (vv. 3-7).

The Spirit as the Woman Seeking the Lost Coin

The second parable is that of a woman seeking a lost coin (vv. 8-10). This signifies the Spirit seeking a lost sinner. The Son’s finding took place outside the sinner and was completed at the cross
through His redemptive death. The Spirit’s seeking is inward and is carried out by His working within the repenting sinner.

**The Father as the Father of the Prodigal Son**

Because of the Son’s step of seeking the sinner by dying on the cross and the Spirit’s step of sanctifying by searching and cleansing the sinner’s inward parts, the sinner comes to his senses. This is shown by the prodigal son’s coming to himself and desiring to return to his father (vv. 17-18). First Peter 1:2 reveals that before we received the sprinkling of Christ’s blood, the Holy Spirit sanctified us. This is His seeking sanctification. The sinner is awakened by the Spirit’s seeking to cause him to return to the Father. When the prodigal son returned, his father saw him while he was still a long way off. This indicates that the father was expectantly waiting and watching day by day for his son to return. When his father saw him, he ran to receive his returning son (Luke 15:20). This shows that God the Father runs to receive the returning sinners.

I hope that there will be a genuine revival among us by our receiving this burden of shepherding. If all the churches receive this teaching to participate in Christ’s wonderful shepherding, there will be a big revival in the recovery. In the past we did much speaking and teaching with very little shepherding. Shepherding and teaching should be like two feet for our move with the Lord. Our shepherding should always be with teaching, and our teaching should always be with shepherding.

We have seen from our crystallization-study of the Gospel of John that its last chapter, John 21, reveals the apostolic ministry in cooperation with Christ’s heavenly ministry. In His heavenly ministry Christ is shepherding people, and we need to cooperate with Him by shepherding people. Without shepherding, our work for the Lord cannot be effective. We must learn all the truths so that we may have something to speak and go to contact people to shepherd them.

Shepherding is something divine. In order to be a shepherd, we must be a witness of Christ, a member of Christ, and a brother of Christ, sharing His sonship. Then we will participate in the oracle of the sonship to become a prophet. As a prophet for God’s oracle, we will speak for the Lord. Meanwhile, we need to shepherd people. This is the way to be fruitful, to have the multiplication and the increase. If this kind of fellowship is received by us, I believe there will be a big revival on the earth, not by a few spiritual giants but by the many members of Christ’s Body being shepherds who follow the steps of the processed Triune God in seeking and gaining fallen people. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994–1997*, vol. 5, “The Vital Groups,” pp. 91-93)

**LOVE PREVAILS**

**OUTLINE**

I. God is love; we love because He first loved us—1 John 4:8, 19.

II. God’s predestination of us unto the divine sonship was motivated by the divine love—Eph. 1:4-5.

III. God’s giving of His only begotten Son to us that we may be saved from perdition judicially through His death and have the eternal life organically in His resurrection was motivated by the divine love—John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10.

IV. God’s love is the source of the grace of Christ dispensed to us through the fellowship of the Spirit—2 Cor. 13:14.

V. God’s love motivates us, His children, to love our enemies that we may be perfect as He is; He loves the fallen human race, who became His enemies, by causing His sun (signifying Christ) to rise on the evil and the good indiscriminately and sending rain (signifying the Spirit) on the just and the unjust equally; thus, we may become the sons of the heavenly Father who are sanctified from the tax collectors and the Gentiles—Matt. 5:43-48.

VI. Love builds up—1 Cor. 8:1b.

VII. Love is not jealous, is not provoked, does not take account of evil, covers all things, endures
all things, never falls away, and is the greatest—13:4-8, 13.

VIII. Love is the conclusion of all spiritual virtues and the factor of fruit-bearing that supplies us bountifully with the rich entrance into the kingdom of Christ—2 Pet. 1:5-11.

IX. The Body of Christ builds itself up in love—Éph. 4:16.

X. The spirit that God gives us is of love; hence, it is of power and of sobermindedness—2 Tim. 1:7.

XI. He who does not love abides in death—1 John 3:14b.

XII. Pursue love while you desire spiritual gifts—1 Cor. 14:1.

XIII. To overcome the degradation of the church we need to pursue love with those who seek the Lord out of a pure heart—2 Tim. 2:22.

XIV. Loving one another is a sign that we belong to Christ—John 13:34-35.

XV. The love of God makes us more than conquerors over our circumstantial situations—Rom. 8:35-39.

XVI. Love is the most excellent way—1 Cor. 12:31b.

In the previous two chapters we saw that shepherding and teaching are the obligation of the vital groups. In this chapter we want to see that love prevails. Regardless of how much we shepherd and teach others, without love everything is in vain. First Corinthians 13 is a chapter covering one unique thing, that is, love. This chapter tells us that even if we prophesy in the highest way and give everything for others, without love they mean nothing (vv. 2-3). Both shepherding and teaching need love, not our natural love but His divine love.

**GOD BEING LOVE**

We are God’s species because we have been born of Him to have His life and nature (John 1:12-13). We have been regenerated to be God’s species, God’s kind, and God is love. Since we become God in His life and nature, we also should be love. This means that we do not merely love others but that we are love itself. As His species, we should be love because He is love. Whoever is love is God’s species, God’s kind.

God is love; we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:8, 19). God does not want us to love with our natural love but with Him as our love. God created man in His image (Gen. 1:26), which means that He created man according to what He is. God’s image is what God is, and His attributes are what He is. According to the revelation in the Holy Scriptures, God’s first attribute is love. God created man according to His attributes, the first of which is love. Although created man does not have the reality of love, there is something in his created being that wants to love others. Even fallen man has the desire within him to love. But that is just a human virtue, the very expression of the divine attribute of love. When we were regenerated, God infused us with Himself as love. We love Him because He first loved us. He initiated this love.

**GOD’S PREDESTINATION OF US UNTO THE DIVINE SONSHIP**

God’s predestination of us unto the divine sonship was motivated by the divine love. Ephesians 1:4-5 says that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world “to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship.” The phrase in love can be joined with the phrase predestinating us unto sonship. God predestinated us unto sonship in love. John 3:16 says that God so loved the world. He loved us before the foundation of the world.

**GOD’S GIVING OF HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON TO US BEING MOTIVATED BY THE DIVINE LOVE**

God’s giving of His only begotten Son to us that we may be saved from perdition judicially through His death and have the eternal life organically in His resurrection was motivated by the divine love (3:16; 1 John 4:9-10). John 3:16 is strengthened by two verses from John’s first Epistle—4:9 and 10. First John
4:10 says that God sent His Son to us as a propitiation for our sins. This is judicial through His death. Verse 9 says that God sent His Son to us that we may have life and live through Him. This is organic in His resurrection. John 3:16 should be read with 1 John 4:9-10.

**GOD’S LOVE BEING THE SOURCE**

God’s love is the source of the grace of Christ dispensed to us through the fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). This is for us to enjoy the processed and consummated Triune God.

**GOD’S LOVE MOTIVATING US TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES**

God’s love motivates us, His children, to love our enemies that we may be perfect as He is; He loves the fallen human race, who became His enemies, by causing His sun (signifying Christ) to rise on the evil and the good indiscriminately and sending rain (signifying the Spirit) on the just and the unjust equally; thus, we may become the sons of the heavenly Father who are sanctified from the tax collectors and the Gentiles (Matt. 5:43-48). The entire human race became His enemies, but God still loves the human race. If God sent Christ to us with discrimination, we would be disqualified from receiving His salvation. He causes His sun to rise first on the evil and then on the good without discrimination.

We should be like God in our love for others. The tax collectors love only those who love them. The Lord said, “If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” (v. 46). If we love only those who love us, we are of the same species as the tax collectors. But we are of the super, divine species, so we love the evil ones, our enemies, as well as the good ones. This shows how God as love prevails.

The vital groups should be groups that are prevailing. A proof that our vital group is prevailing is that we love people without any discrimination. Some Christian co-workers may feel that we should let certain persons suffer eternal perdition. They may say that they would not love certain persons, such as bank robbers. But while Christ was being crucified on the cross, two robbers were crucified with Him (27:38). One of them said, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Jesus said to him, “Truly I say to you, Today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (v. 43). The first one saved by Christ through His crucifixion was not a gentleman but a criminal, a robber, sentenced to death. This is very meaningful.

**LOVE BUILDS UP**

First Corinthians 8:1b says, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” Teaching without love may puff us up. We may listen to the messages of the ministry and become puffed up with mere knowledge. This does not build up. Love builds up.

**LOVE BEING THE GREATEST**

Love is not jealous, is not provoked, does not take account of evil, covers all things, endures all things, never falls away, and is the greatest (13:4-8, 13). Jealousy is in our nature. When a new child is born in a family, the other child may become jealous. Jealousy is also present in the church life. One sister may be jealous of another sister because she receives many Amens from the saints when she prays or prophesies. Some brothers may be jealous when they see that another brother has been appointed into the eldership. After being in the church life for over sixty years, I can testify that one of the hardest things is to appoint the elders. We realize that if we appoint a certain brother, another brother whom we do not feel to appoint may be stumbled because of jealousy. If a certain sister is asked to take the lead in a sisters’ house, the others may become jealous, but love is not jealous.

Also, love is not provoked. People are easily provoked because of the shortage of love. Regardless of how much we are rebuked, we will not be provoked if we are filled with the divine love. Love does not take account of evil. We have to confess that we have taken account of other people’s evil. Some wives have a record, an account, of their husband’s failures and defects. This record may not be written, but it is
in their mind. They are taking account of their husband’s evil.

The elders need to realize that in their shepherding, they have to cover others’ sins, to not take account of others’ evils. Love covers all things, not only the good things but also the bad things. Whoever uncovers the defects, shortcomings, and sins of the members of the church is disqualified from the eldership. Our uncovering of the members under our eldership, our shepherding, annuls our qualification. Love also endures all things and never falls away. First Corinthians 13 concludes by saying, “Now there abide faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (v. 13).

**LOVE BEING THE CONCLUSION OF ALL SPIRITUAL VIRTUES**

**AND THE FACTOR OF FRUIT-BEARING**

Love is the conclusion of all spiritual virtues and the factor of fruit-bearing that supplies us bountifully with the rich entrance into the kingdom of Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

**THE BODY BUILDING ITSELF UP IN LOVE**

The Body of Christ builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:16). The phrase *in love* is used repeatedly in the book of Ephesians (1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2). God predestinated us unto sonship before the foundation of the world in love, and the Body of Christ builds itself up in love. The growth in life is in love. In the last few years we have appreciated the Lord’s showing us the high peak of the divine revelation. My concern is that although we may talk about the truths of the high peak, love is absent among us. If this is the case, we are puffed up, not built up. The Body of Christ builds itself up in love.

**THE SPIRIT THAT GOD GIVES US BEING OF LOVE**

The spirit that God has given us is our human spirit regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This spirit is a spirit of love; hence, it is of power and of sober-mindedness (2 Tim. 1:7). We may think that we are very powerful and sober, but our spirit is not of love. We talk to people in a way that is full of power and sober-mindedness, but our talk threatens them.

Paul says that we need to fan our gift into flame (v. 6). The main gift that God has given us is our regenerated human spirit with His Spirit, His life, and His nature. We must fan this gift into flame. This means that we have to stir up our spirit so that our spirit will be burning. Romans 12:11 says that we should be burning in spirit. If our spirit is not a spirit of love, our fanning it into flame will burn the whole recovery in a negative way. We must have a burning spirit of love, not a burning spirit of authority, which damages. Whatever is mentioned in 2 Timothy is a requirement for us to face the degradation of the church. How can we overcome the degradation of the church? We must have a burning human spirit of love. Under today’s degradation of the church, we all need a spirit of love fanned into flame to be burning in spirit. Love prevails in this way.

According to my observation throughout the years, most of the co-workers have a human spirit of “power” but not of love. We need a spirit of love to conquer the degradation of today’s church. We should not say or do anything to threaten people. Instead, we should always say and do things with a spirit of love, which has been fanned into flame. This is what the recovery needs.

**THE ONE WHO DOES NOT LOVE ABIDING IN DEATH**

First John 3:14b says that he who does not love abides in death. We may think that we are living, but we are dead because we do not love. If we do not love our brother, we abide in death and are dead, but if we do love him, we abide in life and are living.

**Pursuing Love**

First Corinthians 13 speaks of love, and then chapter 14 begins by saying that we are to pursue love while we desire spiritual gifts (v. 1). Our desiring of gifts must go along with the pursuing of love. Otherwise, the gifts will puff us up.
PURSUING LOVE WITH THOSE WHO SEEK THE LORD OUT OF A PURE HEART

To overcome the degradation of the church we need to pursue love with those who seek the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22). We have to pursue love with a group of seekers of the Lord. This is a vital group.

A SIGN THAT WE BELONG TO CHRIST

Loving one another is a sign that we belong to Christ (John 13:34-35). We do not need to bear an outward sign that we are of Christ. If all the saints in the Lord’s recovery love one another, the whole world will say that these people are of Christ.

THE LOVE OF GOD MAKING US MORE THAN CONQUERORS

The love of God makes us more than conquerors over our circumstantial situations (Rom. 8:35-39). If we are to be more than conquerors, we need the love of Christ and of God.

LOVE BEING THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

The end of 1 Corinthians 12 reveals that love is the most excellent way (v. 31b). How can one be an elder? Love is the most excellent way. How can one be a co-worker? Love is the most excellent way. How do we shepherd people? Love is the most excellent way. Love is the most excellent way for us to prophesy and to teach others. Love is the most excellent way for us to be anything or do anything.

Love prevails. We should love everybody, even our enemies. If the co-workers and elders do not love the bad ones, eventually, they will have nothing to do. We must be perfect as our Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48) by loving the evil ones and the good ones without any discrimination. We must be perfect as our Father because we are His sons, His species. This is most crucial. How can we be a co-worker and an elder? It is by love in every way. We must love any kind of person. The Lord Jesus said that He came to be a Physician, not for the healthy ones but for the sick ones. The Lord said, “Those who are strong have no need of a physician, but those who are ill” (9:12).

The church is not a police station to arrest people or a law court to judge people but a home to raise up the believers. Parents know that the worse their children are, the more they need their raising up. If our children were angels, they would not need our parenting to raise them up. The church is a loving home to raise up the children. The church is also a hospital to heal and to recover the sick ones. Finally, the church is a school to teach and edify the unlearned ones who do not have much understanding. Because the church is a home, a hospital, and a school, the co-workers and elders should be one with the Lord to raise up, to heal, to recover, and to teach others in love.

Some of the churches, however, are police stations to arrest the sinful ones and law courts to judge them. Paul’s attitude was different. He said, “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” (2 Cor. 11:29a). When the scribes and Pharisees brought an adulterous woman to the Lord, He said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). After all of them left, the Lord asked the sinful woman, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you” (vv. 10-11). Who is without sin? Who is perfect? Paul said, “To the weak I became weak that I might gain the weak” (1 Cor. 9:22). That is love. We should not consider that others are weak but we are not. That is not love. Love covers and builds up, so love is the most excellent way for us to be anything and to do anything for the building up of the Body of Christ. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994–1997, vol. 5, pp. 117-127)
I. The subject of Song of Songs, a poem, is the history of love in an excellent marriage, revealing the progressive experience of an individual believer’s loving fellowship with Christ for the preparation of His bride in six major stages:

A. In the first stage of Song of Songs, the lover of Christ is drawn to pursue Him for satisfaction (1:2—2:7); the Lord wants His seeker to have a personal, affectionate, private, and spiritual relationship with Him:

1. *Draw me* is personal (1:4); the Lord said, “I drew them with cords of a man, / With bands of love” (Hosea 11:4a); this indicates that God loves us with His divine love not on the level of divinity but on the level of humanity; the cords of a man through which God draws us include Christ’s incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension; it is by all these steps of Christ in His humanity that God’s love in His salvation reaches us in a personal way (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9-10).

2. *Kiss me* (S. S. 1:2) is affectionate; after believing in Christ to receive Him as the divine life (John 1:4,12), we need to love Christ in a personal and affectionate way that we may pursue Him and enjoy Him as our satisfaction; Psalm 2:12 commands us to “kiss the Son”; kissing Christ is the enjoyment of Christ.

3. In her pursuing of Christ the seeker is brought by Him into her regenerated spirit as the Holiest of all (his chambers—S. S. 1:4) to have fellowship with Him; His chambers indicate a private relationship with the Lord.

4. Furthermore, because Christ visits us in our regenerated spirit as His inner chambers, our relationship with Him must be spiritual; He visits us in our spirit privately, coming to us in a spiritual way, not in a physical way.

5. All the spiritual principles are contained in this first stage of the seeker’s overcoming life in Song of Songs; the lessons that follow are not new, but they are old lessons repeated in a deeper way; regeneration brings the gene of God into us, and all the experiences of our whole Christian life are in this gene—1 John 3:9.

B. In the second stage of Song of Songs, the lover of Christ is called to be delivered from the self through her oneness with the cross of Christ—2:8—3:5:

1. Song of Songs 2:8-9 speaks of the vitality of resurrection; in these verses Christ is likened to a gazelle or a young hart “leaping upon the mountains, / Skipping upon the hills”; mountains and hills refer to difficulties and barriers, but nothing is too high or too great to stop the resurrected Christ; we need to seek for and know Christ’s mountain-leaping and hill-skipping presence.

2. The lover of Christ falls into introspection, which becomes a seclusion as a wall that
keeps her away from the presence of Christ (v. 9b); hence, Christ encourages her to rise up and come out of her low situation to be with Him (v. 10).

3. The lover of Christ also hears the Lord telling her that the time of dormancy (winter) is past and that the trials (rain) are over and gone (v. 11); He also tells her that the springtime has come; thus, she is entreated and encouraged by the Lord with the flourishing riches of resurrection (vv. 12-13).

4. It is by the power of resurrection, not by our natural life, that we, the lovers of Christ, are enabled to be conformed to His death by being one with His cross (vv. 14-15); the reality of resurrection is the pneumatic Christ as the consummated Spirit, who indwells and is mingled with our regenerated spirit; it is in such a mingled spirit that we participate in and experience the resurrection of Christ, which enables us to be one with the cross to be delivered from the self and to be transformed into a new man in God’s new creation for the fulfillment of God’s economy in the building up of the organic Body of Christ (Rom. 8:2, 4, 29; Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17).

C. In the third stage of Song of Songs, the lover of Christ is called to live in ascension as the new creation in resurrection—3:6—5:1:

1. To live in ascension is to live continually in our spirit; when we live in our spirit, we are joined to the ascended Christ in the heavens—Eph. 2:22; Gen. 28:12-17; John 1:51; Rev. 4:1-2; Heb. 4:12, 16 and footnote 1.

2. “King Solomon made himself a palanquin/Of the wood of Lebanon./Its posts he made of silver,/Its bottom, of gold;/Its seat, of purple;/Its midst was inlaid with love / From the daughters of Jerusalem”—S. S. 3:9-10:
   a. By the Spirit’s transforming work in us, we become the moving vessel of Christ, the carriage of Christ, the “car” of Christ, for the move of Christ in and for the Body of Christ—cf. 2 Cor. 2:12-17.
   b. We are rebuilt with the Divine Trinity so that our external structure is the resurrected and ascended humanity of Jesus, and our interior decoration is our love for the Lord—S. S. 3:9-10.
   c. Our inner being should be “inlaid with love” (v. 10); loving the Lord will keep us in the realm of having Christ as our humanity, safeguarding our humanity in the constraint of His affection (2 Cor. 5:14).
   d. Through our loving the Lord in a personal, affectionate, private, and spiritual way, our natural being is torn down, and we are remodeled with Christ’s redeeming death (posts made of silver), God’s divine nature (base), and Christ’s kingship as the life-giving Spirit ruling within us (seat of purple)—S. S. 3:10; cf. Rom. 8:28-29; 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

3. Through her living in Christ’s ascension as the new creation in resurrection, the lover of Christ becomes mature in the riches of the life of Christ so that she can become a garden to Christ for His private enjoyment (S. S. 4:12-15); she is prepared to give forth Christ’s fragrance in any circumstance or environment; she wants the difficult environment (north wind) and the pleasant environment (south wind) to work on her as a garden that its fragrance may be spread (v. 16).

D. In the fourth stage of Song of Songs, the lover of Christ is called more strongly to live within the veil through the cross after resurrection—5:2—6:13:

1. By living within the veil, the lover of Christ is transformed into the heavenly bodies; she looks forth like the dawn, she is as beautiful as the moon, and she is as clear as the sun—v. 10:
   a. The path of the overcomers is like the light of dawn, shining brighter and brighter until the full day—Prov. 4:18; John 1:5.
b. The light of dawn, the sunrise, signifies both Christ in His coming and our being revived every morning; the Christian life is like the dawning of the sun—Luke 1:78; Prov. 4:18; Psa. 110:3; Judg. 5:31.

2. In the maturity of Christ’s life, the lover of Christ becomes the Shulammite (the feminine form of “Solomon”), signifying that she has become the same as He is in life, nature, expression, and function (but not in the Godhead) as the reproduction and duplication of Christ to match Him for their marriage—S. S. 6:13; 2 Cor. 3:18.

3. The Shulammite is likened to the dance of two camps, or two armies (Heb. mahanaim), in the sight of God; after Jacob saw the angels of God, the two armies of God, he named the place where he was Mahanaim and divided his wives, children, and possessions into “two armies”—S. S. 6:13; Gen. 32:1-2:
   a. The spiritual significance of the two armies is the strong testimony that we more than conquer, we “super-overcome,” through Him who loved us, according to the principle of the Body of Christ—Rom. 8:37; 12:5.
   b. God does not want those who are strong in themselves; He wants only the feeble ones, the weaker ones, the women and children; those who are counted worthy to be overcomers will be the weaker ones who depend on the Lord—1 Cor. 1:26-28; 2 Cor. 1:8-9; 12:9-10; 13:3-5.

