International Training for Elders and Responsible Ones

October 2023

GENERAL SUBJECT:

LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH
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LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH  
(Thursday—First Morning Session)  
Message One  
Living and Serving according to the Heavenly Vision of God’s Economy  

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

RA Hymns: 750, 554

1 Tim 1:3 Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things
1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God’s economy, which is in faith.
Eph 1:4 Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love,
Eph 1:5 Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,
Eph 3:2 If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you,
Eph 3:9 And to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things,
Eph 5:26 That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word,
Eph 5:27 That He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish.
Heb 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.
Heb 2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers,
1 Thes 5:23 And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.
Acts 26:19 Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,

I. The one thing, the unique thing, that should be focused on, stressed, and ministered in the Lord’s recovery is the heavenly vision of the eternal economy of God; the central subject of the Bible is the economy of God, and the entire Bible is concerned with the economy of God—1 Tim. 1:3-4; Eph. 1:10; 3:2, 8-9, 16-19; Acts 26:18-19:

1 Tim 1:3 Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things
1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God’s economy, which is in faith.
Eph 1:10 Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him;
Eph 3:2 If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you,
Eph 3:8 To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel
Eph 3:9 And to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things,
Eph 3:16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,
Eph 3:17 That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
Eph 3:18 May be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are
Eph 3:19 And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.
Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.
Acts 26:19 Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,
A. “God’s economy and plan is to make Himself man and to make us, His created beings, ‘God’ so that He is ‘man-ized’ and we are ‘God-ized’” (A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing, pp. 51-52).
B. God’s eternal economy is for Him to become man that man might become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead for the building up of the Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem—John 1:1, 14; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Rev. 4:5; 5:6; 21:2, 10-11.
John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.
1 Cor 15:45b ... the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.
Rev 4:5 And out of the throne come forth lightnings and voices and thunders. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;
Rev 5:6 And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as having just been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.
Rev 21:2 And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
Rev 21:10 And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,
Rev 21:11 Having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.
C. Today we can be in one accord because we have only one vision, the vision of the eternal economy of God—Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 1:9-10; Jer. 32:39.
Acts 1:14 These all continued steadfastly with one accord in prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.
1 Cor 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
1 Cor 1:10 Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion.
Jer 32:39 And I will give them one heart and one way, to fear Me all the days, for their own good and for the good of their children after them.

II. Our becoming God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead was initiated by God the Father in eternity past by His choosing us to be holy, predestinating us unto sonship; the divine sanctification for the divine sonship is the center of the divine economy and the central thought of the revelation in the New Testament—Eph. 1:4-5:
Eph 1:4 Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love,
Eph 1:5 Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,
A. To be sanctified is to be made holy, which is to be separated unto God and saturated with God as the Holy One, the One who is different, distinct, from everything that is common—1 Pet. 1:15-16; Eph. 1:4-5.
1 Pet 1:15 But according to the Holy One who called you, you yourselves also be holy in all your manner of life;
1 Pet 1:16  Because it is written, "You shall be holy because I am holy."

Eph 1:4  Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love,

Eph 1:5  Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

B. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy in order for us to become God in nature (v. 4); God is the only One who is holy; for us to be holy we need God in His holy nature dispensed into us, and this holy nature becomes the holy element with which the Holy Spirit sanctifies us (2 Pet. 1:4; Heb. 12:14).

Eph 1:4  Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love,

2 Pet 1:4  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.

Heb 12:14  Pursue peace with all men and sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord;

C. He predestinated us unto sonship even before we were created in order for us to become God in life (Eph. 1:5); for us to become sons of God, we must be born of God by the dispensing of God’s life into our being (John 1:12-13; 3:6; 1 John 5:11-12):

Eph 1:5  Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

John 1:12  But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name,

John 1:13  Who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 3:6  That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

1 John 5:11  And this is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son.

1 John 5:12  He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

1. Ephesians 1:4-5 reveals that God chose us to be holy for the purpose of our being made sons of God; to be made holy is the process, the procedure, whereas to be sons of God is the aim, the goal, so that our whole being, including our body (Rom. 8:23), may be “sonized” by God (Rev. 21:2, 9-11).

Eph 1:4  Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love,

Eph 1:5  Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Rom 8:23  And not only so, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan in ourselves, eagerly awaiting sonship, the redemption of our body.

Rev 21:2  And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Rev 21:9  And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, Come here; I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.

Rev 21:10  And he carried me away in spirit unto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

Rev 21:11  Having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.

2. Hebrews 2:10-11 reveals that the resurrected Christ as the Captain, the Author, of God’s salvation is leading many sons into glory by sanctifying them.

Heb 2:10  For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Heb 2:11  For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers.

3. The divine sanctification is the holding line in the carrying out of the divine economy
to sonize us divinely, making us sons of God that we may become the same as God in His life and in His nature (but not in His Godhead), so that we may be God’s expression; hence, God’s sanctification is the divine sonizing.

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

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<th>Reference</th>
<th>Scripture</th>
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<td>1 Thes 5:23</td>
<td>And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.</td>
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<td>John 17:17</td>
<td>Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.</td>
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<td>Eph 5:26</td>
<td>That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word,</td>
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<td>Eph 5:27</td>
<td>That He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish.</td>
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<td>1 Cor 6:11</td>
<td>And these things were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.</td>
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<td>1 Cor 12:3b</td>
<td>... and no one can say, Jesus is Lord! except in the Holy Spirit.</td>
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<td>Heb 12:4</td>
<td>You have not yet resisted unto blood, struggling against sin,</td>
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<td>Heb 12:5</td>
<td>And you have completely forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with sons, &quot;My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when reproved by Him;</td>
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<td>Heb 12:6</td>
<td>For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.&quot;</td>
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<td>Heb 12:7</td>
<td>It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline?</td>
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<td>Heb 12:8</td>
<td>But if you are without discipline, of which all sons have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.</td>
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<td>Heb 12:9</td>
<td>Furthermore we have had the fathers of our flesh as discipliners and we respected them; shall we not much more be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?</td>
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<td>Heb 12:10</td>
<td>For they disciplined for a few days as it seemed good to them; but He, for what is profitable that we might partake of His holiness.</td>
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<td>Heb 12:11</td>
<td>Now no discipline at the present time seems to be a matter of joy, but of grief; but afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been exercised by it.</td>
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<td>Heb 12:12</td>
<td>Therefore set straight the hands which hang down and the paralyzed knees,</td>
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<td>Heb 12:13</td>
<td>And make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather may be healed.</td>
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<td>Heb 12:14</td>
<td>Pursue peace with all men and sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord;</td>
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<td>Rom 8:28</td>
<td>And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.</td>
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<td>Rom 8:29</td>
<td>Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers;</td>
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<td>Eph 4:30</td>
<td>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed unto the day of redemption.</td>
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<td>1 Thes 5:19</td>
<td>Do not quench the Spirit;</td>
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<td>Rev 2:7a</td>
<td>He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. ...</td>
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<td>Psa 73:16</td>
<td>When I considered this in order to understand it, / It was a troublesome task in my sight,</td>
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<td>Psa 73:17</td>
<td>Until I went into the sanctuary of God; / Then I perceived their end.</td>
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<td>Psa 73:25</td>
<td>Whom do I have in heaven but You? / And besides You there is nothing I desire on earth.</td>
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<td>Psa 73:26</td>
<td>My flesh and my heart fail, / But God is the rock of my heart and my portion forever.</td>
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Rev 21:2  And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Rev 21:10 And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

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

1 Cor 15:45b ... the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.
1 Thes 5:23 And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Eph 5:26 That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word,

A. Christ as the life-giving Spirit sanctifies the church by cleansing her according to the washing of the water in the word; according to the divine concept, water in Ephesians 5:26 refers to the flowing life of God, typified by flowing water (Exo. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4; John 7:37-39; Rev. 7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17); we are now in such a washing process in order that the church may be holy and without blemish.

Eph 5:26 That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word,
Exo 17:6 I will be standing before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it so that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.
1 Cor 10:4 And all drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank of a spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ.
John 7:37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.
John 7:38 He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.
John 7:39 But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.
Rev 7:17 For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and guide them to springs of waters of life; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
Rev 21:6 And He said to me, They have come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely.

Rev 22:1 And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street.
Rev 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely.

B. The Greek word for washing in Ephesians 5:26 is literally “laver”; in the Old Testament the priests used the laver to wash away their earthly defilement (Exo. 30:18-21); day by day, morning and evening, we need to come to the Bible and be cleansed by the laver of the water in the word.

Eph 5:26 That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word,
Exo 30:18 You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base of bronze, for washing. And you shall put it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it.
Exo 30:19 And Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet with water from it;
Exo 30:20 When they go into the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water, that they may not die; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn an offering by fire to Jehovah.
Exo 30:21 They shall wash their hands and their feet, that they may not die. And it shall be a perpetual statute to them, for him and for his seed throughout their generations.

C. Paul uses the Greek word rhema when he speaks of the word with its washing process (Eph. 5:26); logos is God’s Word objectively recorded in the Bible; rhema is the word of God spoken to us on a specific occasion (Mark 14:72; Luke 1:35-38; 5:5; 24:1-8).

Eph 5:26 That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word,
Mark 14:72 And immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered the word, how Jesus had said to him, Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times. And thinking upon it, he wept.
Luke 1:35  And the angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the holy thing which is born will be called the Son of God.

Luke 1:36  And behold, Elizabeth your relative, she also has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who is called barren,

Luke 1:37  Because no word will be impossible with God.

Luke 1:38  And Mary said, Behold, the slave of the Lord. May it happen to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.

Luke 5:5  And Simon answered and said, Master, through the whole night we toiled and caught nothing; but based on Your word I will let down the nets.

Luke 24:1  Now on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bringing the spices which they had prepared.

Luke 24:2  And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb;

Luke 24:3  But when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Luke 24:4  And while they stood perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling clothing.

Luke 24:5  And they became frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, and the men said to them, Why are you seeking the living One among the dead?

Luke 24:6  He is not here but has been raised. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee,

Luke 24:7  Saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise up.

Luke 24:8  And they remembered His words.

D. As the life-giving Spirit, Christ is the speaking Spirit; whatever He speaks is the word that washes us; this does not refer to logos, the constant word, but to rhema, which denotes an instant word, the word that the Lord presently speaks to us—Matt. 4:4; John 6:63; Rev. 2:7; 22:17a; cf. Isa. 6:9-10; Matt. 13:14-15; Acts 28:25-31.

Matt 4:4  But He answered and said, It is written, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God."

John 6:63  It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

Rev 2:7  He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

Rev 22:17a  And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! …

Isa 6:9  And He said, Go and say to this people, Hear indeed, but do not perceive; / And see indeed, but do not understand.

Isa 6:10  Make the heart of this people numb; / Dull their ears, / And seal their eyes; / Lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, / And their heart perceive and return, and they are healed.

Matt 13:14  And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, "In hearing you shall hear and by no means understand, and seeing you shall see and by no means perceive.

Matt 13:15  For the heart of this people has become fat, and with their ears they have heard heavily, and their eyes they have closed, lest they perceive with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and they turn around, and I will heal them."

Acts 28:25  And when they disagreed with one another, they departed, Paul saying one word to them, Well has the Holy Spirit spoken through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

Acts 28:26  Saying, "Go to this people and say, In hearing you shall hear and by no means understand, and seeing you will see and by no means perceive;

Acts 28:27  For the heart of this people has become fat, and with their ears they have heard heavily, and their eyes they have closed, lest they perceive with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and they turn around, and I will heal them."

Acts 28:28  Let it be known to you therefore that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also hear it.

Acts 28:29  And when he had spoken these things, the Jews departed, having much dispute among themselves.
Acts 28:30  And he remained two whole years in his own rented dwelling and welcomed all those
who came to him,
Acts 28:31  Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus
Christ with all boldness, unhindered.
E. The rhema reveals something to us personally and directly; it shows us what we need to deal
with and what we need to be cleansed from (the laver of bronze was a mirror that could
reflect and expose—Exo. 38:8); the important thing for each one of us is this—is God
speaking His word to me today?—Rev. 2:7; 1 Sam. 3:1, 21; Amos 3:7.

Exo 38:8  And he made the laver of bronze and its base of bronze from the mirrors of the
serving women who served at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.
Rev 2:7  He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who
overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.
1 Sam 3:1  And the boy Samuel ministered to Jehovah before Eli. Now the word of Jehovah was
rare in those days; visions were not widespread.
1 Sam 3:21  And Jehovah continued to appear in Shiloh, for Jehovah revealed Himself to Samuel
in Shiloh by the word of Jehovah.
Amos 3:7  Surely the Lord Jehovah will not do anything unless He reveals His secret to His
servants the prophets.

F. One thing that we always treasure is that the Lord still speaks to us personally and directly
today; true growth in life depends upon our receiving the word directly from God; only His
speaking in us has true spiritual value—Heb. 3:7-11, 15; 4:7; Psa. 95:7-8.

Heb 3:7  Therefore, even as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice,
Heb 3:8  Do not harden your hearts as in the provocation, in the day of trial in the wilderness,
Heb 3:9  Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me and saw My works for forty years.
Heb 3:10  Therefore I was displeased with this generation, and I said, They always go astray in
their heart, and they have not known My ways;
Heb 3:11  As I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest!"
Heb 3:15  While it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the
provocation."

Heb 4:7  He again designates a certain day, today, saying in David after so long a time, even
as He has said before, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

Psa 95:7  For He is our God, / And we are the people of His pasture / And the flock of His hand.
/ Today, if you hear His voice,
Psa 95:8  Do not harden your heart as at Meribah, / As in the day of Massah in the wilderness;

G. The central point of our prayers should be our longing for the Lord’s speaking, which
enables us to fulfill the goal of His eternal economy according to His heart’s desire to have

Luke 1:38  And Mary said, Behold, the slave of the Lord. May it happen to me according to your
word. And the angel departed from her.
Luke 10:38  Now as they went, He entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named
Martha received Him into her home.
Luke 10:39  And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to
His word.
Luke 10:40  But Martha was being drawn about with much serving, and she came up to Him and
said, Lord, does it not matter to You that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell
her then to do her part with me.
Luke 10:41  But the Lord answered and said to her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled
about many things;
Luke 10:42  But there is need of one thing, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be
taken away from her.

Eph 1:5  Predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the
good pleasure of His will.

H. In a very practical sense, the Lord’s presence is one with His speaking; whenever He
speaks, we realize His presence within us; Christ’s speaking is the very presence of the life-

Exo 33:12  And Moses said to Jehovah, See, You say to me, Bring up this people; but You have
not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, I know you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.

Exo 33:13 Now therefore if I have found favor in Your sight, please let me know now Your ways, that I may know You, so that I may continue to find favor in Your sight. Consider also that this nation is Your people.

Exo 33:14 And He said, My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.

Exo 33:15 And he said to Him, If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.

Exo 33:16 For how then shall it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, are distinct from all the other people who are on the face of the earth?

Exo 33:17 And Jehovah said to Moses, I will do this thing also that you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight, and I know you by name.

Heb 11:8 By faith Abraham, being called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

I. The speaking of the indwelling Christ as the life-giving Spirit within us is the cleansing water that deposits a new element into us to replace the old element in our nature and disposition; this metabolic cleansing causes a genuine and inward change in life, which is the reality of dispositional sanctification and transformation.

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

Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.

A. “To open their eyes”—v. 18:

1. We need to continually pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation to understand and to see more and more of Christ, the Body of Christ, and the divine dispensing for the divine economy—Eph. 1:17; 3:5; cf. Rev. 4:6; 3:17; Matt. 6:6.

Eph 1:17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him,

Eph 3:5 Which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit,

Rev 4:6 And before the throne there was as it were a glassy sea like crystal; and in the midst of the throne and around the throne, there were four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.

Rev 3:17 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,

Matt 6:6 But you, when you pray, enter into your private room, and shut your door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

2. We cannot go on without new knowledge of the Lord and a new vision of Him—Acts 26:16; Phil. 3:8b, 10a, 13; cf. Deut. 4:25.

Acts 26:16 But rise up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me and of the things in which I will appear to you;

Phil 3:8b ... on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ

Phil 3:10a To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, ...

Phil 3:13 Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before,
Deut 4:25  When you have brought forth children and grandchildren and have languished in the land, and you have spoiled yourselves by making an idol, the form of anything, and have done that which is evil in the sight of Jehovah your God so as to anger Him;

3. Our commission is to “enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is”—Eph. 3:9.

B. “To turn them from darkness to light”—Acts 26:18:

1. Light is the presence of God; we need to be people who are full of light—Isa. 2:5; 1 John 1:5; Luke 11:34-36.
   
   Isa 2:5  House of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of Jehovah.
   1 John 1:5  And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.
   Luke 11:34  The lamp of the body is your eye. When your eye is single, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is evil, your body also is dark.
   Luke 11:35  Watch out therefore that the light which is in you is not darkness.
   Luke 11:36  If therefore your whole body is full of light and does not have any dark part, the whole will be full of light as when the lamp with its rays illuminates you.

2. The enjoyment of Christ as our God-given portion is “in the light”—Col. 1:12; John 8:12; 1:4; Psa. 119:105, 130; Matt. 5:14; Rev. 1:20.
   
   Col 1:12  Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light;
   John 8:12  Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
   John 1:4  In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
   Psa 119:105  Your word is a lamp to my feet / And a light to my path.
   Psa 119:130  The opening of Your words gives light, / Imparting understanding to the simple.
   Matt 5:14  You are the light of the world. It is impossible for a city situated upon a mountain to be hidden.
   Rev 1:20  The mystery of the seven stars which you saw upon My right hand and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

3. We need to be luminaries in the world, holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:14-16); we need to tell out the virtues of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).
   
   Phil 2:14  Do all things without murmurings and reasonings
   Phil 2:15  That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world,
   Phil 2:16  Holding forth the word of life, so that I may have a boast in the day of Christ that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain.
   1 Pet 2:9  But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people acquired for a possession, so that you may tell out the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

C. “To turn them…from the authority of Satan to God”—Acts 26:18:

1. The highest point in our spiritual experience is to have a clear sky with the throne above it; to have the throne above a clear sky is to give the Lord the preeminence in our being and the highest and most prominent position in our life—Ezek. 1:22, 26; Col. 1:18; cf. Ezek. 14:3.
   
   Ezek 1:22  And over the heads of the living creature there was the likeness of an expanse, like the sight of awesome crystal, stretched forth over their heads above.
   Ezek 1:26  And above the expanse that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, like the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne was One in appearance like a man, above it.
   Col 1:18  And He is the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things;
Ezek 14:3  Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts and have put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I be inquired of at all by them?

