

LESSON SEVEN

**GOD'S DESIRE FOR A GLORIOUS CHURCH
&
EXPERIENCING CHRIST IN GOD'S ECONOMY**

Scripture Reading:

Eph. 5:25 Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her

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.

Eph. 5:28 In the same way the husbands also ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his own wife loves himself.

Eph. 5:29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as Christ also the church,

Questions:

Section 1:

1. What is the difference between someone who is spiritual, heavenly and victorious versus someone who is glorious?
2. What is Christ doing to us that we may be the glorious church? Is this an individual or a corporate matter?
3. What does it mean for Christ to glorify us in a subjective way? Share a short gospel
- 4.

Section 2:

- 1.

Section 3

1. How long does it take for Christ to present to Himself a glorious church? What process does it involve?
2. Use the example of a steel rod to describe the matter of being inwardly saturated with the glory of God.
3. Why do we need to have an 'unveiled face' as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:18? What are the veils in your experience?

Section 4:

1. What is 'God's economy'? Why should we take this way?
2. Where is Christ today according to New Testament revelation? What aspect of Christ do most christian neglect?
3. What is God's concern in His economy?

[Section 1]

GOD'S DESIRE FOR A GLORIOUS CHURCH

We have seen that God's intention in His economy is to obtain a glorious church. Strictly speaking, God is not seeking a spiritual church, a heavenly church, nor even a victorious church. He wants a church of glory. Glory is the expression of God and it is altogether different from human morality and behavior. When God filled the tabernacle and the temple, both of them were filled with glory, with the very manifestation of God. The church should be characterized by glory—not by anything else, not even spirituality. I am not happy to hear talk about a so-called spiritual church. The only way God can have a glorious church is through Christ's sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing. As we experience these things in a personal and practical way, the church becomes glorious.

The Bible does not speak of a spiritual church. But in Ephesians 5 Paul speaks of a glorious church. **One of Brother Nee's books is entitled The Glorious Church.** Many Christians have as their goal a so-called spiritual church. Instead of seeking spirituality, we should seek to be filled with glory so that Christ may have His glorious church.

GOD'S GOAL

Because of religious teachings, many have been blinded to God's desire for a glorious church. In a sense, some have been helped by those teachings, but in another sense, they have been frustrated by them. Religious teachings can keep the saints from seeing the revelation of the glorious church and can cause them instead to seek such things as spirituality, gifts, and victory. Ultimately, it is not God's intention to have a church that is merely spiritual, [496] victorious, or heavenly. His goal is a glorious church. Do not aspire to be like the angels. They may be spiritual, heavenly, and victorious, but they are not glorious, for they do not bear the glory of God. Praise the Lord that we who believe in Christ bear God's glory! Religion actually brings people down to the level of angels. Under the influence of the religious concept, many Christians are envious of the angels. If we see God's economy, we shall reject such an influence and desire to become filled with glory in order that God may reach His goal.

NOT VICTORIOUS BUT GLORIOUS

It is possible to be victorious without being glorious. For example, a brother may be pleased at his success in overcoming his temper. He may have been defeated by his temper for years and now at last he has gained victory over it. Such a victory, however, may be completely lacking in glory. God's economy is not a matter of becoming victorious over such things as our temper. It is a matter of taking Christ as our life and our person and allowing Him to live in us. The result of this is the expression of God as glory. In ourselves we may be victorious, but in order to be glorious we need Christ to be our life and our person.

THE DECEPTIVENESS OF RELIGION

In a sense, religion is deceptive. While it is helping us, it is also deceiving us. The reason is that religion is part truth and part falsehood. This mixture of truth and falsehood is a subtle form of deception. For example, it is rather easy to preach the gospel to the heathen and to bring people to the Lord. **However, it is very difficult to bring someone to the Lord who has had a background in Catholicism,** for he has been cheated by the half-truths of that religious system. On the one hand, we have been helped by the religious teachings we received in the past. But on the other hand, these same teachings have veiled us in relation to God's economy. Therefore, we need to discard religious concepts and teachings and come back to the whole truth of the pure Word of God.