E. In the fifth stage of Song of Songs, the lover of Christ shares in the work of the Lord—7:1-13:
1. In verse 4 the Spirit reviews the loving seeker’s beauty in her submissive will (neck) wrought by the Spirit’s transforming work through sufferings for the carrying out of God’s will, in the expression of her heart, which is open to the light, clean, full of rest, and accessible (eyes like pools—cf. 1:15; 4:1; 5:12), and in her spiritual sense of high and sharp discernment (nose—cf. Phil. 1:9-10; Heb. 5:14).
2. Song of Songs 7:11 shows that Christ’s lover wants to carry out with her Beloved the work that is for the entire world (fields) by sojourning from one place to another (lodging in the villages); this indicates that she is not sectarian in carrying out the Lord’s work but keeps the work open, so that others can come to sojourn there and she can go to sojourn elsewhere; this is to keep one work in one Body.
3. To share in the work of the Lord is to work together with Him (2 Cor. 6:1a); to work with Him, we need the maturity in life, we need to be one with the Lord, and our work must be for His Body (Col. 1:28-29; 1 Cor. 12:12-27).
4. The Shulammite works as Solomon’s counterpart, taking care of all the vineyards (S. S. 8:11), the churches and the believers on the whole earth; we must have a work that is for the entire world; this is what Paul did by establishing local churches and then working to bring them into the full realization of the Body of Christ—Rom. 16:1-24.
5. Song of Songs 7:12 says, “Let us rise up early for the vineyards; / Let us see if the vine has budded, / If the blossom is open, / If the pomegranates are in bloom; / There I will give you my love”; at this time she is able to relate the Lord’s work to the Lord Himself; now she can express her love to the Lord at the place of His work.

F. In the sixth stage of Song of Songs, the lover of Christ is hoping to be raptured (8:1-14); she is coming up from the wilderness (the earthly realm) by “leaning on her beloved” (v. 5):
1. Leaning on her beloved implies that, like Jacob, the socket of her hip has been touched, and her natural strength has been dealt with by the Lord—Gen. 32:24-25.
2. Leaning on her beloved also implies that she finds herself pressed beyond measure, and this seems to last until the wilderness journey is over—2 Cor. 1:8-9; 12:9-10; 13:3-4.
3. She asks her Beloved to set her as a seal on His heart of love and as a seal on His arm of strength; at this point she is conscious of her powerlessness and helplessness, and she realizes that everything depends on God’s love and preserving power—S. S. 8:6-7.
4. The lover of Christ asks Him who dwells in the believers as His gardens to let her hear His voice—v. 13; cf. 4:13—5:1; 6:2:
   a. This indicates that in the work that we do for the Lord as our Beloved, we need to maintain our fellowship with Him, always listening to Him—Luke 10:38-42.
   b. Our lives depend on the Lord’s words, and our work depends on the Lord’s commands; the central point of our prayers should be our longing for the Lord’s speaking—Rev. 2:7; 1 Sam. 3:9-10; cf. Isa. 50:4-5; Exo. 21:6.
   c. Without the Lord’s words, we will not have any revelation, light, or subjective knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God and of the church as the mystery of Christ (Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4-5; 5:32); the life of the believers hinges totally upon the Lord’s speaking (vv. 26-27).

II. As the concluding word of this poetic book, the lover of Christ prays that her Beloved would make haste to come back in the power of His resurrection (gazelle and young hart) to set up His sweet and beautiful kingdom (mountains of spices), which will fill the whole earth—S. S. 8:14; Rev. 11:15; Dan. 2:35:
   A. Such a prayer portrays the union and communion between Christ as the Bridegroom and His lovers as the bride in their bridal love, in the way that the prayer of John, a lover of Christ, as the concluding word of the Holy Scriptures, reveals God’s eternal economy concerning Christ and the church in His divine love—Rev. 22:20.
   B. “Come, Lord Jesus!” is the last prayer in the Bible (v. 20); the entire Bible concludes with the desire for the Lord’s coming expressed as a prayer.
   C. “When He comes, faith will be turned to facts, and praise will replace prayer. Love will consummate in a shadowless perfection, and we will serve Him in the sinless domain. What a day that will be! Lord Jesus, come quickly!” (Watchman Nee, The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 23, “The Song of Songs,” p. 126).

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**PURSUITING CHRIST FOR SATISFACTION**

This series of messages covers the living of a Christ-seeker as depicted in Song of Songs. Such a living is expressed in the following stages of the seeker’s experience:

   (1) Attracted by Christ’s love, charmed by His name, and captivated by His person to pursue Him and be led into the church life.
   (2) Called to remain in the cross that she may be freed from her introspective self for the fulfilling of her Beloved’s purpose concerning her in the divine life.
   (3) Called to live in ascension and even within the veil to experience the stronger cross that she may be one with God in her spirit even before rapture.
   (4) Conformed, ultimately, to be the wonderful Shulammite, who, as the duplication of Solomon, is the greatest and ultimate figure of the New Jerusalem as the counterpart of Christ.

We have interpreted nearly every sign in Song of Songs in the life-study of this book (see Life-study of Song of Songs). Now we have the burden to help all of us, through God’s mercy, apply what we have seen. In our application we will cover only the first six chapters of Song of Songs. I believe that after we pick up the way to apply this interpreted book, we will be able to see for ourselves the “crystals” in the last two chapters.

**MAN BEING CREATED WITH A SEEKING HEART FOR GOD**

The first “crystal” in this book is to pursue Christ for satisfaction. God created us for the accomplishment of His eternal economy in His own image with the intention that we could become Him
in life and nature but not in the Godhead. For this purpose He created us with a spirit to receive Him. Many people do not realize that God also created us with a seeking heart for Himself so that He could be our satisfaction.

Man fell away from God, and sin through Satan came in to frustrate man from receiving God for his satisfaction. Yet the desire for God, the seeking for God, still remains in man’s heart. History tells us that over the past six thousand years many wise, great, philosophical, and thoughtful men have given the same testimony that nothing can fully satisfy man. Regardless of what they could get from the world, what they could attain, or what they could obtain, nothing can satisfy them because within them there is a seeking heart for God (Eccl. 3:11). This is why the wise King Solomon, after his many human experiences, concluded, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (1:2). Everything under the sun is vanity of vanities if one does not have God. God purposely created within man a desire for Himself. The monks in Buddhism and the nuns in Catholicism have this desire, but they do not have the proper understanding of how to seek God. God has given man a heart that is seeking after Him for satisfaction.

PURSUING CHRIST

Song of Songs is a book in the Bible that tells us how we can be properly satisfied with God. There is no other way except by pursuing after Christ, because Christ is the very embodiment of the Triune God. He is the reality of God. He is God in reality, God’s embodiment, coming to earth to give people the opportunity to receive Him for satisfaction.

Peter may be counted as the first one among the apostles, and Paul was a later one. They were seekers of God, but initially, they took the wrong way. Eventually, both Peter, a fisherman, and Paul, a learned scholar, found the way to seek Christ for satisfaction. Paul tells us in Philippians 3 that we have to pursue Christ to gain Him (vv. 12-14) because He is the most excellent way. All things other than Christ are dung (v. 8). Only Christ is excellent. Whatever we obtain or have obtained other than Christ is vanity. Paul says that it is dung. Do you like dung? But today many worldly people are gaining dung day after day. Dung is their food. Solomon says that they are pursuing vanity. Vanity of vanities is what they are eating. That is their food. Paul’s desire was to gain Christ, and he instructs us how to gain Christ as he did.

In this chapter our point is that we have to pursue Christ for satisfaction. Song of Songs opens in this way: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!” (1:2a). The seeker longs for kisses, not just one kiss. The most impressive thing about weddings in the Western world is the time of kissing. The bridegroom opens the bride’s veil to kiss her with his own mouth. He does not kiss the ears or the nose of the bride but her mouth. This is the most personal and affectionate thing. Here is a book in the Bible that opens in such a way: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!” This is what it means to pursue Christ.

According to the New Testament, God’s ordained way for man to receive Him in this kind of personal and affectionate way is first to believe in Him. To believe in Him is to receive Him as the divine life into us so that we may have an organic union with God in the divine life. Regrettfully, very few Christians know what believing in Christ means. They know that they need to take Him as their Savior and Redeemer, but they do not know that to believe in Christ is to receive Him as the divine life into us so that we can have an organic union with God in His divine life. This is the first step.

Now that we have received Christ into us, what does God want us to do? Many Christian teachers teach people in the wrong way. They say that after one has believed in Christ, he should do many things. This is wrong. According to the New Testament, after we believe in Christ, after we receive Him as the divine life into us, we have to love Him (see 1 Cor. 2:9 and footnote 3, Recovery Version). Paul says that the Lord’s grace superabounded to him with faith and love in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 1:14). Faith is to receive Christ, and love is to pursue Christ.

“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!” This word indicates that to some extent the seeker has obtained a part of Christ’s love, but now she wants something more intimate. She wants to be kissed
not just with one kiss but with the kisses of His mouth. Someone who is affectionate with another may kiss him on the cheek, but this expression of affection is not the first category of love. On the wedding day who would want to see the bridegroom kiss his bride on the cheek? He is expected to kiss his bride on the mouth as the expression of his utmost affection.

In her desire to be kissed with the kisses of His mouth, the seeker goes on to say, “Your love is better than wine” (S. S. 1:2b). She does not say that His love is as good as wine but that it is better than wine. Wine cheers, but Christ’s love cheers us in an unrivaled way. No wine can compare with His unrivaled love. Nothing is so cheering as Christ’s love.

Verse 3 says, “Your anointing oils have a pleasant fragrance; / Your name is like ointment poured forth; /Therefore the virgins love you.” Christ’s name signifies Christ’s person, His being, and Christ is the compound Spirit signified by the anointing ointment in Exodus 30. “The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45b). This indicates that Christ’s name as His person is the anointing ointment. An ointment is always a compound. Christ is compounded with God, with man, with His death, with the effectiveness of His death, with His resurrection, and with the power of His resurrection. At least these six things are compounded together to be the anointing ointment,signifying Christ in His resurrection as the compound Spirit. If someone says your name, you respond because you are the person of that name. Christ’s charming name, His person, is the all-inclusive compound Spirit.

His love is attracting, His name is charming, and His person is captivating. He has drawn and captivated millions of His lovers to pursue after Him and is still doing the same today. Therefore, all His lovers would run after Him for their satisfaction. This is why the seeker prays, “Draw me; we will run after you” (S. S. 1:4a).

THE NEED FOR A PERSONAL AND AFFECTIONATE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

Dear saints, in this chapter I want to impress you with something particular. After you have received Christ as your life, you must have a very personal seeking after Christ. No one can represent you or do anything for you in this matter. It must be personal. Every believer’s relationship with Christ must be personal and affectionate.

God works in a personal and affectionate way, not in the way of a movement. Mao Tsetung gained the people of China by a movement, not by personal contact and affection. Even many in Christianity like to use the term movement. Some say that at John Wesley’s time in Oxford there was a movement. They also say that there was a great movement, a great revival, in Wales at the beginning of this century. This concept of having a movement is wrong. We do not want to have a movement in the Lord’s recovery. A person can be moved to join a movement and not have any personal contact with the Lord. Recently, we have stressed that God became a man that man may become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. Although many responded to this truth, I was not very happy, because this response was a movement. In order to practice such a high truth, we need the personal and affectionate experience of Christ.

Since we have been born of God, we have become His children (John 1:12-13). John 3:6 says, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Since God is Spirit and we were born of Him, what are we? That which is born of a cow is a cow. That which is born of Chinese is Chinese. Also, that which is born of God as the Spirit is spirit. This is logical. A paraphrased version of John 3:6 could read this way: “He who is born of God the Spirit is the spirit-God.” We were regenerated of God as the Spirit to be a spirit. As those who have been born of God, we are the children of God, the same as God in life and nature but not in the Godhead. Therefore, our relationship with God has to be personal and affectionate.

In these days I feel very much that there is a warm, intimate, close affection between me and my God. The seeker said, “Draw me.” She did not say, “Draw us.” Draw me is personal. We want a drawing from the Lord that is His personal and affectionate doing. We want Him to be with us in a personal and affectionate way. All the religions, including Christianity, present a portrait of God that is inaccurate.
They portray God merely as great, almighty, sovereign, majestic, and even unapproachable; no one can or even dares to touch God. To say that God is majestic is not wrong, but that is only one attribute of the Divine Being. Regardless of how great, sovereign, almighty, and majestic God is, when He wanted to build up His relationship with man, He took the personal, affectionate way. He took the way of becoming a man. If the Lord Jesus had come to Peter in a majestic way, Peter would have felt threatened. But He did not come to Peter as the majestic, untouchable God. Instead, He came to Peter as his countryman. Peter was a Galilean, and Jesus was also a Galilean. This is personal and affectionate.

The Lord Jesus lived among men for thirty-three and a half years. This was the way in which God came to build up His relationship with man. This is the personal, affectionate way recorded in the New Testament from the incarnation to the day of resurrection. On the morning of His resurrection the Lord’s empty tomb was discovered by three sisters (Mark 16:1, 8). When they entered into the tomb, an angel gave them a message from the Lord, saying, “Go, tell His disciples and Peter” (v. 7). Peter’s name mentioned in this way is personal and affectionate. Peter’s intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus was particular, so it was stressed even by the angel. At the beginning of his contact with the Lord, Peter’s response was not too personal, but gradually, Peter’s transaction with the Lord became personal and affectionate.

The apostle John could recline on the Lord’s bosom (John 13:23). How personal and affectionate that was! The very God, the very Lord whom we seek, sets up a feast and invites us to feast with Him (Rev. 3:20). We must have such a personal and affectionate contact with Him. If we mail someone a letter, that affects him in a certain way. But if we come to him with a personal visitation and an affectionate contact, that makes a great difference.

_Hymns, #437 (stanzas 1 and 6 with the chorus)_ says,

_Hast thou heard Him, seen Him, known Him?_

_Is not thine a captured heart?_

_Chief among ten thousand own Him;_

_Joyful choose the better part._

_Captivated by His beauty,_

_Worthy tribute haste to bring;_

_Let His peerless worth constrain thee,_

_Crown Him now unrivaled King._

'_Tis that look that melted Peter,_

'_Tis that face that Stephen saw,_

'_Tis that heart that wept with Mary,_

_Can alone from idols draw:_

Only the face of tears that Peter saw, only the face of glory into which Stephen looked, and only the heart that wept with Mary can keep us away from the idols, the attractions, of this world. The Bible tells us that Jesus wept with Mary (John 11:35). Have you ever heard that God weeps? Many say that Jesus came to express God, but they mainly refer to the miracles that He did, not to the tears that He shed.

Dear saints, my burden in this chapter is to share that you have to start seeking the Lord in a personal and affectionate way. I want to stress these two words: _personal_ and _affectionate_. The very God whom we pursue is personal and affectionate.

I have been in the Lord’s fellowship for about seventy years, but there was one particular occasion when the Lord touched me in the most personal and affectionate way. In 1943 Japan invaded and occupied China. One day the military police of the invading Japanese army arrested me and imprisoned me for thirty days. Every day I was subjected to two very stern and strict examinations. At that time the Chinese knew how cruel the invading Japanese army was. They would kill a Chinese as they would a chicken. I do not believe that there were many Chinese who were arrested by the Japanese army and released after thirty days. All my relatives, friends, and brothers and sisters in the church were very concerned for my life.
On the first day of my imprisonment, the Japanese military police put me into a soldier’s bedroom; that night the Lord gave me a dream, indicating to me that the Japanese army would not hurt me. The next day they began to interrogate me. They threatened to pour cold water upon me if I did not tell the truth. I said to myself, “You don’t need to threaten me, because I will surely speak the truth. I am a man of truth.” After many times of their testing, they could not find anything wrong with me. After fifteen days of being imprisoned, I was alone in my small cell in the night. I stood up and I can testify that the Lord was in my presence embracing me. I said with tears, “Lord, You know why I am here.” This experience of the Lord was personal to the uttermost. In my whole life I never had a time like that in which the Lord was so personal to me. I was so personal and affectionate to Him, and He was the same to me.

We all need this kind of personal, affectionate, intimate contact with the Lord every day. This has become my habit. Every morning after rising up I go to my desk, and the first thing I say is, “Lord Jesus, I love You.” I am not just a poor man praying to a merciful God, but I am contacting a Savior who is personal and affectionate to me, as I am personal and affectionate to Him. We all need to take heed to what the seeker says: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!” Right away her tone changes: “Your love is better than wine.” This is a personal, intimate prayer. “Draw me; we will run after you.” This is personal and affectionate. We need this kind of personal and affectionate seeking after Him, and we need to build up such a relationship with Him that is so personal and affectionate. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994–1997, vol. 3, “Crystallization-study of Song of Songs,” pp. 254-260)

FELLOWSHIPPING IN THE INNER CHAMBERS WITH CHRIST

In the first chapter we stressed two words: personal and affectionate. In saving us and in building up a relationship with us, God came to visit us personally and affectionately. How personal and affectionate Jesus was in the Gospels! But this was His visitation to His chosen people in the physical life. He was a man physically but was not yet the Spirit.

One day He told His disciples of His intention to die. They could not understand this. They thought that He had come to build up the kingdom of God and that they would be with Him on the throne. James and John wanted to sit at His right and left in His kingdom. When the other ten heard this, they were indignant, showing that they also were ambitious to be with the Lord on the throne (Matt. 20:20-28). They were in the physical realm.

Through His death and in His resurrection He became “another kind of Jesus.” He was no longer physical, because He became a life-giving Christ, a life-giving Spirit. The last Adam, who was Jesus in the flesh, became a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). I would like to ask, “Are you still preaching and ministering a physical Jesus or a pneumatic Christ?” Mostly, those in Christianity preach a physical Savior, but the Bible unveils to us that this physical Savior, after He accomplished God’s full redemption through His death, changed into a life-giving Spirit in resurrection. They do not believe that Christ has become another kind of person, not physical but spiritual.

When Christ was in the flesh, He could visit His disciples outwardly and openly, but there was no possibility for Him to visit His disciples inwardly and privately. Today Christ visits us privately and spiritually because He is the life-giving, compound, consummated, all-inclusive Spirit. He is the Spirit as the consummation of the processed and consummated Triune God, so He visits people secretly, privately, not openly.

THE KING, CHRIST, BRINGING US INTO HIS INNER CHAMBERS, OUR REGENERATED SPIRIT

First, in Song of Songs the Lord captivates His seeker, and she with all her companions follows Him. To pursue Christ for satisfaction is the first “crystal” in Song of Songs. The second crystal is the King bringing His seeker into His inner chambers. Song of Songs is a book of figures. In a figure of speech the king’s inner chambers signify our regenerated spirit as Christ’s inner chambers.
God created man so that man may become Him by His being received by man so that He can enter into and stay in man. For this reason God created us with a spirit. According to the New Testament teaching, our regenerated spirit is not only for us to have a means to receive Him but also for us to contain Him. Second Timothy 4:22 says, “The Lord be with your spirit.” Ephesians 3:16 says that we need to be strengthened into our inner man. The inner man is our regenerated spirit. Ephesians 2:22 shows that our spirit is a habitation, a dwelling place, to God. The real inner chambers to God are our spirit.

Regrettably, the majority of Christians in today’s Christianity do not believe that there is such a thing as the human spirit. They say that the human spirit is synonymous with man’s soul or heart. The Chinese translation of the Bible mixes up the heart, the soul, and the spirit by using the terms spirit—soul or heart—spirit. Not many Christians today know definitely that they have a spirit. When I came to the United States in the early 1960s, I began to teach concerning the human spirit. Many told me that before I taught this, they never knew that they had a spirit.

There are three verses in the New Testament that show the divine Spirit and the regenerated human spirit. John 4:24 says, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit.” In this verse are God the Spirit and our spirit, with which we worship God the Spirit. John 3:6 says, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.” I came to the United States with a burden to release all the high-peak truths. One among these is the human spirit. Another is that Christ, as the last Adam, became a life-giving Spirit. Christ as the life-giving Spirit dwells in our human spirit, and these two spirits are mingled together to be one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17).

In this chapter we want to stress the words private and spiritual. Christianity preaches the physical Jesus, but we preach the pneumatic Christ, the Christ who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17). This One is private and spiritual. We have seen that the king’s chambers signify our spirit. He visits us in our spirit privately, and He comes to us in a spiritual way, not a physical way. He visits us privately as the all-inclusive consummated Spirit.

Christ the King brings His seekers into His chambers, that is, into their regenerated spirit, His dwelling place. Let us consider the application of this. When I was young, I was taught to pray to God as the heavenly Father. I was also told not to pray to the Spirit, because in the entire New Testament you cannot find a verse concerning praying to the Spirit. But the more we pray, the more we have the feeling that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in us (Eph. 4:6; 2 Cor. 13:5; Rom. 8:9). According to our experience, our spirit is the Holy of Holies—the dwelling place, the inner chambers, of the Triune God. In this first chapter of Song of Songs He and we have the private and affectionate fellowship.

The seeker in Song of Songs prayed, “Draw me; we will run after you” (1:4a). Then the king drew her and she followed, but she did not know where to go. The King knows where to go. We must go to our spirit. The inner chambers of Christ are His lovers’ regenerated spirits mingled with and indwelt by Him as the life-dispensing Spirit (Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:11) and are the practical Holy of Holies in Christ’s lovers for their participation in and enjoyment of the pneumatic Christ as the consummated Triune God (Heb. 4:16).

After we were saved, we began to pray, and eventually, we realized that the heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus, and the Spirit are all in us. But at that time we did not know in what part of our being the Triune God dwelt. We did not know that we had a human spirit, but gradually we found out that the Triune God dwells in our regenerated spirit. The seeker followed the Lord, and He immediately brought her to her regenerated spirit to have fellowship with Him. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994–1997, vol. 3, “Crystallization-study of Song of Songs,” pp. 263-265)

BEFORE THE RAPTURE (8:5-14)

Song of Songs 8:5 says, “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee
forth that bare thee.” This book speaks of the maiden coming up from the wilderness two times. The first coming up from the wilderness in 3:6 refers to her forsaking of a wandering life. There she began her absolute union with the Lord in His death, His life, and all His grace. Since then she steadily advanced, until she left the wilderness completely. Although in her latter experience she stopped once or twice, we dare not say that these stops were necessary, but surely we can say that they were excusable. Once we leave the wandering life, we leave it for good. Why then does the Lord speak about her coming up from the wilderness a second time, as if she is still in the wilderness?

We must pay attention to what the wilderness refers to. The wilderness for us is not just a wandering life, but the world itself. Not only is there a wilderness in the spiritual realm; there is also a wilderness in the fleshly realm. We must not only be delivered spiritually from the wilderness of wandering, but we must be delivered from this earthly wilderness as well. When the Lord reigns within us through the Holy Spirit, we begin to leave behind a fluctuating life. When we hear the call for the rapture, we will be delivered from the worldly environment. The cross of Christ delivers us from the spiritual wilderness, and the coming of Christ delivers us from the earthly wilderness. This is why there is a second coming up from the wilderness. This is being delivered from this earth.