2.  If we are under a clear sky with the throne above it, genuine authority will be with us to bring others under God’s authority—2 Cor. 10:4-5, 8; 13:3, 10.

2 Cor 10:4  For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly but powerful before God for the overthrowing of strongholds.

2 Cor 10:5  As we overthrow reasonings and every high thing rising up against the knowledge of God, and take captive every thought unto the obedience of Christ.

2 Cor 10:8  For even if I should boast somewhat more abundantly concerning our authority, which the Lord has given for building you up and not for overthrowing you, I will not be put to shame.

2 Cor 13:3  Since you seek a proof of the Christ who is speaking in me, who is not weak unto you but is powerful in you.

2 Cor 13:10  Therefore I write these things while being absent in order that when present I would not have to use severity, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for building up and not for overthrowing.

3.  Our uttermost love for the Lord qualifies, perfects, and equips us to speak for the Lord with His authority—cf. John 21:15, 17.

John 21:15  Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.

John 21:17  He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.

D. “That they may receive forgiveness of sins”—Acts 26:18:

1.  We need to go to the Lord to receive a thorough forgiveness of all our sins—1 John 1:7, 9.

   1 John 1:7  But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin.

   1 John 1:9  If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

2.  David begged God to blot out his transgressions, wash him thoroughly from his iniquity, and cleanse him from his sin—Psa. 51:1-2, 7, 9:

   Psa 51:1  Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; / According to the greatness of Your compassions blot out my transgressions.

   Psa 51:2  Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, / And from my sin cleanse me.

   Psa 51:7  Purge my sin with hyssop, and I will be clean; / Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

   Psa 51:9  Hide Your face from my sins, / And blot out all my iniquities.

   a.  Like David we need to stay in the presence of God to have a thorough and genuine repentance and confession to receive a full forgiveness from God.

   b.  If we confess our sins to receive God’s forgiveness, we will have the gladness of God’s salvation and be sustained with a willing spirit; then we can teach transgressors His ways, and sinners will turn back to Him—vv. 12-13.

   Psa 51:12  Restore to me the gladness of Your salvation, / And sustain me with a willing spirit.

   Psa 51:13  I will teach transgressors Your ways, / And sinners will turn back to You.

E. “That they may receive…an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me”; this inheritance is the Triune God Himself with all He has, all He has done, and all He will do for His redeemed people—Acts 26:18:

1.  The Triune God is embodied in the all-inclusive Christ, who is the portion allotted to the saints as their inheritance—Col. 2:9; 1:12.

   Col 2:9  For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,
Col 1:12  Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light;

2. We enjoy the pneumatic Christ as the pledge of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14) “among those,” that is, among those in the church life (cf. 2 Tim. 2:22).

Eph 1:14  Who is the pledge of our inheritance unto the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory.

2 Tim 2:22  But flee youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

3. We need to bring people into the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ in the church life so that they may enjoy Christ as we do and be sanctified dispositionally with the holy nature of God through the exercise of their spirit—Heb. 2:10-11; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 4:13.

Heb 2:10  For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Heb 2:11  For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One, for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brothers,

1 Cor 1:9  God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

2 Cor 4:13  And having the same spirit of faith according to that which is written, “I believed, therefore I spoke,” we also believe, therefore we also speak,

V. Our being sanctified for the divine sonship ultimately consummates in the New Jerusalem as the holy city (Rev. 21:2, 10) and the aggregate of the divine sonship (v. 7); this is the ultimate consummation of God becoming a man in the flesh that man might become God in the Spirit to gain a great, corporate God-man (vv. 3, 22) for the corporate expression, the glory, of the Triune God (vv. 11, 23).

Rev 21:2  And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Rev 21:10  And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.

Rev 21:7  He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me.

Rev 21:3  And I heard a loud voice out of the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.

Rev 21:22  And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

Rev 21:11  Having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.

Rev 21:23  And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**THE LORD’S APPEARING MAKING SAUL A WITNESS**

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

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

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

**THE LORD’S CHARGE**

In Acts 26:18 the Lord charged Saul “to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.” This is the work that you young people should do today. Do not preach the traditional gospel of Christianity. Rather, open the eyes of this generation that they may turn from darkness to light. The first thing we must do is to help others to see. In order to do this, we ourselves must have the vision and see the heavenly things. We must see the things concerning Christ, not by being taught but by having Christ appear to us. After you have seen the vision, you need to contact people, telling them that Jesus has appeared to you and that you have seen Him. Do not preach the low, traditional gospel. Many who have received this poor gospel are still blind and in darkness. Do not teach people religion—open their eyes that they may turn from darkness and Satan to light and God. By turning in this way, they will be released from the evil power of darkness, which is the authority of Satan, to God. As a result, they will receive forgiveness of sins and a portion among those who are sanctified. All the saved and forgiven ones are saints, and all the saints have a portion (Col. 1:12). According to Colossians, the portion of the saints is simply Christ Himself. Christ has been allotted to us, and we all share a portion in Him. What is our portion? It is neither the heavens nor the earth but Christ. Thus, Christ is the common portion of all the saints. Unbelievers do not have a positive portion. Their portion—the lake of fire—is negative. Our portion—Christ—will consummate in the New Jerusalem. Those who turn from Satan to God will not have a portion individually but corporately and collectively with all the saints. This means that they will have a portion among those who are members of the church life. We cannot have such a portion alone; we can only have it among the saints, among those who are sanctified by faith.

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

THE NEED FOR PRAYER

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

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

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

PAUL’S RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND THE LORD’S APPEARING

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

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

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

**GRACE GIVEN TO LESS THAN THE LEAST**

In Ephesians 3:8 Paul says, “To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel.” Probably we all hold the concept that the apostle Paul was a specially selected one. But here he says that he was less than the least of all saints. If one who is less than the least can have such a vision, then certainly all of us can have the same thing. Do not say, “I am not an apostle, especially not the apostle Paul. Thus, I could never see as much as he did.” Paul said that he was less than all of us. Paul said this because he had opposed God’s economy. In Paul’s understanding, the one who opposed the most was the smallest and the least. Since he was the most opposing, he became even less than the least. Peter, John, Andrew, and Matthew were with the Lord Jesus, but Paul was far away. No one else opposed Christ and the church as much as Paul did. Therefore, this one who was the farthest away and the most opposing became the least and smallest one. In Ephesians 3 Paul seemed to be saying, “Dear brothers in Ephesus, don’t you realize that I was once far, far away? None of you was as far away from Christ as I was. Because I was the farthest away, I am less than the least of all the saints.”

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

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

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

Are you young people burning today? If you are, then I challenge you to pray with all these verses. If you pray, something will come out, and you will see the vision of the full gospel and become a witness of what you see of the Lord to today’s young generation. You all must fellowship about this chapter and pray about it both individually and corporately until you are transfused by the Lord with such a heavenly vision and are burdened for the Lord’s move among today’s young generation to bring a number of them into the Lord’s testimony. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975–1976, vol. 3, “Young People’s Training,” pp. 308-316)
LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH
(Thursday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two

The Gospel of the Glory of the Blessed God

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

1 Tim 1:11 According to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I was entrusted.
Acts 7:2 And he said, Men, brothers and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,
Acts 7:55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;
2 Cor 4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in those who are perishing,
2 Cor 4:4 In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.
2 Cor 4:6 Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out.

I. Glory is an attribute of God; glory is the expression of God, God expressed in splendor—Exo. 40:34; Acts 7:55; 2 Pet. 1:3; Rev. 21:11.

Exo 40:34 Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle.
Acts 7:55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God;
2 Pet 1:3 Seeing that His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who has called us by His own glory and virtue,
Rev 21:11 Having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.

II. The glory of God is intrinsically related to the economy of God—Eph. 1:6, 10, 12, 14; 3:21; 5:27:

Eph 1:6 To the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He graced us in the Beloved;
Eph 1:10 Unto the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, in Him;
Eph 1:12 That we would be to the praise of His glory who have first hoped in Christ,
Eph 1:14 Who is the pledge of our inheritance unto the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory.
Eph 3:21 To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen.
Eph 5:27 That He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish.

A. The Triune God is a God of glory—Acts 7:2; Eph. 1:17; 3:14, 16; 1 Cor. 2:8; 2 Cor. 4:6; 1 Pet. 4:14.

Acts 7:2 And he said, Men, brothers and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,
Eph 1:17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him,
Eph 3:14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father,
Eph 3:16 That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,
1 Cor 2:8 Which none of the rulers of this age have known; for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;
2 Cor 4:6 Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
1 Pet 4:14 If you are reproached in the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

B. Man was created by God in His image in order that man would express Him in glory—Gen. 1:26; Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6.

Gen 1:26 And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of heaven and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.

Col 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation,

2 Cor 4:4 In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.

2 Cor 4:6 Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

C. God created us as vessels unto honor, prepared unto glory; we were predestinated in His sovereignty to be His vessels to express what He is in glory—Rom. 9:21, 23.

Rom 9:21 Or does not the potter have authority over the clay to make out of the same lump one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor?

Rom 9:23 In order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory,

D. Through the gospel of the glory of Christ, God has called us by and into His eternal glory—2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Tim. 1:11; 1 Thes. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:10; 2 Pet. 1:3.

2 Cor 4:4 In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.

1 Tim 1:11 According to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I was entrusted.

1 Thes 2:12 So that you might walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

1 Pet 5:10 But the God of all grace, He who has called you into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you.

2 Pet 1:3 Seeing that His divine power has granted to us all things which relate to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who has called us by His own glory and virtue.

III. “The god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them”—2 Cor. 4:4:

A. The god of this age is Satan, the deceiver, the ruler of the present age—John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph. 2:2:

John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out.

John 14:30 I will no longer speak much with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and in Me he has nothing;

John 16:11 And concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

Eph 2:2 In which you once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit which is now operating in the sons of disobedience;

1. In addition to his kingdom, Satan, the devil, has his own religion; he is not merely the ruler of this world but also the god of this age—Matt. 12:26; John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4.

Matt 12:26 And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out.

2 Cor 4:4 In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.
2. *The ruler of this world* refers to Satan’s rule over people; *the god of this age* refers to the worship that he receives from people today—John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4.
   
   **John 12:31** Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out.

   **2 Cor 4:4** In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.

3. Nearly all people today, whether primitive or highly cultured, have been blinded by the god of this age—v. 4.

   **2 Cor 4:4** In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.

B. If we drop our concepts and turn our heart to the Lord, the veils will be taken away, the god of this age will have no ground in our being, and the gospel of the glory of God will shine in our hearts—vv. 4, 6.

   **2 Cor 4:4** In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.

   **2 Cor 4:6** Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

IV. The glory of God is involved with Christ’s incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and coming again:

A. The Word became flesh, and the glory of His divinity was concealed within the shell of His humanity, yet the disciples beheld His glory—John 1:14; Matt. 17:2.

   **John 1:14** And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.

   **Matt 17:2** And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as the light.

B. In His life and work the Lord Jesus did not seek His own glory but the glory of the One who sent Him—John 7:18; 8:50, 54.

   **John 7:18** He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this One is true, and unrighteousness is not in Him.

   **John 8:50** But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks glory for Me and judges.

   **John 8:54** Jesus answered, If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say that He is your God.

C. The glory of Christ’s divinity was released through the breaking of the shell of His humanity by His death—12:23-24.

   **John 12:23** And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

   **John 12:24** Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.


   **Luke 24:26** Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into His glory?

   **John 7:39** But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

   **John 17:5** And now, glorify Me along with Yourself, Father, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

   **Acts 3:13** The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him.

   **1 Pet 1:21** Who through Him believe into God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.
E. Christ was glorified in His ascension; the Lord Jesus is a model of a person who has “crossed the river” and entered into God’s glory, where He is crowned with glory and honor—Heb. 2:9-10; 6:19-20; 9:24.

Heb 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little inferior to the angels because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death on behalf of everything.

Heb 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and through whom are all things, in leading many sons into glory, to make the Author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Heb 6:19 Which we have as an anchor of the soul, both secure and firm and which enters within the veil,

Heb 6:20 Where the Forerunner, Jesus, has entered for us, having become forever a High Priest according to the order of Melchizedec.

Heb 9:24 For Christ did not enter into a holy place made by hands, a figure of the true, but into heaven itself, to appear now before the face of God for us;

F. The Lord as the Son of Man will come in the glory of the Father—Matt. 16:27; Luke 21:27.

Matt 16:27 For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will repay each man according to his doings.

Luke 21:27 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

G. In the New Jerusalem for eternity, Christ, the Lamb as the lamp, will shine with God as the light to illuminate the New Jerusalem with the glory of God, which glory is the expression of the divine light—Rev. 21:11, 23; 22:5.

Rev 21:11 Having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.

Rev 21:23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon that they should shine in it, for the glory of God illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Rev 22:5 And night will be no more; and they have no need of the light of a lamp and of the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them; and they will reign forever and ever.

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

Col 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation,

Heb 1:3 Who, being the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance and upholding and bearing all things by the word of His power, having made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

2 Cor 4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled in those who are perishing,

2 Cor 4:4 In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.

Rev 6:2 And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and he who sits on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went forth conquering and to conquer.

A. The gospel of the glory of Christ is the gospel of the glory of the blessed God—1 Tim. 1:11:

1 Tim 1:11 According to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I was entrusted.

1. The expression the gospel of the glory of the blessed God refers to God’s economy in 1 Timothy 1:4.

1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God’s economy, which is in faith.

2. The gospel with which the apostle Paul was entrusted is the effulgence of the glory of the blessed God—Heb. 1:3; Rom. 1:25; 9:5.

Heb 1:3 Who, being the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance and upholding and bearing all things by the word of His power, having made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Rom 1:25 Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Rom 9:5 Whose are the fathers, and out of whom, as regards what is according to flesh, is the Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.
3. By dispensing God’s life and nature in Christ into God’s chosen people, this gospel shines forth God’s glory, in which God is blessed among His people—2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3, 6, 12, 14.

2 Cor 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and God of all comfort.

Eph 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ,

Eph 1:6 To the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He graced us in the Beloved;

Eph 1:12 That we would be to the praise of His glory who have first hoped in Christ,

Eph 1:14 Who is the pledge of our inheritance unto the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory.

B. The gospel is the gospel of the glory of Christ, which illuminates, radiates, and shines in our hearts—2 Cor. 4:4, 6:

2 Cor 4:4 In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.

2 Cor 4:6 Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

1. God’s shining in our hearts results in the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that is, in the enlightenment that causes us to know the glory of God in the gospel of Christ—vv. 4, 6.

2 Cor 4:4 In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.

2 Cor 4:6 Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 God, image, Christ, glory, gospel, and illumination are all in apposition, referring to the same wonderful person; God is the image, the image is Christ, Christ is the glory, the glory is the gospel, and the gospel is the illumination.

3. The illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God is in the face of Jesus Christ; this means that the gospel of the glory of Christ is a lovely person in whose face we can see the glory of God—vv. 4, 6; Matt. 17:2.

2 Cor 4:4 In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.

2 Cor 4:6 Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Matt 17:2 And He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as the light.

4. The glory of God manifested in the face of Jesus Christ is the God of glory expressed through Jesus Christ, who is the effulgence of the glory of God; to know Him is to know the God of glory—Acts 7:2; Heb. 1:3.

Acts 7:2 And he said, Men, brothers and fathers, listen. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,

Heb 1:3 Who, being the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance and upholding and bearing all things by the word of His power, having made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

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

Phil 2:15 That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world,
John 1:18  No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

A.  The gospel of the glory of Christ shines into us, and then it shines out from within us—Matt. 5:16.
   Matt 5:16  In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in the heavens.

B.  In our preaching of the gospel, there should be an illumination; we need to shine forth the gospel of the glory of Christ from within us—Phil. 2:15.
   Phil 2:15  That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world.

C.  In proclaiming the gospel of the glory of Christ, we should not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, who is the content of the gospel—2 Cor. 4:5.
   2 Cor 4:5  For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.

D.  Those who receive the gospel of the glory of Christ through our shining will have Christ as the precious treasure dispensed into them; then, like us, they will be earthen vessels containing this priceless treasure—vv. 4, 6-7.
   2 Cor 4:4  In whom the god of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelievers that the illumination of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, might not shine on them.
   2 Cor 4:6  Because the God who said, Out of darkness light shall shine, is the One who shined in our hearts to illuminate the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
   2 Cor 4:7  But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

The Shining of the Gospel of the Glory of Christ

Their Gospel Veiled in the Perishing Ones

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Not Preaching Themselves but Christ Jesus as Lord**

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

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

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

**God Shining in Their Hearts**

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

In our hearts is much deeper than on the skin of Moses’ face (3:7; Exo. 34:29-30). This presents a
comparison between the glory of the apostolic ministry of the gospel and that of the Mosaic ministry of
the law. In the heart is related to the inner life, whereas on the skin of the face has nothing to do with
the inner life. The glory of the old covenant is on the surface, but the glory of the new covenant has
great depth.
*Our hearts* in 2 Corinthians 4:6 denotes the hearts of the apostles. They represent all the believers of the new covenant.

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

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

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

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

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

Message Three

The Full Knowledge of the Truth

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

1 Tim 2:4 Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
1 Tim 2:7 For which I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I speak the truth; I do not lie), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.
1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
1 Tim 4:3 Who forbid marriage and command abstaining from foods, which God has created to be partaken of with thanksgiving by those who believe and have full knowledge of the truth.
2 Tim 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth.
2 Tim 2:25 In meekness correcting those who oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance unto the full knowledge of the truth.
2 Tim 3:7 And are always learning yet never able to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
Titus 1:1 Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God’s chosen ones and the full knowledge of the truth, which is according to godliness,

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

A. Truth is the shining of light, the expression of the divine light—John 8:12, 32; 1 John 1:5-6:

1 John 1:5 And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.
1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and are not practicing the truth;

B. Knowledge without light is doctrine, but knowledge full of light is truth—1 John 1:5-6; 4:6.

1 John 1:5 And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.
1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and are not practicing the truth;

B. The truths as revealed in the Scriptures have been lost, missed, misunderstood, misinterpreted, and wrongly applied throughout the ages—John 17:17:

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.
1. The goal of the Lord’s recovery is to recover the reality, life, livingness, strength, power, and impact of the matters revealed in the Bible.

2. The truth in the Lord’s recovery is the consummation of the truth of the past nineteen centuries—2 Tim. 2:2.

   2 Tim 2:2 And the things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also.

C. We need to have the truth wrought into us and constituted into our being—1 John 1:8; 2:4; 2 John 1-2; 3 John 3-4:

1 John 1:8 If we say that we do not have sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
1 John 2:4 He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in this one;
2 John 1 The elder to the chosen lady and to her children, whom I love in truthfulness, and not only I but also all those who know the truth,
2 John 2 For the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:
3 John 3 For I rejoiced greatly at the brothers’ coming and testifying to your steadfastness in the truth, even as you walk in truth.
3 John 4 I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear that my children are walking in the truth.