GOD EXPRESSED THROUGH MAN

According to the truth in the Word, God has no intention of gaining a group of spiritual beings. He already has myriads of angels. God's goal is to have a glorious people as His expression. In the midst of this dark, evil age, God desires to have on earth a people full of His glory. If the meeting hall were filled with angels, we would probably think that the situation of the church is glorious. We perhaps would marvel at all the spiritual, heavenly, victorious beings. However, such a situation would not be a true manifestation of God's glory. God expresses Himself not through angels, but through man. Although we are men in the flesh, we can take Christ as our life and our person. When we do this, even the angels will marvel at the expression of glory in us. The angels may say, "Look at these people. They are full of God's glory!"

Do you still desire to have a spiritual church, a heavenly church, a victorious church? If you know God's economy, your desire will be for a glorious church. We should be able to say to the

angels, “Angels, we don’t envy your spirituality, victory, or heavenliness. We have Christ within us as our life and our person, and we are being filled with glory. Angels, do you have Christ as your life and your person? Gabriel could announce the birth of Christ, but he does not have the privilege of taking Christ as his life and person. Angels, we would like to tell you that Christ dwells within us. You may be spiritual, heavenly, and victorious, but we are glorious.”

Verse 27 of Ephesians 5 has been in the New Testament for centuries, but it has been lost as far as the experience of believers is concerned. Therefore, today the Lord is in the process of recovering the glorious church. Let us read this verse again: “That He might present the church to Himself glorious, not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” Christ is [498] sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing us so that we may be a glorious church. He is not doing these things simply to make us spiritual, heavenly, or victorious.

[Section 2]

A CORPORATE MAN

The glorious church is a corporate man. This means that every part of this corporate man is glorious. Are you a part of this glorious man in a practical way? In other words, are you being filled with glory? Even after reading all these messages, we still may be occupied with the thought of victory and may seek to be victorious over our temper or a difficult situation. We may be very appreciative of those whose teaching can lead us into the way of victory. Oh, may the Lord impress us with His desire to have a glorious, shining people! The goal of His economy is to gain a church that shines with His glory.

CHRIST COMING FROM WITHIN US

The concept of glorification common among believers today is that Christ will suddenly descend from the heavens and sweep us away into a realm of glory. Until then, we are simply to wait until the Lord Jesus comes to glorify us. But as we pointed out in message fifty-seven, Christ will come from within us. I fully realize that certain verses in the New Testament indicate that Christ will come objectively from the heavens. Nevertheless, other verses indicate that He will come forth from within us and will glorify us in a very subjective way.

THE GOSPEL OF THE GLORY OF CHRIST

A number of verses in the New Testament show that the experience of glory is subjective. Second Corinthians 4:4 says, “In whom the god of this age hath blinded the thoughts of them that believe not, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (Gk.). In this verse Paul does not speak of the gospel of forgiveness or of justification by faith. He speaks instead of the gospel of the glory of Christ. Our gospel is not simply [499] a gospel of redemption, forgiveness, and regeneration. It is also the gospel of the glory of Christ.

Only this gospel has the ability to shine into us. Firstly it shines into us and then it shines out from within us. The more the glory shines within us, the more it penetrates into our being and saturates it. Eventually, the inner glory will consume, swallow up, our entire inward being. Then the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ will shine out through us. Such a shining cannot come by way of teaching, but only through the experience of Christ who is Himself the glory of God and the manifestation of God. Hallelujah, Christ has shone into the depths of our being and now He is shining within us! The time is coming when He will shine throughout our inward being. Hence, the light of God’s glory will shine not in an outward way, but will shine from within us. The more Christ shines, the more we are filled with glory.

CONCENTRATING ON THE LORD’S INWARD SHINING

When we are in a difficult situation, we do not need to strive to be victorious. Forget about trying to be victorious and pay attention to the inner shining of Christ as the glory within. Learn to say, “Hallelujah, Christ is shining in me and through me! He is my life and my person. How sweet and pleasant is His inward shining!” As we concentrate on the Lord’s shining within, we shall spontaneously be victorious without any conscious effort on our part.

The goal of God’s economy is that we all shine forth His glory. As we are under such a shining, we enjoy the sweetness of Christ living in us to be our life and our person. This comes not by teaching, but by Christ’s saturating us with Himself according to God’s economy. The saints taking the way of God’s economy are those built up with the glory of God.