The Holy Spirit once again asks a question through the mouth of a third party. “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness?” It seems as if He sees a maiden coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved; the closer she gets, the clearer her identity becomes.

Here we see that the rapture that delivers us from the wilderness does not happen suddenly, but is a result of a step-by-step walk with the Lord. The rapture is the last step of our walk with the Lord. All that men see will be the instant change from earth to heaven. But this is merely the last step of the rapture. The beginning of the rapture does not happen then. When a believer is attracted by heaven and walking away from the world step by step, he becomes further and further away from the world, and there will be a clearer and clearer separation between him and the world. When the process is complete, he will find himself waking up before the face of the Lord. This is the way that Enoch was raptured. We must never be misled to think that the rapture is something that will happen suddenly or something that will instantly change our spiritual condition.

This is the time to prepare ourselves for the rapture. By leaning upon our Beloved, we constantly leave the world behind and come up again and again until the Lord comes to take us away.

“Leaning upon her beloved.” She seems to be powerless and unable to walk. “Leaning upon her beloved.” She makes herself a burden for her beloved to carry. “Leaning upon her beloved.” It is as if the hollow of her thigh has been touched. “Leaning upon her beloved.” She seems to find herself pressed beyond measure, and this seems to last until the wilderness journey is over. Only the Lord can prepare us for the rapture. A trusting life is indispensable. We should trust in Him helplessly until the Holy Spirit exclaims, “Who is this that cometh…leaning upon her beloved?”

The Lord answers and says that she is none other than the once-filthy sinner, who was seen by grace, called by grace, and saved by grace. Her mother is God’s grace. The grace of God does not refer just to God’s forbearance. His forbearance is only a small part of His grace. God’s grace also includes His plan and selection before the foundation of the world and His Son’s redemption and the work of the Holy Spirit in time. All these are God’s grace according to the Bible. When God’s grace seeks and finds a chosen sinner, it puts him under the shadow of Christ. There he is fed with life, and there he is brought forth. When he wakes up, he finds himself in the love of Christ.

The “apple” tree is the same bergamot orange in 2:3; it refers to Christ, who is full of affection. Who is this maiden? She is none other than a sinner saved by grace. Thank God that when she first opened her eyes to behold the world, the first thing she saw was the affectionate Christ. The first fact she discovered was that she was under the shadow of such an affectionate Christ. This was her origin. How fitting it is for her to remember this at the time of her spiritual maturity!

Verse 6 of chapter 8 says, “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most
vehement flame.” When she recalls her original condition, she cannot help but be filled with humility. She cannot help but consider her emptiness, the vanity of her experience, the undependability of her mind, and the futility of her pursuit. Her only hope is the Lord. She realizes that whether she can endure to the end does not depend on her own endurance, but on the Lord’s preservation. No spiritual perfection can sustain a person until the Lord’s return. Everything depends on God and His preserving power. When she realizes this, she cannot help but exclaim, “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.” The heart is the place of love, while the arm is the place of strength. “Set me as permanently as a seal upon Your heart, and as indelibly as a seal upon Your arm. Just as the priests bore the Israelites upon their breasts and their shoulders, remember me constantly in Your heart and sustain me with Your arm. I know that I am weak and empty, and I am conscious of my powerlessness. Lord, I am a helpless person. If I try to preserve myself until Your coming, it will only bring shame to Your name and loss to myself. All my hopes are in Your love and power. I loved You before. But I know the undependability of that love. Now I look only to the love You have toward me. I held You once, and it seemed to be a powerful grip. But now I realize that even my strongest grip is just weakness. My trust is not in my holding power, but in Your holding power. I dare not speak of my love to You any longer. I dare not speak of my grasping of You any longer. From this point on, everything depends on Your strength and Your love.

“Your love is as strong as death. Who can shake death? No sighing of parents, no tears of wives, and no sorrow of friends can bring back a man from death. Death holds its captives and keeps them firmly, unrelentingly, and unshakably in its hand. If You love me, I will not be shaken, because Your love cannot possibly be weaker than death.

“If You love me, Your jealousy will follow. Your jealousy will be as cruel as Sheol. You will surely rebuke and surely seek for perfection. You will not allow anything to share my heart. Even if You owned a major part of me, You would not be satisfied. Your eyes cannot stand to see those who are Yours being defiled by the world or usurped by other loves. You are jealous; from the beginning of time You have been a jealous God (Exo. 20:5). Have not Your apostles told us about the jealousy of God (2 Cor. 11:2)? If You are jealous, who can withstand Your jealousy? What can withstand Your jealousy? You will destroy all Your enemies. You will remove all hindrances until You become the unique Lord, the God of all, and the unchallenged King. In this way, I will be protected, and my chastity will be preserved until I see Your face.”

Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol. What can be crueler than Sheol? A person may be the most lovable one, the most adorable one, or the most precious one, but when Sheol comes to claim a sinner, it will not care if such a one is lovable or adorable. No tears, sorrow, or pleading can move its heart. It does not know mercy and compassion. It has no sympathy or feeling. It is cruel. “Since I have consecrated myself to You as a chaste virgin, if You see anything in me that stirs up Your jealousy, You will surely deal with it at all cost until You completely prevail. There may be loving friends, close relatives, or dear lovers begging, pleading, and weeping, but You do not care for any of these things; You only care for Your own feeling. But this is the only way that I will be preserved.”

“The coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.” Jehovah is a fire (Heb. 12:29). His love and jealousy are also like fire which burns up everything that can be burned. Everything that is not eternal, that can pass away, that is of the world, and that is of man will be burned away.

Song of Songs 8:7 says, “Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.” “Many waters” signify trials that believers go through. “Floods” signify persecutions from the enemy. His love and the fire of His love will not be quenched by trials. His love and the fire of His love cannot be drowned by persecutions. If He loves us, no trial or persecution can do anything to us.

This love cannot be bought with money. In other words, it is irreplaceable. We cannot replace this love with the tongues of men and angels. We cannot replace this love with the gift of prophecy, the knowledge of mysteries, all knowledge, or all faith. Even if we doled out all our possessions to feed
others and delivered up our body so that we might boast, we would still be despised. These things are merely part of the treasures of a man’s house. Trying to exchange love for these things will result in being despised. Since this is the case, we will not earn His love with more work, busy times, or toiling services. We can only offer ourselves to Him so that we will become the object of His love.

Verse 13 says, “Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it.” “Thou” refers to the Lord. “The gardens” are plural in number. He is not only dwelling in the garden of the maiden (6:2) but dwelling in many other gardens as well. He is the Lord who dwells in the hearts of men. He is not only dwelling in the heart of one who follows Him absolutely, but He is dwelling in the hearts of all those whom He delights in. The maiden addresses Him according to this relationship. She says to Him, “The companions hearken to thy voice.” The word “hearken” means that everyone is listening. All those who are seeking the Lord together with her adopt the same attitude. They have been dealt with, and they know the futility of speaking and the profit of hearkening. They know that they have to be slow to speak in order to be quick to hear. Both she and they are no longer as talkative as they once were; they no longer babble about their condition before the Lord as soon as they acquire some experience. That conduct is gone. They no longer insist on speaking like others do, and they no longer speak for the sake of speaking. Those who cannot stop talking about trivial things still have the earthly life reigning within them. But these are listening; they adopt the attitude of a hearer. They know that their lives depend on the Lord’s words and their work depends on the Lord’s commands. They will only listen, because they cannot and will not move by themselves any longer. Without the Lord’s words, they will not have any revelation, light, or knowledge. The life of the believers hinges totally upon the Lord’s speaking.

“O Lord, while we are waiting to hearken, make us hear. If those who seek find, and if those who knock have the door opened to them, make us hear, and make us able to hear. If Jehovah will not speak to us, we will be like those who are dead. What use is there in hearing something if it is not heard in a real way? Therefore, please allow us to hear Your voice, because only this can guide us until Your return.” She has learned her lessons by now; therefore, she offers up such a profound prayer toward the end.

Song of Songs 8:14 says, “Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.” These words are the same as in 2:17. It is the same prayer, but the things that are referred to are not the same in both cases. This book mentions the wilderness two times, and in the same way, it mentions the Lord’s coming as “a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices” two times. The first time on the mountains refers to His fellowship with the believers; it shows His longing for an absolute fellowship with the believers. But then the shadows had not fled and the day had not yet broken; that is, the Lord had not yet come. The emphasis was fellowship. Therefore, we saw Him upon the mountains of Bether; He was clearing away everything that was causing “separation.” But the second refers to the Lord’s second coming. This coming is in the future, and though it may be very near, no one knows when it will be. Unlike the case in chapter two, it does not have a time limit. The matter is not fellowship; therefore, this verse does not speak of the mountains of Bether but of the mountains of spices. It describes the condition of the Lord’s coming and His kingdom. At that time, it will be a marvelous world, one like the mountains of spices.

Then the maiden’s experience will be like a drop of water that has disappeared into the ocean; there will no more room for advancement, though the tide can always go deeper. All that is left in the world is just her body. Everything else has gone to another world. Therefore, she cannot help but cry, “Make haste, my beloved.” “Come as quickly as the roe or a young hart. Just as a roe or a young hart appears on the mountains of spices, may You come in Your kingdom.” Although the love is perfect, something is still lacking. When He comes, faith will be turned to facts, and praise will replace prayer. Love will consummate in a shadowless perfection, and we will serve Him in the sinless domain. What a day that will be! Lord Jesus, come quickly! (The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 23, “The Song of Songs,” pp. 116-121, 124-126)
LOVING THE LORD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER FOR THE ORGANIC BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST
(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Three
Loving the Lord Jesus Christ in Incorruptibility


I. “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility”—Eph. 6:24:

A. Grace is needed for us to live a church life that fulfills God’s purpose and solves God’s problem with His enemy—1:2; 3:2, 8, 10-11; 4:7, 29.

B. The enjoyment of the Lord as grace is with those who love Him—6:24:

1. Love in 1:4 refers to the love with which God loves His chosen ones and His chosen ones love Him:
   a. It is in this love that God’s chosen ones become holy and without blemish before Him.
   b. God first loved us, and then this divine love inspires us to love Him in return.
   c. In such a condition and atmosphere of love, we are saturated with God to be holy and without blemish, just as He is.

2. According to 3:17, we may be rooted and grounded in love, and according to verse 19, we can know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ; as God’s cultivated land, we need to be rooted for our growth, and as God’s building, we need to be grounded for our building up—1 Cor. 3:9.

3. Ephesians 4:15-16 reveals that we hold to truth in love and that the Body builds itself up in love:
   a. This is the love of God in Christ, which becomes the love of Christ in us, by which we love Christ and the fellow members of His Body—1 John 4:7-8, 10-12, 16, 19.
   b. Love is the inner substance of God; the goal of Ephesians is to bring us into God’s inner substance so that we may enjoy God as love and enjoy His presence in the sweetness of the divine love, and thereby love others as Christ did—5:2, 25.

C. For the proper church life we need to love the Lord in incorruptibility—6:24:

1. According to the usage of incorruptible in the writings of Paul, this word refers mainly to God and the things of God; everything natural is corruptible, but God, the divine life, and all things that are in resurrection are incorruptible—1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:42, 52-54.

2. To love the Lord in incorruptibility is to love Him in the new creation, not in the old creation— Eph. 2:15; 4:24; 2 Cor. 5:17.

3. To love the Lord in incorruptibility is to love Him in the regenerated and renewed spirit indwelt by the Holy Spirit—John 3:6; 1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Tim. 1:7.

4. To love the Lord in incorruptibility means to love Him according to all the incorruptible things revealed in Ephesians:
   a. We need to love the Lord Jesus in His being the embodiment of the Triune God (Col. 2:9); in His being the element of the Body (1 Cor. 12:12); in His being reality, grace, peace, love, and light (John 1:17; 8:12; 14:6; Eph. 2:14; 1 John 4:8); and in His being the constituent of the one new man (Eph. 2:15; Col. 3:10-11).
b. All these things are related to what is revealed and taught in Ephesians, including the Triune God, Christ, and His Body, the church.

c. Ephesians speaks concerning the dispensing of the Triune God to produce the church (1:3-23; 3:16-21), of what Christ is and has done for the church (1:7; 2:13-18; 5:25-27, 29), and about the church being the Body of Christ, being the bride of Christ, and being one with Christ in the heavenlies (1:22-23; 5:23, 25-27; 2:6).

d. All these matters are incorruptible, and if we love the Lord Jesus in all these things, our love toward Him will be incorruptible (6:24); such a love is not a natural love; it is a love in resurrection, the love that God Himself is in His divine essence (1 John 4:16).

5. In the Lord’s recovery we need to love our Lord Jesus Christ in all the divine, spiritual, heavenly, and incorruptible things revealed in Ephesians concerning the Triune God, the divine life, what Christ is to us, what He has done, and the church—1:3-23; 2:5-6, 13-18; 3:16-21; 4:4-6; 5:23, 25-27.

II. Paul’s blessing at the end of his Epistle to the Ephesians foreshadows a problem that would arise: the love in the church in Ephesus would fade, as indicated by the Lord’s rebuke in Revelation 2:2-5:

A. The concluding word of Ephesians 6:24 adds a condition to the presence of grace: loving the Lord in incorruptibility; this seems to imply that if the Ephesians did not love the Lord in such a way, the grace of the Lord would no longer be with them.

B. Ephesians emphasizes the relationship between grace and love (1:2, 4; 3:17; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2; 6:23-24); this indicates that if we want to receive and enjoy grace continually, we need to fulfill one condition—love.

C. The church in Ephesus failed in the matter of loving the Lord; such a failure became the main reason for the failure of the church throughout the ages—Matt. 24:12; Mark 12:30-31; cf. Dan. 7:25:

1. The genuine ministry of the New Testament always stirs us up to love the Lord Jesus with the first love, strengthening us in the simplicity of enjoying Christ as our life supply—2 Cor. 11:2-3; 3:3-6.

2. The churches in Asia, including the church in Ephesus, turned away from the apostle Paul’s betrothing ministry (2 Tim. 1:15; 2 Cor. 11:2-3); approximately twenty-six years later, when the apostle John wrote the epistle to the church in Ephesus, they had left their first love and lost the genuine enjoyment of Christ, resulting in the loss of the testimony of the Lord (Rev. 2:4-5, 7).

III. The revelation of the church in the Epistle to the Ephesians has two main aspects: the first aspect is the work of the ministry to build up the Body of Christ, and the second aspect is our spiritual life, which comprises many spiritual experiences that enable us to live a life that matches the church life:

A. We need to love the Lord in incorruptibility by doing the work of the ministry to build up the Body of Christ:

1. What is needed today is an organic building of the Body not directly by Christ as the Head or by the gifted persons but by all the members being perfected to function as the gifted persons do—4:11-16.

2. The building up of the Body of Christ comprises the following categories of work, which are eternal and glorious:

a. We need to visit others with the gospel to bring them into the Triune God (Matt.
28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; John 15:5; cf. 2 Tim. 1:10), offering them as sacrifices to God (Rom. 15:16).

b. We need to shepherd the new believers in home meetings (John 15:16; 21:15-17), nourishing them and helping them to grow so that they can offer themselves as living sacrifices to God (1 Pet. 2:2; Rom. 12:1).

c. We need to perfect the saints in group meetings that they may do the work of the ministry unto the organic building up of the Body of Christ—Eph. 4:11-16; Heb. 10:24-25.

d. We need to lead the saints to prophesy, to speak for God, one by one in the church meetings for the organic building up of the church—1 Cor. 14:3, 4b, 12, 26, 31.

3. This is the organic service of the Body of Christ, which is also the organic service of the New Testament priesthood of the gospel (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), in which we have to be like the apostle Paul, who labored and struggled in all wisdom to present every man full-grown in Christ to God (Col. 1:28-29).

B. We need to love the Lord in incorruptibility in the spiritual experiences that match the church life as unveiled in each chapter of Ephesians:

1. Chapter 1 unveils our being chosen in Christ to be holy and without blemish before God in love (v. 4); chapter 2 unveils our being God’s masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works (v. 10); chapter 3 unveils the unsearchable riches of Christ becoming our enjoyment, Christ making His home in our hearts, and our being filled unto all the fullness of God (vv. 8,14-19); chapter 4 unveils our putting off the old man and putting on the new man (vv. 22-24); chapter 5 unveils our being filled in spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalming with our heart to the Lord (vv. 18-19); and chapter 6 unveils our being empowered in the Lord and putting on the whole armor of God (vv. 10-11).

2. The key to all the spiritual experiences in Ephesians is to be strengthened into the inner man (3:16) in order to be supplied with the supporting grace (vv. 2, 8; 6:24).

3. This is the miraculous yet normal way to live the church life, a revived life, a life that continually overcomes, and a life that loves the Lord in incorruptibility.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

TO LOVE THE LORD IN INCORRUPTIBILITY

Ephesians 6:24 says, “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility.” We all must ask ourselves what it means to love the Lord in incorruptibility. In 1 Timothy 1:17 Paul says that God is incorruptible, and in 2 Timothy 1:10 he says that the Lord “nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel.” First Corinthians 15 tells us that in resurrection the corruptible things will become incorruptible (vv. 50-53). To love the Lord in incorruptibility means to love Him in the new creation. All the things of the old creation are corruptible. This is proved by Romans 8 where we see that the whole creation is groaning under the slavery of corruption (vv. 21-22). Everything of the old creation is corrupting. Only the new creation is not.

Ephesians 6:24 is a total conclusion of the entire book of Ephesians. In the six chapters of Ephesians Paul surely reveals to us the incorruptible things. Christ is incorruptible, the church is incorruptible, and all the positive items related to Christ and the church in chapters 1 through 6 are incorruptible items. We must love the Lord in these incorruptible things. This means we must love the Lord in the new creation and not in the old creation. We have to love the Lord according to the Father’s predestination unto sonship. We have to love the Lord according to the Son’s redemption. We have to love the Lord according to the sealing and the pledging of the Spirit. We have to love the Lord according to the hope of God’s calling, according to the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and
According to the surpassing greatness of His power, which made Christ the Head of all things to the church. We have to love the Lord according to Christ’s resurrection, which made us alive, resurrected us, and seated us in the heavens. We have to love the Lord according to all the incorruptible things revealed in the six chapters of Ephesians. We must love the Lord in incorruptibility.

Many times we love the Lord in the way of corruption. We should not love the Lord in a natural way, in the way of the old creation, but in the new creation. When some Christian groups wanted to raise money, they put out a list of those who gave, with the ones giving the most at the top of the list. This is to love the Lord in corruption. What is it to love the Lord in incorruptibility in giving? Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (Matt. 6:3). To give in the way of making a show is in the old creation. As the kingdom people, our righteous deeds should be kept secret as much as possible (vv. 4, 6, 18). What we do in our spirit, under the heavenly rule to please solely our Father, must not be interfered with by our flesh lusting for man’s glory. The kingdom people’s living is by the Father’s divine life according to their spirit. Thus, they are required to do good things in secret, not in public. Any public exhibition does not correspond with the mysterious, hidden nature of the divine life. In Matthew 6:4 the Lord says that our alms should be in secret, and our Father who sees in secret shall repay us.

To do things in the way of not making a display or a show of oneself is in the new creation. Sometimes when a brother testifies, he testifies because he likes to make a show or a display. When his testifying gets many Amens, he feels glorious. This is to function in corruption because it is in the old creation. When you are testifying, you must remain on the cross. When you are giving a testimony, try your best not to make a show. The Lord Jesus told us that the Pharisees always liked to make a show. Whatever they did, they did to be seen by men (23:5a). The Lord also told us that whenever we fast, “do not be like the sullen-faced hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so that they may appear to men to be fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (6:16-18). This shows us that we should not make a show in anything we do. If we do, we are serving in corruptibility.

To love the Lord in incorruptibility is to love Him in the regenerated, renewed, and indwelt spirit. If you do anything in your flesh, that is in corruption. I believe that when Paul was writing the book of Ephesians and was giving a conclusion to his writing, he was filled with the feeling that whatever he taught in the preceding six chapters was all incorruptible. Then he concluded that we have to love the Lord in incorruptibility.

Many Christians love the Lord concerning the church in corruption. The organization and some of the practices of the denominations are corruptible things, since they are something of the old creation. If one loves the Lord and yet serves the Lord in the denominational way, this is in corruption.

To love the Lord in incorruptibility, we have to love the Lord according to everything revealed in Ephesians. At the end of Ephesians 1 is the church which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. This surely does not refer to any religious organization. The church is incorruptible, but the religious organizations are corruptible. To stand on the proper ground is something incorruptible. To take any other ground other than that of the unique oneness of the Body of Christ kept and expressed in each local church at its locality (Rev. 1:11) is to take the ground of corruption. We should not love the Lord in corruption; we should love Him in a pure way, in the way of incorruptibility that could stand forever.

Paul concluded his Epistle according to its contents because whatever is revealed in his Epistle to the Ephesians is incorruptible. At the conclusion he charged his recipients to love the Lord in incorruptibility, which means to love the Lord according to what he revealed in the entire book. Paul does not conclude his Epistle by only saying, “Grace be with everyone.” The condition for receiving the grace is that we love the Lord in incorruptibility. For the proper church life we need to love the Lord in incorruptibility, that is, in a condition which is incorruptible. For the church our love toward the Lord must be incorruptible, immortal, and imperishable. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1985, vol. 3,

LOVING THE LORD IN INCORRUPTIBILITY
BY BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST

The Gifts Perfecting the Saints to Function as They Do
for the Building Up of the Body of Christ

Ephesians 4:11-12 says, “He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ.” The ascended Christ as the Head of the Body in resurrection gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers to His Body, which is the church (vv. 8-11). The purpose for which Christ gave these gifted persons to the church was not merely so that they could preach and teach. According to verse 12, the purpose of Christ’s giving the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers was to perfect the saints. We all need this perfecting.

The perfecting of the saints is unto the work of the ministry. The work of the ministry is a deep expression, which few Christians understand. Among Christian workers today there are many different opinions and even disputes concerning the ministry. Most think that the ministry is only the business of professional preachers and pastors and that it has nothing to do with ordinary Christians. However, in verse 12 Paul says that the gifts given by Christ to His Body are to perfect the saints to do the work of the ministry. This is not a small thing.