1. To be constituted with the truth is to have the intrinsic element of the divine revelation wrought into us to become our constituent, our intrinsic being, our organic constitution.

2. There is the desperate need of the living truth to produce the church, to help the church to exist, and to build up the church—1 Tim. 3:15.

   1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

3. The solid truth that is constituted into us becomes in us a constant and longterm nourishment—4:6.

   1 Tim 4:6 If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed.

4. If the truth is wrought into us and constituted into our being, we will be able to protect the interests of the riches of God’s divinity and the attainments of His consummation—Rev. 21:12a, 17.

   Rev 21:12a It had a great and high wall and had twelve gates, …
   Rev 21:17 And he measured its wall, a hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.

5. The Lord’s word, the truth, is in the Bible, but the Bible needs the proper interpretation—2 Tim. 2:15.

   2 Tim 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth.

6. We need to pay the price to learn the truth—Prov. 23:23.

   Prov 23:23 Buy truth, and do not sell it; / Buy wisdom and instruction and understanding.

7. The truth is absolute in itself, and we must be absolute for the truth—2 John 1-2, 4; 3 John 3-4, 7-8.

   2 John 1 The elder to the chosen lady and to her children, whom I love in truthfulness, and not only I but also all those who know the truth,
   2 John 2 For the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever:
   2 John 4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father.
   3 John 3 For I rejoiced greatly at the brothers’ coming and testifying to your steadfastness in the truth, even as you walk in truth.
   3 John 4 I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear that my children are walking in the truth.
3 John 7  For on behalf of the Name they went out, taking nothing from the Gentiles.
3 John 8  We therefore ought to support such ones that we may become fellow workers in the truth.

II. God desires that we “all…come to the full knowledge of the truth”—1 Tim. 2:4:
A. The Lord’s recovery is to recover the full knowledge of the truth—v. 7; 4:3:
   1 Tim 2:7  For which I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I speak the truth; I do not lie), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.
   1 Tim 4:3  Who forbid marriage and command abstaining from foods, which God has created to be partaken of with thanksgiving by those who believe and have full knowledge of the truth.
1. The degradation of the church issued from the neglect of the truth.
2. The Lord’s recovery today is the full recovery of the divine truths in the holy Word—John 1:14, 17; 8:32.
   John 1:14  And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.
   John 1:17  For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ.
   John 8:32  And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.
B. Paul was an apostle not only according to the faith but also according to the full knowledge of the truth—1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 1:1:
   1 Tim 2:4  Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
   Titus 1:1  Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God's chosen ones and the full knowledge of the truth, which is according to godliness.
1. Faith is to receive all God has planned for us, all God has done for us, and all God has given to us—1 Tim. 1:4; 2:7.
   1 Tim 1:4  Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith.
   1 Tim 2:7  For which I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I speak the truth; I do not lie), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.
2. In the books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul emphasizes the need of the believers to come to the full knowledge of the truth—1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7.
   1 Tim 2:4  Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
   1 Tim 4:3  Who forbid marriage and command abstaining from foods, which God has created to be partaken of with thanksgiving by those who believe and have full knowledge of the truth.
   2 Tim 2:25  In meekness correcting those who oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance unto the full knowledge of the truth,
   2 Tim 3:7  And are always learning yet never able to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
3. The full knowledge of the truth is a thorough apprehension of the truth, a full acknowledgement of the reality of all the spiritual and divine things that we have received through faith—1 Tim. 4:3.
   1 Tim 4:3  Who forbid marriage and command abstaining from foods, which God has created to be partaken of with thanksgiving by those who believe and have full knowledge of the truth.
C. All the believers need to come to and be in the full knowledge of the truth—v. 3:
   1 Tim 4:3  Who forbid marriage and command abstaining from foods, which God has created to be partaken of with thanksgiving by those who believe and have full knowledge of the truth.
1. Every believer has the capacity to come to the full knowledge of the truth—2:4.
   1 Tim 2:4  Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
2. To have the full knowledge of the truth is to fully know the truth; knowing the truth in this way is a safeguard.
D.  All the believers need to know, experience, and be absolute for the subjective truths—John 8:32; 14:6:

John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.
John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except Me.

1. The truths in the Bible have both an objective aspect and a subjective aspect—Rom. 8:34, 10; Col. 3:1; 1:27.

Rom 8:34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ Jesus who died and, rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.
Rom 8:10 But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness.
Col 3:1 If therefore you were raised together with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.
Col 1:27 To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory,

2. The objective truths are for the subjective truths, and the subjective truths are for the producing of the church—2 John 1, 4; 3 John 3-4, 7-9a.

2 John 1 The elder to the chosen lady and to her children, whom I love in truthfulness, and not only I but also all those who know the truth,
2 John 4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, even as we received commandment from the Father.
3 John 3 For I rejoiced greatly at the brothers' coming and testifying to your steadfastness in the truth, even as you walk in truth.
3 John 4 I have no greater joy than these things, that I hear that my children are walking in the truth.
3 John 7 For on behalf of the Name they went out, taking nothing from the Gentiles.
3 John 8 We therefore ought to support such ones that we may become fellow workers in the truth.
3 John 9a I wrote something to the church; ...

3. The Lord desires to recover the subjective truths in the Holy Scriptures—the subjective aspect of the truth concerning the Triune God and the church—John 1:14; 14:16-20; 1 Tim. 6:15-16; 2 Tim. 4:22; 3:15-16.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.
John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever,
John 14:17 Even the Spirit of reality, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him; but you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you.
John 14:18 I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you.
John 14:19 Yet a little while and the world beholds Me no longer, but you behold Me; because I live, you also shall live.
John 14:20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.
1 Tim 6:15 Which in its own times the blessed and only Sovereign will show, the King of those who reign as kings and Lord of those who rule as lords,
1 Tim 6:16 Who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen nor can see, to whom be honor and eternal might. Amen.
2 Tim 4:22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.
2 Tim 3:15 And that from a babe you have known the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus.
2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,


John 4:14 But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water springing up into eternal life.
John 6:57  As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.

John 14:16  And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever,

John 14:17  Even the Spirit of reality, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him; but you know Him, because He abides with you and shall be in you.

John 14:20  In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

John 3:15  That everyone who believes into Him may have eternal life.

John 3:16  For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life.

5. The subjective truths are linked to the Spirit and life and are constituted with Spirit and life—Rom. 8:2; 2 Cor. 3:6:

Rom 8:2  For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death.

2 Cor 3:6  Who has also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

a. The Spirit and life are the substance of the subjective truths; without the Spirit and life we do not have the subjective truths.

b. When we live by the Spirit and life, we have the experience of the subjective truths—Rom. 8:2, 4, 14.

Rom 8:2  For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death.

Rom 8:4  That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

Rom 8:14  For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

c. The church life is an issue of our experience of the subjective truths; when we experience the subjective truths, the church is spontaneously produced—vv. 10-11; 12:4-5; 16:1, 4-5; 1 Cor. 1:9, 30; 15:45b; 6:17; 1:2; 12:27.

Rom 8:10  But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit is life because of righteousness.

Rom 8:11  And if the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.

Rom 12:4  For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function,

Rom 12:5  So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Rom 16:1  I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a deaconess of the church which is in Cenchrea,

Rom 16:4  Who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles;

Rom 16:5  And greet the church, which is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the firstfruits of Asia unto Christ.

1 Cor 1:9  God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Cor 1:30  But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

1 Cor 15:45b  … the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.

1 Cor 6:17  But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

1 Cor 1:2  To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours:

1 Cor 12:27  Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

E. We need to fully know and be absolute for the highest truth—Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4; 12:4-5:

Rom 8:3  For that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin,
condemned sin in the flesh,

Rom 1:3 Concerning His Son, who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh,
Rom 1:4 Who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord;
Rom 12:4 For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function,
Rom 12:5 So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

1. The highest truth is that in Christ God became man to make man God in life, nature, constitution, and expression but not in the Godhead so that the redeeming God and the redeemed man can be united, mingled, and incorporated together to become one entity—John 1:12-14; 14:20; Rev. 21:2, 10-11.

John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name,
John 1:13 Who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.
John 14:20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.
Rev 21:2 And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
Rev 21:10 And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,
Rev 21:11 Having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, as clear as crystal.

2. The high peak of the divine revelation—the “diamond” in the “box” of the Bible—is the revelation that in Christ God has become man in order that man might become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead—2 Sam. 7:12-14a; Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4; Eph. 3:17a.

2 Sam 7:12 When your days are fulfilled and you sleep with your fathers, I will raise up your seed after you, which will come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.
2 Sam 7:13 It is he who will build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.
2 Sam 7:14a I will be his Father, and he will be My son. …
Rom 8:3 For that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh,
Rom 1:3 Concerning His Son, who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh,
Rom 1:4 Who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord;
Eph 3:17a That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, …


John 3:5 Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.
John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name,
John 1:13 Who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
Rom 6:19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to uncleanness and lawlessness unto lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness unto sanctification.
Rom 6:22  But now, having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end, eternal life.

Rom 12:2  And do not be fashioned according to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect.

Rom 8:29  Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brothers;

Rom 8:30  And those whom He predestinated, these He also called; and those whom He called, these He also justified; and those whom He justified, these He also glorified.

4. It is only by God’s becoming man to make man God that the Body of Christ can be produced and built up; this is the high peak of the divine revelation given to us by God—v. 3; 1:3-4; 8:14-16; 12:4-5.

Rom 8:3  For that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh,

Rom 1:3  Concerning His Son, who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh,

Rom 1:4  Who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord;

Rom 8:14  For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Rom 8:15  For you have not received a spirit of slavery bringing you into fear again, but you have received a spirit of sonship in which we cry, Abba, Father!

Rom 8:16  The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.

Rom 12:4  For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function,

Rom 12:5  So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

F. The standard of the Lord’s recovery depends upon the standard of the truth we put out; the truths will be the measure and the standard—John 18:37.

John 18:37  Pilate said therefore to Him, So then You are a king? Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, that I would testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

ADVANCING IN THE DEEPER AND HIGHER TRUTHS

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

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

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

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

Furthermore, because the Christians lack a view of the deeper truths, they interpreted chapters 12 and 14 in a very shallow way. If you have the view of the deeper truths, you can see that what Paul is talking about in these two chapters is not that shallow. Could you tell me what the difference is between the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge (12:8)? These are the first two aspects of the manifestation of the Spirit. The two highest aspects of the manifestation of the Spirit are the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge. The third one is faith, the fourth is healing, the fifth is miracles or works of power, the next is the discernment of spirits, and the last are tongues and their interpretation. The first two are the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge, and the last two are tongues and interpretation of tongues (vv. 8-10). Could you explain why Paul puts tongues and interpretation of tongues as the last two items and why he exalts the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge to be on the top? To speak in tongues is a shallow thing, but to give a word of wisdom or a word of knowledge is much deeper. Of course, this knowledge is not the knowledge of science or of politics but the knowledge of God’s New Testament economy. To speak the word of wisdom, you need a lot of experience of the all-inclusive Christ. This is why we may be able to speak in tongues and practice so-called healings, but we cannot speak the word of wisdom or the word of knowledge, because this is much higher and much deeper. It is easy to be an elementary student in kindergarten, but to be one in graduate school is not that easy. To speak the word of wisdom and to speak the word of knowledge is like being in graduate school.

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

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul says, “Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation” (v. 26). In chapters 12 and 14 Paul was trying his best to uplift the Corinthians from their low estate to a higher one. The Corinthians were too low and too shallow (3:2-3). In these days, in the Lord’s recovery, we should try to leave our kindergarten state. Why would we not go further and higher? We surely need to advance.
The problem with the Corinthians was the same as that with the Hebrews. In Hebrews, as I mentioned already, Paul says clearly that we need to advance, to leave the word of the beginning of Christ (6:1). According to the entire book of Hebrews, the word of the beginning of Christ concerns Christ’s earthly ministry. Although we may consider His conception or His incarnation so deep, Paul says that is something at the beginning. You have to go higher from the earth to the heavens, from the good word of God to the word of righteousness, from the word as milk to the word as solid food. Paul says clearly that milk is for infants and that solid food is for the mature ones (5:13-14). Whether we are the infants or the mature ones depends upon what kind of food we take. If you still take milk, you are just an infant. Are we still in that stage, not able to take any solid food? We should have left that stage already.

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

“LET US GO ON”

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

Since 1962 some have mostly been remaining for twenty-three years in the same things. Merely to be teaching people the things around the altar, the cross of Christ, is still too shallow. We need to go on to the deeper truths of our very God who is triune, to get into His foremost and highest attribute, that is, His Divine Trinity. His Divine Trinity is much higher than His power, His love, or even His life. We need to learn of His trinity, the Godhead, how the Father is embodied in the Son, how the Son is realized as the Spirit, and how such a Spirit is the realization of the Son and also the ultimate consummation of the processed Triune God. We need to learn these things, not only for our knowledge but also for our enjoyment. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14). If you would enjoy this benediction, surely you must know the Divine Trinity, the Godhead.

Christians today are shallow because they would not pay the price to labor adequately. These riches are all here in the Bible, just like gold in a mine, but nearly no one would labor to dig them out. Just to buy a few pieces of gold is not our job. Our job is to dig the gold mine. We are to do the mining work. This is the Lord’s recovery. I hope, brothers, that in your localities you would not repeat the old things. We should learn to go on, to learn the things in the heavenlies, and to learn to speak these higher and deeper things. The book of Revelation, for example, has never been opened up to the Lord’s children as it is today. This is now an absolutely transparent book to us. All the points have been covered in the Life-study messages and the footnotes of the Recovery Version. If you want to know them, you can go to the printed pages, and you will get them. This will require your time. To dig out the gold is not that easy. I would encourage all of us to go on in this way. Otherwise, the Lord would not have much of a way to go on; we will delay Him, retain Him, hold Him back. Some of us even repeat the things we taught twenty-three years ago. What we are teaching holds people back. In education if you hold even a problem student in the same grade for a couple of years, he will be spoiled. You even have to encourage the problem student to go to the next grade. We should go further. Let us go on. There is real hope for us to go on in His recovery. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1985, vol. 3, “Elders’ Training, Book 5: Fellowship concerning the Lord’s Up-to-date Move,” pp. 370-375)
I. “I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men; on behalf of kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of our Savior God”—1 Tim. 2:1-3:

A. After speaking of God’s economy and after charging Timothy to war the good warfare for God’s economy (1:3-4, 18), Paul indicates that a prayer ministry is the prerequisite for the administrating and shepherding of a local church (2:1-3, 8).

1 Tim 1:3 Even as I exhort you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things

1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God’s economy, which is in faith.

1 Tim 1:18 This charge I commit to you, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you might war the good warfare,

1 Tim 2:1 I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men;

1 Tim 2:2 On behalf of kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity.

1 Tim 2:3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of our Savior God,

1 Tim 2:8 I desire therefore that men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and reasoning;

B. A prerequisite for having a proper church life in the Lord’s recovery today is to have a prayer life; a proper church is a praying church; all in the Lord’s recovery must be prayerful and stand against the sin of prayerlessness—1 Sam. 12:23.

1 Sam 12:23 Moreover as for me, far be it from me that I would sin against Jehovah by ceasing to pray for you, but I will instruct you in the good and right way.

C. The elders in the church must take up Paul’s charge to “first of all” pray (1 Tim. 2:1); those
who take the lead in the churches must have a prayer life; if we exercise ourselves to have a prayer life, the church will be living and uplifted.

1 Tim 2:1 I exhort therefore, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men;

D. Instead of talking so much and even instead of working so much, we should pray more; only after we have prayed for a matter thoroughly should we make a decision concerning it, not by ourselves independently, but in oneness with the Lord and according to His leading.

E. The Greek word for intercessions denotes an approaching of God in a personal and confiding manner, that is, an intervening, an interfering, before God in others’ affairs for their benefit.

F. “Recently, my activity was limited for a time so that I could rest and care for my health. When I heard about certain needs, I prayed for them. Perhaps the Lord limited me that He might impress me with the fact that prayer is more important than work. May we all learn the lesson that the way to have a good church life is to pray. This is crucial. If our talking is turned into praying, the church in our locality will be transformed”—Life-study of 1 Timothy, second edition, p. 28.

G. We should pray on behalf of all men because God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth; our prayer is required for the carrying out of God’s desire—1 Tim. 2:4.

1 Tim 2:4 Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.

H. “I desire therefore that men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and reasoning”—v. 8:

1. Hands symbolize our doings; hence, holy hands signify a holy living, a living that is pious and that belongs to God; such a holy life strengthens our prayer life.
2. If our hands are not holy, our living is not holy and is not for God; we then have no supporting strength to pray, no holy hands to lift up in prayer.
3. Wrath and reasoning kill our prayer; wrath is of our emotion, and reasoning is of our mind.
4. To have a prayer life and pray unceasingly, our emotion and mind must be regulated to be in a normal condition, under the control of the Spirit in our spirit.

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

Exo 28:29 So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastplate of judgment on his heart when he goes into the sanctuary, for a memorial before Jehovah continually.

Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.

A. After the Urim and the Thummim were put into the breastplate, it became not only a memorial but also a breastplate of judgment—v. 30:

Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.

1. Urim means “lights,” “illuminators”—v. 30:

Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.
a. The Urim was an illuminator inserted into the breastplate under the twelve stones; it had the capacity to contain oil for burning, and the fire used to burn the oil came from the altar.

b. The Urim had twelve illuminators, one to illuminate each of the twelve transparent precious stones on the breastplate so that they could shine with light (David Baron).

c. The Urim typifies Christ as lights, illuminators (John 8:12; Luke 1:78-79), shining through the Spirit (the oil) and the cross (the fire from the altar).

John 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

Luke 1:78 Because of the merciful compassions of our God, in which the rising sun will visit us from on high,

Luke 1:79 To shine upon those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

2. Thummim means “perfecters,” “completers”—Exo. 28:30:

Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.

a. The names on the twelve stones on the breastplate contained only eighteen of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet; the remaining four letters were put on the Thummim, making it the perfecter and completer (David Baron).

b. By the shining of the Urim on the individual precious stones and by the darkening of the stones, the full alphabet of twenty-two letters could be used to spell out words and sentences.

c. The Thummim typifies Christ as the perfecter and completer (Heb. 12:2); thus, He is the spiritual alphabet for both inscribing and completing (cf. Rev. 22:13a).

Heb 12:2 Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.

Rev 22:13a I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, …

d. Together, the Urim and the Thummim typify Christ as God’s witness, God’s testimony (3:14), as the means for God to speak to His people (Heb. 1:2).