THE FACE OF JESUS

In 2 Corinthians 4:6 Paul also speaks of glory: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out

of darkness, hath [500] shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” The word face here refers to the Lord’s countenance, to His presence. How we need to have the presence of the Lord Jesus within us! His presence is the very glory of God, for the glory of God is in the face of Christ. If our Christ is only a Christ objectively in the heavens, we shall not have the shining of His face within us. Neither shall we have the experience of His indwelling glory. We have pointed out that glory is the manifestation of God. Now, according to this verse, we see furthermore that glory is simply the face of Jesus. When we have His face, we have the glory. When we are in the presence of Christ and before His countenance, we are in glory.

TRANSFORMED FROM GLORY TO GLORY

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul says, “But we all, with unveiled face beholding and reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit” (Gk.). Our need today is to behold and reflect the glory of the Lord. As we behold His glory, we are transformed. Notice that Paul does not say that we are corrected, adjusted, or even changed. He points out that we are being transformed into Christ’s image. We are not being transformed from behavior to behavior, from spirituality to spirituality, nor from victory to victory. Hallelujah, we are being transformed from glory to glory! The source of this transformation is not doctrine in letters; it is the Lord Spirit. The more we behold the Lord’s glory and are transformed by the Lord Spirit from glory to glory, the more the Lord will gain the glorious church He desires.

[Section 3]

EXPERIENCING CHRIST IN GOD’S ECONOMY

Christ is sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing us in order to present to Himself a glorious church. Contrary to the religious concept, this presentation will not take place suddenly, without any preparation, when the Lord Jesus appears in His coming back. Rather, Christ’s presentation of the glorious church involves a process which began at the time of the Apostles and which has been going on throughout the centuries. Today we also are participating in the process through which Christ is presenting the glorious church to Himself. This presentation is the goal of His sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing.

Since the day we first called upon the Lord Jesus and received Him into us, He has been seeking opportunities to work Himself into our being. The more His element is worked into us, the more we are saturated with Himself and the more we are sanctified, cleansed, nourished, and cherished. The ultimate consummation of this process will be the presentation of the church to Himself in glory.

SATURATED WITH CHRIST

Christ’s working Himself into us is not a matter of behavior or self-improvement. It is a matter of our being inwardly saturated with the shekinah glory of God. Suppose a steel rod, hard, cold, and black, is thrust into fire and held there. Eventually, the fire will saturate the steel and cause it to glow. In this way the steel loses its natural color and becomes white hot. In a sense, the color of the steel is swallowed up by the fire. Now the steel is shining, glowing. However, it would be useless, even ridiculous, for someone [502] to teach steel to shine. What can cause the steel to shine is not teaching, but burning. It must be burned until fire has saturated its very substance. This will cause the steel rod to become a bearer of light. If this steel is to keep on glowing, however, it must remain in the fire. If it is kept out of the fire for any length of time, its natural color and darkness will return. In a similar way, what we need today is not doctrine in letters; we need to be burned by Christ and saturated with Him as the indwelling glory of God.

COMING TO CHRIST IN THE WORD

I can testify that most of the teachings I received in Christianity did not afford me very much help. They actually hindered me and frustrated me from going on with the Lord. Today to me the Bible is not mainly a book of teachings, but a book that reveals the Person of the living Christ. As I read the Word, I open to the Lord, and immediately I experience His burning within me. Since I have His burning, what need do I have for mere teachings?

In John 5:39 and 40 the Lord Jesus said to the religionists, “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is these that testify concerning Me; and you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.” These verses indicate that religion may even help people to honor and respect the Bible, but that very respect for the holy Word may be used to keep them away from the presence of the living Christ. If we read the Word properly, it should always bring us to the Lord. Whenever we come

to the Bible, we must also come to Him so that we may have life.

AN UNVEILED FACE

We have seen that God's desire is to obtain a glorious church. Only Christ who is the expression of God's glory can make the church glorious, for only He Himself is the fire of glory that burns His glory into us. Moses had an experience along this line. After Moses had spent forty days in the Lord's presence on the mountain, the skin of his face shone [503] with God's glory (Exo. 34:29-35). The glory of God had been burned into him. This was not the result of religious teaching; it came from directly beholding the glory of God.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul tells us that we all, with an unveiled face, need to behold and reflect as mirrors the glory of the Lord (Gk.). Pay attention to the term "unveiled face." This term indicates a face that used to be veiled and from which the veil has been removed. I am deeply concerned that many of us are still veiled by religious concepts and teachings. Oh, how we need a face unveiled to behold the Lord! Hence, we all should pray, "Lord, remove the veils from me."

