



LESSON SEVEN

Discipline for Holiness and Not Falling Away from Grace

Scripture Reading:

HEBREWS 12:1-17

- 1 Therefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, put away every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles *us* and run with endurance the race which is set before us,
- 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.
- 3 For compare Him who has endured such contradiction by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary, fainting in your souls.
- 4 You have not yet resisted unto blood, struggling against sin,
- 5 And you have completely forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when reproved by Him;
- 6 For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."
- 7 *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?
- 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all *sons* have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.
- 9 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?
- 10 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.
- 11 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.
- 12 Therefore set straight the hands which hang down and the paralyzed knees,
- 13 And make straight paths for your feet, that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather may be healed.
- 14 Pursue peace with all men and sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord;
- 15 Looking carefully lest anyone fall away from the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and through this many be defiled;
- 16 Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one meal gave up his own birthright.
- 17 For you know that also afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place for repentance, even though he sought it with tears.

QUESTIONS:

Section 1:

1. What is the aim and intention of the book of Hebrews?
2. What is God's dealing with us for?
3. According to this message what is God's desire today?

Section 2:

1. Where does peace come from in our experience?
2. What does it mean to be "put out of joint" in the context of verses 12 and 13?
3. What is the proper peace spoken of here?

Section 3:

1. How do we run the race continually in our experience?
2. What is grace? What does it mean to fall away from Christ?
3. What is the enjoyment of Christ according to the new covenant way? How do we remain in the new covenant way?

Section 4:

1. What is the root of bitterness referring to? How did it affect the Hebrew believers?
2. What is a profane person? Give examples in the Bible.
3. What is our birthright? Use Genesis 1 and the development in the New Testament to show how we should exercise our birthright.

DISCIPLINE FOR HOLINESS

I. GOD WANTING THE HEBREW BELIEVERS TO BE HOLY, TO BE SEPARATED ABSOLUTELY UNTO HIM

In this message we come to the matter of discipline for holiness (12:5-14). One of the basic concepts of this book is that God wanted the Hebrew believers to be holy, to be separated absolutely unto Him, not to remain common in Judaism (v. 14; 3:1), but rather to enter into the Holy of Holies (10:19, 22). True holiness is to enter into the Holy of Holies. Once we have entered into the Holy of Holies, we have reached the peak of holiness. There is no place where we can be more holy than in the Holy of Holies.

Entering into the Holy of Holies is not merely a matter of being in the shekinah glory. Even this is somewhat outward and superficial. Although we may be in the shekinah glory in the Holy of Holies, we still need to experience the contents of the ark. Even inside the ark there is something concealed—the hidden manna in the golden pot. This hidden manna is near the tables of the testimony, the ultimate item in the experience of Christ. To be holy means to reach the consummate point of the experience of Christ, that is, to experience the law of life. Nothing can make us more subjectively holy than the law of life, for it works God's holy nature, which is true holiness, into our being. God's divine nature is the substance of holiness. Nothing other than the law of life is able to work God's divine nature into our being. Only when we experience the law of life can we be truly holy.

The aim of the book of Hebrews is to bring us on into the Holy of Holies, with the intention that we may experience the contents of the ark of testimony. These contents consist of three things: the hidden manna, the budding rod, and the law of life. Both the hidden manna and the budding rod are for our enjoyment and privilege, but the law of life is for God's working. Through it, He works Himself into our being. Therefore, if we would be holy to the uttermost, we must experience the law of life by which God works Himself into us as our real holiness.

II. THE PERSECUTION SUFFERED BY THE HEBREW BELIEVERS BEING A DISCIPLINE

Hebrews 12:7, referring to the persecution of the Hebrew believers, says, "It is for discipline that

you are enduring." From God's point of view, the persecution which the Hebrew believers suffered from Judaism was a discipline, a chastening. They were being disciplined that they might be separated from the common things unto the holiness of God.