Rev 3:14 And to the messenger of the church in Laodicea write: These things says the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God:

Heb 1:2 Has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son, whom He appointed Heir of all things, through whom also He made the universe;

e. In the New Testament, the reality of the Urim and the Thummim is the mingled spirit—the unveiling Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, indwelling our receiving spirit, our regenerated human spirit—Rom. 8:4, 14, 16; Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10.

Rom 8:4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

Rom 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.

Rev 1:10 I was in spirit on the Lord's Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,

Rev 4:2 Immediately I was in spirit; and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne there was One sitting;

Rev 17:3 And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.
Rev 21:10  And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

B. According to the Old Testament, the Urim and the Thummim added to the breastplate were a means for God to speak to His people to indicate to them His leading; thus, we may say that the breastplate of judgment is a “breastplate of leading”—Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; Josh. 7:16-21; 1 Sam. 23:6, 9-12; 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65.

Lev 8:8  And he placed the breastplate upon him, and in the breastplate he put the Urim and the Thummim.

Num 27:21  And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Jehovah. At his word shall they go out and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even the whole assembly.

Deut 33:8  And concerning Levi he said, May Your Thummim and Urim be with Your faithful man, / Whom You tested at Massah, / With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah —

Josh 7:16  So Joshua rose early in the morning and brought Israel near by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken.

Josh 7:17  And he brought the family of Judah near, and the family of the Zerahites was taken. And he brought the family of the Zerahites near warrior by warrior, and Zabdi was taken.

Josh 7:18  And he brought the house of Zabdi near warrior by warrior, and Achan the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was taken.

Josh 7:19  And Joshua said to Achan, My son, give glory to Jehovah the God of Israel, and make confession to Him. And tell me what you have done; do not hide anything from me.

Josh 7:20  Then Achan answered Joshua and said, It is true; I have sinned against Jehovah the God of Israel; and this is what I did:

Josh 7:21  When I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle of Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them. And now they are hidden in the earth in my tent, with the silver under it.

1 Sam 23:6  Now it so happened that when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, he came down with an ephod in his hand.

1 Sam 23:9  But when David learned that Saul was planning evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring the ephod here.

1 Sam 23:10  And David said, O Jehovah the God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah in order to destroy the city on my account.

1 Sam 23:11  Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O Jehovah the God of Israel, do tell Your servant. And Jehovah said, He will come down.

1 Sam 23:12  And David said, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And Jehovah said, They will deliver you.

1 Sam 28:6  And Saul inquired of Jehovah; but Jehovah did not answer him, not by dreams or by the Urim or by the prophets.

Ezra 2:63  And the governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.

Neh 7:65  And the governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.

C. In spiritual experience, in order to know God’s leading we must judge whatever is of the flesh, the self, the old man, and the world; the fact that God’s speaking as His leading was through the breastplate signifies that God makes His leading known to His people through the church.

D. The breastplate of judgment for God’s leading was like a heavenly, divine, and spiritual typewriter, and His way of speaking through the breastplate with the Urim and the Thummim is the opposite of what we would expect:

1. God speaks not through the stones that are shining but through the stones that become dark; this means that God speaks through negative situations; because the Lord’s speaking by the breastplate of judgment is through negative situations, that speaking is a judgment.
2. Normally the twelve stones in the breastplate were under the shining of the Urim; suddenly a piece inscribed with a certain name would become dark; this darkening of a particular stone was God’s instant speaking:
   a. Paul’s Epistles and the seven epistles of the Lord Jesus to the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 2—3) were all written according to this principle; they were written according to the negative situation of the churches, not according to the positive things found in the churches.
   
   Rev 2~3 be omitted.

   b. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians according to his reading of the negative situation at Corinth, but although his writing was based on the negative things, in this Epistle he ministered positive things—the riches of Christ—to the church—cf. 1:9.
   
   1 Cor 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

   c. The saints in Corinth became the letters used by Paul in the spiritual typesetting of his Epistle; in the same way, in a local church the leading ones need to seek the Lord’s guidance by reading the actual situation and condition of the saints.

   d. The problem among Christians today is that because there is so much darkness, there is no way for God to expose the darkness; in order for the darkness to be made known, there must first be the shining of the light; God speaks through things that become negative in the midst of the shining of the light—cf. Eph. 5:8-9.

   Eph 5:8 For you were once darkness but are now light in the Lord; walk as children of light
   Eph 5:9 (For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth),

   e. By reading the negative situations in this way, we come to know God’s leading, His judgment; then in our locality we will know what God wants us to do, and we should then follow His leading.

E. The breastplate is the building up of the Body life and the means for us to know God’s will concerning His people; by much and thorough prayer, we can experience the reality of the breastplate; then we will receive the Lord’s judgment of what we have to do or what we must not do; we will know the Lord’s way, and the whole church will go on according to the judgment given by the Lord.

F. The elders need not only the Bible and the Holy Spirit but also the brothers and sisters as the alphabet; this means that they need to bear the brothers and sisters before God and read the condition of every brother and sister before God; in this way the elders’ meeting will become the watchtower of the church, and the elders will know what God wants them to do and what God’s present will is in the church life.

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

Acts 6:4 But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word.

A. Whether the church is living and fresh and enriched depends on this one thing—that we are being filled continuously with the Spirit; in order to be filled continuously with the Spirit, we need to be those who are willing, empty, and praying—Phil. 2:13; Matt. 5:3, 8; Luke 1:53; Eph. 5:18.

Phil 2:13 For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure.
Matt 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of the heavens.
Matt 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Luke 1:53  The hungry He has filled with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.
Eph 5:18  And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit,

B. The wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill for the noble work of building up the church must be God Himself as the Spirit to us; only the Spirit of God can build His own dwelling place through us—Exo. 31:1-3; Zech. 4:6.
Exo 31:1  And Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,
Exo 31:2  See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.
Exo 31:3  And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom and with understanding and with knowledge and with all kinds of workmanship,
Zech 4:6  And he answered and spoke to me, saying, This is the word of Jehovah to Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says Jehovah of hosts.

C. Because the elders are short of prayer, they are short of the Spirit; it is when we are fully condemned in our prayer under the shining of the light of the Lord’s indwelling presence that we receive wisdom and the real understanding of the Lord concerning the situation, concerning people, and concerning the church.

D. If all the saints in all the churches persevere in prayer, the recovery will be greatly enriched and uplifted; furthermore, the saints will enjoy the Lord, His presence, and His instant and constant anointing; all day long they will enjoy the smile of the Lord’s face, and the living person of Christ will become their experience and enjoyment.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT THROUGH PRAYER

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

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

THE NEED TO BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD

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

THE SPIRIT—GOD REACHING US

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

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

THE BURDEN

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

A WILLING HEART

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

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

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

ABANDONING YOUR NATURAL CAPABILITY

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

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

THE EXAMPLE OF MOSES

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

EMPTYING YOURSELF

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

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

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

**PRAYING CONTINUOUSLY**

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

**SETTING AN EXAMPLE**

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

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

**WILLING, EMPTY, PRAYING**

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

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

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

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

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

I believe we have all had some experience of this. Whenever we have been emptied and are in a prayerful spirit, if we stand up in the church meeting, we are aware, and all the other saints are also aware, that we are living, fresh, and rich. Other times we may stand up and share a lot, but the congregation has the feeling that it is from the old man, that it is empty. When we contact others, we may speak the same word, talk about the same point, but sometimes there is a result, and other times it is lifeless. It is when we are willing and empty and continuously praying that we have the wisdom to work in the divine nature and to minister to the needy ones the very Christ they need, not just to minister in a general way.

FELLOWSHIP OR DISCUSSION?

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

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

SHORT OF PRAYER—SHORT OF THE SPIRIT

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

The Christian life is a life of prayer. Elders are not extraordinary Christians. To be a proper elder is to be a normal Christian. Many Christians are abnormal. Thus, the elders should set up a normal pattern, giving the saints a normal lead. In this way the church can be built up. Try to practice this, looking to the Lord for His mercy and grace. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1983, vol. 1, “Practical Talks to the Elders,” pp. 71-77)
LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH
(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

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

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

I. “I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God”—1 Tim. 3:15a:

A. What Paul ministered to Timothy was entirely concerning how to conduct himself in the church—1:3-5, 18-19.

1 Tim 3:15a  But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, …

1 Tim 3:16a  And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: …

1 Tim 4:7b  … and exercise yourself unto godliness.

1 Tim 4:8  For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come.

B. The way to conduct ourselves in the church is by becoming one who loves the Word of God—3:15a; cf. John 6:63, 68.

1 Tim 3:15a  But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, …

John 6:63  It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

John 6:68  Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life,

C. Respecting the headship of Christ and bearing the truth are two governing principles that we must follow in order to know how to conduct ourselves in the church life—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15.

Col 2:19  And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God.

Eph 4:15  But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,

D. In order to properly conduct ourselves in the house of God, the church, we need to take care of the healthy teaching—2 Tim. 4:3-4.

2 Tim 4:3  For the time will come when they will not tolerate the healthy teaching; but according to their own lusts they will heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears,
And they will turn away their ear from the truth and will be turned aside to myths.

E. We must live and act in our spirit so that in the church God can be manifested as the living God—John 4:23-24; 1 Cor. 6:17; 1 Tim. 3:15-16.

John 4:23 But an hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truthfulness, for the Father also seeks such to worship Him.

John 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness.

1 Cor 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

1 Tim 3:16 And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.

II. “Confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness”—v. 16a:
A. The important word godliness is used nine times in 1 and 2 Timothy—1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7-8; 6:3, 5-6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5.

1 Tim 2:2 On behalf of kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity.

1 Tim 3:16 And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.

1 Tim 4:7 But the profane and old-womanish myths refuse, and exercise yourself unto godliness.

1 Tim 4:8 For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come.

1 Tim 6:3 If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness,

1 Tim 6:5 Perpetual wranglings of men corrupted in mind and deprived of the truth, supposing godliness to be a means of gain.

1 Tim 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain;

1 Tim 6:11 But you, O man of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, meekness.

2 Tim 3:5 Having an outward form of godliness, though denying its power; from these also turn away.

B. Godliness is a mystery because it is real and living yet invisible—1 Tim. 3:16a; 6:11.

1 Tim 3:16a And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: …

1 Tim 6:11 But you, O man of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, meekness.

C. The full knowledge of the truth is according to godliness—Titus 1:1.

Titus 1:1 Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God's chosen ones and the full knowledge of the truth, which is according to godliness,

D. The truth, the reality, of God’s eternal economy is according to godliness, which is God manifested in man—v. 1; 1 Tim. 3:16a.

Titus 1:1 Paul, a slave of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the faith of God's chosen ones and the full knowledge of the truth, which is according to godliness,

1 Tim 3:16a And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: …

E. Godliness is godlikeness, being like God, expressing God—Col. 1:15; 3:10.

Col 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation,

Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

F. Godliness is not merely an outward matter; the word manifested in 1 Timothy 3:16 indicates that godliness is an inward life with an outward expression.

1 Tim 3:16 And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.
G. As believers in Christ, we should pursue godliness; to pursue godliness is to live a daily life that manifests God—6:11.
   1 Tim 6:11 But you, O man of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, meekness.

H. In order for God to be manifested in the flesh, godliness needs to be expressed in our whole living—1 John 3:2; 2:28.
   1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet been manifested what we will be. We know that if He is manifested, we will be like Him because we will see Him even as He is.
   1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, so that if He is manifested, we may have boldness and not be put to shame from Him at His coming.

I. God’s economy is God coming into us, and godliness is God going out of us—1 Tim. 1:4; 3:16a:
   1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith.
   1 Tim 3:16a And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: ...
   John 4:14 But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water springing up into eternal life.
   John 7:29 I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me.
2. Because godliness is the expression of God, the Christian life should be a life that expresses God and bears God’s likeness in all things—Heb. 1:3; 2 Cor. 3:18.
   Heb 1:3 Who, being the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance and upheld and bearing all things by the word of His power, having made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;
   2 Cor 3:18 But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.
3. First Timothy 2:2 says that we need to lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness; even in small things, we need to lead a life in all godliness, everywhere and in everything.
   1 Tim 2:2 On behalf of kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity.
4. Our church life, our daily life, and our family life are simply God coming in and God going out all day—2 Cor. 13:14; 3:18.
   2 Cor 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
   2 Cor 3:18 But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.

J. The church of the living God is the ultimate mystery of godliness because the proper church life is the corporate manifestation of God in the flesh—1 Tim. 3:15-16; Col. 1:15.
   1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
   1 Tim 3:16 And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.
   Col 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of all creation,

III. “Exercise yourself unto godliness”—1 Tim. 4:7b:
A. The way to conduct ourselves in the church life is to exercise ourselves unto godliness—3:15a; 4:7b; 2:2.
   1 Tim 3:15a But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, …
1 Tim 4:7b … and exercise yourself unto godliness.
1 Tim 2:2 On behalf of kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all godliness and gravity.

B. We all have to exercise our spirit because the mystery of God is with our spirit—Eph. 1:9; 3:3-4, 9; 5:32; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2; 2 Tim. 4:22.

Eph 1:9 Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself.
Eph 3:3 That by revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I have written previously in brief.
Eph 3:4 By which, in reading it, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ,
Eph 3:9 And to enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is, which throughout the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things,
Eph 5:32 This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church.
Col 1:26 The mystery which has been hidden from the ages and from the generations but now has been manifested to His saints;
Col 1:27 To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory,
Col 2:2 That their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love and unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ,
2 Tim 4:22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

C. Our Christian life is a life of godliness, which comes out of God’s dispensing of Himself into us; this depends upon our spirit being fully exercised—2 Cor. 13:14; 2 Tim. 4:22; Philem. 25.

2 Cor 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
2 Tim 4:22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.
Philem 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

D. We need to build up the habit of exercising our spirit—1 Tim. 4:7b; 1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 2:22:

1 Tim 4:7b … and exercise yourself unto godliness.
1 Cor 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.
Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.

1. A godly life issuing from God’s dispensing depends upon the exercise of our spirit—1 Tim. 4:7b; John 4:23-24.

1 Tim 4:7b … and exercise yourself unto godliness.
John 4:23 But an hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truthfulness, for the Father also seeks such to worship Him.
John 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness.

2. If we do not exercise our spirit strongly to cooperate with the Lord, God cannot dispense Himself into us—2 Cor. 13:14; 1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 8:4, 9.

2 Cor 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
1 Cor 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.
Rom 8:4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.
Rom 8:9 But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Yet if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him.

E. The word exercise implies forcing—1 Tim. 4:7b:

1 Tim 4:7b … and exercise yourself unto godliness.

1. To exercise is always a forced matter.
2. Whenever we are in a hard situation, we have to force ourselves to exercise our spirit—cf. Rom. 8:28.

Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
3. If we Christians want to be strong and grow in the Lord, we must force ourselves to use our spirit—2 Tim. 4:22; Rev. 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10; Rom. 8:16.

2 Tim 4:22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.
Rev 1:10 I was in spirit on the Lord's Day and heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,
Rev 4:2 Immediately I was in spirit; and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and upon the throne there was One sitting;
Rev 17:3 And he carried me away in spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.
Rev 21:10 And he carried me away in spirit onto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,
Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.

F. To exercise our spirit is to set our mind on the spirit—v. 6; Mal. 2:15-16:

Rom 8:6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace.
Mal 2:15 But did He not make them one? And the remnant of the Spirit was His. And why the one? He sought the seed of God. Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one be treacherous to the wife of his youth.
Mal 2:16 For I hate divorce, says Jehovah the God of Israel; and he who does it behaves in violence, says Jehovah of hosts. Take heed then to your spirit, and do not be treacherous.

1. When we set our mind on the spirit, we have the inner sense of life and peace, the sense of strength, satisfaction, rest, release, liveliness, watering, brightness, and comfort.

2. When we set our mind on the flesh, we have the inner sense of death, the sense of weakness, emptiness, uneasiness, restlessness, depression, dryness, darkness, and pain.

3. Our Christian life is not according to the standard of right and wrong but according to the spirit, and we know the spirit by the inner sense of life and peace—Rom. 8:6, 16; 9:1; 2 Cor. 13:14.

Rom 8:6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace.
Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.
Rom 9:1 I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit,
2 Cor 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

G. To exercise our spirit is to discern our spirit from our soul—Heb. 4:12:

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

1. We should always be on the alert to discern and deny anything that is not of the spirit but of the soul, the self—Matt. 16:25; cf. Luke 9:25.

Matt 16:25 For whoever wants to save his soul-life shall lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it.
Luke 9:25 For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world but loses or forfeits himself?

2. All the time we need to keep our spirit separate from our soul—Heb. 4:12; 1 Thes. 5:23.

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and operative and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
1 Thes 5:23 And the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The enemy’s strategy is always to mix our spirit with our soul.
4. Whatever we are, whatever we have, and whatever we do must be in the spirit; everything that God is to us is in our spirit—2 Tim. 4:22.

2 Tim 4:22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

H. In order to prove that the exercise unto godliness is the exercise of the spirit, we need to go to 2 Timothy, where Paul says that God has given us a spirit that is strong, loving, and sober; such a spirit is with a strong will, a loving emotion, and a sober mind—I:7:

2 Tim 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.

1. The word spirit in 2 Timothy 1:7 denotes our human spirit, regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit—John 3:6; Rom. 8:16.

2 Tim 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.

John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.

2. To fan into flame the gift of God is related to our regenerated spirit—2 Tim. 1:6.

2 Tim 1:6 For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

3. Of power refers to our will, of love to our emotion, and of sobermindedness to our mind—v. 7.

2 Tim 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.

I. To exercise ourselves unto godliness is to exercise our spirit to live Christ in our daily life for the building up of the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 4:7b; Eph. 2:20-22; 4:12, 16; 1 Cor. 14:4, 12.

1 Tim 4:7b ... and exercise yourself unto godliness.

Eph 2:20 Being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone:

Eph 2:21 In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord:

Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.

Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ,

Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

1 Cor 14:4 He who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but he who prophesies builds up the church.

1 Cor 14:12 So also you, since you are zealous of spirits, seek that you may excel for the building up of the church.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE EXERCISE OF OUR SPIRIT

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

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

Proverbs 20:27 says that our spirit is the lamp of the Lord, searching all our inward parts. This shows that within man there is something of God, and this is man's spirit to be God's lamp. Of course, in the lamp is the light, so here the implication is very meaningful. Within man there is such a lamp, but the lamp needs the light, and the light is God. What man has is just an empty lamp. The lamp needs the light to shine. This shows that God as the light has something in man as His vessel to contain Him and to express Him, just as the lamp contains the light and expresses it.
The second point we have to stress is that this lamp of God, which is our spirit, searches all our inward parts. No doubt, this is altogether the inward searching, not the outward rebuking or instruction. We should help the saints realize how significant the human spirit is. Proverbs 20:27 can be used to impress the saints so that they can see how man’s spirit is so close to God and is something of God within man. This is a strong point. The human spirit is God’s vessel to contain God and to express God. Every lamp serves these two purposes. The lamp serves to contain the light and to express it. Then it works. When it works, it enlightens, it shines, and it searches.