How pitiful it is to be veiled. Nevertheless, many believers are covered by layers of veils they do not even realize are there. For this reason, Paul was burdened that the saints would be unveiled. Then with unveiled faces we can behold and reflect the glory of the Lord. In this way we are genuinely transformed from one degree of glory to another. Such a transformation takes place through the Lord Spirit. Therefore, we do not behold doctrines and teachings; we behold the glory of the Lord. Moreover, we are not taught or corrected, but we are transformed into the image of Christ from glory to glory.

In the Lord's ministry we are fighting to remove the veils from the saints. How subtle is the influence of religion! Its subtlety is seen in the fact that it causes the Lord's people to become veiled. Although many are sincerely seeking the Lord, they have been completely veiled by religion with its teachings and concepts. Therefore, I say once again that we are here not for doctrine in letters, but for the genuine recovery of the experience of Christ. We all need an unveiled face to behold the Lord.

Various things can be veils to us today, just as they were veils to the Jews. The Jews were veiled by the Scriptures, by the law, by the ordinances, and by Judaism as a religious system. Today

Christians are veiled especially by teachings and ordinances. I am burdened that all the veils would be removed so that the saints may have an unveiled face to behold the glory of the Lord. [504]

VEILED BY ORDINANCES

Let us consider in more detail the matter of ordinances as veils. Sometimes in our meetings we shout praises to the Lord. Visitors may be troubled by our shouting. They may even think that our enthusiasm in the meetings matches that of a crowd at a sporting event. Such a criticism of shouting comes from an ordinance regarding meetings. Others may criticize the meetings because they see no exercise of such gifts as speaking in tongues. This indicates that they have an ordinance concerning gifts. Still others may react to the way certain of the saints dress. This indicates that they have an ordinance concerning the proper way to dress for a church meeting. Let us drop all the ordinances and come back to the living Person of Christ.

~~In message after message we desire to do just one thing: to point out your need for the living Christ. You need to be sanctified, cleansed, nourished, and cherished by Him. Nevertheless, no matter how much we emphasize the need to experience Christ as our life and our person, many are still preoccupied with secondary matters related to our meetings or our practice of the church life, because they are still veiled by their ordinances. Therefore, we wish to declare that we are not here for any particular practice. We are here for the wonderful Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.~~

~~Over the years Christians have been divided by various ordinances and are still being divided by ordinances today. For example, to insist upon the practice of pray reading is wrong. We are not a church of pray reading. However, to reject pray reading is also wrong. In either case, there would be an ordinance regarding pray reading. We need to turn from all ordinances to the Christ who sanctifies, cleanses, nourishes, and cherishes us.~~

~~It is a mistake to come to Los Angeles with the intention of learning how we practice the church life. Because we are constantly changing, not even we ourselves know the way to have the church life. Prior to 1966 we did not have pray reading, and before 1968 we did not have the practice of calling on the name of the Lord. Perhaps after another [505] period of time, the Lord will show us something further that we should practice.~~

Christians are easily divided over practices. Some like to shout praises to the Lord, but others oppose shouting. The same is true regarding quiet meetings or speaking in tongues. If we have truly seen the church, then we shall realize that all ordinances regarding practices must be set aside, for all such ordinances are divisive. Many dear saints love the Lord and seek Him, but they do not realize the divisiveness of their ordinances.

[Section 4]

GOD'S ECONOMY

God's economy is so simple: it is just to work Christ into us so that He may live in us and we may live by Him. If we take the way of God's economy, the church will eventually become glorious, for Christ, the glory of God, will continually burn His glory into us. We are not here for a particular practice or way of having the church life. We are here only for Christ. The church is the issue of the enjoyment of Christ. The proper church life is a matter of us all enjoying Christ and then coming together to express Him, without insisting upon any particular way of expressing Christ. What we need in the Lord's recovery today is not a particular practice—it is only the living Christ.

Concerning the living Christ, we have pointed out that in His coming back Christ will come out from within us. He will spread within us, saturate us with Himself, and swallow up every part of our inward being. Then He will come out through us. When some hear of this, they may argue that the New Testament teaches that Christ will descend from the heavens. Yes, a number of verses tell us that the Lord is in the heavens and that in His coming He will descend from the heavens. However, for many, the teaching of the Lord's coming from heaven has become a religious preoccupation. Therefore we must also pay attention to the verses which emphasize the fact that Christ is in us. For example, Colossians 3:4 says that when Christ appears we [506] shall appear with Him in glory, but Colossians 1:27 says that Christ in us is the hope of glory.