III. DISCIPLINE BEING THE FATHER'S DEALING WITH HIS SONS THAT THE SONS MAY PARTAKE OF THE FATHER'S HOLY NATURE

Verse 10 says, "For they indeed disciplined us for a few days as it seemed good to them, but He for our profit that we might partake of His holiness." Discipline is the Father's dealing with His sons that they may partake of His holy nature. God's discipline, God's dealing with us, is to bring us into His intention, which is that we forsake everything other than the Holy of Holies and enter into the Holy of Holies where we may have genuine holiness. However, like the Hebrew believers in the ancient times, many of us do not cooperate with God in this way. Thus, under His sovereignty, He disciplines us that we might be brought into His intention.

As we have seen, holiness is God's nature, and to partake of God's holiness is to partake of His nature. It was common, unholy, for the Hebrew believers to remain in Judaism. They needed to be separated to God's new covenant that they might partake of God's holy nature. For this purpose, persecution was aroused to discipline them that they might be separated from the common to the holy.

In verse 9 God is called the "Father of spirits." "Father of spirits" is contrasted with "fathers of our flesh." In regeneration, we are born of God (John 1:13) in our spirit (John 3:6). Hence, He is the Father of our spirits. Since the staggering Hebrew believers were wandering in their mind, not following the Lord in their spirit, the Father of spirits used the persecution by Judaism to force them to turn from their mind to their spirit (4:12) that they might partake of His holy nature.

In the Holy of Holies is the ark. The first of the three items in the ark is the hidden manna. With respect to the hidden manna, there are three layers of coverings: the tabernacle covering the ark, the ark covering the golden pot, and the golden pot covering and containing the hidden manna. Here in the golden pot we enjoy Christ in the most hidden way. It is not only in the Holy of Holies and in the ark but also in the golden

pot. What is the golden pot? It is the divine nature of the Triune God which contains Christ, the standard model, as our life supply. How deep is this thought! When we enjoy Christ as our life supply in such a hidden and mysterious way, we shall experience the rod budding with authority in resurrection life. The budding rod brings us to the consummate item of God's economy—the inward law of life (signified by the table of testimony), the working of the Spirit of the Triune God within us. The inward law of life is working within us, infusing the element of God into our being and making us a corporate reproduction of the standard model. In this way, God can have the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. This is what God desires today.

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IV. DISCIPLINE BEING FOR HOLINESS, RESULTING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Discipline is for holiness resulting in righteousness. Holiness is the inward nature, the nature of the divine life, and righteousness is the outward behavior, the behavior of the sanctified believers, which comes out of the inward nature and which brings forth the peaceable fruit, the fruit of peace (v. 11; Isa. 32:17). If we have never been permeated inwardly with God's holy nature, we can never have proper righteousness in our outward behavior. Firstly, the law of life must work God's divine nature into us. Then in our outward behavior we shall have the peaceable fruit of righteousness as the issue of inward holiness. In our practical experience, holiness is first, righteousness is second, and peace is third.

The Hebrew believers were being persecuted by the Judaizers. Some of the persecutors were probably their relatives, perhaps even parents or children. As they were under this persecution, they tried to make peace with their persecutors. But they did so at the neglect of their holiness. Holiness is entering into the Holy of Holies to reach the law of life, the working of which saturates us with God's holy nature. When we are saturated with God's nature, we spontaneously have the issue of righteousness, and this righteousness brings in genuine peace. Many Christians have a peace which is not genuine; it is a peace which comes from compromise. Some of the Hebrew believers might have said, "Oh, father, if you will not let me be in the new covenant way absolutely, then maybe I can go with you to the temple on the seventh day and attend the Christian assembly on

the eighth day, the first day of the week. Then we can be at peace." This peace is a peace through compromise, a peace which comes from sacrificing holiness.

As we have seen, peace is the fruit of righteousness, and holiness is the inward nature, while righteousness is the outward behavior. God's discipline helps the believers not only to partake of His holiness, but also to make them right with both God and man that in such a condition of righteousness they might enjoy peace as a sweet and peaceable fruit of righteousness.