**OUR SPIRIT BEING THE HIDDEN MAN OF THE HEART**

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

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

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

**OUR REGENERATED SPIRIT BEING OUR INNER MAN**

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

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

**OUR SPIRIT NEEDING TO BE STIRRED UP**

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

**OUR SPIRIT NEEDING TO BE BURNING**

Our spirit needs to be burning. Romans 12:11 charges us to be burning in spirit, and Acts 18:25 tells us that Apollos was fervent, burning, in spirit.
OUR SPIRIT INDWELT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT
NEEDING TO BE THE FACULTY OF OUR PRAYER

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

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

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

OUR SPIRIT NEEDING TO BE THE MEANS OF OUR WORSHIP

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

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

Our meetings need to be full of the exercise of the spirit. When we come together to meet, before singing, before praying, before reading, before doing anything, all of us should exercise our spirit. There should be such a worshipping spirit in all our meetings. Many times the elders exercise their spirit to open the meeting. Then they stir up others’ spirit. This is not the best situation. All the saints must rise up to exercise their spirit. We have to help the saints to realize that we need to use our spirit to worship. Our spirit needs to worship God directly apart from merely depending upon singing, reading, or praying in a formal way.

OUR SPIRIT NEEDING TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ENJOYING THE LORD

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

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

OUR SPIRIT KNOWING THE THINGS OF A MAN

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

PERCEIVING THINGS IN OUR SPIRIT

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

PURPOSING IN OUR SPIRIT

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

JUDGING A PERSON IN OUR SPIRIT

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

BEING A PERSON IN OUR SPIRIT

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

EXERCISING OUR SPIRIT BY DOING THE ABOVEMENTIONED THINGS

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

## A Good Minister of Christ

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

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1 Tim 4:7</td>
<td>But the profane and old-womanish myths refuse, and exercise yourself unto godliness.</td>
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<td>1 Tim 4:8</td>
<td>For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come.</td>
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<td>1 Tim 4:15</td>
<td>Practice these things; be in them, that your progress may be manifest to all.</td>
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<td>1 Tim 4:16</td>
<td>Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things; for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.</td>
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<td>Ezek 3:1</td>
<td>Then He said to me, Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.</td>
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<td>Ezek 3:2</td>
<td>So I opened my mouth, and He gave me that scroll to eat.</td>
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<td>Ezek 3:3</td>
<td>And He said to me, Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your inward parts with this scroll that I am giving you. And I ate it, and it was like honey in my mouth in its sweetness.</td>
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<td>Rom 15:6</td>
<td>That with one accord you may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.</td>
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<td>S. S. 4:11</td>
<td>Your lips drip fresh honey, my bride; / Honey and milk are under your tongue; / And the fragrance of your garments / Is like the fragrance of Lebanon.</td>
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**I. First Timothy 4:6 says, “If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed”:**

A. A good minister of Christ is one who serves people with Christ, ministering Christ as Savior, life, life supply, and every positive thing to people.

B. If we would minister Christ to others, we ourselves must be nourished; a good minister of Christ does not merely teach others about Christ but ministers Christ into others as food—Matt. 4:4; Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 3:1-4; John 6:57, 63.

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<td>But He answered and said, It is written, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out through the mouth of God.”</td>
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<td>Jer 15:16</td>
<td>Your words were found and I ate them, / And Your word became to me / The gladness and joy of my heart, / For I am called by Your name, / O Jehovah, God of hosts.</td>
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<td>John 6:57</td>
<td>As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.</td>
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<td>John 6:63</td>
<td>It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.</td>
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C. We need to lay before the saints the things with which we have been nourished by the Lord through the ministry; we need to present the saints with the riches, the grocories, the Lord has shown us from the Word; let us first be nourished ourselves and then minister this nourishment to all the people of God.

D. We need to minister the riches of Christ as spiritual food to others that they may be nourished and grow in life; the word of God is likened to milk and solid food, which are for nourishment—Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Pet. 2:2:

Heb 5:12 For when because of the time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you what the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God are and have become those who have need of milk and not of solid food.

Heb 5:13 For everyone who partakes of milk is inexperienced in the word of righteousness, for he is an infant;

Heb 5:14 But solid food is for the full-grown, who because of practice have their faculties exercised for discriminating between both good and evil.

1 Cor 2:2 For I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified.

1 Pet 2:2 As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word in order that by it you may grow unto salvation.

1. The words of the faith are the words of the full gospel concerning God’s New Testament economy.

2. The words of the good teaching are the sweet words that contain and convey the riches of Christ to nourish, edify, and strengthen His believers.

E. As members of the one Body of Christ, we should aspire to be good ministers of Christ who “speak the same thing” (1 Cor. 1:10) “with one accord” and “with one mouth” (Rom. 15:6):

1 Cor 1:10 Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion.

Rom 15:6 That with one accord you may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. “We have to learn the high peaks of God’s present revelation and learn to speak these things...I would encourage all of us to pick up this high commission: to go out with...God’s up-to-date vision to move with God for His high peaks of the divine revelation that will consummate His eternal economy”—The Triune God’s Revelation and His Move, p. 98.

2. The saints who have been raised up by the Lord’s up-to-date ministry have a taste for this ministry, and this taste is the controlling factor in the Lord’s recovery; those who have been raised up by this ministry will reject a taste that is contrary to it; this means that if you speak something contrary to the taste of the Lord’s recovery, your speaking will be rejected, and you will suffer loss—cf. Psa. 34:8; 1 Pet. 2:3.

Psa 34:8 Taste and see that Jehovah is good; / Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him.

1 Pet 2:3 If you have tasted that the Lord is good.

II. A good minister of Christ sacrifices himself and puts himself aside in order to keep the absoluteness of the truth; the truth cannot be entrusted to a person who walks according to his feelings; a man must stand on the side of the truth to oppose himself:

A. The condition of an individual has nothing to do with God’s truth; what you are personally cannot affect what God’s truth is, because the truth is like an immovable pillar—1 Tim. 3:15.

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
B. Some people lower down the truth a little when they are wrong, and they lift up the truth a little when they are right; this means that they are like elevators, and the truth goes up and down with them; only those who have dealt with themselves are able to maintain the truth.

C. If we can take the truth as the unique standard, and we have the courage to admit that we are wrong, new light will come to us; if we do not sacrifice the light, the light will uplift us; blessed are those who can go along with the truth.

D. On the one hand, a man cannot preach the truth unless he has the experience; on the other hand, a person has to know that the truth has nothing to do with him; if a man is brought to a point that he can no longer withstand God’s word, if he does not sacrifice the word, and if he finds the word condemning him, he will receive the light; this is the secret to receiving revelation.

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

1 Pet 4:10 Each one, as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God.
1 Pet 4:11 If anyone speaks, as speaking oracles of God; if anyone ministers, as ministering out of the strength which God supplies; that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might forever and ever. Amen.
Eph 1:6 To the praise of the glory of His grace, with which He graced us in the Beloved;
1 Thes 2:6 Nor did we seek glory from men, neither from you nor from others, though we could have stood on our authority as apostles of Christ.
John 5:41 I do not receive glory from men.
John 5:44 How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that is from the only God?
2 Cor 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.
Lev 14:9 And on the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair; he shall shave his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair. Then he shall wash his clothes and bathe his flesh in water, and he shall be clean.

note 1 The hair of the head signifies man’s glory in self-display; the beard, man’s self-assumed honor; the eyebrows, man’s excellencies, merits, and virtues issuing from his natural birth; and all the hair of the body, man’s natural strength and ability. The shaving off of all the hair and the bathing in water equal getting rid of the self with all its glory, honor, excellencies, merits, virtues, strength, and ability through the “razor” of the cross. When we have nothing and are nothing, we shall be clean (cf. Phil. 3:7-11).

1 Cor 10:31 Therefore whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.
Isa 43:7 Everyone who is called by My name, / Whom I have created, formed, and even made for My glory.

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

Gen 2:9 And out of the ground Jehovah God caused to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, as well as the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

John 10:10b ... I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly.
1 Cor 15:45b ... the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit.
2 Cor 3:6 Who has also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
2 Cor 4:10 Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.
2 Cor 4:11 For we who are alive are always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.
2 Cor 4:12 So then death operates in us, but life in you.
1 John 5:12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.
1 John 5:16a If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and he will give life to him, to those sinning not unto death. ...
1 Cor 1:9 God is faithful, through whom you were called 2 into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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

Phil 1:20 According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death.
Phil 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.
Phil 2:2 Make my joy full, that you think the same thing, having the same love, joined in soul, thinking the one thing,
Phil 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,
Phil 3:7 But what things were gains to me, these I have counted as loss on account of Christ.
Phil 3:8 But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ
Phil 3:9 And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith,
Phil 3:10 To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
Phil 3:11 If perhaps I may attain to the out-resurrection from the dead.
Phil 3:12 Not that I have already obtained or am already perfected, but I pursue, if even I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.
Phil 3:13 Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before,
Phil 3:14 I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward.
Phil 4:13 I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me.

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

Exo 3:8 And I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites.

A. Honey is sweet, and it restores the weak and stricken ones (Psa. 119:103); milk feeds the immature ones (1 Pet. 2:2).
Psa 119:103 How sweet are Your words to my taste! / Sweeter than honey to my mouth!
1 Pet 2:2  As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word in order that by it you may grow unto salvation,

B. The sweetness of honey and the nourishing milk under the tongue of the Lord’s loving seeker indicate that she has stored up the riches of the Lord as her spiritual food; she has stored so many riches within her that food seems to be under her tongue, and she can dispense this food to the needy ones at any time—Psa. 119:11; Col. 3:16.

Psa 119:11  In my heart I have treasured up Your word / That I might not sin against You.

Col 3:16  Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.

C. Her indwelling treasure of the Lord’s sweet and nourishing words is not produced overnight; it comes from a long period of gathering, inward activity, and careful storage; this is the unique possession of one who is taught by God with the healthy words of the healthy teaching of God’s economy—1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3.

1 Tim 1:10  For fornicators, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever other thing that is opposed to the healthy teaching,

1 Tim 6:3  If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness,

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

Isa 1:1  The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, the kings of Judah:

Isa 2:1  The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

Isa 13:1  The burden concerning Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw:

Isa 15:1  The burden concerning Moab: Indeed in a night it is devastated

Zech 12:1  The burden of the word of Jehovah concerning Israel. Thus declares Jehovah, who stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him,

Mal 1:1  The burden of the word of Jehovah to Israel through Malachi.

 Acts 6:4  But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word.

1 Cor 14:4b  ... but he who prophesies builds up the church.

A. Our burden is to release God’s revelation to man, and God’s revelation is released through the words of revelation that God gives to us—2:11-16.

1 Cor 2:11  For who among men knows the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him? In the same way, the things of God also no one has known except the Spirit of God.

1 Cor 2:12  But we have received not the spirit of the world but the Spirit which is from God, that we may know the things which have been graciously given to us by God;

1 Cor 2:13  Which things also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things with spiritual words.

1 Cor 2:14  But a soulish man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he is not able to know them because they are discerned spiritually.

1 Cor 2:15  But the spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no one.

1 Cor 2:16  For who has known the mind of the Lord and will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

B. When we minister the word of God, our concern must be whether we have God’s speaking, not the topic of our speaking; in order to have God’s speaking, the one who ministers the word must have a burden—Mal. 2:7; S. S. 8:13-14; Eph. 5:26-27.

Mal 2:7  For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of Jehovah of hosts.

S. S. 8:13  O you who dwell in the gardens, / My companions listen for your voice; / Let me hear it.
S. S. 8:14 Make haste, my beloved, / And be like a gazelle or a young hart / Upon the mountains of spices.

Eph 5:26 That He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word,
Eph 5:27 That He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she would be holy and without blemish.

C. Those who minister the word must bear people’s condition before God, sense their condition, and know what God wants to speak—Exo. 28:29-30.

Exo 28:29 So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastplate of judgment on his heart when he goes into the sanctuary, for a memorial before Jehovah continually.
Exo 28:30 And you shall put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be on Aaron’s heart when he goes in before Jehovah, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before Jehovah continually.

D. The greatest problem in the ministry of the word is not having a burden from the Lord; without a burden, all our activity will be dead and ineffective; with a burden, we will be living and flourishing:
1. Having a burden deals with us the most; if there is a burden, the self decreases and is dealt with, because there are things that our burden will not allow us to do, and there are areas that will require our being dealt with before we can release our burden.
2. If we serve according to obligation instead of serving with a burden, such service will cause us to lose the Lord’s presence—Mal. 3:14; Deut. 4:25.

Mal 3:14 You say, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge and have walked mournfully before Jehovah of hosts?
Deut 4:25 When you have brought forth children and grandchildren and have languished in the land, and you have spoiled yourselves by making an idol, the form of anything, and have done that which is evil in the sight of Jehovah your God so as to anger Him;

3. Whenever our service becomes a matter of fulfilling an obligation, our service has already degraded.

VIII. In order to be a good minister of Christ, we must aspire to have the following organic characteristics:
A. We must love the Lord to the uttermost to be filled with Him and overflow Him into others with the resurrected Christ as our authority—Psa. 18:1; 91:14; 97:10; 116:1-2; 119:140; John 21:15-17; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 John 4:16, 19; Num. 17:1-10; Matt. 19:26.

Psa 18:1 I love You, O Jehovah, my strength.
Psa 91:14 Because He has set His love upon Me, I will rescue Him; / I will set Him on high, because He has known My name.
Psa 97:10 O you who love Jehovah, hate evil! / He preserves the souls of His faithful ones; / He delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
Psa 116:1 I love Jehovah because He hears / My voice, my supplications,
Psa 116:2 Because He inclines His ear to me; / Therefore I will call upon Him all my days.
Psa 119:140 Your word is very pure, / And Your servant loves it.

John 21:15 Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.
John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep.
John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.

2 Cor 5:14 For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died;
2 Cor 5:15 And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised.
1 John 4:16 And 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.
1 John 4:19  We love because He first loved us.
Num 17:1  Then Jehovah spoke to Moses, saying,
Num 17:2  Speak to the children of Israel, and take from them rods, one for each father’s house, twelve rods from all their leaders according to their fathers’ houses; you shall write everyone’s name upon his rod.
Num 17:3  And you shall write Aaron’s name upon the rod of Levi, for there shall be one rod for the head of each of their fathers’ houses.
Num 17:4  And you shall place them in the Tent of Meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you.
Num 17:5  And the rod of the man whom I choose shall bud, and I will put a stop to the murmurings of the children of Israel against Me, which they murmur against you.
Num 17:6  So Moses spoke to the children of Israel. And every one of their leaders gave him a rod, one rod for each leader according to their fathers’ houses, twelve rods, with the rod of Aaron among their rods.
Num 17:7  And Moses placed the rods before Jehovah in the Tent of the Testimony.
Num 17:8  And on the next day Moses went into the Tent of the Testimony, and there was the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi; it had budded; it even put forth buds and produced blossoms and bore ripe almonds.
Num 17:9  And Moses brought out all the rods from before Jehovah to all the children of Israel, and they looked; and each one took his rod.
Num 17:10  Then Jehovah said to Moses, Put back the rod of Aaron before the Testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels, so that you may put an end to their murmurings against Me, and they not die.
Matt 19:26  And looking upon them, Jesus said to them, With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.


Rev 3:18  I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined by fire that you may be rich, and white garments that you may be clothed and that the shame of your nakedness may not be manifested, and eyesalve to anoint your eyes that you may see.
Rev 3:19  As many as I love I rebuke and discipline; be zealous therefore and repent.
Rev 3:20  Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me.
Rev 3:21  He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne.
Rev 3:22  He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
Hosea 6:1  Come and let us return to Jehovah; / For He has torn us, but He will heal us, / And He has stricken us, but He will bind us up.
Hosea 6:2  He will enliven us after two days; / On the third day He will raise us up, / And we will live in His presence.
Hosea 6:3  Therefore let us know, let us pursue knowing Jehovah; / His going forth is as sure as the dawn, / And He will come to us as the rain, / As the late rain which waters the earth.
Rom 6:4  We have been buried therefore with Him through baptism into His death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life.
Rom 7:6  But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter.
1 Pet 2:25  For you were like sheep being led astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.
1 Pet 5:1  Therefore the elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory to be revealed;
1 Pet 5:2  Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly;
1 Pet 5:3  Nor as lording it over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock.
1 Pet 5:4  And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

C. We must abide in the fellowship with the Lord daily and hourly—1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14.
1 Cor 1:9  God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
2 Cor 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

D. We must be praying persons—Col. 4:2; Gen. 4:26; Lam. 3:55-56; Rom. 10:12-13.
  Col 4:2 Persevere in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving.
  Gen 4:26 And to Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time men began to call upon the name of Jehovah.
  Lam 3:55 I called upon Your name, O Jehovah, / From the lowest pit.
  Lam 3:56 You have heard my voice; do not hide / Your ear at my breathing, at my cry.
  Rom 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all and rich to all who call upon Him;
  Rom 10:13 For "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

E. We must enjoy the Lord in the Word early in the morning to have a new start of each day—Psa. 119:147-148.
  Psa 119:147 I anticipated the dawn and cried out; / I hoped in Your words.
  Psa 119:148 My eyes anticipated the night watches, / That I might muse upon Your word.

F. We must walk by and according to our spirit, which is mingled with the divine Spirit—Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4, 16; 1 Cor. 6:17.
  Gal 5:16 But I say, Walk by the Spirit and you shall by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh.
  Gal 5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.
  Rom 8:4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.
  Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.
  1 Cor 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

G. We must live Christ for His magnification by the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ—Phil. 1:19.
  Phil 1:19 For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

H. We must build up a habit of speaking Christ to all kinds of people daily in season and out of season—Acts 5:42; 8:4; 2 Tim. 4:2.
  Acts 5:42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and announcing the gospel of Jesus as the Christ.
  Acts 8:4 Those therefore who were scattered went throughout the land announcing the word as the gospel.
  2 Tim 4:2 Proclaim the word; be ready in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching.