What is needed today is an organic building of the Body not directly by Christ as the Head or by the gifted persons but by all the members. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord told Peter, “I will build My church.” If we read only this verse, we may think that only Christ builds. Some even teach that we cannot build up the church because only Christ can. However, the Epistles, especially Ephesians, reveal that Christ as the Head does not build up the church directly. What He has done is to constitute particular believers as useful gifts. Some of these gifted persons, such as Peter and John, began as lowly fishermen, but through Christ’s work on them, they were constituted into apostles. Christ constituted these gifts and gave them to the church, but even these ones do not build up the church directly. Instead, they build indirectly by perfecting all the saints so that the perfected members can function to build the Body of Christ directly. The real need today, especially in the Lord’s recovery, is that all the members of the Body of Christ would function according to their measure in order to build up the Body (Eph. 4:16).

We first need to go out to contact others with the gospel in order to gain new believers. After baptizing new believers, we need to continue to take care of them. It is impossible for only the elders, co-workers, and full-time serving ones to do this. Because of the great number of new ones who need care, every member must function in this way. Every healthy young woman can bear and deliver a child, and every young mother can and must learn how to care for her child. Similarly, in the church life we should all preach the gospel to save sinners and learn to take care of the new ones. We cannot excuse ourselves by saying that we do not know how to do this, because someone in the church life knows and can perfect us by helping us to learn how to do it. There is a promising situation ahead of us. I believe the day will soon come when all the saints will be able to take care of the new ones in home meetings. However, this cannot occur simply by assigning the saints to visit certain homes. Instead, there is the need of perfecting.

Building Up the Body of Christ by Preaching the Gospel,
Caring for the New Believers, and Speaking in the Meetings

To love the Lord in incorruptibility is to love Him in things that build up the Body of Christ. According to my observation and experiences, the building up of the Body of Christ requires three things. First, we need to gain new believers by preaching the gospel. Following this, we need to visit new believers weekly for at least a year to keep them remaining in grace, living in the Lord’s salvation, and growing in Christ. In addition to preaching the gospel and caring for the new believers, we also need to
attend and speak in the church meetings. These three things are necessary for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Since we are all busy, whether or not we can do these three things depends on how we budget and manage our time. The Bible charges us to redeem the time (Eph. 5:16). I have encouraged the young people to redeem the time by reading a few chapters in the Bible every day. We can redeem much time by refraining from unnecessary talk, reading newspapers and magazines, and watching television. Because living a proper church life requires time, we must budget and manage our time. We can all budget enough time to attend at least two church meetings weekly. Everyone can live a proper church life. If the saints are faithful to the Lord in this, they will soon be perfected to do the three things that are necessary to build up the Body.

We need to regularly go out to visit others in order to preach the gospel. Two hours once a month is sufficient. Everyone can redeem time for this purpose. Within two hours, we can knock on twenty doors. It is wonderful if early on we contact one who is open to the gospel, and we should not worry about going on to other doors but should spend time with the one who is open. If we go out monthly, we will lead at least two or three persons a year to be saved and baptized.

After we baptize new believers, we should not leave immediately but should take time to teach them some basic truths. Then we need to return weekly to teach them more. Every saint can visit new believers regularly in order to take care of them as a nursing mother. I have the assurance that every saint can afford to go out for two hours weekly to take care of the new ones in their homes.

All the saints can also speak in the meetings, because we can be daily revived and live a victorious life. If we daily enjoy the Lord in the Word, we will accumulate the truth in our being and will store up many experiences of Christ as life. As a result, whenever we come to the meetings, we will have something to speak. Because the saints were not perfected in this way in the past, many do not think that they can speak in the meetings. Therefore, we need to change our way by perfecting the saints to do this.

Loving the Lord in Incorruptibility by Preaching the Gospel, Caring for New Believers, and Speaking in the Meetings

We need to love the Lord in incorruptibility (Eph. 6:24). We can do this in the three practices mentioned above. First, we can set aside two hours a month to go out to visit others in order to gain new believers. Second, after baptizing them, we need to visit them weekly for at least a year to keep them living in God’s grace. The Lord will be happy to see a situation of many home meetings, in which the saints are caring for new believers. Third, in every meeting, regardless of the size or location, we need to speak. There is always an opportunity. We can even speak to the other saints as we are entering the meeting room. In this way the meetings will be living. To practice these three things is to love the Lord according to His good pleasure and heart’s desire. This is to love Him in incorruptibility, for whatever is according to His heart will remain forever. It is possible to love the Lord yet do things that grieve His heart, things that are subject to corruption. Therefore, we need to receive this word and try our best to redeem the time to practice these three things.

There are many unbelievers around us in our communities. If we so desire, it is possible for us to gain a few for the Lord. If we gain some new believers and return regularly to take care of them, we will be welcomed by them into the kingdom. The Lord said, “Make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles” (Luke 16:9). We can make friends by preaching the gospel so that when the kingdom comes, many will welcome us into it. The apostle Paul referred to the believers whom he cared for as “my joy and crown” (Phil. 4:1). When the Lord returns, we will be welcomed by those whom we have led to salvation as well as by others who were saved through them. According to the Bible, we need to visit others to bring them the gospel. Therefore, we need to change our way. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1988, vol. 1, pp. 557-564)
Next we look at…the corporate, organic service of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8). Our living is corporate, and our service is also corporate. It is like our human body—there is nothing in it that is not corporate. Whether it speaks or moves, it does so corporately. The same is true with service in the Body of Christ. Hence, in this service every member is necessary (1 Cor. 12:14-22). Moreover, every member functions organically according to his measure (Eph. 4:16b). Since we are members in the Body of Christ, we are all necessary, and we all have our function. Once we fulfill our function in the Body, we have the corporate, organic service.

Furthermore, this service of the organism is the organic service of the New Testament priesthood of the gospel (1 Pet. 2:5, 9). This service involves the preaching of the gospel for the saving of sinners, offering them up as sacrifices to God (Rom. 15:16). Following that, there is the nourishing of the believers and helping them to grow so that they can offer themselves up as living sacrifices to God (John 21:15; 1 Pet. 2:2; Rom. 12:1). In addition, there is the perfecting of the saints that they may do the work of the ministry unto the organic building up of the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-16). Finally, we have to lead the saints to prophesy, to speak for God, for the organic building up of the church (1 Cor. 14:1, 3-5, 12, 24, 31). These are the four steps in the practice of the new way: the preaching of the gospel, the nourishing of others, the perfecting of the saints, and the prophesying for the Lord. Hence, we all have to be like the apostle Paul, who labored and struggled in all wisdom to present every man full-grown in Christ to God (Col. 1:28-29). This is the organic service of the Body of Christ. It is for everyone, and it is in a priesthood. Everyone preaches the gospel to save sinners, everyone nourishes the believers, everyone perfects the saints, and everyone prophesies. In this way all of us will arrive at a full-grown stage, and the Body of Christ will be built up. By this the great work of the organic service in the Body of Christ will be accomplished. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1990, vol. 2, “The Mysteries in God’s New Testament Economy,” pp. 217-218)
LOVING THE LORD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER
FOR THE ORGANIC BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH
AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Four
The Organic Body of Christ Building Itself Up in Love

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:8-16

I. The intrinsic building up of the organic Body of Christ is by the giving of the gifted persons (such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers), who are constituted in the dispensing of the Divine Trinity, by Christ as the Head in His ascension (including His resurrection), to His Body—Eph. 4:8-12; Acts 2:24, 27; 1:9:

A. Ephesians 4:8 says, “Having ascended to the height, He led captive those taken captive and gave gifts to men”:
   1. Height in the quotation from Psalm 68:18 refers to Mount Zion (vv. 15-16), symbolizing the third heaven, where God dwells (1 Kings 8:30).
   2. Psalm 68 implies that it was in the Ark that God ascended to Mount Zion after the Ark had won the victory (Num. 10:35); this portrays how Christ won the victory and ascended triumphantly to the heavens.
   3. Through His universal traffic and in His ascension, Christ led as captives those who had been taken captive by Satan and made them gifts to His Body—Eph. 4:8-11:
      a. The redeemed saints had been taken captive by Satan before they were saved by Christ’s death and resurrection—cf. Luke 4:18.
      b. In His ascension Christ led them captive; that is, He rescued them from Satan’s captivity and took them to Himself—Psa. 68:18.
      c. In His ascension Christ led them to the heavens as His captives in His train of vanquished foes and made them gifts to His Body.
      d. Now God is celebrating Christ’s triumph over them, His vanquished foes, and leading them as His captives in a triumphal procession in His move for His ministry to build up His Body—2 Cor. 2:14.

B. The more Christ ascends and descends within us, capturing and vanquishing us, the more He fills us with Himself to constitute us as gifts to His Body—cf. Eph. 4:9-10.

II. The intrinsic building up of the organic Body of Christ is by the gifted persons’ perfecting of the saints in the divine dispensing so that all the saints may be able to do the work of the New Testament ministry, that is, to build up the Body of Christ—vv. 11-12:

A. The Greek word for perfecting in verse 12 also means “completing,” “equipping,” “supplying the functions”; the way to be perfected is to grow in life and to become skillful in function.

B. The gifted persons perfect the saints by nourishing them according to the tree of life with the life supply for their growth in life—Gen. 2:9; 1 Cor. 3:2, 6.

C. The gifted persons perfect the saints (according to their measure) to do what they do for the direct building up of the Body of Christ—Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:11-12; cf. 1 Tim. 1:16; 4:12: 1. The apostles perfect the saints by visiting the churches (Acts 15:36, 40-41; 20:20, 31),
by writing epistles to the churches (Col. 4:16; 1 Cor. 1:2), and by assigning their
co-workers to stay in certain places to perfect the saints (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 3:15; Titus 1:5).

2. The prophets perfect the saints by teaching them to speak the Lord into
people, by speaking in the meetings to set up a model, and by helping the saints to live a
prophesying life by being revived every morning and overcoming every day—Acts
13:1; 1 Cor. 14:31; Prov. 4:18.

3. The evangelists perfect the saints by stirring them up to be burning in the
gospel-preaching spirit, by teaching them with gospel truths, by training them to preach
the gospel, by helping the saints to be equipped with the power of the economical Spirit,
and by setting an example of loving the sinners and praying for them—2 Tim. 4:5.

4. The shepherd-teachers perfect the saints by shepherding—feeding and nourishing the

D. The result of this perfecting is that we will all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full
knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, and at the measure of the stature of the

E. This perfecting will cause us to be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about
by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a satanic system
of error—Eph. 4:14.

F. Shepherding and teaching are the essential functions among the gifted persons given by
Christ as the ascended Head to the churches for the building up of His Body (John 21:15-17;
Matt. 28:20; 1 Cor. 4:17b; 7:17b; 2 Cor. 11:28-29); in addition, Christ as the Head of the
church also charged the apostles to appoint elders in all the local churches to carry out His
shepherding of His flock (1 Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17a; 1 Pet. 5:2a) and to be apt to teach in order to
strengthen the shepherding and carry out its goal (1 Tim. 3:2b; 5:17b).

III. The intrinsic building up of the organic Body of Christ is by the direct building
by all the members—into the Head and out from the Head:
A. In order to be built up, we must hold to truth in love, growing up into the Head, Christ, in all
things—Eph. 4:15:

1. We must hold to the divine truth of God’s eternal economy, of the all-inclusive Christ,
and of the church as the Body of Christ.

2. We must be subject to the Head, Christ (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23; 1:22, 10), and allow His
divine life to expand and increase into all our inward parts (Rom. 8:10, 6, 11; 2 Cor.
5:4).

3. The word Head in Ephesians 4:15 indicates that our growth in Christ should be a
growth as members in the Body under the Head; our growth is not only in Christ but
also in His Body.

B. Out from the Head, in the divine dispensing, all the Body is joined closely together through
every joint of the rich supply and knit together, interwoven, through the operation in the
measure of each one part—v. 16:

1. When we grow into the Head, we can produce out from the Head many functions for the
building up of His Body.

2. Every member of the Body of Christ has a measure through the growth in life and can
function for the growth and building up of the Body of Christ.

C. The joints supplying and the parts functioning cause the growth of the Body unto the building
up of the Body itself in the divine love—v. 16:

1. All the Body causes the growth of the Body—cf. 1 Cor. 14:4b, 31.

2. The growth of the Body of Christ is the increase of Christ in the church, which results in
the building up of the Body by the Body itself—Eph. 3:17a:
a. When Christ enters into the saints and lives within them, the Christ within the saints becomes the church—Col. 3:10-11.

b. The Body of Christ grows by the growth of Christ within us and is built up this way—1:18; 2:19.

3. The love in which the Body builds itself up is the love that is the very element, the inner substance, of God; it is the love of God in Christ, which becomes the love of Christ in us, by which we love Christ and the fellow members of His Body—1 John 4:7-8, 11, 16, 19; Rom. 5:5; 8:39:
   a. It is in the condition and atmosphere of such a divine love that we are saturated with God to be holy and without blemish before Him—Eph. 1:4.
   b. It is in such a divine love, realized and experienced by us in a practical way, that we are rooted for growth and grounded for building—3:17.
   c. It is in such a divine love that we bear one another for the oneness of the Body—4:2-4.
   d. It is in such a divine love that we hold to truth, that is, to Christ with His Body—v. 15.
   e. It is in such a divine love that we need to walk—to live, act, and have our being—as the beloved children of God, who are God-men, born of God, possessing the life and nature of God, and belonging to the species of God, to be imitators of God—5:1-2.

D. “The direct building of the organic Body of Christ is by the Body itself. The Body is built directly by all the members of Christ functioning, each in his own measure, mainly in prophesying—speaking for the Lord…This direct building by all the members of Christ takes place through the perfecting work of all the gifted persons under the bountiful supply of the divine element of the ascended Christ in His ascension. We need to practice [this] so that we can see the reality of such an organic building on this earth” (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1988, vol. 4, “Further Light concerning the Building Up of the Body of Christ,” pp. 388-389).

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE APOSTLES’ PERFECTING

By Visiting the Churches

First, the apostles perfected the saints by visiting the churches (Acts 15:36, 40-41). When Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, they had not been invited (14:21-22). Later, Paul desired to return to these churches again, and he said to Barnabas, “Let us return now and visit the brothers in every city in which we announced the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing” (15:36). Because Paul was burdened to perfect the saints in these churches, he returned to visit them.

In Paul’s talk with the elders in Ephesus in Acts 20, Paul said that he taught them “publicly and from house to house” (v. 20). To teach the saints publicly, no doubt, indicates that he taught them in a meeting. He also taught them from house to house. This phrase from house to house means “according to houses.” Paul spoke Christ to all the saints in their homes. He admonished the saints with tears even for as long as three years (v. 31). Our concept of an apostle may be that he is a good speaker who is eloquent, knowledgeable, and highly appraised and exalted. But here is an apostle in Acts 20 who visited the homes of the poor saints and admonished them with tears. An apostle should go to the saints’ homes, especially to the poor ones’ homes.

The apostles perfected the saints by visiting them. In Acts 20 Paul sent for the elders in Ephesus to come to him, and he told them that he had stayed with them for three years, teaching the saints publicly
and visiting them from house to house. There is a different teaching being taught today, saying that once the apostles have established the churches and appointed the elders, they should keep their hands off the churches and the elders. This is a wind of teaching that distracts the saints from the truth in God’s Word. Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years to touch many homes of the saints after the elders had already been established. This is a proper apostle. How could a mother who gave birth to some children keep her hands off her children once they have been born, leaving them as orphans? It is a wrong and damaging teaching to say that the apostle should have nothing to do with the churches once they have been established and the elders have been appointed. If the apostles keep their hands off the churches and the elders, the saints cannot be perfected, and the Body cannot be built up. Acts 20 reveals that the way to be an apostle is to stay with a church like Paul did. I regret that since I came to the United States over twenty-five years ago, I have never stayed in a place for a longer time to teach and to bring the elders into the proper eldership. My concern is that it might be that a number of the elders in the Lord’s recovery are taking the lead in the churches in a probing way. This is because they have not been fully perfected to be proper elders. I am looking to the Lord that He would give me the time to stay in a place the way Paul did for three years to perfect the elders and the saints.

By Writing Epistles to the Churches

The apostles’ perfecting work was also carried out by their writing Epistles to the churches. Paul’s heart was in the churches. If there was not the possibility for him to visit the churches, he wrote to them. In his writing, he rebuked, corrected, nourished, taught, and admonished the saints (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:3-4, 2; 12:31; 4:14). In his Epistle to the Galatians he unveiled Christ to the saints and labored on them so that Christ might be formed in them (1:16a; 4:19). In his Epistles, Paul also ministered Christ and His riches to the saints for the building up of the church to accomplish God’s eternal economy (Eph. 3:8-10). Paul ministered Christ and His unsearchable riches to the saints in his writing, especially in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. In his Epistles, Paul admonished and taught the saints to present each of them to God full-grown in Christ (Col. 1:28). Paul also indicated that what he wrote to the churches was to be read by all the saints (4:16; 1 Cor. 1:2). What an apostle Paul was! He is a pattern of what an apostle should be.

All of us need to be perfected to do what Paul did. We need to be the sent ones. We can go to the homes, visit the new ones, and bring God to them, ministering Christ into them. After some have received the Lord and have been baptized, we can go again to visit them in their homes two times a week, exhorting them with tears. The church can be doubled yearly if some faithful ones will pick up the burden to visit people in their homes with the gospel and visit the newly saved ones to perfect them and establish them.

By Assigning Their Co-workers to Stay in Certain Places to Perfect the Saints

The Scriptures also reveal that Paul assigned his co-workers to stay in certain places to perfect the saints, such as his assigning Timothy to stay in Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 3:15) and his assigning Titus to stay in Crete (Titus 1:5). In 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul gave many instructions to these dear brothers regarding how to take care of the church and how to teach the church. Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 3:15, “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.” This indicates that 1 Timothy gives instructions concerning how to take care of a local church. Paul wrote his letter to Timothy that he might know how to behave, how to go out and come in, in the church, which is the house of the living God.

By Teaching the Saints to Do the Work of the New Testament Ministry, That Is, to Build Up the Body of Christ as the Apostles Do

According to Ephesians 4:11-12, the apostles teach the saints to do the work of the New Testament
ministry, that is, to build up the Body of Christ as the apostles do. I have the burden to perfect the saints in the churches that the Lord has raised up through my ministry. My expectation is that after the saints receive my perfecting, they will do the same work that I do. I expect that many saints will be perfected to speak for the Lord and to speak forth the Lord even for three minutes in the way of teaching and revelation. Many saints need to be perfected to do what the apostles do to build up the Body of Christ. The professors in a university expect their students to be perfected to do what they do.

I hope that many of the brothers would be perfected and have something to minister in different aspects in the line of God’s New Testament economy. The writers of the New Testament talked about Christ, but they spoke concerning Christ from different angles and not in the same way. Mark did not copy Matthew, nor did Matthew copy Luke. These three writers of the synoptic Gospels did not teach the same thing concerning Christ as John did in his Gospel. The Epistles of Paul, Peter, and John speak the same thing from different angles and with new light. God’s speaking in His oracle is with new light.

THE PROPHETS’ PERFECTING

According to the record of the New Testament, it is not adequate for a prophet merely to visit a church. He must stay with a church in order to perfect the saints. Acts 13:1 says that in the church in Antioch there were some prophets and teachers. The prophets were in the church in Antioch to perfect the saints to speak for the Lord. The professors in a college need to stay in their school at least two or three times a week in order to take care of their classes. They must do this constantly, regularly, and continually to perfect their students. The ones among us who have learned to speak the Lord as prophets should stay in a certain church to perfect the saints. The prophets perfect the saints by teaching them to speak for the Lord, to speak forth the Lord, and to speak the Lord into people to do the work of the New Testament ministry to build up the Body of Christ, as the prophets do. Teaching means instructing and implies allowing the saints to practice speaking for the Lord.

A prophet who is staying with a church should not merely speak in the meetings but should go to visit all the members of the church in order to perfect them. Sometimes he may instruct the saints in a small group, and sometimes he may tutor certain saints, that is, help one saint at a time. His burden is that the saints would learn how to speak for the Lord in a meeting. To teach students a course takes a period of time. One cannot teach a course in just one day or a few days. A prophet who is burdened to perfect the saints must speak in the meeting to spontaneously set up a model. According to the model he has set up, he can then contact the saints to perfect them.

To learn anything that can build up the Body of Christ requires a spiritual life. Therefore, a prophet has to help the church first of all in a general way. He would tell the saints that since we all love the Lord, and we know that the Lord desires to build up His Body by our growth in life, we must have a daily revival. Every morning after we rise up, we have to have a new start with the Lord. Lamentations tells us that the Lord’s compassions are new every morning (3:22-23). The Lord’s kindness and mercy are fresh every morning like the morning dew. Every morning, even according to the natural law, there is a new start. Even in the new heaven and new earth outside the New Jerusalem, the moon will still be there to divide the twelve months (Rev. 22:2), and the sun will also be there to separate day and night into periods of twelve hours each (21:23, 25). Therefore, we must follow the natural law in God’s creation. In the new creation we must have a new start every day.

Proverbs 4:18 says, “The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, / Which shines brighter and brighter until the full day.” In the Christian life there is no afternoon. The Chinese expression for afternoon means “going down from noon,” while the Chinese expression for morning means “going up to noon.” Our Christian life should be a life that is going up to noon. Sometimes, however, we experience a going down from noon. But when we go to bed, the dawning of the sun is awaiting us. We can have a new start with the Lord. Every twenty-four hours there is a new start.

We must be revived every morning. Then we must daily live an overcoming life. An overcoming life is to live Christ by walking in our spirit. Every morning we should experience Christ as the rising sun
to be revived by Him, and all day long we should live Christ. We must be such persons so that we can learn how to speak Christ. Without such a life, such a living, how can we speak Christ? If a brother quarrels with his wife and behaves recklessly, how can he go out to preach the gospel? He will not be able to speak Christ. If we are defeated in our Christian life or are angry with others, we cannot speak Christ. To speak Christ requires a victorious life, a life that is right in the morning and overcoming the entire day. Then we are qualified and have the capital to do the business of speaking Christ. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1988, vol. 4, “Further Light concerning the Building Up of the Body of Christ,”* pp. 357-366)

**THE EVANGELISTS’ PERFECTING**

An evangelist perfects the saints by stirring them up to be burning in the gospel-preaching spirit. An evangelist must have the ability to stir up the saints, to set them on fire for the gospel. An evangelist should burn the whole church in the gospel-preaching spirit. We may not be qualified to perfect the saints as an evangelist because we do not have such a gospel-preaching spirit. Our spirit may be very cold instead. How can others be very strong and hot in preaching the gospel if we are not? A real evangelist has a burning spirit within him that stirs others up to preach the gospel. We need this kind of perfecting.