V. THE WEARIED AND PARALYZED HEBREW BELIEVERS NEEDING TO MAKE STRAIGHT PATHS THAT THE LAMED MEMBERS MAY NOT BE PUT OUT OF JOINT BUT RATHER MAY BE HEALED

Verses 12 and 13 say, "Wherefore lift up the wearied hands and the paralyzed knees, and make straight paths for your feet that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather may be healed." The Christian life is not a matter of theoretical doctrines for the mind. Rather, it must be practical in providing paths for our feet. All the sound, healthy doctrines of the Bible are for the paths. This is absolutely true with this book of Hebrews. This book firstly ministers to us the most high and healthy doctrines concerning Christ and His new covenant. Then, based upon the proper doctrines which it has shown us, it charges us to run the race and make straight paths for our feet. The first section of this book (1:1-10:18) is of doctrines, and the second (10:19-13:25) is of a race, of paths.

In verse 13 the writer tells the Hebrew believers to "make straight paths for your feet that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather may be healed." The Greek word translated "put out of joint" may also be rendered "dislocated" or "wrenched." The implication of the context is that the staggering Hebrew believers should abandon all appearance of the practices of Judaism (that is, to make straight paths) that they, the lamed members (limbs) of the Body may not fall into apostasy (that is, may not be put out of joint), but rather may be fully brought into the new covenant way (that is, may be healed). Thus, to make straight paths is to abandon all appearance of the practice of Judaism; not to be lamed is not to fall into apostasy; and to be healed is to be fully brought into the new covenant way.

The new covenant way must be straight, having no curves. If the Hebrew believers still went to the temple on the Sabbath day with their relatives, they would have been making curves in the paths of the new covenant way. Every compromising activity is a curve. How could the Hebrew believers make the new testament way straight? Only by abandoning every appearance of Judaism. They had to say to their relatives, "Because the temple is an appearance of the Jewish practice, I will never go there with you on the Sabbath day."

God will never honor the curves. God is not a God of curves; He is a straight God. If a certain way is not right, we must condemn it. But if it is right, we must tell everyone, including the angels and the demons, that it is right. To make the way straight is to abandon the appearance of anything that is not God's new covenant way.

The lame members alluded to in verse 13 were the staggering Hebrew Christians. Paul did not want the lame members to be put out of joint, that is, to be dislocated. To be put out of joint, dislocated, is to fall into apostasy, into the heresy of Judaism. The staggering Hebrew believers were in danger of falling into such apostasy. If your ankle is out of joint, it will be easy for you to fall from the right way. The words "but rather may be healed" mean to be brought fully into the new covenant way.

VI. THE PROPER CHRISTIAN LIFE BEING A BALANCE BETWEEN PEACE AND HOLINESS

Verse 14 says, "Pursue peace with all men, and holiness without which no one shall see the Lord." The proper Christian life must be a balance between peace and holiness. With God, holiness is His holy nature; with us, it is our separation unto God. The implication here is that while we are pursuing peace with all men, we must also pay attention to the matter of holiness before God. Our pursuing peace with all men must be balanced by our holiness before God, our separation unto God, without which no one shall see the Lord and have fellowship with Him.

We should not attempt to have peace with others without first having holiness. Peace without holiness means compromise. We do not want such a compromising peace. We want the peace that is the product of holiness. In the past years I have met many Christians who compromised in order to keep the peace. Eventually, there was no peace among them. Outwardly, they compromised about so many things, but

inwardly they were fighting with one another. Praise the Lord that in His recovery today, the more we come into the Holy of Holies, the more we are at peace. If the elders in a certain local church are not at peace with one another, that is a shame. When we care for holiness, that is, for being in the Holy of Holies, we have true peace. The peace among us is not produced by compromise; it is produced by the holiness in the Holy of Holies.