I. We must be ones who deal with our sins thoroughly—1 John 1:7, 9; Psa. 51:1-9, 17.
  1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin.
  1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
  Psa 51:1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; / According to the greatness of Your compassions blot out my transgressions.
  Psa 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, / And from my sin cleanse me.
  Psa 51:3 For I do know my transgressions, / And my sin is before me continually.
  Psa 51:4 Against You and You alone have I sinned, / And I have done what is evil in Your sight. / Therefore You are righteous when You speak; / You are clear when You judge.
  Psa 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, / And in sin did my mother conceive me.
  Psa 51:6 Behold, You delight in truth in the inward parts; / And in the hidden part You would make known wisdom to me.
  Psa 51:7 Purge my sin with hyssop, and I will be clean; / Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
  Psa 51:8 Let me hear gladness and joy, / That the bones which You have broken may exult.
  Psa 51:9 Hide Your face from my sins, / And blot out all my iniquities.
  Psa 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; / A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

J. We must be filled with the essential Spirit inwardly and with the economical Spirit outwardly—Acts 13:52; Eph. 5:18; Acts 4:31, 8; 13:9.
  Acts 13:52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.
Eph 5:18  And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissoluteness, but be filled in spirit,
Acts 4:31 And when they had so besought, the place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.
Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, Rulers of the people and elders,
Acts 13:9 But Saul, who is also Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him.

K. We must accumulate the experiences of Christ (Phil. 3:8-10, 12-14) and keep a rich storage of the Lord’s word (Col. 3:16; Psa. 119:11, 15; John 8:31; 15:7; 1 John 2:14).

Phil 3:8 But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ.
Phil 3:9 And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith,
Phil 3:10 To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
Phil 3:12 Not that I have already obtained or am already perfected, but I pursue, if even I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.
Phil 3:13 Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before,
Phil 3:14 I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward.

Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.

Psa 119:11 In my heart I have treasured up Your word / That I might not sin against You.
Psa 119:15 I will muse upon Your precepts / And regard Your ways.
John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples;
John 15:7 If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.
1 John 2:14 I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you and you have overcome the evil one.

IX. Whenever we minister God’s word, the primary thing is for us to exercise our spirit; a good minister of Christ builds up a habit of exercising his spirit unto godliness to live Christ in his daily life—1 Tim. 4:6-8, 15-16; 2 Tim. 1:6-7; Rom. 1:9; 7:6; 12:11; John 4:23-24:

1 Tim 4:6 If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed.
1 Tim 4:7 But the profane and old-womanish myths refuse, and exercise yourself unto godliness.
1 Tim 4:8 For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come.
1 Tim 4:15 Practice these things; be in them, that your progress may be manifest to all.
1 Tim 4:16 Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things; for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.
2 Tim 1:6 For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.
2 Tim 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.
Rom 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers.
Rom 7:6 But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter.
Rom 12:11 Do not be slothful in zeal, but be burning in spirit, serving the Lord.
John 4:23  But an hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truthfulness, for the Father also seeks such to worship Him.

John 4:24  God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness.

A. We saved ones have the capital to live the Christian life and the church life; this capital is our God-given spirit—2 Tim. 1:6-7; 4:22.
   2 Tim 1:6  For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.
   2 Tim 1:7  For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.
   2 Tim 4:22  The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

B. Godliness, a living that is the expression of God, is the issue of the divine dispensing for the divine economy, and this dispensing depends on the exercise of our spirit to live Christ in our daily life for the corporate manifestation of God in the church life—1 Tim. 1:3-4; 3:15-16; 4:7-8; 2 Tim. 1:6-7; Hymns, #493, stanza 5.
   1 Tim 1:3  Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things
   1 Tim 1:4  Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith.
   1 Tim 3:15  But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
   1 Tim 3:16  And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.
   1 Tim 4:7  But the profane and old-womanish myths refuse, and exercise yourself unto godliness.
   1 Tim 4:8  For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come.
   2 Tim 1:6  For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.
   2 Tim 1:7  For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.

Hymns, #493, stanza 5
   Lord, teach me how to exercise
   That in Thy Spirit I may walk
   My spirit now to contact Thee,
   And live by Thy reality.

C. The word exercise implies forcing; if we Christians want to be strong and want to grow in the Lord, we must force ourselves to use our spirit until we build up a strong habit of exercising our spirit—1 Tim. 4:7.
   1 Tim 4:7  But the profane and old-womanish myths refuse, and exercise yourself unto godliness.

D. We must exercise our spirit to employ and enjoy the entire blessed Trinity by praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ in the day of His victorious appearing so that we may become the totality of the eternal life, the New Jerusalem—Jude 19-21.
   Jude 19  These are those who make divisions, soulish, having no spirit.
   Jude 20  But you, beloved, building up yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,
   Jude 21  Keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

A GOOD MINISTER OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 4:6-16

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

**LAYING THESE THINGS BEFORE THE BROTHERS**

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

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

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

Throughout the years my aim in the ministry has been to nourish the saints. No doubt I have passed on a good deal of knowledge. But I can testify that in every message, I exercise my spirit not just to pass on knowledge but, while I am giving forth a certain kind of knowledge, to supply something nourishing to the Lord’s people. My desire is to minister the riches of Christ as food that the saints may be nourished. Recently, many have written me letters telling how they have been richly fed with Christ through the messages.

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

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

At this point, I would like to say a word concerning my burden in putting out the Lifestudy messages. The aim of these messages is to produce groceries for the local churches. My burden is not mainly to “cook” these spiritual groceries; it is to produce them and supply them to the churches that every local church may be a well-stocked supermarket, filled with a variety of nourishing foods. If the leading ones in a local church lay before the saints the riches contained in the Life-studies, the saints will be abundantly nourished. I have received many letters testifying that this has happened.
It is a fact of history in the Lord’s recovery that any church that follows the ministry is strong and blessed. But those churches that neglect the ministry and try instead to do something on their own have become a failure. However, in saying these things, I wish to make it very clear that I by no means insist that the churches or the saints read the Life-study messages. To repeat, my burden is to produce groceries. The churches and the saints are free either to use them or to disregard them. But if the saints cast away the nourishment found in these messages, I wonder what they will feed on. We are what we eat. If we eat the “groceries” produced in today’s religion, we will be part of religion. Let me say in frankness and honesty that the leading ones need to take “these things” and lay them before the saints that they may be nourished.

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

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

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

BEING NOURISHED

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

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

REFUSING PROFANE AND OLD-WOMANISH MYTHS

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

EXERCISING UNTO GODLINESS

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

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

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

Once again, I would urge you to refuse all profane and old-womanish myths. Even talk about doctrines such as eternal security can be nothing more than an old-womanish myth. People may come to us after a meeting and say, “I have been to the meetings of the church a number of times. But I have not yet heard a message on eternal security. What do you think about this?” Others may want to discuss the seventh-day Sabbath. This also is to talk of old-womanish myths.

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

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

THE FIRST PROBLEM—NOT HAVING A BURDEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Being Desperate for People’s Situation to Preach the Effective Word**

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

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

When Brother Nee began his work in Foochow, he fasted and prayed every Saturday for the gospel meeting on the Lord’s Day. He considered before the Lord what to speak and how to speak. He considered what word the sinners needed to hear. Since he fasted and prayed with a heavy burden, his words were always very effective and were later published as messages. Many who are used by the Lord bear a burden in their ministry of the word. When Peace Wang was young, she had a successful revival work. She always knelt before the Lord and spent a long period of time weeping and grieving for sinners. Therefore, when she stood up to speak, her words were always living and operative.

**Serving with a Burden**

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

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

**Discerning between the Service of Responsibility and the Service of Burden**

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

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

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

Serving with a Burden Causing the Self to Be Dealt With

Children will never be successful in their studies if they study only for their tests. If they have a burden, their studying will change. A brother may give a message merely out of obligation, because it is his turn to speak. However, giving messages is not a matter of obligation but of burden. We may speak for half a year, but those who listen might not receive anything, and our speaking will be in vain. If we have a burden, our messages will not be ineffective. Our messages should “trouble” people so that they have no peace, and they are stirred up to love and serve the Lord. In this situation, our being will be touched by God. There is no need for the self to be dealt with if we give messages that are out of obligation. However, in giving a message out of a burden, our self must be dealt with.

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

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

Everyone Receiving a Burden and Serving the Lord according to Burden

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

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

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

Some say that it is easy to lose their burden after a period of time. However, those who have been shown mercy receive burdens continually. It is a serious problem if our burden disappears after we have worked for some time. However, a Christian can continue to work out of obligation even though he has no burden, because his conscience will bother him if he stops working. Whenever our service becomes a matter of fulfilling an obligation, our service has already degraded. Genuine service is not a matter of obligation but a matter of burden; burden always goes beyond obligation. (The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1957, vol. 2, “The Administration of the Church and the Ministry of the Word,” pp. 233-240)
LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH
(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Seven
The Pattern of the Apostle Paul

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

1 Tim 1:16 But because of this I was shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display all His long-suffering for a pattern to those who are to believe on Him unto eternal life.
1 Tim 4:12 Let no one despise your youth, but be a pattern to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.
1 Thes 2:1 For you yourselves know, brothers, our entrance toward you, that it has not been in vain.
1 Thes 2:2 But having suffered previously and having been outrageously treated, even as you know, in Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much struggle.
1 Thes 2:3 For our exhortation is not out of deception nor out of uncleanness nor in guile;
1 Thes 2:4 But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who proves our hearts.
1 Thes 2:5 For neither were we found at any time with flattering speech, even as you know, nor with a pretext for covetousness; God is witness.
1 Thes 2:6 Nor did we seek glory from men, neither from you nor from others, though we could have stood on our authority as apostles of Christ.
1 Thes 2:7 But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.
1 Thes 2:8 Yearning in this way over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us.
1 Thes 2:9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and travail: While working night and day so as not to be burdensome to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
1 Thes 2:10 You are witnesses, as well as God, how in a holy and righteous and blameless manner we conducted ourselves toward you who believe,
1 Thes 2:11 Just as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father to his own children, exhorting you and consoling you and testifying,
1 Thes 2:12 So that you might walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

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

1 Tim 1:16 But because of this I was shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display all His long-suffering for a pattern to those who are to believe on Him unto eternal life.
1 Tim 4:12 Let no one despise your youth, but be a pattern to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.
Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.
Phil 1:19 For I know that for this me will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,
Phil 1:20 According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death.
Phil 1:21a For to me, to live is Christ …
Phil 1:25 And being confident of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of the faith.
2 Cor 3:3 Since you are being manifested that you are a letter of Christ ministered by us, inscribed not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone but in tablets of hearts of flesh.
2 Cor 3:6 Who has also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

A. The Lord appeared to Paul to appoint him as a minister and a witness both of the things in which Paul had seen Him and of the things in which He would appear to Paul—Acts 26:16-
Acts 26:16 But rise up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me and of the things in which I will appear to you;

Acts 26:17 Delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I send you,

Acts 26:18 To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.

Acts 26:19 Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,

Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Acts 23:11 But in the night following, the Lord stood by him and said, Take courage, for as you have solemnly testified to the things concerning Me in Jerusalem, so also you must testify in Rome.

Acts 20:20 How I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house,

Acts 20:31 Therefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.

1. Paul lived a life that was fully dignified, with the highest standard of human virtues expressing the most excellent divine attributes, a life that resembled the one that the Lord Himself had lived on the earth years before—Eph. 4:20-21; Phil. 4:5-8, 11-13.

   Eph 4:20 But you did not so learn Christ,
   Eph 4:21 If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him as the reality is in Jesus,
   Phil 4:5 Let your forbearance be known to all men. The Lord is near,
   Phil 4:6 In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;
   Phil 4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses every man's understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus,
   Phil 4:8 Finally, brothers, what things are true, what things are dignified, what things are righteous, what things are pure, what things are lovely, what things are well spoken of, if there is any virtue and if any praise, take account of these things.
   Phil 4:11 Not that I speak according to lack, for I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content.
   Phil 4:12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to lack.
   Phil 4:13 I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me.

2. The wonderful, excellent, and mysterious God-man, who lived in the Gospels, continued to live through Paul as one of His many members; Paul was a living witness of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and God-exalted Christ—Acts 1:8; Phil. 2:2, 5; 1:8; 2:13; Acts 27:22, 24-25; 28:3-9, see footnote 1 on v. 9.

   Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.
   Phil 2:2 Make my joy full, that you think the same thing, having the same love, joined in soul, thinking the one thing,
   Phil 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,
   Phil 1:8 For God is my witness how I long after you all in the inward parts of Christ Jesus.
   Phil 2:13 For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure.
   Acts 27:22 And now I advise you to cheer up, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.
   Acts 27:24 Saying, Do not fear, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.
Acts 27:25 Therefore, cheer up, men, for I believe God that it shall be so, even in the way in which it has been spoken to me.
Acts 28:3 But when Paul had collected a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened onto his hand.
Acts 28:4 And when the natives saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to one another, Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, whom, though he has been brought safely out of the sea, Justice has not allowed to live.
Acts 28:5 However he shook off the snake into the fire and suffered no harm;
Acts 28:6 And they expected that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited for a long time and beheld nothing unusual happening to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.
Acts 28:7 Now in the vicinity of that place were the lands of the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and gave us hospitality three days in a friendly way.
Acts 28:8 And the father of Publius was lying down sick with fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him, and having prayed and laid his hands on him, healed him.
Acts 28:9 And when this happened, the rest also in the island who had sicknesses came to him and were healed.

note 1 On the sea in the storm, the Lord had made the apostle not only the owner of his fellow voyagers (27:24) but also their life-guarantor and comforter (27:22, 25). Now, on the land in peace, the Lord made him furthermore not only a magical attraction in the eyes of the superstitious people (vv. 3-6) but also a healer and a joy to them (vv. 8-9). All during the apostle's long and unfortunate imprisonment voyage, the Lord kept the apostle in His ascendancy and enabled him to live a life far beyond the realm of anxiety. This life was fully dignified, with the highest standard of human virtues expressing the most excellent divine attributes, a life that resembled the one that the Lord Himself had lived on the earth years before. This was Jesus living again on the earth in His divinely enriched humanity! This was the wonderful, excellent, and mysterious God-man, who lived in the Gospels, continuing to live in the Acts through one of His many members! This was a living witness of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and God-exalted Christ! Paul in his voyage lived and magnified Christ (Phil. 1:20-21). It is no wonder that the people honored him and his companions with many honors (v. 10), that is, with the greatest respect and highest regard! An ambassador sent by God should be treated by men with such respect and regard.

B. Paul took Christ as everything—as his living, pattern, goal, and secret—Phil. 1:19-21a; 2:5-16; 3:7-14; 4:11-13.

Phil 1:19 For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,
Phil 1:20 According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death.
Phil 1:21a For to me, to live is Christ ...
Phil 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,
Phil 2:6 Who, existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God a treasure to be grasped,
Phil 2:7 But emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men;
Phil 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross.
Phil 2:9 Therefore also God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,
Phil 2:10 That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
Phil 2:11 And every tongue should openly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.
Phil 2:12 So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;
Phil 2:13 For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure.

Phil 2:14 Do all things without murmurings and reasonings

Phil 2:15 That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world.

Phil 2:16 Holding forth the word of life, so that I may have a boast in the day of Christ that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain.

Phil 3:7 But what things were gains to me, these I have counted as loss on account of Christ.

Phil 3:8 But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ

Phil 3:9 And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith,

Phil 3:10 To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Phil 3:11 If perhaps I may attain to the out-resurrection from the dead.

Phil 3:12 Not that I have already obtained or am already perfected, but I pursue, if even I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Phil 3:13 Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before,

Phil 3:14 I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward.

Phil 4:11 Not that I speak according to lack, for I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content.

Phil 4:12 If anything is needed, I know both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to lack.

Phil 4:13 I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me.

C. Paul was infused with God to shine forth God in the ministry of the new covenant, which is the ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of righteousness, and the ministry of reconciliation—2 Cor. 3:18; 4:1; 3:6, 8-9; 5:18-20.

2 Cor 3:18 But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.

2 Cor 4:1 Therefore having this ministry as we have been shown mercy, we do not lose heart;

2 Cor 3:6 Who has also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

2 Cor 3:8 How shall the ministry of the Spirit not be more in glory?

2 Cor 3:9 For if there is glory with the ministry of condemnation, much more the ministry of righteousness abounds with glory.

2 Cor 5:18 But all things are out from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

2 Cor 5:19 Namely, that God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them, and has put in us the word of reconciliation.

2 Cor 5:20 On behalf of Christ then we are ambassadors, as God entreats you through us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God.

D. Because Paul was a pattern to the believers (1 Tim. 1:16), he could charge Timothy to be a pattern “in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (4:12).

1 Tim 1:16 But because of this I was shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display all His long-suffering for a pattern to those who are to believe on Him unto eternal life.

1 Tim 4:12 Let no one despise your youth, but be a pattern to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

E. Paul is our pattern in his being an ambassador of Christ (Eph. 6:20; 2 Cor. 5:18-20) with the following qualifications:

Eph 6:20 For which I am an ambassador in a chain, that in it I would speak boldly, as I ought to speak.
2 Cor 5:18 But all things are out from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation;
2 Cor 5:19 Namely, that God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them, and has put in us the word of reconciliation.
2 Cor 5:20 On behalf of Christ then we are ambassadors, as God entreats you through us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God.

1. He did not live by what he was or could do but by the immortal life, which is Christ Himself—v. 4; John 14:6; Col. 3:4; Gal. 2:20.

2. For also, we who are in this tabernacle groan, being burdened, in that we do not desire to be unclothed, but clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

3. Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.

4. When Christ our life is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory.

1 Cor 5:9 I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

1 Cor 5:15 So then we, from now on, know no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer.

2 Cor 5:16 So then if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, they have become new.

Gal 6:15 For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation is what matters.

2. He was determined to gain the honor of being well pleasing to Christ in all things—living Christ, growing Christ, expressing Christ, and propagating Christ in every respect—2 Cor. 5:9; Col. 1:10.

3. To walk worthy of the Lord to please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work and growing by the full knowledge of God.

4. For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died;

1 Cor 5:15 And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised.

1 Cor 5:16 So then if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, they have become new.

Gal 6:15 For neither is circumcision anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation is what matters.

F. Paul is our pattern by living and serving God in his regenerated spirit by the indwelling Christ, the life-giving Spirit, not in his soul by the power and ability of the soul; he was a spiritual man who sowed unto the Spirit to bear the fruit of the Spirit—Rom. 1:9; 7:6; 8:4, 16; Gal. 3:3; 5:16, 22-25; 6:8; 2 Cor. 4:5; 1 Cor. 2:15; 2 Cor. 2:13.

Rom 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers,

Rom 7:6 But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter.

Rom 8:4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.

Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.