To perfect the saints in gospel preaching, the first thing the evangelists have to do is to stir them up. Then they have to teach the saints with the gospel truths. The saints need to be taught what it means to repent and what it is to believe in the Lord Jesus. There are many gospel truths that need to be imparted into the saints. The evangelists also need to train the saints to preach the gospel. They have to train them how to preach, how to speak, how to contact people, and how to converse with people. They also need to equip the saints with the power of the economical Spirit. This means that they themselves must be experientially and presently under the outpouring of the Spirit. The evangelists should also set an example of loving the sinners and praying for them. They must have an overwhelming concern for the salvation of sinners.

The evangelists preach Christ, the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the kingdom of God as the gospel in the way of dispensing for the building up of the Body of Christ, and they teach the saints to do the same thing (*Acts 5:42; Eph. 3:8; Acts 8:12*). To preach about going to hell or to heaven is too low. That kind of preaching is not adequate for the building up of the Body of Christ. We have to preach Christ as the gospel according to *Acts 5:42*, we have to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel according to Ephesians 3:8, and we have to preach the kingdom of God as the gospel according to *Acts 8:12*. This kind of preaching is in the way of dispensing Christ. The evangelists’ perfecting work is to equip and furnish the saints in gospel preaching to do the work of the New Testament ministry, that is, to build up the Body of Christ. We need this kind of perfecting in order to fully enter into the reality of *1 Corinthians 14:26*.

**THE SHEPHERD-TEACHERS’ PERFECTING**

The shepherd-teachers perfect the saints by shepherding—feeding and nourishing the young saints. We need to teach others to take care of the young saints, the new believers. The shepherd-teachers also perfect the saints by teaching the growing saints (*Acts 11:25-26; 13:1*). Finally, the shepherd-teachers raise, equip, and furnish the saints to do the work of the New Testament ministry, that is, to build up the Body of Christ, as the shepherd-teachers do.

**THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE BUILDING UP OF THE BODY OF CHRIST BY THE GIFTED PERSONS AND THE BUILDING UP BY THE PERFECTED SAINTS**

There are two kinds of building up—one is by the gifted persons, and the other is by the perfected saints. The building up of the Body of Christ by the gifted persons is under the Head’s supply and is done
indirectly. The gifted persons do not build up the Body of Christ directly. Even Christ as the Head of the church does not build the church directly. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord told us that He would build His church, but He builds His church indirectly through His giving of the gifts to His Body. Then these gifts perfect the saints, and the perfected saints do the building work directly. The building up of the Body of Christ by the perfected saints is under the gifted persons’ perfecting and is done directly. Ephesians 4:16 says that the Body builds itself up in love because all the members build up the Body of Christ. They build up the Body of Christ by growing into the Head in all things (v. 15). The growth in life of each member of the Body added together equals the building up of the Body. The perfected saints also build up the Body by functioning out from the Head, causing the growth of the Body that the Body may be built up directly by itself (v. 16).

We must have this kind of perfecting work among us in the Lord’s recovery. We must enter into this new light. The co-workers and the elders especially must immediately start to practice this. We should learn how to be apostles, how to be prophets, how to be evangelists, and how to be shepherd-teachers. We need to spend the time to teach each of the saints. After a certain period of time, many of the saints will have the ability to speak Christ. They will practice speaking Christ daily, and at the end of each week they will have prepared something to offer in the larger church meeting. Then in the church meeting spontaneously 1 Corinthians 14:26 will be fulfilled. The attendants will not be waiting for inspiration, but they will have something already.

In 1 Corinthians 14:26 Paul uses the word has five times. He does not say that we will have but that we have something already. When we come to the meeting, we should already have something. It would be tragic if I came to a meeting for the ministry of the word and did not have something to speak. It would be a tragedy if I had to ask the saints to pray that the Lord would give me something to speak. Every attendant of the church meeting must have something when he comes to the meeting. This is just like the Israelites in the ancient times who went to the festival in Jerusalem three times a year with something of the produce of the good land in their hands. God charged them to not appear before Him empty-handed (Deut. 16:16). We may have been Christians for many years and members in a local church in the Lord’s recovery for years. However, how many times did we have something of Christ with us to speak when we came to the church meetings? We may have had the thought when we came to the meetings that someone else would speak for us. We need to build up a habit of bringing something of Christ to the meeting to speak.

If the co-workers and elders endeavor to practice this new light, they will develop the ability to teach others. The co-workers and elders especially need to teach others to do what the apostles do, what the prophets do, what the evangelists do, and what the shepherd-teachers do. Then the whole church will be full of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. What a church this will be! Spontaneously, there will be the building up of the Body of Christ among us. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1988, vol. 4, “Further Light concerning the Building Up of the Body of Christ,” pp. 374-377)
LOVING THE LORD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER
FOR THE ORGANIC BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH
AS THE BODY OF CHRIST
(Saturday—Second Morning Session)
Message Five
Life’s Washing in Love to Maintain Fellowship

Scripture Reading: John 13:1-17, 34-35

I. Since John is a book of signs (2:11), what is recorded in John 13 concerning foot-washing should be considered a sign, which is a symbol with spiritual significance (vv. 1-17):

A. Foot-washing should not be taken merely in a physical sense but rather, and even more intrinsically, in a deeper, more important, and spiritual sense.

B. In John 1—12 the Lord as life came and brought forth the church, composed of the regenerated ones; in their spirit the regenerated ones are in God and in the heavenlies, but in their body they are still living in the flesh and walking on the earth; this shows us the necessity of the Lord’s fellowship in John 13.

II. “Jesus knowing that His hour had come for Him to depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the uttermost…Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all into His hands and that He had come forth from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His outer garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself; then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded”—vv. 1, 3-5:

A. The outer garments that the Lord laid aside signify the Lord’s virtues and attributes in His expression; hence, He was putting off of what He is in His expression.

B. The Lord’s girding Himself signifies His being bound and restricted with humility—cf. 1 Pet. 5:5.

C. In ancient times the Jews wore sandals, and since their roads were dusty, their feet easily became dirty; if, when they came to a feast, they sat at the table and stretched out their feet, the dirt and smell would certainly frustrate the fellowship; hence, for the feast to be pleasant they needed foot-washing.

D. The Lord washed His disciples’ feet to show them that He loved them to the uttermost (John 13:1), and He charged them to do the same to one another in love:
   1. “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet”—v. 14.
   2. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another”—v. 34.

E. The Lord’s washing of the disciples’ feet was the washing away of their dirtiness so that their fellowship with the Lord and with one another could be maintained.

III. In our experience the defilement of the feet signifies separation from God and from one another through contact with the world; foot-washing signifies the recovery of spiritual freshness and vitality and the recovery of our fellowship
with the Lord and with one another:
A. In our experience the washing water in John 13 signifies the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), the word (Eph. 5:26; John 15:3), and life (19:34; 10:10; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:6; 1 John 5:16); the Lord washes our feet by the work of the Holy Spirit, by the enlightenment of the living word, and by the operation of the inner law of life.
B. This is not the washing away of our sins by the blood (1:9); this is why, after John 12, there is the need for such a sign in chapter 13; spiritual foot-washing saves us from staleness in our fellowship with the Lord.
C. Today the world is dirty, and we, the saints, are easily contaminated; for us to maintain pleasant fellowship with the Lord and with one another, we need spiritual foot-washing carried out both by the Lord in His love and by one another in love.
D. This is absolutely necessary for us to live in the fellowship of the divine life, which is revealed in John’s first Epistle, a continuation of the Gospel of John.

IV. For us to experience the washing, we need to spend time in the Lord’s presence and with the saints who are full of the Spirit, the word, and the divine life—cf. Matt. 6:6; 1 Cor. 16:17-18; Acts 6:5, 8; 2 Cor. 1:15:
A. If we remain in the Lord’s presence, the Lord will come to us and wash us, not with the blood but with the Spirit, the living word, and the inner life:
   1. Whenever we are in need of such a washing, we can just open ourselves up to the Lord as we spend time in His presence and allow the inner life to flow within us.
   2. Spontaneously, something living will water, flow, and wash us, and we will become clean again; our spirit will be uplifted, and our whole being will be so pleasant in the Lord’s presence.
B. “You also ought to wash one another’s feet”—John 13:14:
   1. In our experience, the Lord Jesus Himself and the saints who have much life can afford us such a washing.
   2. It is the spiritual foot-washing ministered to one another that keeps us clean from the earthly touch; while we are walking and working on the earth, we not only need the Lord’s foot-washing ministered directly within our spirit but also the foot-washing from the brothers and sisters.
C. Whenever we are about to wash others’ feet, we need to follow the Lord’s pattern by “laying aside our garments”; this is to lay aside our attainments, virtues, and attributes:
   1. We must humble ourselves and empty ourselves; many wear a garment of spirituality and look down on others; they are proud of being spiritual.
   2. To lay aside our garments means to dethrone ourselves.
D. To be girded with a towel means that we are bound and are willing to lose our liberty; we give up our liberty for the purpose of ministering life to our dear brothers and sisters.

V. Each of us must learn how to love the brothers and sisters by ministering the spiritual foot-washing to them to cleanse them from the earthly touch; this keeps them new, fresh, and living; our loving one another in this way is a sign that we belong to Christ—vv. 34-35:
A. We can summarize defiled feet as staleness in our fellowship with the Lord; clean feet, however, denote fresh fellowship with the Lord:
   1. Not many can say today that they treasure and love the Lord as much as they did five or ten years ago; many people have to say that they do not have the same feeling that they had a year ago.
   2. Their feet are defiled, and they have become weary; this is spiritual weariness; it is the
loss of spiritual freshness and vitality.

B. The Lord is always fresh, and He wants us to be fresh all the time, not spiritually enervated; this is why He makes us lie down in green pastures, He leads us beside waters of rest, and He restores our soul; foot-washing sustains an intimate fellowship between us and the Lord and rekindles our spiritual vitality and spiritual freshness—Psa. 23:2-3; Acts 3:20; cf. Deut. 34:7.

C. We should never allow ourselves to become old, which is to be set, settled, and occupied; we must keep ourselves empty, open, fresh, new, living, and young with the Lord; we need to pray that the Lord as the Spirit of reality would guide us into the reality of Psalm 110:3—“Your people will offer themselves willingly/In the day of Your warfare./In the splendor of their consecration./Your young men will be to You / Like the dew from the womb of the dawn.”

VI. There must be an enigmatic freshness, power, nourishment, and supply within us that will drive others to seek after God by our presence; others should desire to seek after God, and their spiritual energy should be revived as a result of meeting us and speaking to us—cf. Acts 20:20, 31:

A. We need the renewal of the Holy Spirit day by day so that we can always be fresh and invigorated—Titus 3:5; 2 Cor. 4:16-18.

B. Foot-washing means recovering our former feelings, bringing us back to the freshness and newness of life (Rom. 6:4), and giving us fresh strength (Psa. 27:1, 4) to recover how we previously treasured the Lord as our first love by giving Him the first place in all things (Rev. 2:4-5; Col. 1:18b).

C. We cannot wash others’ feet unless we enjoy the Lord as our overcoming life and obtain the Spirit’s help to live out such a life; the Spirit within us is our Comforter, the One who takes care of our case, our cause, and our affairs—John 14:26; Phil. 1:19-21a.

D. Every one of us needs our feet washed, and every one of us needs to be prepared to wash others’ feet; among all the services that Christians minister to one another, nothing is more crucial or precious than foot-washing—“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them”—John 13:17.

VII. Foot-washing is a matter of the Lord’s loving us to the uttermost in order to meet our uttermost need; each of us must learn how to love the brothers and sisters by ministering the spiritual foot-washing to them:

How can we wash one another’s feet? Suppose you have completed your day’s work and feel tired. You cannot utter any praises from your mouth. In the evening when you come to the meeting, someone asks you to pray. Halfway through your prayer, you cannot go on, and you stop. You feel as if your prayer is nothing more than a composition. However, perhaps one brother in the meeting has a fresh spirit, and his prayer refreshes your spirit. Your spiritual energy is renewed. This is washing one another’s feet. Many times when we come to the meeting, we find the saints’ spirit weak and downtrodden. We pray and read the Word, but nothing seems to work. The reason for this is that everyone’s feet are defiled, and there is no basin to wash the feet. It is as if something is quenching our spirits. If someone would stand up at this point and wash everyone’s feet by offering a prayer or saying a few words, the whole meeting will be refreshed. Without the basin and without the foot-washing, everyone’s spirit is bound. The same is true in our family life. A brother or sister may unexpectedly drop by your home and fellowship a short while or give a testimony, and everyone in the family is brought into the presence of God. Before that time there was a separation between them and God, but after such a simple conversation, all the separation is gone. This is washing one another’s feet. Those who do this are precious in the Lord’s eyes.

“We should have an ambition before the Lord to wash others’ feet. In order to wash others’
feet, we must have the water; that is, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit and be in constant fellowship with the Lord. For this cause we must live in the Holy Spirit daily. Only then will we have the living water to wash others’ feet. Every time we come to the meeting, we must have the living water to wash others’ feet” (The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 42, pp. 281-282).

VIII. Without the spiritual foot-washing, the church life cannot be realized, and the reality of the church life would be gone:

A. In order to wash others’ feet, we must daily be filled with the Holy Spirit, be in constant fellowship with the Lord, and live in the mingled spirit—Eph. 5:18; 3:19; 2 Cor. 3:16-18; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4, 6.

B. Therefore, the daily foot-washing definitely needs to be exercised by the Lord Himself on the one hand and by all the saints on the other hand; then we shall be able to maintain an excellent fellowship with which we shall have the real church life.

C. “Now I rejoice at the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because these have filled up the lack caused by your absence; for they refreshed my spirit and yours. Acknowledge therefore such ones”—1 Cor. 16:17-18; cf. 2 Cor. 7:13.

D. May we have fresh spiritual experiences every day; Romans 15:32 says, “I may refresh myself and rest with you”; this is the result of foot-washing.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE MEANING OF FOOT-WASHING

The Feet Touching the Earth, Which Signifies the World

Now let us look at the meaning of foot-washing. We know that our feet touch the earth all the time. Our hands, head, and back do not have to touch the earth. But our feet come into contact with the earth all the time. We can say that as long as we are men, we have to touch the earth. As long as we live on this earth, we will come into contact with this earth. The head is for thinking, the hands are for working, the heart is for loving, the legs are for exercising, the back is for resting, and the feet are for contacting the earth. Here the Lord was not washing the hands. The Jews washed their hands before they ate. Yet the Lord washed the disciples’ feet before they ate. He did not wash the head, the back, or the hands; He washed the feet. Why? This is a profound lesson, and I hope that I can express it adequately. Brothers, on this earth man is alienated from God because of sin. However, this problem is solved through the Lord’s shed blood on the cross; the sins that we committed as a sinner have been washed away. After being saved and becoming a believer, the Lord’s overcoming life enables us to overcome all sins. The judgment on sin was settled on the cross, and today the power of sin can be overcome through Him as the overcoming life within us. However, let me ask a question: Other than sin, is there anything else which separates us from God? Those who are honest will say that there are many things which separate us from God. These things may not be sin, but there may be worldly elements that are produced through our contact with the world.

The Defilement of the Feet Signifies Separation from God through Contact with the World, While Foot-washing Signifies the Recovery of Spiritual Freshness and Fellowship with the Lord

Suppose this morning you had a quiet time before the Lord; you read the Word and prayed. The prayer time was sweet and the Lord’s Word was precious. You felt that heaven was so close to earth that you could almost touch it with your hands. This was between five and seven o’clock in the morning. By eight o’clock, numerous affairs of the day began to occupy you. Some have to conduct their businesses; others have to teach at school or go to their offices. Some have to go to school, while others have to visit the sick, shop, clean the house, or do laundry. There are many things which are waiting to be done. When
you read the Bible and prayed in the morning, you felt that heaven was very close. But as a businessman who spends three to six hours in your office doing many seemingly “proper” things (you may not have lied or sinned at all), are you still as close to God in the evening as you were in the morning? No, you are not.

Students busy themselves in schoolwork at the schools, and housewives engage themselves in their household chores at home. Once a person occupies himself in these affairs, he feels as if heaven has moved away. It is no longer as close as it was in the morning. He may still be able to set aside some time to pray, but he has nothing to say. He can only touch the superficial letter of the Word; he can no longer touch the inward reality. When the prayer meeting comes, he may want to pray, but he is short of words. Even when he does manage to think of some words to say, his conscience bothers him. He may still shout hallelujah, and the words and sounds may still be the same, but the meaning and taste are different. He feels that something has separated him from God, but he cannot pinpoint any sin. It seems as if confession does not help the situation either. If he was separated from God through sin, he should deal with it through the application of the blood shed on the cross. But this does not seem to be a question of sin. He only feels somewhat dimmed and has lost the former brightness. There is the need of something else to deal with this problem. This is different from ordinary sins. What is needed is the foot-washing. What is foot-washing? It is dealing with everything apart from sin that separates us from God.

This happens to us all the time. We do not sin, but neither do we touch God. It is understandable when a person is separated from God through sin. But we do not know what to do when we have not sinned, yet cannot touch God. Thank the Lord that He has not only washed us of our sins, but washed our feet as well. This is not the washing of our hands; the hands signify the things we do. Whether or not we do things is our responsibility. This is not the washing of our head; the head signifies our thoughts. Whether or not we think certain things is our responsibility. This is not the washing of our backs. Whether or not we lie down is our responsibility. If our head, hands, or backs have a problem, we have sinned because the activities associated with these parts are under our control. Our feet however have no choice but to stand on the ground; this is something that is not up to us. What do the feet signify? The feet signify our contact with our family, business, and schools. These are unavoidable contacts in our daily life. As long as we are human beings and live in this world, we have to stand on the ground and touch the earth. This will continue until the day the Lord comes back to rapture us away. When Jacob was about to die, the Bible says that he gathered up his feet into his bed (Gen. 49:33). This meant that from that day on, he would no longer need to use his feet; he could go to his fathers. Before we go to our fathers, our feet are still on the ground; they are not gathered up into our bed.

The feet signify our inevitable and non-sinful contact with the world. This contact is not sinful, yet it can separate us from God and make heaven less near to us and our prayers less sweet. While living on this earth, our feet are easily defiled. We have to use our feet whether we are standing up or sitting down. Of all the members of our body, the feet tire us out the most easily. I am not saying that the other parts of the body will not tire us out; but the feet tire us out most easily. In the same way, it is very easy for a spiritual man to become defiled. How many spiritual men sitting here tonight have feet that are defiled? I know that many of our feet have been defiled.

Now that you are clear about the significance of the feet, we have to go on to consider the meaning of defiled feet. Defiled feet are feet that have to be washed. It is not wrong for the feet to be defiled; this is something that is inevitable. This defilement has nothing to do with sin; sinning is something else. We are not talking about sin, we are talking about the things that separate us from God, the things that tire us out spiritually. This is having defiled feet. Suppose we come to the meeting and say something in an old and habitual way. Although we have opened up our mouth, nothing is touching us inwardly. Or we may be reading the Bible and know what we are reading, yet we may have no feeling about what we have read. This is having defiled feet. We can summarize defiled feet with a few words—staleness in fellowship with the Lord. Clean feet, however, denote fresh fellowship with the Lord.

One day someone said to me, “Mr. Nee, when I was in Chuenchow, I had a wonderful time. I felt
that the Lord was very precious to me. But today all those feelings are gone. I still believe in the Lord, I still pray to the Lord, I still love Him, and I am still consecrated to Him. I have not lost any of these things. Yet I must admit that something within me is not the same as it was before.” This is having defiled feet. A man defiles his feet through contact and communication with the world, and through working and conducting business in that realm. If you ask such a one if he has sinned, he may answer, “No.” Outwardly he is the same as he was before, but inwardly he is different. He can still say that the Lord is precious and that he loves the Lord very much. However, this only describes his condition last year, the year before last, or five or ten years ago. How many can say today that they treasure the Lord and love the Lord as much as they did five or ten years ago? Many people have to say that they do not have the same feeling that they had a year ago. Their feet are defiled, and they have become weary. This is spiritual weariness; it is the loss of spiritual freshness and vitality. This is why the Lord says that we need foot-washing. What does foot-washing mean? It means recovering our former feelings, bringing us back to the freshness of life, and giving us fresh strength to treasure what we previously treasured. This is the meaning of foot-washing. Thank the Lord that He washes our feet all the time.

Many times when we speak, our words do not match our inward feelings. Today many believers in Christ have become stagnant in their spiritual growth. They sing, praise, and pray reluctantly. Sometimes this is the result of sin, but many times this is not the result of any sin. They simply have defiled feet, and they have become spiritually enervated. We have to realize that the Lord wants us to be fresh all the time. This is why He says that He leads us to the green pastures (Psa. 23:2). We have a brother in Shanghai who is a manual laborer. He lost his job a few months ago but recently found another job. His work involves cutting grass. For every thousand catties [a Chinese unit of weight] of grass he cuts, he gets a dollar. After the grass is dried, it is bundled up into bundles of six hundred catties and sent to the dairy farms. He gets fifty cents a day for this. He cuts, dries, and delivers all day long. Last month I met him while he was drying the grass and asked him about his job. He said, “I have to dry the grass and deliver it to the dairy farms. The farms store it in their barns and feed the cows with it in winter.” I then said, “The dairy farmers feed the cows with yellow grass, but the Lord feeds us with green grass.” The Lord wants us to be fresh; He wants us to be fresh every day. We may have been yellow yesterday, but we can be green again today. We may have been yellow this morning, but we can be green this afternoon. The Lord is fresh running water; He does not flow for five minutes and then stop. He flows continuously, daily, monthly, and yearly. There is not a minute in which He is short. He is always fresh, and He is constantly refreshing us. This is the life that the Lord is leading us to live. Here is power, joy, peace, and holiness. Only by living this way can we express the Lord’s life. After the victory at Jericho, there is still the victory at Ai. After great victories, there are still small, daily victories. This should be our daily experience before the Lord.