The staggering Hebrew Christians tried to keep the peace with their opposers, but eventually they lost their holiness. Therefore, the writer tried his best to bring them back to the proper peace, the peace which is the fruit of righteousness and true holiness. Peace is for us to live with man, and holiness is for us to see the Lord. Although you may have peace with man, do you still have the presence of the Lord? We must firstly care for the Lord's presence and then for our living with others. Our peace must issue from the Lord's presence. For us today, His presence is our practical holiness.

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DO NOT FALL AWAY FROM GRACE

In chapter twelve we have the fifth and final warning in the book of Hebrews. This book has a special arrangement. It has five main teachings, and with each teaching there is a warning. Three of the warnings come after the teachings (3:7-4:13; 10:19-39; 12:1-29), and two are inserted into the teachings (2:1-4; 5:11-6:20). All of chapter twelve is a warning which follows the teaching given in chapter eleven. This warning tells us to run the race and not to fall away from grace. The race needs the grace, and the grace is sufficient for the race.

To remain in the Holy of Holies is to continue the running of the race. According to our experience, whenever we exercise our mind to compromise a little, we can sense deep within our spirit that we are away from God's presence, that we are no longer in the Holy of Holies. Immediately, our way of contacting God is no longer straight; it has become curved. This curve leads us away from the Holy of Holies, away from the ark of testimony, the hidden manna, the budding rod, and the tables of the testimony. Although at the beginning we may be only a short way off from the Holy of Holies, eventually we find that we are a great distance away.

Our race must eventually be in the Holy of Holies. If we are running the race only in the outer court, we are too shallow. We must run our race in the Holy of Holies. Perhaps you are thinking that the Holy of Holies is too small an area in which to run a race. Yes, in the tabernacle it was a cube only ten cubits in length, width, and height (Exo. 26:8, 16). In the temple it became twenty cubits in length, width, and height (1 Kings 6:20). Eventually, in the New Jerusalem it will be twelve thousand stadia in length, width, and height (Rev. 21:16). The cubical dimensions of the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and in the temple and of the New Jerusalem signify the completeness of God's eternal being. From any direction, God is perfect and complete. His completeness and perfection is eternal, unlimited.

The more we run, the larger the Holy of Holies becomes, expanding from the tabernacle, to the temple, and ultimately to the New Jerusalem. When we first run the race in the tabernacle, it is ten cubits. As we continue to run, it becomes twenty cubits in the temple and twelve thousand stadia in the New Jerusalem. When we run the race in eternity, we shall discover that it is eternally spacious. This is very meaningful.

I. THE GRACE OF GOD

Now we must ask a crucial question: what is grace? When I was young, I was taught by some great teachers that grace means that we do nothing and that God does everything for us. According to this teaching, anything we do is work, not grace, but whatever the Lord does for us is grace. For example, there is no need for us to do anything for our sins. If we do this, it is our work. The Lord Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and that is grace. Are you satisfied with this definition of grace? For a while, I was satisfied with it. But as a result of considering certain verses in the Bible, I began to question it. John 1:17 says that grace came through Jesus Christ, and John 1:16 says, "Of His fullness we all received, and grace upon grace" (Recovery Version). In 1 Corinthians 15:10 the Apostle Paul says, "By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." One day, as I was comparing this verse with Galatians 2:20 where Paul says, "Not I, but Christ liveth in me," I realized that grace is just God in Christ dispensed into our being for our enjoyment in our experience. It is not only the work the Lord does for us; it is the Triune

God Himself dispensed into our being and experienced as our enjoyment. In brief, grace is the Triune God experienced by us. According to the entire revelation of the New Testament, grace is nothing less than God in Christ dispensed into our being for our enjoyment. Firstly, He is dispensed into our spirit, and then, as He spreads into our inward parts, He becomes our enjoyment. This grace has come to us through Christ (John 1:14, 17), and it is the grace of Christ (2 Cor. 13:14; 12:9), even Christ Himself (Gal. 6:18; cf. 2 Tim. 4:22).