Gal 3:3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Gal 5:16 But I say, Walk by the Spirit and you shall by no means fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
Gal 5:23 Meekness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
Gal 5:24 But they who are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and its lusts.
Gal 5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.
Gal 6:8 For he who sows unto his own flesh will reap corruption of the flesh, but he who sows unto the Spirit will of the Spirit reap eternal life.
2 Cor 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.
1 Cor 2:15 But the spiritual man discerns all things, but he himself is discerned by no one.
2 Cor 2:13 I had no rest in my spirit, for I did not find Titus my brother; but taking leave of them, I went forth into Macedonia.

G. Paul is our pattern in his being Body-conscious and Body-centered, doing everything in the Body, through the Body, and for the Body—Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:1-6, 15-16; Col. 2:19; Acts 28:13-15 and footnote 2 on v. 15.
Rom 12:4 For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function.
Rom 12:5 So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
1 Cor 12:12 For even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is the Christ.
1 Cor 12:13 For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all given to drink one Spirit.
1 Cor 12:14 For the body is not one member but many.
1 Cor 12:15 If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body.
1 Cor 12:16 And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, it is not that because of this it is not of the body.
1 Cor 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were the hearing, where would the smelling be?
1 Cor 12:18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, even as He willed.
1 Cor 12:19 And if all were one member, where would the body be?
1 Cor 12:20 But now the members are many, but the body one.
1 Cor 12:21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.
1 Cor 12:22 But much rather the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.
1 Cor 12:23 And those members of the body which we consider to be less honorable, these we clothe with more abundant honor; and our uncomely members come to have more abundant comeliness,
1 Cor 12:24 But our comely members have no need. But God has blended the body together, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacked,
1 Cor 12:25 That there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same care for one another.
1 Cor 12:26 And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it.
1 Cor 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.
Eph 4:1 I beseech you therefore, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called,
Eph 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing one another in love,
Eph 4:3 Being diligent to keep the oneness of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace:
Eph 4:4 One Body and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling;
Eph 4:5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism;
Eph 4:6 One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
Eph 4:15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,
Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.
Col 2:19  And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God.

Acts 28:13  From there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind came on, and the second day we came to Puteoli,

Acts 28:14  Where, having found brothers, we were urged to remain with them seven days. And thus we came to Rome.

Acts 28:15  And from there the 2 brothers, having heard about the things concerning us, came as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

note 2  The warm welcome of the brothers from Rome and the loving care of those in Puteoli (vv. 13-14) show the beautiful Body life that existed in the early days among the churches and apostles. This life was a part of the heavenly kingdom life on the Satan-darkened and man-inhabited earth. Apparently, the apostle, as a prisoner in bonds, had entered the region of the dark capital of the Satan-usurped empire; actually, as the ambassador of Christ with His authority (Eph. 6:20; Matt. 28:18-19), he had come into another part of the participation in the Body life of Christ's church in the kingdom of God on earth. While he was suffering the persecution of religion in the empire of Satan, he was enjoying the church life in the kingdom of God. This was a comfort and an encouragement to him.

II.  The best way to shepherd people, to cherish and nourish them, is to give them a proper pattern; Paul fed his spiritual children with his own living of Christ—

1 Thes. 2:1-12; 2 Cor. 1:23—2:14; 11:28-29; 1 Cor. 9:22; Acts 20:28:

1 Thes 2:1  For you yourselves know, brothers, our entrance toward you, that it has not been in vain.
1 Thes 2:2  But having suffered previously and having been outrageously treated, even as you know, in Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much struggle.
1 Thes 2:3  For our exhortation is not out of deception nor out of uncleanness nor in guile;
1 Thes 2:4  But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who proves our hearts.
1 Thes 2:5  For neither were we found at any time with flattering speech, even as you know, nor with a pretext for covetousness; God is witness.
1 Thes 2:6  Nor did we seek glory from men, neither from you nor from others, though we could have stood on our authority as apostles of Christ.
1 Thes 2:7  But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.
1 Thes 2:8  Yearning in this way over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us.
1 Thes 2:9  For you remember, brothers, our labor and travail: While working night and day so as not to be burdensome to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
1 Thes 2:10  You are witnesses, as well as God, how in a holy and righteous and blameless manner we conducted ourselves toward you who believe,
1 Thes 2:11  Just as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father to his own children, exhorting you and consoling you and testifying,
1 Thes 2:12  So that you might walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

2 Cor 1:23  But I call on God as a witness against my soul that to spare you I have not yet come to Corinth.
2 Cor 1:24  Not that we lord it over your faith, but we are fellow workers with you for your joy; for by faith you stand.
2 Cor 2:1  But I determined this for myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow.
2 Cor 2:2  For if I cause you sorrow, who then is the one who makes me glad, except the one who is made sorrowful by me?
2 Cor 2:3  And I wrote this very thing to you that when I come I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all.
2 Cor 2:4  For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you through many tears, not that you would be made sorrowful but that you would know the love which I have more abundantly toward you.
2 Cor 2:5  But if anyone has caused sorrow, he has not caused me to sorrow, but in part (lest I lay too heavy a burden) all of you.
2 Cor 2:6  Sufficient for such a one is this punishment by the majority,
2 Cor 2:7  So that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with excessive sorrow.

2 Cor 2:8  Therefore I exhort you to confirm your love toward him.

2 Cor 2:9  For to this end also I wrote, that I might know your approvedness, whether you are obedient in all things.

2 Cor 2:10  But whom you forgive anything, I also forgive; for also what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, it is for your sake in the person of Christ;

2 Cor 2:11  That we may not be taken advantage of by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.

2 Cor 2:12  Furthermore, when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and a door was open to me in the Lord,

2 Cor 2:13  I had no rest in my spirit, for I did not find Titus my brother; but taking leave of them, I went forth into Macedonia.

2 Cor 2:14  But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in the Christ and manifests the savor of the knowledge of Him through us in every place.

2 Cor 11:28  Apart from the things which have not been mentioned, there is this: the crowd of cares pressing upon me daily, the anxious concern for all the churches.

2 Cor 11:29  Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is stumbled, and I myself do not burn?

1 Cor 9:22  To the weak I became weak that I might gain the weak. To all men I have become all things that I might by all means save some.

Acts 20:28  Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.

A.  Paul and his co-workers were a pattern of the glad tidings that they spread; “you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake”—1 Thes. 1:5b.

B.  In the church the most important thing is the person; the person is the way, and the person is the Lord’s work; what you are is what you do—John 5:19; 6:57; Phil. 1:19-26; Acts 20:18-35; Matt. 7:17-18; 12:33-37.

John 5:19  Then Jesus answered and said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, The Son can do nothing from Himself except what He sees the Father doing, for whatever that One does, these things the Son also does in like manner.

John 6:57  As the living Father has sent Me and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also shall live because of Me.

Phil 1:19  For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Phil 1:20  According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death.

Phil 1:21  For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Phil 1:22  But if I am to live in the flesh, if this to me is fruit for my work, then I do not know what I will choose.

Phil 1:23  But I am constrained between the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for this is far better;

Phil 1:24  But to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

Phil 1:25  And being confident of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of the faith,

Phil 1:26  That your boast may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my coming again to you.

Acts 20:18  And when they came to him, he said to them, You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you all the time,

Acts 20:19  Serving the Lord as a slave with all humility and tears and trials which came upon me by the plots of the Jews;

Acts 20:20  How I did not withhold any of those things that are profitable by not declaring them to you and by not teaching you publicly and from house to house,

Acts 20:21  Solemnly testifying both to Jews and to Greeks repentance unto God and faith in our Lord Jesus.

Acts 20:22  And now, behold, I am going bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what will meet me there,

Acts 20:23  Except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in city after city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.
Acts 20:24 But I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of the grace of God.

Acts 20:25 And now, behold, I know that you all, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will see my face no more.

Acts 20:26 Therefore I testify to you on this day that I am clean from the blood of all men,

Acts 20:27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you all the counsel of God.

Acts 20:28 Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.

Acts 20:29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

Acts 20:30 And from among you yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverted things to draw away the disciples after them.

Acts 20:31 Therefore watch, remembering that for three years, night and day, I did not cease admonishing each one with tears.

Acts 20:32 And now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able up to and give you the inheritance among all those who have been sanctified.

Acts 20:33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing.

Acts 20:34 You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me.

Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you by example that toiling in this way we ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Matt 7:17 Even so every good tree produces good fruit, but the corrupt tree produces bad fruit.

Matt 7:18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, neither can a corrupt tree produce good fruit.

Matt 12:33 Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt; for by the fruit the tree is known.

Matt 12:34 Offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Matt 12:35 The good man, out of his good treasure, brings forth good things, and the evil man, out of his evil treasure, brings forth evil things.

Matt 12:36 And I say to you that every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment.

Matt 12:37 For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.

C. We need to follow the pattern of the apostles to pay more attention to life than to work—John 12:24; 2 Cor. 4:12.

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

2 Cor 4:12 So then death operates in us, but life in you.

D. The apostles not only preached the gospel but also lived it; their ministering of the gospel was not only by word but also by a life that displayed the power of God, a life in the Holy Spirit and in the assurance of faith—1 Thes. 1:5.

1 Thes 1:5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, even as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.

E. The saints in Thessalonica became imitators of the apostles; this led them to follow the Lord, to take Him as their pattern, thus making them a pattern to all other believers—vv. 6-7.

1 Thes 1:6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit,

1 Thes 1:7 So that you became a pattern to all those who believe in Macedonia and in Achaia.

F. The apostle Paul stressed repeatedly the apostles’ entrance toward the believers; this shows that their manner of life played a great role in infusing the gospel into the new converts—vv. 5, 9; 2:1:

1 Thes 1:5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, even as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.
1 Thes 1:9  For they themselves report concerning us what kind of entrance we had toward you and how you turned to God from the idols to serve a living and true God
1 Thes 2:1  For you yourselves know, brothers, our entrance toward you, that it has not been in vain.

1. The apostles were struggling and speaking the gospel to the Thessalonians in the boldness of God—v. 2.

1 Thes 2:2  But having suffered previously and having been outrageously treated, even as you know, in Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much struggle.

2. The apostles were free from deception, uncleanness, and guile—v. 3.

1 Thes 2:3  For our exhortation is not out of deception nor out of uncleanness nor in guile;

3. The apostles were first tested and approved by God and then were entrusted by Him with the gospel; hence, their speaking, the preaching of the gospel, was not of themselves to please men but of God to please Him; God proved, examined, and tested their hearts continually—v. 4; Psa. 26:2; 139:23-24; 2 Cor. 1:12; 6:6; 7:3.

1 Thes 2:4  But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who proves our hearts.

Psa 26:2  Examine me, O Jehovah, and try me; / Test my inward parts and my heart.
Psa 139:23  Search me, O God, and know my heart; / Try me, and know my anxious thoughts;
Psa 139:24  And see if there is some harmful way in me, / And lead me on the eternal way.
2 Cor 1:12  For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you.
2 Cor 6:6  In pureness, in knowledge, in long-suffering, in kindness, in a holy spirit, in unfeigned love,
2 Cor 7:3  I do not say this to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts for our dying together and our living together.

4. The apostles were neither found with flattering speech nor with a pretext for covetousness—1 Thes. 2:5:

1 Thes 2:5  For neither were we found at any time with flattering speech, even as you know, nor with a pretext for covetousness; God is witness.

a. To have any pretext for covetousness is to peddle or adulterate the word of God—2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2.

2 Cor 2:17  For we are not like the many, adulterating the word of God for profit; but as out of sincerity, but as out of God, before God we speak in Christ.
2 Cor 4:2  But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every conscience of men before God.

b. It is also to pretend to be godly for the sake of gain—1 Tim. 6:5; Titus 1:11; 2 Pet. 2:3.

1 Tim 6:5  Perpetual wranglings of men corrupted in mind and deprived of the truth, supposing godliness to be a means of gain.
Titus 1:11  Whose mouths must be stopped, who overthrow whole households, teaching things for the sake of base gain, which they ought not to do.
2 Pet 2:3  And in covetousness, with fabricated words, they will make merchandise of you, for whom the judgment of old is not idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

5. The apostles did not seek glory from men—1 Thes. 2:6a:

1 Thes 2:6a  Nor did we seek glory from men, neither from you nor from others, ...

a. To seek glory from men is a real temptation to every Christian worker; many have been devoured and spoiled by this matter—cf. 1 Sam. 15:12.

1 Sam 15:12  Then Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, saying, Saul went to Carmel and has now set up a monument for himself, and he has returned and passed on down to Gilgal.
b. Lucifer became God’s adversary, Satan, because of glory-seeking; anyone who seeks glory from men is a follower of Satan—Ezek. 28:13-17; Isa. 14:12-15; Matt. 4:8-10.

Ezek 28:13 You were in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, diamond, chrysolite, onyx, jasper, sapphire, carbuncle, and emerald, with gold. The workmanship of your tambourines and your pipes was prepared with you on the day that you were created.

Ezek 28:14 You were the anointed cherub who covered the Ark; indeed I set you, so that you were upon the holy mountain of God; you walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek 28:15 You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you.

Ezek 28:16 By the abundance of your trading they filled your midst with violence, and you sinned. So I cast you out as profane from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.

Ezek 28:17 Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness. I cast you to the ground; I present you before kings that they may look at you.

Isa 14:12 How you have fallen from heaven, / O Daystar, son of the dawn! / How you have been hewn down to earth, / You who made nations fall prostrate!

Isa 14:13 But you, you said in your heart: / I will ascend to heaven; / Above the stars of God / I will exalt my throne. / And I will sit upon the mount of assembly / In the uttermost parts of the north.

Isa 14:14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; / I will make myself like the Most High.

Isa 14:15 But you will be brought down to Sheol, / To the uttermost parts of the pit.

Matt 4:8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

Matt 4:9 And he said to Him, All these will I give You if You will fall down and worship me.

Matt 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, Go away, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve."

c. How much we will be used by the Lord and how long our usefulness will last depend on whether we seek glory from men—cf. John 7:17-18; 5:39-44; 12:43; 2 Cor. 4:5.

John 7:17 If anyone resolves to do His will, he will know concerning the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.

John 7:18 He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of Him who sent Him, this One is true, and unrighteousness is not in Him.

John 5:39 You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify concerning Me.

John 5:40 Yet you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

John 5:41 I do not receive glory from men.

John 5:42 But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves.

John 5:43 I have come in the name of My Father, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him.

John 5:44 How can you believe when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that is from the only God?

John 12:43 For they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God.

2 Cor 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake.

6. The apostles did not stand on their own authority or dignity as apostles of Christ—1 Thes. 2:6b:

1 Thes 2:6b … though we could have stood on our authority as apostles of Christ.
a. To assert authority, dignity, or right in Christian work damages that work; the Lord Jesus, while on earth, gave up His dignity (John 13:4-5), and the apostle preferred not to use his right (1 Cor. 9:12).

John 13:4  Rose from supper and laid aside His outer garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself;  
John 13:5  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.  
1 Cor 9:12  If others partake of this right over you, should not rather we? Yet we did not use this right, but we bear all things that we may not cause any hindrance to the gospel of Christ.

b. If we follow this pattern, we will kill a deadly disease germ in the Body of Christ, the germ of assuming a position—Matt. 20:20-28.

Matt 20:20  Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, worshipping and asking something of Him.  
Matt 20:21  And He said to her, What do you want? She said to Him, Say that these two sons of mine will sit, one on Your right and one on Your left, in Your kingdom.  
Matt 20:22  But Jesus answered and said to them, You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup which I am about to drink? They said to Him, We are able.  
Matt 20:23  He said to them, My cup you shall indeed drink, but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father.  
Matt 20:24  And when the ten heard this, they were indignant concerning the two brothers.  
Matt 20:25  But Jesus called them to Him and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great exercise authority over them.  
Matt 20:26  It shall not be so among you; but whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant,  
Matt 20:27  And whoever wants to be first among you shall be your slave;  
Matt 20:28  Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

7. The apostles cherished the believers and yearned over them as a nursing mother would cherish and yearn over her own children—1 Thes. 2:7-8; cf. Gal. 4:19; Isa. 49:14-15; 66:12-13:

1 Thes 2:7  But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.  
1 Thes 2:8  Yearning in this way over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us.  
Gal 4:19  My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you,  
Isa 49:14  But Zion has said, Jehovah has forsaken me, / And the Lord has forgotten me.  
Isa 49:15  Can a woman forget her nursing child, / That she would not have compassion on the son of her womb? / Even though they may forget, / Yet I will not forget you.  
Isa 66:12  For thus says Jehovah, / I now am extending to her / Peace like a river, / And the glory of the nations / Like an overflowing stream; / And you will nurse, you will be carried on the hip, / And you will be bounced on the knees.  
Isa 66:13  As one whom his mother comforts, / So will I comfort you; / And you will be comforted in Jerusalem.

a. To cherish people is to make them happy, to comfort them, to make them feel that you are pleasant to them, easy to be contacted in everything and in every way.  
b. To cherish people in our natural humanity is not genuine; we must cherish people with the Lord’s presence as the charming factor, as the reality of resurrection.  
c. Cherishing includes nourishing; to nourish people is to feed them with the all-inclusive Christ in His full ministry of three stages—Eph. 5:29.

Eph 5:29  For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church,
8. The apostles not only imparted the gospel of God to the Thessalonians; they also imparted their own souls—1 Thes. 2:8:
   1 Thes 2:8 Yearning in this way over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us.
   a. To live a clean and upright life (vv. 3-6, 10) and to love the new converts, even by giving our own souls to them (vv. 7-9, 11), are the prerequisites for infusing them with the gospel.
   1 Thes 2:3 For our exhortation is not out of deception nor out of uncleanness nor in guile;
   1 Thes 2:4 But even as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who proves our hearts.
   1 Thes 2:5 For neither were we found at any time with flattering speech, even as you know, nor with a pretext for covetousness; God is witness.
   1 Thes 2:6 Nor did we seek glory from men, neither from you nor from others, though we could have stood on our authority as apostles of Christ.
   1 Thes 2:7 But we were gentle in your midst, as a nursing mother would cherish her own children.
   1 Thes 2:8 Yearning in this way over you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own souls, because you became beloved to us.
   1 Thes 2:9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and travail: While working night and day so as not to be burdensome to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
   1 Thes 2:11 Just as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father to his own children, exhorting you and consoling you and testifying.
   b. Paul was willing to spend not only what he had but also himself, his very being, on behalf of the saints—2 Cor. 12:15.
   2 Cor 12:15 But I, I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent on behalf of your souls. If I love you more abundantly, am I loved less?