The Bible says that Saul was taller than any of the people from his shoulders and upward (1 Sam. 10:23). Yet God was not pleased with his reign. Eventually, God did not choose him. Instead, He chose David to be the king. The Bible does not indicate David’s height; it merely says that he was ruddy and of a beautiful countenance (16:12). This implies freshness, like the freshness of a newborn baby whose face does not have any wrinkles; there is freshness and vitality, God wants our life to be fresh. Psalm 1 says that the blessed man is one who is like a tree planted beside streams of water, yielding fruit in its season, and whose foliage does not wither (v. 3). We have leaves, which are our outward conduct. We may be patient, meek, humble, and perfect in our conduct and virtues. But the question is whether this conduct and virtues are green or whether they are wilting and yellow. Are they fresh, or are they old? Leaves denote our conduct. If we are not under the fresh operation of the Holy Spirit, we will be doing the same things that we have done in the past. The result will surely not be green and fresh, but dry and old. A person may have risen at five o’clock in the morning yesterday. He may do the same thing today. But yesterday he felt God’s presence very near to him, yet today he does not touch Him at all. Outwardly, he is doing the same thing, but inwardly the feeling is gone. The inward freshness is gone because the leaves have dried up like the things in Noah’s ark that belonged to the old creation. They are not like the fresh
Creating a Thirst within Man for God

Tonight I have a word specifically for the co-workers. We have to know why God has put us in the world. He has put us in the world so that our presence would create a hunger and thirst for righteousness in sinners, believers, and the world. In our work, we have to create a hunger within others. There must be an enigmatic freshness, power, nourishment, and supply within us that will drive others to seek after God by our presence. Others should have a desire to seek after God as a result of meeting us and speaking to us. If we always see others and communicate with them without creating a desire within them for God, it means that we have failed. If our reading of the Bible, prayer, service, and gospel preaching do not produce such a powerful hunger within man, our work has failed.

Many who knew Miss Barber can testify that she was very different from others. Whenever someone went to her and sat in front of her, spontaneously he would realize how much he was off. He would realize that he did not have what she had and would aspire for what she had. Fifteen years ago (1921) when I first became a Christian, I was very proud. I thought highly of myself because I was able to read one or two chapters of the Bible a day with some understanding. (Very few people are proud outwardly; most people are proud inwardly.) I went to her to tell her about this. After I prayed a few words with her, I saw my pride before she even opened her mouth to rebuke me. I knew that I did not have what she had. This is foot-washing. My feet were washed by her presence. I met God. Prior to that I was living outside of God, and I was old and dark. But once I came to her, I was refreshed and enlightened. I often felt that I was washed by her presence. We often have the same sensation—we feel that we are washed after talking to certain brothers. Our spiritual energy is revived; we can touch and feel God once more. This is foot-washing.

A few days ago, I felt that my feet were defiled. At first I thought that I had sinned, and I proceeded to deal with my sins. But God was still very far from me. I felt that there was a separation between myself and God. I could do nothing about it. While I was praying I was secretly saying to myself, “You are just composing your prayer. This is not something from your heart.” Later, I saw a sister who had been saved for only two or three months. She told me of her salvation experience and told me how she was persecuted by her family. She hoped that I would give her some help. When I heard this, I said, “Thank the Lord. When I came, my feet were defiled. But when I leave, my feet will be clean because your testimony has washed away the oldness in my experiences.” The book of Titus mentions the renewing of the Spirit (3:5). This is a very precious expression. We need the renewing of the Spirit so that we can always be spiritually fresh and invigorated.

A bronze flower vase needs constant polishing to make it shine. If there is no polishing, there may not be any rust, but there will be a coating of dust and the vase will not shine. The same is true with us. We may not be sinful, but we may have a coating of dust that prevents us from shining. The Lord said to Peter, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me” (John 13:8). What does this mean? Having no part with the Lord does not mean perdition; it means having no part in the fresh fellowship of the Lord’s life. If our feet are not washed, there will be a separation between us and the Lord, and we will not be able to enjoy the freshness of His life and the freshness of His supply. This is the meaning of having no part in the Lord. The Lord wants to wash our feet. Therefore, we must be willing to be washed and renewed.

Aspiring to Wash Others’ Feet

At the same time, we have to aspire to wash others’ feet. However, we cannot wash others’ feet unless we have the overcoming life and the Spirit’s help to live out such a life. Some can wash others’ feet, while others cannot. You may live with someone for over a year and yet still not have your feet washed once. Washing requires that we live an overcoming life before the Lord. We have to be fresh all the time before we can wash others’ feet.

Who are the ones who need washing, and who are the ones who have to wash others’ feet?
Lord said, “You also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14). This tells us that we all need the washing. Those who were spiritually fresh but who have lost their freshness need the washing. Every one of us needs our feet washed, and every one of us needs to be prepared to wash others’ feet. The Lord said, “If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.” Among all the services that Christians minister to one another, nothing is more crucial or more precious than foot-washing. “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (v. 17). I love what Brother Yu has said many times: “The Bible today is more precious than the Bible yesterday.” May we have fresh spiritual experiences every day. Romans 15:32 says, “I may refresh myself and rest with you.” This is the result of foot-washing. (The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 42, pp. 232-240)
LOVING THE LORD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER
FOR THE ORGANIC BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH
AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Six
The Lord’s New Commandment Given to Us—
That We Love One Another

Scripture Reading: John 13:34-35; 1 John 2:7-8; 3:11, 23

I. In John 13, after the Lord Jesus washed His disciples’ feet to show them that He loved them to the uttermost (v. 1), He charged them to do the same to one another in love (v. 14); then He said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (vv. 34-35):

A. The commandment in verse 34 is the new commandment given to us by the Lord in the New Testament, which is different from the old commandments in the Old Testament:

1. The New Testament commandments of the Lord (John 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12; 1 John 2:3, 4, 7, 8; 3:22, 23, 24; 4:21; 5:2, 3; 2 John 4, 5, 6) are not merely injunctions; they are His words, which are spirit and life as a supply to us—John 6:63.

2. We should love God and His children with the divine love that is conveyed to us through the words of the Lord to become our experience and enjoyment.

B. A way to receive, experience, and enjoy Christ is by keeping His new commandment to love one another for the expression of His love that all the people may know that we are His disciples—13:34-35:

1. Real love is the issue of enjoying the processed Triune God in the divine dispensing—2 Cor. 13:14.

2. When we are in the fellowship of the divine life (1 John 1:1-3), that is, in the enjoyment of the Triune God, the outcome of this enjoyment is the divine love with which we spontaneously love others; in particular, we love all those who are organically related to our begetting Father (5:1); this love is possible only because we have had the divine birth (John 1:12-13; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:4, 18).

3. Here we have a triangular love involving God, ourselves, and all those born of God, which is in the organic union with the Triune God who is love (4:8, 16).

II. The love of God is God Himself; love is the inward essence of God and the heart of God—vv. 8, 16:

A. The love of God is the source of salvation—John 3:16; Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:4-5.

B. God’s predestination of us unto the divine sonship was motivated by the divine love—Eph. 1:4-5.

C. The love of God accomplished salvation for us; God’s giving of His only begotten Son to us that we may be saved from perdition judicially through His death and have the eternal life organically in His resurrection was motivated by the divine love—John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10:

1. In the love of God, the Son of God saves us not only from our sins by His blood but also from our death by His life—Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5; Rom. 5:10.
2. God loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins in His judicial redemption with the intention that we might have life and live through Him in His organic salvation—1 John 2:1; 4:9-10; John 6:57; 14:19; Gal. 2:20.

3. God’s excelling love is seen in His becoming a propitiatory sacrifice for our sins and the propitiation place for us to meet and be infused with God; God as love meets with us and speaks to us in the propitiating, redeeming, and shining Christ so that we can be infused with Him as love, mercy, and grace for His effulgent and radiant glory—Rom. 3:24-25; Heb. 4:16; Exo. 25:17, 22.

D. The love of God causes us to obtain salvation (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Matt. 22:3; Acts 5:32; 2 Tim. 3:15) and become His children (1 John 3:1).
F. God has poured out His love in our hearts with the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), who has been given to us, as the motivating power within us, so that we may more than conquer in all our tribulations (8:37 and footnote 1).

III. In 1 John 2:7-8, relating to the Lord’s commandment in John 13:34, the apostle John says, “Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you but an old commandment, which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you heard. Yet again a new commandment I am writing to you, which is true in Him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining”:

A. The commandment regarding brotherly love is both old and new: old, because the believers have had it from the beginning of their Christian life; new, because in their Christian walk it dawns with new light and shines with new enlightenment and fresh power again and again—1 John 2:7-8; 3:11, 23; cf. John 13:34.
B. The fact that the old commandment is new is true in the Lord, since He not only gave it to His believers but also renews it in their daily walk continually; it is true also in the believers, since they not only have received it once for all but also are enlightened and refreshed by it repeatedly.

IV. In 1 John we see that the practice of the divine love is the outcome of our enjoyment of the Triune God as the all-inclusive Spirit, the One who is moving and working within us as the anointing in the fellowship of the divine life to saturate us with all that the Triune God is, with all that He has done, and with all that He has obtained and attained—1:3; 2:3-11, 27:

A. If we would experience and enjoy the divine love and have it become the love by which we love others, we need to know God experientially by continuously living in the divine life—vv. 3-6; Phil. 3:10a.
B. In order to practice the divine love as a virtue of the divine life, we need the divine life that has been sown as the divine seed (1 John 3:9; 2:29 and footnote 7) into our being; we also need the divine Spirit (3:24); the divine life is the source, and the divine Spirit is the One who actually carries out the matter of loving others.
C. We should love God and His children with the divine love and not with our natural love, which must be put on the cross; one difference between God’s love and our natural love is that it is very easy for our natural love to be offended.
D. Our living in the love of God toward one another is the perfection and completion of this love in its manifestation in us—4:11-12; 2:5.
V. The church life for the organic building up of the Body of Christ is a life of brotherly love—4:7-8; 2 John 5-6; John 15:12, 17; Rev. 3:7; Eph. 5:2; cf. Jude 12a:

A. The one who loves God and the brothers is enjoying the divine life; the one who does not love is abiding in the satanic death—1 John 3:14; cf. 2 Cor. 11:2-3.

B. Just as the Lord Jesus laid down His soul-life that we might have the divine life, we need to lose our soul-life and deny the self to love the brothers and minister life to them in the practice of the Body life—1 John 3:16; John 10:11,17-18; 15:13; Eph. 4:29—5:2; 2 Cor. 12:15; Rom. 12:9-13.

C. We need to lose our soul-life by not loving the world with its pleasure; instead, taking in God and expressing God as love in the church life of brotherly love should be our joy, amusement, entertainment, and happiness—1 John 2:15-17; Matt. 16:25-26; cf. 2 Tim. 3:4; Psa. 36:8-9.

D. Brotherly love in the church life is expressed practically in our caring for the necessities of the needy saints without any self-serving purpose or outward self-display; in the sharing of material things with the needy saints, the grace of the Lord’s life with His love flows among the members of the Body of Christ and is infused into them—1 John 3:17-18; Matt. 6:1-4; Rom. 12:13; 2 Cor. 8:1-7.

E. Loving to be first in the church is versus loving all the brothers—3 John 9.

F. Loving one another is a sign that we belong to Christ (John 13:34-35); if we desire to have the ability to influence people concerning the Lord and to bear fruit, we must have love for one another and become one in the church life; the best way for us to bear fruit is to love one another by taking Christ as our person and life (v. 35; 17:21, 23).

G. The genuine preaching of the gospel is a matter in fellowship (Phil. 1:5) because it is a matter of the Body; the branches of a tree bear fruit in a way of fellowship (John 15:5, 12, 17); the more we live in the Body life and have the reality of the Body life, the more we will be fruitful.

H. The condition of the vital groups in the church life is that of loving one another in oneness and with one accord; for the practice of the vital groups, the saints need to be trained how to have fellowship that is altogether based on oneness and one accord—Acts 1:14.

I. In the church life of brotherly love (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thes. 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thes. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8), we receive one another (Rom. 15:7), have the same mind toward one another (v. 5), pursue the things for building up one another (14:19), bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), bear one another in love (Eph. 4:2), comfort and build up one another (1 Thes. 5:11), confess our sins to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16), forgive one another (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13), and are subject to one another (Eph. 5:21).

J. The proper church meeting is a “one another” meeting, a “round-table” meeting, in which we speak to one another (v. 19), teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16), consider one another and exhort one another (Heb. 10:24-25), and listen to one another (1 Thes. 5:20); we need to learn to have a proper mutual care in the meetings (1 Cor. 12:25-26).

K. We need to be dealt with and built up by the Lord (8:1) so that our administration of the church and our ministry of the word will result in the brothers and sisters spontaneously loving one another for the building up of the church; when the saints genuinely grow in their spiritual life, the experience of the divine life will result in an increase of love, because love is the issue of life (1 John 3:14); this will cause the church life to be living, prevailing, functioning, and powerful.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

CONDITIONS OF THE DIVINE FELLOWSHIP
Loving God and the Brothers

Confessing our sins is the first condition of our enjoyment of the fellowship of the divine life. According to [1 John] 2:3-11, the second condition is that we keep the Lord’s word and love the brothers. [The Lord’s] commandments are to love God and to love the brothers. We love our begetting Father, and we love all His children, all those begotten of Him. When we are abiding in the Lord, having fellowship with Him, our abiding in Him spontaneously issues in love for God and for the brothers. Therefore, the second condition, the second requirement, of fellowship is that we love God and the brothers.

[In 1 John 2:5] “the love of God” denotes our love toward God, which is generated by His love within us. The love of God, the word of the Lord, and God Himself are all related to one another. If we keep the Lord’s word, God’s love has been perfected in us. This is altogether a matter of the divine life, and this life is God Himself.

God’s love is His inward essence, and the Lord’s word supplies us with this divine essence, with which we love the brothers. The word itself is not this essence or substance. The word is what conveys this essence and supplies it to us. Therefore, the word supplies us with the very essence of God, which is the divine love. As a result, we have something substantial within us for us to participate in and enjoy. This means that eventually the essence of God’s being becomes our enjoyment. Then out of this enjoyment there will be an issue—our love for God and His children.

Not Loving with Our Natural Love

It should not be with our natural love that we love God and His children. On the contrary, our natural love needs to be put on the cross. We should love God and His children with the divine love, the love that is conveyed to us through the word of the Lord and that becomes our experience and enjoyment.

Many of today’s Christians understand the Bible in a natural, religious, or ethical way. This is true in particular concerning the requirement to love God, the brothers, and our neighbor. From the time I was a youth I heard about loving the brothers and loving our neighbor. Today Christians often talk about loving the brothers or about loving our neighbor. Once when I was in Houston for a conference, a lady came up to me after the meeting and said strongly, “People in this country don’t know to love others. You should travel to different places and teach Christians to love one another.”

Yes, the Bible does tell us that we should love one another and that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. However, it is not God’s intention to command us to love others with our natural love. Instead, God desires that we love Him and His children with the divine love which we have enjoyed.

The Love of God Becoming Our Love

This is the reason verse 5 says that the love of God has been perfected in us. On the one hand, this love is the love of God; on the other hand, this love, having been experienced and enjoyed by us, becomes our love for God and the brothers.

How can our love for God be called the love of God? It is because this love is not our love, but is God’s love. However, this is not the love of God as it is objectively; it is the love of God experienced by us subjectively. This is the love of God becoming our love through our experience and enjoyment of Him. This love then becomes our love for God and others.

God wants us to love Him with His love. He also wants us to love His children, and even the whole world, with His love. First we need to enjoy God’s love and experience His love to such an extent that it fills us, saturates us, and becomes our very essence, causing us to be permeated with the love of God. Then with this love we shall love God, we shall love God’s children, and we shall love all people. We do not love them with our natural love; we love them with the love of God we have experienced and enjoyed. Praise the Lord for such a wonderful love! This is the love revealed in the first Epistle of John.
This experience of the love of God is altogether a matter in the fellowship in the divine life. If we do not enjoy God in the fellowship of the divine life, we cannot have such a love.

Loving Others with the Love of God

If we experience the love of God, we shall have the deep realization that our natural love is one thing and that the love of God which becomes our love through experience is something very different. One difference between God’s love and our natural love is that it is very easy for our natural love to be offended.

When we love others, we become involved with them. For this reason, it is often the case that those we love in a natural way eventually become our enemies. Because natural love may have such a result, those who are wise in a human way are slow and careful in loving others. They realize that if you love others in a foolish way, sooner or later that love will cause trouble. Many divorces and separations are the result of a foolish natural love that is easily offended and leads to enmity. For example, a certain man and woman may know each other only for a short time. In a quick way they get married. Then after only a little time has gone by, they may separate or get a divorce. At first they loved each other, but not too long after they were married they became enemies. This is the result of loving each other in a natural way. If they had never loved one another in a natural way, they would not have become enemies.

It is not very likely that you will regard as your enemy a person unknown to you that you see walking on the street. Those who become your enemies are often those whom you love in a natural way. This is why some exercise their human wisdom to be very careful in loving others. They realize that loving others in a natural way leads to problems. In order to avoid these problems, they are very slow in loving others.

The point I am making here is that we need to be careful not to love others by our natural love. Rather, our natural love should be put on the cross. We need to love others by the love of God we have experienced and enjoyed. If we experience God’s love, we shall love God with this love. We shall also love the brothers with this same love. This kind of love does not cause trouble. May we all see that we need to love God and others with the divine love that has become our experience and enjoyment.

(1 John 3:11)

LOVING THE BROTHERS AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER IN THE CHURCH

As we live in the church, we love all the brothers; that is, we love one another. The reason for this is that, as Romans 12:9-21 indicates, in the church the believers live a life of the highest virtues of the divine life and love. In verse 9a Paul says, “Let love be without hypocrisy,” and in 10a he continues, “Love one another warmly in brotherly love.” This corresponds to Peter’s word about loving “one another from the heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22).

In John 13:34 and 35 the Lord Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men shall know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” This commandment is the message which we “heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (1 John 3:11). We should not try in a natural way to fulfill this word. We may realize that God is love (4:8) and that we are commanded to love one another. Then in a natural, religious, and ethical way we may try to love others, imitating God’s love. In our nature as human beings there is the tendency to love in this way. This kind of love is ethical, natural, and even cultural. However, real love is the issue of enjoying the processed Triune God in the divine dispensing. When we are in the fellowship of the divine life, that is, in the enjoyment of the Triune God, this enjoyment will have a certain issue or outcome. The outcome of the enjoyment of the Triune God is the divine love. When we enjoy the Triune God, this enjoyment issues in the divine love. With this love we spontaneously love others. In particular, we love all those who are organically related to our begetting Father (5:1). We have been begotten of the Father, and many others also have been begotten of Him. If we enjoy Him, the result will be that we love all His children. Therefore, loving the brothers is the issue
of enjoying the Triune God.

Instead of trying to imitate the Lord’s love, we need to be constituted of the Triune God who is love. This One abides in us and wants to impart Himself into our being and saturate us with Himself so that we may enjoy Him inwardly as love. This love should saturate us until it becomes the love with which we love the brothers.

The revelation concerning love in the New Testament is different from our natural concept of love. The very God who is love abides in us, and we abide in Him. According to 1 John 3:24, “we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He gave to us.” This Spirit keeps us in an organic union with the Triune God who is love, causing this God to become our life and even our being. Furthermore, this Spirit is saturating us with the substance of the God who is love. Eventually, the fibers of our being will be constituted of the loving essence of God. This means that the divine love becomes us. Then spontaneously we love others. However, we do not love them by our own love; we love them by God as our love. What a great difference there is between this kind of love and the love that is simply a human attempt to imitate the love of God!

According to the New Testament, the love the believers have for one another is actually a triangular love, a love that involves three parties. As a child of God born of Him, we surely love our Father, the One who has begotten us. Since we love the begetting Father, we shall also love those who have been begotten of Him. Here we have a triangular love, a love involving God, ourselves, and all those born of God. This triangular love is in the organic union with the Triune God who is love.

How is it possible for believers to love God and to love one another? This is possible only because we have had the divine birth (John 1:12-13; 1 John 5:1; 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:4,18). We have been born of God, begotten of Him, and because of this birth we are able to love one another. Therefore, the triangular love is related to the divine birth. Now we love not only the One who has begotten us, our begetting Father, but also the ones begotten of Him. This is the love with which the believers love one another in the church life. (The Conclusion of the New Testament, pp. 1769-1771)

THE VITAL GROUPS IN THE CHURCH LIFE

The Condition—Loving One Another in Oneness and with One Accord

The condition of the vital groups is that of loving one another in oneness and with one accord (John 13:34-35). To love one another may seem very common. However, we must admit that although we do love one another, we may not love one another very much. Because we meet together day after day and year after year, we surely have human affection for one another, but the condition of loving one another in the vital groups should be more than this. We need to love one another, meeting together in a mutual love.

We not only love one another, but we love one another in oneness and with one accord. In John 17 the Lord Jesus said that when His disciples are one in the Triune God, the whole world will believe that He was sent by the Father (vv. 21, 23). This is the way to gain people. Often when we go out to visit people by twos and threes, the people whom we visit may realize that there is no oneness among us. The result is a lack of impact. But if two or three of us go out as one man, the people whom we visit will realize that there is a dynamic power among us. There will be the impact, and they will be convinced.

In John 13:34-35 the Lord Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” By our loving one another, the whole world will know that we are the Lord’s disciples. This is the real impact. Without our speaking anything, people will be convinced because they see us loving one another in oneness and with one accord. On the whole earth, in every society everyone knows that whenever people group together, there is struggling and fighting. Wherever there are groups of people, there will be debates, arguments, and strife. But when people are among us and we are really one, they will wonder what has made us one. The Lord Jesus is the living person who has made us one. Our being one is the strongest testimony that we are the people of Jesus.
We are disciples of the One who has made us one.

These are the terms and conditions for us to gain people. Regardless of how much others oppose us, if we are such people, nothing can prevent us from gaining the proper increase. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1991–1992*, vol. 3, “Fellowship concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups,” pp. 407-408)

**Keeping the Oneness, Loving One Another, and Having the One Accord**

In John 17:19-21 the Lord Jesus prayed, “For their sake I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. And I do not ask concerning these only, but concerning those also who believe into Me through their word, that they all may be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that You have sent Me.” We are all members of the Body of Christ. As such, we must have the real oneness. We are really one. However, although today we are still in the recovery and in the oneness, we need to realize that the oneness among us is not a living oneness. Our oneness is not a working oneness. We all are one, but you are you and I am I. The oneness among us is a dormant oneness, a sleeping oneness. Our oneness should be very active. The genuine oneness will cause us to take action when we hear of a need among the saints in the Body. The real oneness is an active and acting oneness.

We are one, yet we may not know the eight members of our group so well. That is not the living oneness. In John 17 the Lord said that if we have this oneness, the people of the world will know that Christ is the One who was sent by the Father (vv. 21, 23). This indicates that when we go to visit people, they will realize that we are one among ourselves. They will realize that with us there is something heavenly, something divine, that the people of the world could never have. The worldly people cannot be one, yet we are one in a living way so that our oneness is expressed and is realized by others. When they meet us, people can sense that we have the oneness.