II. TO FALL AWAY FROM GRACE BEING TO FALL AWAY FROM CHRIST

To fall away from the grace of God is to fall away from Christ. When we are "fallen from grace" we are "severed from Christ" (Gal. 5:4, Gk.). In this matter Paul warned the churches of Galatia, which were in the same danger as the Hebrew believers, not to be "severed from Christ" by being turned aside to the law of the Jewish religion, lest they fall away from the grace of God which is Christ Himself. We should not fall away from grace, but rather "have grace" (v. 28), "be confirmed by grace" (13:9), and "stand in grace" (Rom. 5:2). Both Galatians and Hebrews close with the blessings of grace (Gal. 6:18; Heb. 13:25).

According to the Greek, to be severed from Christ means to be cut off from Him like a branch is cut off from a tree. We all have had this experience. A number of times when we were cut off from the fellowship with the living Christ, we also had the sense that we were severed from grace. On the contrary, when we are in intimate fellowship with the dear Lord, we have the deep sense that we are in grace, having grace for our strength and enjoyment and for our every need. If we need life, grace is life. If we need strength and comfort, grace is our strength and comfort. Thus, in an experiential way, not in a doctrinal way, we clearly see that grace is Christ Himself.

A. For the Hebrew Believers to Fall Away from the Grace of God Being to Give Up the Enjoyment of Christ in the New Covenant Way and to Return to Their Old Religion

For the Hebrew believers to fall away from the grace of God was to give up the enjoyment of Christ in the new covenant way and to return to their old religion. The arrangement of the furniture of the tabernacle is a revelation of the enjoyment of Christ. At the altar, we enjoy Christ as our sacrifices, and at the laver we enjoy

Him as the life-giving Spirit who washes us. At the showbread table we enjoy Christ as our daily supply, at the lampstand we enjoy Him as our light of life, and at the incense altar we enjoy Him as the resurrection fragrance by which we are accepted by God. Then at the ark of testimony within the Holy of Holies, we enjoy Christ as the hidden manna, the budding rod, and the law of life. This is the enjoyment of Christ according to the new covenant way. If the Hebrew believers had given up this way, they would have fallen away from grace. We should not understand 12:15 in a superficial way. If we plunge into the depths of Hebrews, we shall realize that what the writer meant by not falling away from the grace of God was not giving up the new covenant way of enjoying Christ. In other words, the writer seemed to be saying, "Hebrew believers, do not go back to Judaism. If you do, you will be giving up the way to enjoy Christ as your grace, and you will fall away from the grace of God."

B. The Hebrew Believers Remaining in the New Covenant Way by Having Grace, Being Confirmed by Grace, and Standing in Grace

Verse 28 says, "Let us have grace, through which we may serve God well-pleasingly with godly fear and awe." For the Hebrew believers to remain in the new covenant way was to "have grace." I prefer the translation, "take grace" to "have grace," for the word "have" in this verse is the equivalent of "take." A mother will often say to her child, "Take your food," or "Take your milk." Likewise, we all need to take grace and to help one another to take grace. If your wife is about to give you a difficult time, you must tell her to take grace. To remain in the new covenant way is to take grace. Whenever we take even a little grace, the entire situation is changed. Sometimes when a brother and his wife are sitting at the dining table, everything is dark. In such a situation, I would advise the wife to be the first to take grace. If she would do this, the dining table would shine, and the husband would say, "Praise the Lord!" Grace certainly is the most healthy food.

In 13:9 Paul tells us to "be confirmed by grace," and in Romans 5:2 he says that we should stand in grace. Since we all have received grace, we now need to stand in it. Once we take grace and have been confirmed by grace, we shall be able to stand in grace.