9. The apostles considered themselves as fathers in exhorting the believers to walk in a manner worthy of God, to have a walk that will enable them to enter into the kingdom of God and usher them into the glory of God—1 Thes. 2:11-12.
   1 Thes 2:11 Just as you know how we were to each one of you, as a father to his own children, exhorting you and consoling you and testifying,
   1 Thes 2:12 So that you might walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE APOSTLES’ ENTRANCE

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

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

SPEAKING THE GOSPEL IN MUCH STRUGGLE

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

HONEST AND FAITHFUL

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

APPROVED BY GOD

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

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

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

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

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

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

NO FLATTERY OR PRETEXT

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

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

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

**NOT SEEKING GLORY FROM MEN**

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

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

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

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

**NOT STANDING ON THEIR AUTHORITY**

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

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

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

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

CHERISHING THE BELIEVERS

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

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

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

IMPARTING THEIR OWN SOULS

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

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

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

THE APOSTLES’ CONDUCT

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

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

A FATHER EXHORTING HIS CHILDREN

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

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

**WALKING IN A MANNER WORTHY OF GOD**

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

In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 Paul exhorts the believers to walk in a manner worthy of God. If he himself had not walked in a manner worthy of God, how could he have exhorted others to do so? In this matter also, he set an example for the believers to follow.

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

**A GOOD PATTERN**

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

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

**PRESENTING A PATTERN**

To give the new believers and young ones a lot of teaching is not the proper way to take care of them. The proper way to foster them is to show them a pattern. By showing them a pattern, you water them, supply them, nourish them, and cherish them. This is fostering. If you find that your experience is somewhat lacking, point the new believers to different people in the Bible, for example, to ones such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and David in the Old Testament and Peter, John, Paul, and Timothy in the New Testament. We can present the lives of Bible characters in such a way as to foster the growth of the young ones.
If we give too much teaching to new ones and young ones, we will damage them. Every mother knows that one of the most important matters in the raising of children is proper feeding. Caring for children is ninety percent a matter of feeding and ten percent a matter of teaching. This also should be our practice in caring for new believers in the church. We must learn to have ninety percent feeding and ten percent teaching. Feeding involves the presenting of patterns either from the Bible or from church history. By reading the biographies of saints throughout the ages, we nourish ourselves and experience a kind of fostering. The point here is that the best way to feed others and foster them is to give them a proper pattern. If there is no pattern, there can be no fostering. Only by having a pattern can we feed others.

In the book of 1 Thessalonians Paul was not preaching himself. Rather, he was feeding his spiritual children with his own living of Christ. This means that Paul’s way of living was used to feed his spiritual children. This was the reason he emphasized his coming to the Thessalonians, his preaching, his way of handling the word of God, and his manner of living. (Life-study of 1 Thessalonians, second edition, p. 108)
LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO
GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH
(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

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

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

1 Tim 3:15  But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

1 Cor 1:2  To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours:

1 Cor 3:16  Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

1 Cor 3:17  If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, and such are you.

1 Cor 10:32  Do not become a stumbling block, both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God;

1 Cor 11:16  But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom of being so, neither the churches of God.

Eph 2:19  So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Eph 2:21  In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;

Eph 2:22  In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.

I. The house of God modifies the church, and the pillar and base of the truth also modifies the church; the house of God and the pillar and base of the truth describe what the church is—1 Tim. 3:15.

1 Tim 3:15  But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

II. The church is the house of God—1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16:

1 Cor 1:2  To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, the called saints, with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, who is theirs and ours:

1 Cor 10:32  Do not become a stumbling block, both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God;

1 Cor 11:16  But if anyone seems to be contentious, we do not have such a custom of being so, neither the churches of God.

A. The expression the church of God indicates that the church is possessed by God and that the church has the nature of God and is constituted with the element of God—Acts 20:28; Gal. 1:13.

Acts 20:28  Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among whom the Holy Spirit has placed you as overseers to shepherd the church of God, which He obtained through His own blood.

Gal 1:13  For you have heard of my manner of life formerly in Judaism, that I persecuted the church of God excessively and ravaged it.

B. The church is of God because it is produced of God as the source and has God as its nature and essence, which are divine, universal, and eternal—1 Cor. 3:16-17.

1 Cor 3:16  Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

1 Cor 3:17  If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, and such are you.
C. The content of the church essentially is God Himself—10:32.

1 Cor 10:32 Do not become a stumbling block, both to Jews and to Greeks and to the church of God;

III. The church of God is the house of the living God—1 Tim. 3:15:

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

A. The house of God is the household of God—Eph. 2:19:

Eph 2:19 So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

1. The dwelling place—the house—and the family—the household—are one entity—a group of called, regenerated ones indwelt by God Himself—1 Pet. 1:3; 2:5; 1 Cor. 3:16.

1 Pet 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has regenerated us unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1 Pet 2:5 You yourselves also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house into a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

2. Just as Christ is not separate from the members of His Body but dwells in them, the Father is not a separate member of His household but is in all the children—Rom. 8:16; 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 3:16.

Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.

Rom 12:4 For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function,

Rom 12:5 So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?


Eph 4:18 Being darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance which is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;

2 Pet 1:4 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.

Matt 28:19 Go therefore and disciple all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

4. Because the church is organic, the church grows—Eph. 2:21.

Eph 2:21 In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;

B. In speaking of the church as the house of God, Paul refers to God as the living God—1 Tim. 3:15:

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

1. The living God, who lives in the church, must be subjective to the church and not merely objective—1 Cor. 3:16.

1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

2. Because God is living, the church as the house of God is also living in Him, by Him, and with Him.

3. A living God and a living church live, move, and work together.

C. As the house of God, the church is the dwelling place of God—the place where God can have His rest and put His trust—Eph. 2:22.

Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.
D. The church as the house of God—the Father’s house—is the enlarged, universal, divine-humans incorporation as the issue of Christ’s being glorified by the Father with the divine glory—John 12:23; 13:31-32; 14:20.

John 12:23 And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

John 13:31 Then when he went out, Jesus said, Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him.

John 13:32 If God has been glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and He will glorify Him immediately.

John 14:20 In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

IV. The Lord wants His church to know Him as the truth and to receive and enjoy Him as life—1 John 1:1-2, 5-6; John 11:25; 14:6; 18:37b:

1 John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life
1 John 1:2 (And the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us);
1 John 1:5 And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.
1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and are not practicing the truth;
John 11:25 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live;
John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.

John 18:37b ... Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.

A. Truth means “reality,” denoting all the real things revealed in God’s Word, which are mainly Christ as the embodiment of God and the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 2:4; Col. 2:9, 19.

1 Tim 2:4 Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
Col 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,
Col 2:19 And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God.

B. The church is built with the divine life in Christ, a life that is indestructible, unconquerable, and able to withstand decline into death from any source—1 Tim. 1:16; 6:12, 19; 2 Tim. 1:1, 10; Titus 1:2; 3:7.

1 Tim 1:16 But because of this I was shown mercy, that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display all His long-suffering for a pattern to those who are to believe on Him unto eternal life.
1 Tim 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith; lay hold on the eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession before many witnesses.
1 Tim 6:19 Laying away for themselves a good foundation as a treasure for the future, that they may lay hold on that which is really life.
2 Tim 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God according to the promise of life, which is in Christ Jesus,
2 Tim 1:10 But now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel,
Titus 1:2 In the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the times of the ages,
Titus 3:7 In order that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

C. Both the truth and the life are Christ Himself—John 14:6:

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.

1. Life is the inward and intrinsic element, and truth is the outward definition and explanation—1:4; 18:37b; 8:12, 32, 36; 17:17.
John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.
John 18:37b ... Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.
John 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.
John 8:36 If therefore the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.
John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

2. The experience of the Lord as life is contained in the Lord as the truth; in order to experience the Lord as life, we must know the truth—14:6; 11:25; 8:32, 36.
John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.
John 11:25 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live;
John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.
John 8:36 If therefore the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.

D. The content of the church should be the growth of Christ in us as truth and life—Col. 2:19; 3:4:
Col 2:19 And not holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God.
Col 3:4 When Christ our life is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory.

1. Truth is the shining, the expression, of the divine light—John 8:12, 36; 1 John 1:5-6.
John 8:12 Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall by no means walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.
John 8:32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.
John 8:36 If therefore the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed.
1 John 1:5 And this is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.
1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and are not practicing the truth;

2. The standard of the truth should constantly be raised higher among all the churches in the Lord’s recovery—1 Tim. 2:4; 3:15.
1 Tim 2:4 Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.
1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

3. We need to grow in life, be saved in life, be filled with life, and reign in life—Eph. 4:13-16; Rom. 5:10, 17.
Eph 4:13 Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
Eph 4:14 That we may 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 system of error,
Eph 4:15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,
Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.
Rom 5:10 For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled.
Rom 5:17 For if, by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.
V. The church is the supporting pillar and the holding base of the truth—1 Tim. 3:15:

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

A. The truth is the Triune God, having Christ as the embodiment, center, and expression, to produce the church as the Body of Christ, the house of God, and the kingdom of God—Col. 2:9; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; 1 Tim. 3:15; John 3:3, 5.

Col 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,

Eph 1:22 And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,

Eph 1:23 Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said to him, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

B. Truth in 1 Timothy 3:15 refers to the real things revealed in the New Testament concerning Christ and the church according to God’s New Testament economy—Matt. 16:16, 18; Eph. 5:32:

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

Matt 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Matt 16:18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Eph 5:32 This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church.

1. The church is the supporting pillar and holding base of all these realities.

2. A local church should be such a building that holds, bears, and testifies the truth, the reality, of Christ and the church—2:22.

Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.

C. The church bears Christ as the reality; the church testifies to the whole universe that Christ, and Christ alone, is the reality—John 1:14, 17; 14:6.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ.

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.

D. As the pillar that bears the truth and the base that upholds the pillar, the church testifies the reality, the truth, of Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ—Col. 2:2; Eph. 3:4.

Col 2:2 That their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love and unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ,

Eph 3:4 By which, in reading it, you can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ,

E. In order for the church to function as the pillar and base of the truth, we all need to arrive at the full knowledge of the truth—1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1.

1 Tim 2:4 Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of the truth.

1 Tim 4:3 Who forbid marriage and command abstaining from foods, which God has created to be partaken of with thanksgiving by those who believe and have full knowledge of the truth.

2 Tim 2:25 In meekness correcting those who oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance unto the full knowledge of the truth,
VI. When every brother and sister is full of life and truth, the church will be strong as the house of the living God and the pillar and base of the truth; this is what is needed in the Lord’s recovery today—1 Tim. 3:15.

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 3:14-16

First Timothy 3:14-16 is the most crucial portion in the four books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Paul has covered the matters of the different teachings, the economy of God, the need for the leading ones to have a prayer life so that all the other brothers may follow, and the charge to the sisters to remain in faith, love, and holiness with sobriety. Furthermore, the elders have been established and the deacons have been appointed. A church that has all these characteristics is certainly wonderful. Now in 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul tells us that the church is the house of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth. Then in verse 16 he goes on to declare, “And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.” In these verses Paul presents an extremely high standard for the church.

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

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

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

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

**THE HOUSE OF THE LIVING GOD**

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

According to Paul’s word in verse 15, the church is the house of God. The Greek word rendered “house” may also be translated “household.” The same word is used in 3:4, 5, and 12 (houses). The household, the family, of God is the house of God. The house and the household are one thing—the assembly that is composed of the believers (Eph. 2:19; Heb. 3:6). The reality of this house as the dwelling place of the living God is in our spirit (Eph. 2:22). We must live and act in our spirit so that in this house God can be manifested as the living God.

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

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

Message Nine
The Function of the Church (2)

The Corporate Manifestation of God in the Flesh

JL Hymns: 818, 740

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

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

1 Tim 3:16 And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.

Col 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,

1 Cor 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

1 Cor 7:25 Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who has been shown mercy by the Lord to be faithful.

1 Cor 7:40 But she is more blessed if she so remains, according to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

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

1 Tim 3:16 And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

Col 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.

A. The New Testament does not say that only the Son of God was incarnated; it reveals that God was manifested in the flesh—1 Tim. 3:15-16:

1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

1 Tim 3:16 And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

1. God was manifested in the flesh not only as the Son but as the entire God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

2. The entire God and not only God the Son was incarnated; hence, Christ in His incarnation was the entire God manifested in the flesh:

a. In His ministry in the stage of incarnation, Christ brought the infinite God into the finite man; in Christ, the infinite God and the finite man became one—John 8:58; 7:6; 12:24.

John 8:58 Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I am.

John 7:6 Jesus therefore said to them, My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready.

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.
b. Through incarnation the divine incorporation—God in His Divine Trinity coinhering mutually and working together as one—was brought into humanity; Christ is therefore the incorporation of the Triune God with the tripartite man—14:10-11.

   John 14:10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works.

   John 14:11 Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; but if not, believe because of the works themselves.

B. The Word, who is God, became flesh—1:1, 14:

   John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

   John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.

1. Became flesh (v. 14) means in the likeness, in the fashion, of man—Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7-8.

   John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.

   Rom 8:3 For that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh,

   Phil 2:7 But emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming in the likeness of men;

   Phil 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, and that the death of a cross.

2. In the form of a man Christ appeared to people, yet He was God manifested in a man—2 Cor. 5:16.

   2 Cor 5:16 So then we, from now on, know no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer.

3. The God who the Word is, is not a partial God but the entire God—God the Son, God the Father, and God the Spirit.

4. The Word is God’s definition, explanation, and expression; hence, the Word who became flesh—God manifested in the flesh—is God’s definition, explanation, and expression in the flesh—John 1:18.

   John 1:18 No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

C. In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily—Col. 2:9:

   Col 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,

1. All the fullness of the Godhead refers to the entire Godhead, to the complete God.

2. Since the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead must be the fullness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

3. That all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily means that the Triune God is embodied in Him—John 14:10.

   John 14:10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak from Myself, but the Father who abides in Me does His works.

4. As the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, Christ is not only the Son of God but also the entire God.

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

   1 Tim 3:15 But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.
1 Tim 3:16  And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.

A. Godliness in verse 16 refers not only to piety but also to the living of God in the church, that is, God as life lived out in the church to be expressed:

1 Tim 3:16  And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.

1. Both Christ and the church are the mystery of godliness, expressing God in the flesh.
2. The church life is the expression of God; therefore, the mystery of godliness is the living of a proper church—1 Cor. 16; 14:24-25.

1 Cor 16  be omitted.

1 Cor 14:24  But if all prophesy and some unbeliever or unlearned person enters, he is convicted by all, he is examined by all;

1 Cor 14:25  The secrets of his heart become manifest; and so falling on his face, he will worship God, declaring that indeed God is among you.

B. God is manifested in the church—the house of God and the Body of Christ—as the enlarged corporate expression in the flesh—Eph. 2:19; 1:22-23:

Eph 2:19  So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.

Eph 1:22  And He subjected all things under His feet and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church,

Eph 1:23  Which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all.

1. The manifestation of God in the flesh began with Christ when He was on earth—John 14:9.

John 14:9  Jesus said to him, Have I been so long a time with you, and you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how is it that you say, Show us the Father?

2. The manifestation of God in the flesh continues with the church, which is the increase, enlargement, and multiplication of the manifestation of God in the flesh—1 Tim. 3:15-16.

1 Tim 3:15  But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

1 Tim 3:16  And confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was manifested in the flesh, / Justified in the Spirit, / Seen by angels, / Preached among the nations, / Believed on in the world, / Taken up in glory.

C. When a church is taken care of according to what is written in 1 Timothy 1—3, the church will function as the house of the living God for His move on earth and as the pillar and base of the truth, bearing the reality of Christ and His Body—3:15.

1 Tim 3:15  But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

D. Such a church becomes the continuation of Christ’s manifestation of God in the flesh—Christ lived out of the church as the manifestation of God—Eph. 5:32.

Eph 5:32  This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church.

E. This is God manifested in the flesh in a wider way according to the New Testament principle of incarnation—1 Cor. 7:40; Gal. 2:20:

1 Cor 7:40  But she is more blessed if she so remains, according to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God.

Gal 2:20  I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

1. The principle of incarnation is that God enters into man and mingle himself with man to make man one with Himself; thus, God is in man, and man is in God—John 15:4-5.

John 15:4  Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.
John 15:5  I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.

2. The principle of incarnation means that divinity is brought into humanity and works with humanity—1 Cor. 6:17; 7:40; 1 Tim. 4:1.
   1 Cor 6:17  But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.
   1 Cor 7:40  But she is more blessed if she so remains, according to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God.
   1 Tim 4:1  But the Spirit says expressly that in later times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and teachings of demons

3. The New Testament principle of incarnation is that, in Christ and through Christ, the divine life and nature are mingled with the human life and nature so that we and God may have one life and one living—1 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 2:20.
   1 Cor 6:17  But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.
   Gal 2:20  I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

4. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 7 in the principle of incarnation:
   1 Cor 7  be omitted.
   a. The principle in verse 10 is the same as that in Galatians 2:20: the principle of incarnation—two persons living as one person.
      1 Cor 7:10  But to the married I charge, not I but the Lord, A wife must not be separated from her husband
      Gal 2:20  I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.
   b. In verses 25 and 40 of 1 Corinthians 7 we see the spirituality of a person who is so one with the Lord and permeated with Him that even his opinion expresses the Lord’s mind.
      1 Cor 7:25  Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who has been shown mercy by the Lord to be faithful.
      1 Cor 7:40  But she is more blessed if she so remains, according to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God.
   c. If we are saturated with the Spirit, what we express will be our thought, but it will also be something of the Lord because we are one with Him—6:17.
      1 Cor 6:17  But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

F. The great mystery of godliness is that God has become man so that man may become God in life and nature but not in the Godhead to produce a corporate God-man for the manifestation of God in the flesh—Rom. 8:3; 1:3-4; Eph. 4:24.
   Rom 8:3  For that which the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of the flesh of sin and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh,
   Rom 1:3  Concerning His Son, who came out of the seed of David according to the flesh,
   Rom 1:4  Who was designated the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness out of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord;
   Eph 4:24  And put on the new man, which was created according to God in righteousness and holiness of the reality.

G. Ultimately, God will be manifested in the New Jerusalem as the consummated corporate expression of the processed and consummated Triune God in the new heaven and new earth—Rev. 21:1-2, 10-11.
   Rev 21:1  And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more.
   Rev 21:2  And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
   Rev 21:10  And he carried me away in spirit unto a great and high mountain and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,
Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE PILLAR AND BASE OF THE TRUTH

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

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

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

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Through incarnation and human living (John 1:1, 14), God was manifested in the flesh. In the flesh means “in the likeness, in the fashion, of man” (Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:7-8). Christ appeared to people in the form of man (2 Cor. 5:16), yet He was God manifested in man.

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

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

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

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

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

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