In John 13:34-35 the Lord said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” If we love one another, we do not need to tell people that we are Christ’s disciples. The worldly people will realize this.

The first thing after the training concerning prayer is to train all the saints how to have fellowship. Fellowship is altogether based on oneness and mutual love. We are one, and we love one another. These are two strong signs.

The early followers of Christ, including Peter and John, followed the Lord Jesus full time. They were fishermen, but they left their nets, their boat, their job, and their father to follow the Lord Jesus (Matt. 4:18-22). To the outsiders they were idle, not doing anything but following this One. They did this for three and a half years. Eventually, they saw the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension of the Lord, and that kept them more in oneness. Thus, the beginning of Acts says that these dear ones were in one accord (1:14), not merely in oneness. Oneness is not as practical as one accord. They were in one accord with no different opinions, concepts, or insights. They were all one in one accord. They were one hundred twenty disciples, but they were just like one person, and they prayed in one accord. Here is the real prayer. Acts does not tell us what they prayed for or how they prayed, but after ten days of prayer, something happened—on the day of Pentecost Christ was poured out upon them as the all-inclusive Spirit (2:1-4), and the church was produced. This is what we need. We need to keep the oneness, we need to love one another, and we need to have the one accord. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1991–1992*, vol. 3, “Fellowship concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups,” pp. 423-425)
LOVING THE LORD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER  
FOR THE ORGANIC BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH  
AS THE BODY OF CHRIST  

(Lord’s Day—First Morning Session)  

Message Seven  

Being Perfect as the Heavenly Father Is Perfect  
by Being Perfected in His Love  

Scripture Reading: Matt. 5:48; 1 John 2:5; 4:12, 16-18  

I. At the end of Matthew 5, to conclude an exceedingly high section of the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens (vv. 17-48), the Lord Jesus said, “You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v. 48):  
A. The kingdom people, the audience for the Lord’s decree of the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens, are the regenerated believers of the New Testament, as the title sons of your Father in verse 45 indicates:  
   1. They are the Father’s children, having the Father’s divine life and divine nature.  
   2. Hence, they can be perfect as their heavenly Father is.  
B. The demand of the new law of the kingdom is much higher than the requirement of the law of the old dispensation (v. 22, footnote 2); this higher demand can be met only by the Father’s divine life, not by the natural life:  
   1. The kingdom of the heavens is the highest demand, and the divine life of the Father is the highest supply to meet that demand.  
   2. The demand of the new law of the kingdom is actually the expression of the new life, the divine life, which is within the regenerated kingdom people; this demand opens up the inner being of the regenerated people, showing them that they are able to attain to such a high level and to have such a high living.  
   3. We become God’s regenerated children by the coming of the Spirit of God into our spirit to regenerate us (Rom. 8:16; John 3:6) and to make our spirit the dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:22); if we walk according to our regenerated human spirit indwelt by and mingled with the divine Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), we are living by God’s life to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law (Rom. 8:4).  
C. For the kingdom people to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect means that they are perfect in His love (Matt. 5:44-45); love is the nature of God’s essence (1 John 4:8, 16):  
   1. Through the precious and exceedingly great promises given by God, we, the believers in Christ, have become partakers of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) in an organic union with Him (John 3:15; Gal. 3:27; Matt. 28:19).  
   2. To partake of the divine nature is to enjoy what God is.  
   3. The virtue of this divine nature carries us into God’s glory (2 Pet. 1:3), into the full expression of the Triune God; we receive the divine life by believing, and we continually enjoy the divine nature, which is the substance of the divine life; the more we enjoy the divine nature, the more we have His virtue, and the more we are brought into His glory.  
   4. Our enjoyment of the divine nature is both for the present and for eternity—Rev. 22:1-2.  
D. To be perfect is to have God added to us, as seen in God’s word to Abraham in Genesis 17:1—“I am the All-sufficient God; / Walk before Me, and be perfect”.
1. The divine title *All-sufficient God* (*El Shaddai* in Hebrew) reveals God as the source of
grace to supply His called ones with the riches of His divine being for the fulfillment of
His purpose; the Lord’s grace being sufficient for us is the Lord’s power being
perfected in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9; Phil. 4:13; John 15:5b).
2. To walk before God is to walk in His presence, constantly enjoying Him and His
all-sufficient supply.
3. To be perfect is to have God added to us as the element and factor of perfection;
practically, it means that we do not rely on the strength of the flesh but trust in God as
the all-sufficient Mighty One for our life and our work.

E. Before God gave Moses the law, He spent time to infuse Moses with Himself—Exo.
24:16-18:
1. God’s intention is to infuse us with Himself so that He will have a way to do everything
in us and for us to fulfill the commandments He gives to us.
2. The emphasis in the Bible is that we need God to come into us and do everything in us
and for us—Phil. 2:12-13.
3. The requirements of the law in the Old Testament were given to prove that man is not
able, and the requirements of the commandments in the New Testament were given to
prove that God is able; outside of us He gives us many commandments, but inside of us
He is keeping all these commandments for us—Heb. 13:21.

II. We need to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect by being perfected in
His love—1 John 2:5; 4:12, 17-18:
A. “Whoever keeps His word, truly in this one the love of God has been perfected”—2:5:
1. Here *the love of God* denotes our love toward God, which is generated by His love
within us.
2. God’s love is His inward essence, and the Lord’s word supplies us with the divine
essence, with which we love God and love the brothers; hence, when we keep the divine
word, the divine love is perfected through the divine life, which is God Himself and by
which we live.
B. “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us”—4:12:
1. Here *His love* denotes God’s love within us that becomes our love toward one another,
and it is with this love that we love one another.
2. In God Himself the love of God itself is perfect and complete; however, in us it needs to
be perfected and completed in its manifestation:
   a. God’s love was manifested to us in God’s sending of His Son to be both a
      propitiatory sacrifice and life to us—vv. 9-10.
   b. This love is perfected and completed in its manifestation when we express it in
      our living by habitually loving one another with it.
   c. Thus, in our living in God’s love, others can behold God manifested in His
      essence, which is love.
C. “In this has love been perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of the
judgment because even as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but
perfect love casts out fear because fear has punishment, and he who fears has not been
perfected in love”—vv. 17-18:
1. Here *perfect love* is the love that has been perfected in us by our loving others with the
love of God; such love casts out fear and has no fear of being punished by the Lord at
2. Christ lived in this world a life of God as love, and He is now our life that we may live
the same life of love in this world and be the same as He is.
3. First John 4:12 and 17 speak of God’s love needing to be perfected in us, and verse 18 speaks of our needing to be perfected in love:
   a. This indicates that we and the divine love are mingled; when love is perfected in us, we are perfected in love; we become love, and love becomes us.
   b. Through God’s dispensing of Himself into us, we become love in the sense of being constituted with God as love.

III. The genuine Christian perfection taught in the New Testament is according to God’s New Testament economy that God wanted to become a man that many men may become the God-men for the producing of the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23) to consummate the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2) as God’s ultimate goal (Eph. 3:8-10; 1:9-10):
   A. Such a Christian perfection is the issue of the dispensing of the processed and consummated Triune God into the believers—the God-men:
      1. This dispensing is by God the Father as the source, the origin—Matt. 5:48; Rev. 21:18b and footnote 3, 21b.
      2. This dispensing is with God the Son as the element—2 Cor. 13:3, 5, 9, 11; Rev. 21:21a and footnote 1, first paragraph.
      3. This dispensing is through God the Spirit as the fellowship—2 Cor. 13:9, 11, 14; Rev. 21:18, 21 and footnote 1, second paragraph.
   B. Second Corinthians 13 was written to encourage the believers to be perfected by the experience of Christ as life and the enjoyment of the processed and consummated Triune God in the Father’s love, with Christ’s grace as the expression of the Father’s love, and through the Spirit’s fellowship that dispenses the Father’s love in Christ’s grace into the believers—vv. 5, 9, 11, 14.
   C. This kind of Christian perfection is for the building up of the Body of Christ, and the perfecting ones are the gifted persons, such as the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the shepherds and teachers—Eph. 4:11-12.
   D. In 2 Peter we see that the divine love, agape, is the ultimate development of the divine nature (1:7), and holiness is the manner of life that partakes of the divine nature (3:11):
      1. We believers have received the divine life with the divine nature (1:4), which is God Himself for us to enjoy; when we enjoy this divine nature to the uttermost, love will be the consummation; then we become a being of love.
      2. The divine love sanctifies us, separates and saturates us, to make us a people who are fully holy, utterly golden; we become pieces of “gold” put together to be a golden lampstand (Rev. 1:12), bearing the testimony of the “golden” Jesus, and consummating in the New Jerusalem, a city of pure gold (21:18), for the accomplishment of God’s economy.
      3. Our teaching and shepherding of the saints in the church life should be according to God’s economy for the working out of the New Jerusalem.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

LIVING BY THE FATHER’S LIFE AND NATURE

At the end of Matthew 5 the Lord Jesus said, “You, therefore, shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (v. 48). This word concludes this section of the constitution, a section which is exceedingly high. After reading all these requirements, we all would say that we cannot possibly fulfill them. Then we come to verse 48 which tells us that we must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. This verse is an indicator that we have the Father’s life and nature within us. We have been born of Him
and we are His children. Because we are His children possessing His life and nature, there is no need for us to imitate Him or copy Him. As long as we grow in His life, we shall be the same as He is. Thus, all the requirements of the law of the kingdom of the heavens reveal how much this divine life and nature can do for us. Our only need is to be exposed so that we may give up all hope in ourselves. When we are exposed, we shall realize that our natural life is hopeless. Then we shall renounce our natural life, turn to the life of our Father, and stay with the divine nature. Spontaneously, this life will grow in us and fulfill the requirements of this highest law. Our need today is to turn to our spirit and walk in our spirit. Whenever we do this, we live by our Father’s life and nature; then spontaneously we fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. It is crucial that we understand this matter, for it is altogether different from our natural concept.

From my experience I can testify that today I am not under the principle of the law. Hallelujah, I am under the principle of faith, and I have the life of my heavenly Father within me! This life is nothing other than the Father’s dear Son. I am now living by this life in my spirit and walking according to the spirit. By this life in my spirit I spontaneously fulfill the highest requirements of the law of the kingdom of the heavens. This is not my boast; it is my humble testimony to give glory to the Lord. This does not mean that I am able to do anything. It means that He is able, for He is in me as my life. He is able to do the same in you and for you. In order for this to be your experience, you need to have a vision of the hopelessness of your natural life. After your natural life has been thoroughly dug out and exposed, you will realize that it is a hopeless case, that you should have no trust in it, and that you must turn to the Father’s divine life and nature within you. Turn to the Father’s life, stay with the Father’s life, and live by the Father’s life. You can easily turn to the Father’s life because at this very moment it is in your spirit. Simply walk according to your spirit, and all the righteous requirements of the law will be fulfilled in you.

**NOT ONLY GOD’S CREATURES, BUT ALSO HIS REGENERATE CHILDREN**

We are not only God’s creatures; we are also His regenerated children, possessing His life and nature. Thus, we are not God’s creatures trying to copy and imitate Him; we are the Father’s children living the Father’s life. How did we become the children of God? It was by the coming of the Spirit of God into our spirit to regenerate us and to make our spirit the very habitation of God Himself (Eph. 2:22, Gk.). Here, in our spirit, we have become God’s children having God’s life and nature. If we walk according to this regenerated spirit, we are the children of God living by God’s life. When we live and walk in the spirit, spontaneously we shall be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Consider a brother who has four children. The more these little ones grow, the more they live like their father. These children are not four monkeys trying to imitate a human being. No, they are children of their father who are growing into the image of their father. The more they grow, the more they live their father’s life. Likewise, we are not monkeys—we are children of God. Although some of us may be rather babyish or childlike, we are growing nonetheless. These young ones may be naughty, but they are growing. Wait for a certain number of years, and you will see that all these naughty little ones will be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect. I am so happy that all the saints in the churches are not monkeys, but dear children. Let these children be naughty for a while. Eventually they will grow. We are not trying to imitate God. Rather we are the Father’s children growing in the Father’s life. This is the reason the Lord Jesus said that we should be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Now we can understand why in Matthew chapter five the Lord refers to us as the children of God or the sons of God. He was not giving a word to unbelievers, to those who were merely God’s creatures; He was giving a word to the sons of God. God is no longer merely our Creator; He is also our heavenly Father. Because He is our Father, we have His life and nature. Eventually, through our growth in life, we shall be the same as He is. Wait for another period of time, and you will see that many of us will have become perfect as the Father is perfect. *(Life-study of Matthew, pp. 251-254)*

**PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE**
Enjoying What God Is

We need to pay close attention to the matter of being partakers of the divine nature. 2 Peter 1:4 says, “Through which He has granted to us precious and exceedingly great promises that through these you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world by lust.” Through the precious and exceedingly great promises given by God, we, the believers in Christ, who is our God and Savior, have become partakers of His divine nature in an organic union with Him. We have entered into this union through faith and baptism (John 3:15; Gal. 3:27; Matt. 28:19). The virtue of this divine nature carries us into God’s glory, into the full expression of the Triune God.

Through the “precious and exceedingly great promises” we may become partakers of the divine nature. We receive the divine life simply by believing, and the divine nature is the substance of the divine life. Although we received the divine life at the time we believed, the divine nature must be continually enjoyed by us. This enjoyment requires the grace of God. The more we enjoy the divine nature, the more we have His virtue, and the more we are brought into His glory.

To partake of the divine nature is to enjoy what God is. In order that we may enjoy all that He is, God will do many things for us according to His precious and exceedingly great promises. This will enable us to enjoy His nature, what He is. One of His precious and exceedingly great promises is that His grace is sufficient for us (2 Cor. 12:9). God’s sufficient grace will work within us day by day so that we may enjoy His nature.

The divine nature refers to the riches of what God is. Whatever God is, is in His nature. Therefore, when we partake of the divine nature, we partake of the divine riches. Having received the divine life at the time of our regeneration, we must go on to enjoy what God is in His nature.

This enjoyment is both for the present and for eternity. For eternity we shall continue to partake of the divine nature. This is illustrated by the tree of life and the river of water of life in Revelation 22:1 and 2. Out from the throne of God and the Lamb the river of life flows. This signifies God flowing out to be the enjoyment of His redeemed. That flowing river will saturate the entire city of New Jerusalem, and the tree of life that grows in and along the river will supply the redeemed with God as their life supply. This is a picture of what it means to partake of the divine nature. (The Conclusion of the New Testament, pp. 63-64)

GOD’S LOVE PERFECTED IN US

In 1 John 4:12 John also speaks of God’s love being perfected in us. The love of God is perfected already in God Himself, but now this love needs to be perfected in us. This requires that the love of God become our experience. If the love of God remains in God, it will be perfected in God Himself. But when this love becomes our experience and enjoyment, it will be perfected in us. The love that is already perfected in God needs to be perfected in us through our enjoyment of this love.

The Greek word translated “perfected” in 4:12 is teleioo, which means to complete, to accomplish, to finish. The love of God is perfect and complete in Him. However, in us it needs to be perfected and completed in its manifestation. It has been manifested to us in God’s sending His Son to be both a propitiation and life to us (4:9-10). Yet, if we do not love one another with this love as it was manifested to us, that is, if we do not express it by loving one another with it as God did to us, it is not perfectly and completely manifested. The love of God is perfected and completed in its manifestation when we express it in our living by habitually loving one another with it. Our living in the love of God toward one another is its perfection and completion in its manifestation in us. Thus, others can behold God manifested in His love-essence in our living in His love.

GOD’S LOVE BECOMING OUR CONSTITUTION

As we consider 4:11-13, we see that we should never teach the saints to love with their own natural love, with the love that is something apart from God Himself. On the contrary, we all need to see that
God abides in us, and we abide in Him. This is a matter of coinherence, of mingling, of organic union. God is not only in us; He abides in us, dwells in us. Through this mingling, this organic union, He becomes us, and we become Him. Therefore, since God is love, this love becomes our constitution. Because we become what He is, our love for others will actually be God Himself. We love others with God as love. Because God abides in us and we abide in Him, we love with God Himself as love.  

*(Life-study of 1 John, pp. 304-306)*

**THE GENUINE CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AS TAUGHT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

We need to be reminded of the genuine Christian perfection as taught in the New Testament. In order to see the genuine Christian perfection, we need to see the revelation of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is the genuine, real Christian perfection.

The New Jerusalem has a strong base, and this strong base is God the Father’s divine nature, signified by gold (Rev. 21:18b, 21b). The holy city is a golden mountain. Surely, that is strong and sufficient to bear any weight. The entire holding strength of the holy city is God’s divine nature, and this base should be the base of our Christian life and work. The base, the gates, and the wall of the city are the basic building, whereas the throne, the temple, and the light are the furnishings. The intrinsic significance of all these items shows us what the genuine Christian perfection is. The New Jerusalem will be the ultimate consummation of the Body of Christ, so the genuine Christian perfection is also the Body of Christ, which is the aggregate of all the God-men living the life of the God-man.

**The Genuine Christian Perfection**

**Being according to God’s New Testament Economy**

The genuine Christian perfection taught in the New Testament is according to God’s New Testament economy that God wanted to become a man that many men may become the God-men for the producing of the Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem as God’s ultimate goal. In the Lord’s recovery the Christian perfection is the living of the God-man.

**The Issue of the Dispensing**

**of the Processed and Consummated Triune God into the Believers**

*By God the Father as the Source, the Origin*

Such a Christian perfection is the issue of the dispensing of the processed and consummated Triune God into the believers, the God-men, by God the Father as the source, the origin (Matt. 5:48). The Father in His nature is the golden base of the New Jerusalem as its source, its origin.

*With God the Son as the Element*

The genuine Christian perfection is also with God the Son as the element (2 Cor. 13:3, 5, 9, 11). This is typified by the pearl gates of the New Jerusalem. An oyster (Christ) lives in the salty water (the world of death) and is wounded by a grain of sand (crucified for the sinner) to produce a pearl by secreting its life-juice (dispensing His life element). The Father is the base, and the Son is the element.

*Through God the Spirit as the Dispensing Fellowship*

The dispensing fellowship of God the Spirit (vv. 9, 11,14) is to secrete the divine life-juice around us by six steps: regeneration, sanctification, renewing, transformation, conformation, and glorification. By these six steps the Spirit, as the third of the Divine Trinity, will finish His transforming work to make us completed pearls.

**Second Corinthians 13 Encouraging the Believers to Be Perfected**

Second Corinthians 13 was written to encourage the believers to be perfected by the experience of Christ as life and the enjoyment of the processed and consummated Triune God in the Father’s love, with
Christ’s grace as the expression of the Father’s love, and through the Spirit’s fellowship that dispenses the Father’s love in Christ’s grace into the believers. Second Corinthians 13:5 says, “Test yourselves whether you are in the faith; prove yourselves. Or do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you, unless you are disapproved?” Verse 9 says, “We rejoice whenever we are weak and you are powerful; this also we pray for, your perfecting.” Verse 11 says, “Finally, brothers, rejoice, be perfected.” Then verse 14 says, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” In 2 Corinthians 13 Paul teaches his kind of Christian perfection by Christ in us. The grace of Christ, God the Son, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Spirit as the third of the Trinity are with us all the time secreting the Triune God in His life element around us to perfect us. James’s perfection is far off from this. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994–1997, vol. 2, “Crystallization-study of the Epistle of James,” pp. 415-416)
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I. We need to see, live, and practice “the present truth,” the “up-to-date” truth, in order to change the age and bring Christ back; we need to hear what the Spirit is speaking to the churches, the voice of God in the present hour—2 Pet. 1:12; Rev. 2:7; Matt. 16:18; Gen. 2:22; Eph. 5:25-27; cf. John 1:23; S. S. 8:13-14:
   A. All the truths are in the Bible, but through man’s foolishness, unfaithfulness, negligence, disobedience, and degradation, many truths were lost and hidden from man—cf. 2 Kings 22:8-11; 23:24-25.
   B. These freshly revealed truths are not God’s new inventions; rather, they are man’s new discoveries; every worker of the Lord should inquire before God as to what the present truth is—Eph. 1:17; Ezek. 1:1-3; Rev. 1:10; 21:10.
   C. God’s truths are cumulative; later truths do not negate the former ones; what we see today are the cumulative revelations of God; today we are living in the tide of God’s will, which is a continuation of all the past works of God in the previous ages; may God be gracious to us so that we do not become castaways of “the present truth”—1 Cor. 9:27; cf. 2 Cor. 3:3, 6, 8-9; 5:18-21.
   D. The present truth of the Lord’s up-to-date and ultimate recovery is to bring us into a new revival to turn the age by our choosing to take the way of Philadelphia; only the recovered church, the church of brotherly love, signified by the church in Philadelphia, can fulfill God’s eternal purpose and satisfy His heart’s desire—Rev. 1:1-3; 3:7-13; Hymns, #880.

II. The characteristic of the overcomers in Philadelphia (vv. 7-13) is their aspiration to arrive at the highest peak of the divine revelation of God’s economy—this highest peak is God becoming man to make man God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead and to make Himself one with man and man one with Him, thus to be enlarged:
   A. Even though the churches in Asia, in a general sense, had turned away from the apostle Paul’s ministry (2 Tim. 1:15), one church was unique and was highly appraised by the Lord—the church in Philadelphia; the Lord highly appraised them and even appreciated them because they kept His word, which means that they did not turn away from the word of the apostle Paul’s healthy teaching of God’s economy, the highest peak of the divine revelation—Rev. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3:
      1. God’s eternal economy is to make man the same as He is in life and nature but not in the Godhead and to make Himself one with man and man one with Him, thus to be enlarged
and expanded in His expression, that all His divine attributes may be expressed in human virtues.

2. God’s eternal economy is His plan to dispense Himself into His chosen, predestinated, and redeemed people as their life, their life supply, and their everything to produce, constitute, and build up the organic Body of Christ—1:3-6; 6:3-4; 2 Cor. 11:2-3; Titus 1:9; Col. 2:19.

B. Those in Philadelphia are “rich toward God” (Luke 12:21) by pray-reading and musing upon His word to treasure up His word in their heart (Eph. 6:17-18; Ps. 119:11, 15); they lift up their hands unto the word of God, indicating that they receive it warmly and gladly and that they say Amen to it (v. 48; Neh. 8:5-6).