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III. THE CAUSE OF FALLING AWAY FROM THE GRACE OF GOD

A. The Root of Bitterness—The Judaizer

In verses 15 and 16, Paul says, "Looking carefully lest anyone be falling away from the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and through this many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one meal gave up his birthright." In these verses we see three causes of falling away from the grace of God: the bitter root, the fornicator, and the profane person. According to the implication of the context of this book, the root of bitterness must be some Judaizer who could cause the Hebrew believers to be turned aside from the grace of God to the rituals of Judaism and, neglecting the holiness of God, to thus defile themselves in the sight of God. This root of bitterness troubled the Hebrew believers by convincing them with Judaism and capturing them back to Judaism to be defiled in the common religion, rather than to be sanctified unto the Holy God. The Judaizers attempted to convince the Hebrew believers that the new covenant way was wrong and that the old covenant way was right. In principle, there have been some roots of bitterness in the churches in the Lord's recovery. Such a root of bitterness will say that there is heresy in the churches. Recently there was such a root of bitterness in one of the churches, and several dear ones were poisoned. Once this poison of bitterness enters into a person, it is not easily extracted.

We should not listen to the roots of bitterness, for their intention is to damage the Lord's recovery. The root of bitterness can cause us to fall away from the grace of God. Deep within our spirit, we know that before we came into the church we never enjoyed grace like we do now. Do not care for what the opposers say; care for your experience. The opposers always try to stir up your mentality, just like the serpent stirred up Eve's mind. Once they have stirred up your mentality to think things over, they will poison you with their talk. As a result, you will either leave the Lord's recovery, or else you will be cold and negative concerning it.

B. The Fornicator

The second cause of falling away from the grace of God is the fornicator. When Paul wrote verse 16, he might have had in mind Reuben, the first son of Jacob, who was wrecked by his fleshly

lust and thereby lost his birthright (Gen. 49:3-4; 1 Chron. 5:1). By the lust of the flesh, the fornicator is kept from the enjoyment of Christ in God's new covenant. Nothing ruins God's people as much as fornication does. We all must flee it. The fornicator, like Reuben, will lose the blessing of the birthright because of the defilement of his lust.

C. The Profane Person

The third cause is the profane person. The profane person is one who loves the world and the worldly things, and who is captured by the entertainment of physical things. He is like Esau who sold his birthright for one meal (Gen. 25:29-34). Esau's birthright as the firstborn son of Isaac was the double portion of the land, the priesthood, and the kingship. Due to his profaneness in giving up his birthright, the double portion of land was given to Joseph (1 Chron. 5:1-2), the priesthood went to Levi (Deut. 33:8-10), and the kingship was assigned to Judah (Gen. 49:10; 1 Chron. 5:2). Verse 17, speaking of Esau says, "For you know that also afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it with tears." The words, "no place for repentance," do not mean that Esau had no ground to repent, but that he had no way to reverse by repentance the result of what he had done.

We Christians, born of God, are the "firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18) which He has reaped in His creation. In this sense, we are the firstborn sons of God. Hence, the church composed of us is called the church of the firstborn ones (12:23). As the firstborn sons of God, we have the birthright of the firstborn. This includes the inheritance of the earth (2:5-6), the priesthood (Rev. 20:6), and the kingship (Rev. 20:4), which will be the main blessings in the coming kingdom and which the profane, world-loving-and-seeking Christians will lose at the Lord's coming back. Eventually, this birthright will be a reward to the overcoming Christians in the millennial kingdom. Any worldly enjoyment, even one meal, can cause us to forfeit this birthright of ours. If after such a serious warning, the Hebrew believers still preferred to indulge in one meal of their old religion, they would have missed the full enjoyment of Christ and lost the kingdom rest with all its blessings.

Actually, what we are privileged to enjoy in Christ today is the foretaste of the blessings in the coming kingdom. The proper enjoyment of

this foretaste will usher us into the full taste of the kingdom blessings. If we do not enjoy Christ today as our good land, how can we enter into His rest in the kingdom and inherit the earth with Him? If we do not exercise our priesthood today to contact Him and prayerfully minister to Him, how can we fulfill our priestly duty in the kingdom? If we do not exercise our spirit with a God-given authority to rule our self, our flesh, our entire being, and the enemy with all his power of darkness today, how can we be Christ's co-kings and rule the nations with Him in His kingdom (Rev. 2:26-27)? Our enjoyment of Christ and the practice of the priesthood and kingship today are the preparation and qualification for our participating in Christ's kingdom tomorrow.