NO SYSTEMATIZING

Certain religious teachers attempt to systematize the revelation in the New Testament. Under the influence of such systematic teachings, some suppose that since Christ is in the third heaven He cannot be elsewhere, particularly not in us. Nevertheless, the Bible says that Christ is both in the third heaven and in us as well (Rom. 8:34, 10). Furthermore, although Christ is in us already, He is coming. This means that He is both here

now and He is coming. I cannot reconcile this. I simply believe both aspects because the New Testament reveals both.

Recently a young man approached me and asked if I believed that the Lord Jesus was at the right hand of God in the heavens. I assured him that I did. Then he asked me if I believed that the Lord had been resurrected with a body. I told him that I definitely believed this also. Then I encouraged him not to systematize the truth of God's revelation in the New Testament. On the day of His resurrection, the Lord Jesus entered the room where the disciples were gathered. Although the doors were closed, He suddenly appeared in their midst. According to Luke 24:37, "They were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." The Lord said to them, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (v. 39). Certainly the Lord in resurrection still had a physical body. How then was He able to enter that closed room? Instead of trying to explain this or to systematize it, we should simply believe the plain word of the Bible. The New Testament says that Christ is the life-giving Spirit indwelling our spirit. As such an indwelling One, He is spreading within us and saturating us with Himself, seeking the opportunity to come out through us. But the Bible also reveals that Christ is on the throne in the third heaven and that in His coming back He will descend to the earth. Instead of trying to reconcile the subjective aspect and [507] the objective aspect of the Lord's coming, let us simply believe both because both are revealed in the New Testament.

EXPERIENCING THE INDWELLING CHRIST

The problem many believers have is that they have been religiously indoctrinated regarding the objective aspect of the Lord's coming, to the neglect of the subjective aspect. They pay their full attention to the Christ in heaven and firmly believe in His coming back. However, they neglect the fact of the indwelling Christ, perhaps not even realizing that Christ is now within them. As we are awaiting Christ's coming back from the heavens, we need to enjoy Him inwardly. The Lord Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). The Lord's word here indicates that He is here already. How we need to experience the living, subjective, indwelling Christ!

My burden is to minister such a Christ to the Lord's people. It is not to teach the saints how to interpret the Bible. What is the use of knowing how to rightly interpret the Bible if we do not have a direct, precious, and intimate enjoyment of the living Christ? How we must fight the battle so that all the children of God may have such an enjoyment of the Lord! This is our need in the Lord's recovery today.

Let us forget the ordinances and practices, and let us say, "O Lord Jesus, I have not realized how much I need to take You as my life and as my person. Lord, I open my being to You, and I take You as my life and as my person. I don't care about my concepts concerning the way to practice the church life. I care only to have the living, intimate, and personal enjoyment of You."

GOD'S CONCERN IN HIS ECONOMY

Regarding the church, we should have no intention of either imitating or of opposing. Our only aim should be to [508] enjoy the living Person of Christ and to inwardly experience Him more and more. We should not be concerned about practices, methods, or ways. Consider as an illustration the various kinds of eating utensils. The Chinese use chopsticks, the Americans use a knife and fork, and the Indonesians may use their fingers. We should not be concerned about what we eat with, but only about what we eat. As long as people take the proper food into them, we should not be concerned whether they use chopsticks, a knife and fork, or their fingers. However, some may boast that the best way is to use a knife and fork. Spiritually speaking, we may do the same thing regarding the practice of the church life. We may be proud of our way, but we may not have any food on our plate. Let us not care for spiritual table manners; let us care only for spiritual eating. Many of us were starving for years because we cared only for manners, not for food. In so many religious groups everything is well-mannered and in excellent order, but there is no food for the Lord's people to eat. Therefore, in His recovery today the Lord is recovering the food on the table, not the manner of eating the food.

In His economy God is not concerned about utensils. His concern is that we experience Christ's sanctifying, cleansing, nourishing, and cherishing. Only as we experience Christ in such a way will He be able to present a glorious church to Himself. Praise Him that the process of this presentation is inwardly taking place day by day. May we all see that in His economy God cares not for forms or practices, but only for His dear Son,

the Lord Jesus Christ. May we all receive mercy to experience and enjoy Him.

References:

Life-Study of Ephesians msg. 59 & 60