C. For the overcomers to be pillars in the temple means that they will be pillars in the Triune God, for the temple is “the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb”; God is built into them to make them living and precious stones, and they are built into God to make them pillars of stone in God for their incorporation with God as the mutual abode of God and man—Rev. 3:12a; 21:22, 3; Ps. 90:1; John 14:23; cf. 1 Kings 7:17.

D. That the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the Lord’s new name are written upon the overcomer indicates that the overcomer is possessed by God, by the New Jerusalem, and by the Lord and that God Himself, His city (the New Jerusalem), and the Lord Himself all belong to him.

E. That the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the Lord’s new name are written upon the overcomers indicates that what God is, the nature of the New Jerusalem, and the person of the Lord have all been wrought into them, labeling them with the Triune God as their “name badge” and making them God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead—Rev. 3:12b; 22:4b.

III. The characteristic of the overcomers in Philadelphia is their endeavoring to enter into the God-man living by enjoying the riches of Christ as their indwelling treasure—Eph. 3:8; 2 Cor. 4:7:

A. In Isaiah 22 God fired Shebna, a steward in the house of the king (vv. 15-19), and replaced him with Eliakim, a type of the all-inclusive Christ as the Steward in God’s house, the One upon whose shoulder the key of the house of God is set (vv. 20-25; Rev. 3:7-8); Christ has the key to control the door of God’s treasury, in which are the riches of God in Christ for our enjoyment (1 Thes. 5:16-19; 1 John 1:7, 9; cf. Ezek. 1:22, 26):

1. When God created us, He hired us, and when He put us on the cross, crucifying us with Christ, He fired us—Gal. 2:20.

2. Whatever or whoever is not Christ, God fires; God has replaced everything in His Old Testament economy with Christ—Mark 1:1-8; Matt. 17:3-5; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 10:5-10; 11:5-6.

3. The real church life is a life in which all the saints are fired and replaced with Christ, making Christ everything in the church; all of us are Shebns, who should be removed and replaced by Christ as the real Eliakim to make us His duplication as stewards of the mysteries of God and the varied grace of God—Col. 3:10-11; 1 Cor. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:10.

4. In the New Testament Christ’s replacing of us is altogether a matter of a grafted life; as wild olive branches, we have been grafted into Christ as the cultivated olive tree (Rom. 11:17, 24); thus, we are united with Christ, and in this union Christ replaces us.

5. Because we have been joined to Christ, and Christ joined Himself to us, uniting Himself with us, when He died on the cross, we died with Him and were terminated; now in our organic union with Christ, He replaces us by living in us, with us, by us, and through us—6:6; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:19-21a; Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17.
6. We live, yet not we, but Christ lives in us, and we live by the faith of the Son of God; this indicates a union with Christ; on the one hand, we are fired, and on the other hand, we are not expelled, for Christ comes to live in us, with us, by us, and through us (Gal. 2:20); thus, the all-inclusive Christ as Immanuel (Isa. 7:14) replaces everything and becomes everything in God’s economy (Col. 3:10-11).

B. In order to enjoy the riches of God in Christ as the treasure, we need to remain in the touch with the Lord, staying in contact with the Lord according to the sense of life and exercising ourselves to be poor in spirit and pure in heart—2 Cor. 2:10; Rom. 8:6; 10:12-13; Col. 3:16; Matt. 5:3, 8.

C. In order to enjoy the riches of God in Christ as the treasure, we need to use the “keys” of denying the self, taking up the cross, and losing the soul-life—Rev. 3:7; Isa. 22:15-24; Matt. 16:18-19, 24-25; 17:5, 8.

D. The Lord’s using the key of David to open the door for the spread of His recovery is objective to us, but Christ is also using the key of David to subjectively open the door in our inner being for us to be transformed and built into the house of God as a pillar with the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and the new name of the Lord—Rev. 2:17; 3:12; cf. 21:22:

1. The name of My God indicates that the pillar is God; the name of the city of My God indicates that the pillar is the New Jerusalem; and My new name indicates that the pillar is Christ in a new significance; the overcomer as a pillar becomes God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead, he becomes a constituent of the New Jerusalem, and he becomes Christ in a new experiential sense—3:12.

2. The New Jerusalem is the new Christ; as God’s enlargement and expansion, we are Christ in a new sense as the New Jerusalem; the new Christ is not the same as He was in the four Gospels; the bride, who is the increase of the Bridegroom, is the New Jerusalem, including all of God’s regenerated ones—John 3:29-30; Rev. 21:9-10.

3. For us to be built into God, become a constituent of the New Jerusalem, and become a part of the new Christ is humanly impossible, but the law of the Spirit of life within us contains an element that deals with impossibility—Rom. 8:2; Luke 18:27; cf. Gen. 28:12-19; John 1:51.

E. The overcomers in Philadelphia pay more attention to life than to work, caring more about quality than quantity (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12); they have “a little power” with the realization that what pleases the Lord is not their doing much for Him but their doing their best for Him with what they have (Rev. 3:8; Mark 14:8).

F. The overcomers in Philadelphia do not deny the Lord’s name; they have abandoned all names other than that of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they call upon the name of the Lord, who is rich to all who call upon Him (Rom. 10:9-10, 12-13); they openly confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:11), and they do not preach themselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and themselves as the believers’ slaves for Jesus’ sake (2 Cor. 4:5).

IV. The characteristic of the overcomers in Philadelphia is their brotherly love; love prevails among them so that they shepherd people according to God (1 Pet. 5:2) by cherishing them with the cheering presence of God and nourishing them with the healthy teaching of the economy of God (Eph. 4:11; 5:29; Acts 20:28):

A. The Lord’s recovery with Philadelphia is a recovery in quality, a recovery of the original substance of the church, the inner substance of God, which is love (1 John 4:8); to stand on the genuine ground of oneness, the ground of the church, is to choose to love all the brothers (Rev. 3:7a; cf. 2:4, 7).

B. The Lord’s recovery is a recovery of loving the Lord Jesus; the overcomers in Philadelphia
stand on the genuine ground of oneness and keep themselves in the love of God to love the Lord and love all the brothers—Jude 20-21; 2 Cor. 5:14; John 12:3; Luke 7:47; 1 John 3:14-16; cf. Psa. 133.

C. The overcomers in Philadelphia keep the Lord’s word in His unique New Testament ministry (Rev. 3:8), which brings them into the genuine appreciation, love, and enjoyment of the precious person of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as their life and everything (2 Cor. 11:2-3).

D. In order to minister life to others and maintain our victory for the building up of the church, we must have a revived living and a labor in shepherding that flow out from our love for the Lord and for the brothers—John 21:15-17.

E. “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God. He who does not love has not known God, because God is love”—1 John 4:7-8.

F. “We know and have believed the love which God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him”—v. 16.

G. God first loved us in that He infused us with His love and generated within us the love with which we love Him and the brothers—vv. 19-21.

H. Brother Lee’s intention for the international elders’ conference in April 1997:
   1. Do not lord it over the flock of God that has been allotted to you; the churches are God’s possession, allotted to the elders as their allotment, their portion, entrusted to them by God for their care—1 Pet. 5:2-3.
   2. Be willing to be a slave to the saints—Matt. 20:26-27; Mark 10:42-45.
   3. The elders should shepherd one another and love one another to be a model of the Body life.
   4. The elders should take care of the saints in everything and in every way for the dispensing of Christ into them.
   5. The elders should contact and visit the saints and invite them to their homes for meals.

I. Brother Lee’s final word to the elders in Anaheim: “The elders need to love one another, their wives need to love one another, and they need to love one another’s children.”

V. In order to continue in the way of Philadelphia, we must be saved from the way of Laodicea, which is a degraded and distorted Philadelphia—Rev. 3:14-22:

A. Laodicea still remembers its history but has lost its former life; we must always remember that all that matters is God’s present presence—Exo. 33:14; 2 Cor. 2:10.

B. Laodicea means to know everything but in reality to be fervent about nothing; in name it has everything, but it cannot sacrifice its life for anything; it remembers its former glory but forgets its present condition before God; formerly, it was Philadelphia, but today it is Laodicea, full of lukewarmness and spiritual pride—Rev. 3:15-17.

C. If we want to continue in the way of Philadelphia, we need to humble ourselves before God and pay the price to gain more of the Triune God as gold, white garments, and eyesalve; then we can be one with the Lord as the leading Overcomer within us in order to sit with Him on His throne in the millennial kingdom—vv. 18, 21.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

The Sixth Church—Philadelphia

Next comes the sixth church; it has the name Philadelphia. Phil means “love” and adelphia means “brotherly.” Philadelphia means “brotherly love.”

Returning to Brotherly Love
Among the seven churches, this is the only one which does not receive any rebuke from the Lord. The Roman Catholic Church was rebuked, and so were the Protestant churches. Only Philadelphia is not rebuked. One only finds praise in Philadelphia.

What are the characteristics of Philadelphia? Revelation 3:8 says, “I know your works; behold, I have put before you an opened door which no one can shut, because you have a little power and have kept My word and have not denied My name.” This is the characteristic of Philadelphia. The characteristic of Thyatira is the teaching of a woman. The characteristic of Sardis is a union between the church and the world and a constant need for separation; it is a continuous struggle between life and death. But the characteristic of Philadelphia is brotherly love. Here is a return to brotherly love. There is no worldliness here because all are brothers. There is no need to struggle to separate oneself from death. It is a return to the original state of brotherhood. Here we find brotherly love.

Just as Sardis comes out of Thyatira, Philadelphia comes out of Sardis. The Protestants came out of the Roman Catholic Church, and Philadelphia came out of the Protestants. This was clearly a new move of the Holy Spirit. This new move attracted people from the dead Sardis and put them on the ground of brotherly love. In other words, they stood on the Body ground. They did not recognize any other relationship except the relationship of brothers. They did not recognize any other fellowship except the fellowship of love. This is Philadelphia.

Keeping the Lord’s Word

Philadelphia had two characteristics: They kept the Lord’s word, and they did not deny the Lord’s name. Here was a group of people who were led by God to keep His word. God opened up the Word to them, and others were able to understand His Word through them. They had no creed, doctrine, or tradition, only the Word of God. At the time of Philadelphia, we find a group of people returning fully to the Word of the Lord, who did not recognize any other authority, doctrine, or creed.

A man can understand and even preach a doctrine, but this does not mean that he understands the Bible. He can memorize creeds and proclaim his faith in them, but this does not mean that he understands the Bible. The Lord would have given us creeds long ago if the church needed them. Today men analyze the Bible and condense its teachings into creeds. Creeds are limited, but the Bible is unlimited. Creeds are simple, while the Bible is complicated. A foolish man can understand creeds if he studies them. But a foolish man cannot understand the Bible. Only a certain type of people can understand the Bible. Only under certain conditions can a man understand God’s Word. Creeds open a wide door and anyone can go in. But the door to God’s Word is not that wide, and only those with life can enter it. The door of the creeds is so wide that a smart mind is all one needs to enter it. But God’s Word is not that simple. Unless a man has life and is single before the Lord, he will not see or understand His Word.

Many people think that God’s Word is too narrow. They want to broaden it so that they can bring more people into it. But those in Philadelphia rejected all creeds and doctrines. They turned back to the Word of the Lord. The Lord said, “You…have kept My word.” In church history, there was never an age when men understood God’s Word more than those in Philadelphia. In Philadelphia God’s Word was given its rightful place. In other ages men accepted creeds and traditions. But Philadelphia accepted nothing other than God’s Word. It returned to His Word and walked in it. In church history there was never a time when the ministry of the Word was as rich as that which we find in Philadelphia.

Not Denying the Lord’s Name

The Lord said, “You…have not denied My name” (v. 8). This is another characteristic of Philadelphia. In the long history of the church throughout the ages, the name of the Lord Jesus has always been last in importance. Men pay attention to names of saints, such as Peter and other apostles. They pay attention to names they like or to names of doctrines and nations. Many say proudly, “I am a Lutheran,” or “I am a Wesleyan.” Oh, the names of men! Many claim proudly, “I am a Coptic” (of a place), or “I am an Anglican” (meaning British). These are names of countries. These names have
divided God’s children into divisions! It is as if the name of Christ were not enough to separate us from the world.

If someone asks you, “Who are you?” and you answer, “I am a Christian,” he will not be satisfied. He will ask again, “What kind of Christian are you?” I remember once when I was in another country, a man asked me, “What are you really?” I said, “I am a Christian.” He said, “This is meaningless!”

The Lord’s Name Being Enough

To the Lord, His name is enough for His children. But we have to wait until Philadelphia before we see men who are satisfied with the Lord’s name alone. There is no need to have so many divisive names. His name alone is enough! The Lord takes note that they “have not denied My name.” This is what He cares for.

There was never a time in church history when men loathed other names as much as they did in Philadelphia. When one returns to Philadelphia, all other names are denied! Philadelphia has abolished all other names and has exalted only the name of Christ. Please bear in mind that the Lord cares for this one thing. This one thing is the basis for His praise. This is something pleasing to Him. Do not belittle this and do not be careless about it. The Lord takes the time to point out that they have confessed His name and have not denied His name. He pays attention to this and praises it!

The Question of Overcoming

Some brothers have asked, “What have the overcomers in Philadelphia overcome?” Do you see the problem posed by this question? The overcomers in Ephesus overcame forsaking their first love. The overcomers in Smyrna overcame the outward threat of death. The overcomers in Pergamos overcame the bondage and temptations of the world. The overcomers in Thyatira overcame the teaching of the woman. The overcomers in Sardis overcame spiritual death—the condition of being living in name and dead in reality. The overcomers of Laodicea overcame lukewarmness and vainglory. But what do the overcomers in Philadelphia overcome? The entire epistle to them shows only the Lord’s pleasure in what they have done. Of the seven epistles, this is the only one which has the Lord’s full approval. What is there to overcome if the Lord is fully pleased? It is a church fully approved and rated as the best; it is altogether according to the Lord’s heart’s desire. But the Lord has a promise for the overcomers in the church in Philadelphia. What do they have to overcome? There is nothing to overcome because there is no problem with this church.

Holding Fast What You Have

But the Lord has a warning here. Verse 11 says, “I come quickly; hold fast what you have that no one take your crown.” This is the only warning in the entire epistle. Those in Philadelphia are reminded to hold fast what they have. In other words, they have what is right, and they should not lose it. They should not be weary of doing the same things for a long time and should not ask for a change. They should not contemplate doing something new after all the years of doing the same things. They have to hold fast what they have and not let it go! This is the only warning for Philadelphia. The Lord has only one charge for Philadelphia—to hold fast what they have. What they have done is right and is blessed by the Lord; therefore, they should continue in it.

If Philadelphia does not hold fast what it has, God will raise up others to take away its crown. The crown has already been given to Philadelphia. But others will come and take its crown if it does not hold it fast. This is the only warning to Philadelphia. Philadelphia overcomes by not losing what it has. This is different from the other six churches. We must pay attention to the Lord’s Word. There is only one church which meets the Lord’s standard—Philadelphia. Her characteristic is keeping the Lord’s word and not denying His name. We must not overlook these two matters.

The Seventh Church—Laodicea
Five of the seven churches were rebuked. One did not receive a rebuke, and one received only praise. The one which received only praise was Philadelphia. Catholicism, Protestantism, and Philadelphia will all remain until the Lord Jesus comes again. The last church, the seventh one, Laodicea, also will continue until the Lord Jesus comes again. Since Sardis came out of Thyatira and Philadelphia came out of Sardis, Laodicea naturally has to come out of Philadelphia. One begets the other.

Laodicea Being the Result of Philadelphia’s Degradation

This is where the issue lies today. Once Philadelphia fails, it becomes Laodicea. Do not think that Protestantism is Laodicea. It is altogether wrong to think this way. Protestantism is Sardis, not Laodicea. Protestantism can only be Sardis today; it cannot be Laodicea. No Bible reader should be so foolish as to think that Protestantism is Laodicea. No, Protestantism is Sardis. After Philadelphia has fallen, it becomes Laodicea. Sardis came out of Thyatira, and it was one step beyond Thyatira. Philadelphia came out of Sardis, and it was one step beyond Sardis. Laodicea, however, comes out of Philadelphia, but it is one step behind Philadelphia. These four churches will remain until the Lord Jesus comes again.

Laodicea is a distorted Philadelphia. When brotherly love is gone, Philadelphia immediately turns into the opinions of many. This is the meaning of the word Laodicea. Laodicea was a city whose name came from a Roman prince, Entiochus. He had a wife whose name was Laodios. He took his wife’s name, dropped the os and added kea or cea to become Laodikea or Laodicea. Lao in Greek means “many people,” and dikea or dicea means “opinion.”

As soon as Philadelphia becomes degraded, the “brothers” become the “many people,” and its “brotherly love” becomes “the opinions of the many.” Love has degenerated into opinion. Brotherly love is something living, but the opinion of many people is something dead. When brotherly love is lost, the Body relationship is lost. The fellowship of life is cut off as well, leaving only the opinion of men. The opinion of the Lord is lost, and the only things left are the vote of the majority, ballots, and the show of hands. Once Philadelphia falls, it becomes Laodicea.

Lukewarmness and Spiritual Pride

Revelation 3:15 says, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.” This is the characteristic of Laodicea. Verse 17 says, “Because you say, I am wealthy and have become rich and have need of nothing, and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” These are the characteristics of Laodicea. In the eyes of the Lord, the characteristics of Laodicea are lukewarmness and spiritual pride. It is bad enough for it to say, “I am wealthy,” but it continues, saying, “and have become rich.” The two statements are evil enough, yet it goes on to say that it has “need of nothing.” In the eyes of the Lord it is “wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” Where does spiritual pride come from? It comes from history. Some were once rich, and they think that they are still rich. The Lord was once merciful to them, and they remember their history. But now they have lost that reality.

The Life That Was Present Being Lost Today

There is hardly any person in Protestantism today who boasts of his own spiritual riches. I have met many Protestant leaders overseas as well as Protestant pastors in China. They all say, “We are poor! We are poor!” It is hard to find a proud person in Sardis. There is only one group of proud people—those who were Philadelphia and who had once kept God’s word and not denied His name. Yet the life which they once had is lost. They still remember their history, but they have lost their former life! They remember that they were once wealthy and had become rich and had need of nothing. But they are now poor and blind! There is only one group of people who can boast of their riches—fallen Philadelphia, the Philadelphia which has lost its power and life.

Learning to Humble Ourselves before God
Brothers and sisters, if you want to continue in the way of Philadelphia, remember to humble yourselves before God. Sometimes I hear some brothers say, “God’s blessing is with us.” God’s blessing is with us, but we must be careful when we say this. As soon as we are not careful, we have the flavor of Laodicea: “We are wealthy and have become rich and have need of nothing.” Let me say that the day we take this position, we have become Laodicea.

Please bear in mind that we have nothing that we have not received. Those around us may be full of death, but we do not need to be conscious of the fact that we are full of life. Those around us may be poor, but we do not need to be conscious of the fact that we are rich. Those who live before the Lord will not be conscious of their own riches. May the Lord be merciful to us that we may learn to live before Him. May we be rich and yet not know that we are rich. It was better for Moses not to know that his face was shining, even though it did shine! Once a person knows himself, he becomes Laodicea, and the result is lukewarmness. Laodicea means to know everything, but in reality to be fervent about nothing. In name it has everything, but it cannot sacrifice its life for anything. It remembers its former glory but forgets its present condition before God. Formerly, it was Philadelphia; today it is Laodicea.

**CHOOSING FOR OURSELVES THE PATHWAY OF THE CHURCH**

Today I present these four churches to us all. The last three came out of Roman Catholicism, and all four will remain until the Lord Jesus comes again. Today every child of God has to choose the pathway he should take with regard to the church. Do you want to be a Roman Catholic? Do you want to be a Protestant? Do you want to follow the oneness of Roman Catholicism? Do you want to follow the many denominations of Protestantism? Or do you want to take the way of Philadelphia? Or were you once Philadelphia but are now living in the shadow of history and boasting of your former glory, thus becoming Laodicean? When a person becomes proud, forsakes the way of life, and neglects reality, while reminiscing on his history and his own riches, the only thing left will be the opinions of many. Among such ones there can only be discussion and consensus. It appears to be a democratic society but bears no resemblance to the Body relationship. If you do not know the binding, authority, and life of the Body, you do not know brotherly love.

These four churches will remain with us. We must be faithful to continue in Philadelphia. Do not be curious about Roman Catholicism. Those who are curious will always suffer loss. Do not touch the denominations in Protestantism. This is not God’s way. The Bible shows us clearly that the Protestant movement as a whole had God’s blessing, but that there are also many things which the Lord condemns and rebukes. We do not need to delve into these things or ask about them.

We must learn to stand on the ground of Philadelphia. Always keep the Lord’s word and never deny His name. Hold fast the brotherly stand and never be proud! Do not be proud in the face of Catholicism, Protestantism, or the denominations. Once you are proud, you become Laodicea and are no longer Philadelphia! As soon as you show your pride before them, you are no longer Philadelphia but Laodicea. Which way do you want to take? May God bless His children and may the brothers take the upright path with regard to the church.

The God-ordained pathway for the church is the way of Philadelphia. I may not have tens of thousands of cases to prove that the best of God’s children speak the same thing and take this same way. But I have hundreds of cases to prove what I am saying. Once the general issue of Protestantism is settled, we need not nit-pick the minor issues. Similarly, once the overall issue of Roman Catholicism is settled, we do not have to be so concerned about its minor issues. The Roman Catholic Church has twenty-one different organizations in China. There is no need to involve ourselves with the Catholic Church, and there is no need to learn about the organizations of its different daughters. Once the overall issue of Roman Catholicism is settled, these twenty-one organizations are no longer a problem. Likewise, once the general issue of Protestantism is settled, we do not need to deal with all of its fifteen hundred denominations one by one.

The Lord’s way is unique. It is the way of Philadelphia. Walk on this way, but be careful not to be
proud. Once we take the way of Philadelphia, the greatest temptation is to become proud and say, “We are better than you are. Our truths are clearer than yours, and we understand them better than you do! We have only the Lord’s name and we are different!” Once we become proud, we fall into Laodicea. Those who follow the Lord have no pride. The Lord will spew the proud ones out of His mouth. May the Lord be merciful to us! This is a warning to all of us: We must not be proud in our speaking! A person must live before the Lord continually before he can refrain from proud words. Only those who live before God continually will not consider themselves rich. Only they will not be proud! (The Collected Works of Watchman Nee, vol. 50, “Messages for Building Up New Believers (3),” pp. 779-787)