In Genesis 1, we see that God created man in His image so that man might express Him. According to the deep thought of the book of Hebrews, expressing God is a matter of the priesthood. To have the priesthood today in the new covenant way is to have the law of life work God into our being that we may become His expression and testimony. This is what it means to be the priesthood expressing God's image. From the very beginning, man was destined to be God's priest. Furthermore, the man created in the image of God was committed with God's dominion to rule over all created things. This is the kingship. Expressing God in His image is the priesthood, and ruling over all created things with God's dominion and authority is the kingship. Hence, both the priesthood and the kingship were with man in the beginning. Moreover, God gave the earth to man that he might take possession of it and replenish it through the spreading of God's expression and dominion. Therefore, in Genesis 1 we see the priesthood, the kingship, and the land, the three things assigned by God to man as his destiny.

After Adam fell, God selected another race, the race of Abraham, to be His people. By reading the Old Testament, we see that God's intention with the children of Israel was the same as with mankind originally. God intended to give the children of Israel the priesthood that they might express Him and His authority that they might represent Him. God also gave them the best land on earth. Hence, with the children of Israel there were the priesthood, the kingship, and the land. However, most of the children of Israel became fallen. Although Reuben, the first son of Jacob, should have had the birthright, he lost it due to his fall and the defilement of his fleshly lust. As a result, the birthright was divided. The land

portion of the birthright went to Joseph, whose two sons received the double portion of the land, the priesthood portion went to Levi, and the kingship portion went to Judah.

When we come to the New Testament, we see that God's intention is that all the church people express God through the priesthood, represent Him with the kingship, and take possession of the land in order to have the proper human living. No one on earth today has a proper human living. The unbelievers do not have it because they are still fallen, and we Christians, though we are saved, do not have it now because this is the time for us to lose our soul and to suffer for God's testimony. According to the book of Hebrews, one day we shall have all three items of the birthright. The land, the coming inhabited earth, is mentioned in chapter two. In the future, the inhabited earth will be given to us, the human partners of Christ. In the next age, we shall possess the land, rule the whole earth, and be the priesthood. During the coming millennial kingdom, we shall have the proper human life. That will be the full recovery of what was lost in Genesis 3. When, in the coming age of the kingdom, all the overcomers take possession of the inhabited earth, express God as priests, and rule as kings over the nations, everything that was given to man in Genesis 1 will be recovered. That will be the proper human living. This is God's intention.

Because not all of God's people care for His intention, He has made it a reward for those who do care for it. In the past, we have seen the reward and the gaining of the soul. The gaining of the soul is simply having the proper human life with the proper humanity. We cannot have such a life today because the earth has not been cleared up. But in the coming age of the kingdom, the whole earth will be cleared up, and we shall enter into our possession and be God's priesthood to express Him and His kingship to represent Him. Then we shall be the proper humanity living by Jesus, the proper man, to fulfill God's eternal purpose. At that time, Genesis 1 will be completely fulfilled. The whole earth will be under the possession of the proper humanity, which will be the expression of God in the priesthood and the representation of God in the kingship. This is God's intention in His eternal purpose, which has been assigned by our wise God and Father to be our portion and reward. During the coming age of the kingdom, we shall be in perfection and glorification and shall gain our soul to enjoy the proper human living with the proper humanity. This is the goal

of God's intention, the reward, and the birthright.

Since we have this birthright today, we must exercise it. We must exercise our spirit to express God, to represent God, and to enjoy Christ as our real land. If we fail to do these three things today, how shall we be able to do them during the coming age of the kingdom? We must practice the priesthood and the kingship and we must enjoy and take full possession of our good land today. If we do this, we shall be fully prepared to enter into the joy of taking possession of the coming inhabited earth and of exercising our priesthood and kingship. At that time, we shall receive the reward and enjoy the birthright. This is God's goal.