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THE WILL OF GOD

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message One

The Mystery of God's Will in the Universe Ultimately Being to Head Up All Things in Christ through the Church as the Body of Christ

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:5, 9-11; 3:11; 5:17; Col. 1:9; Rev. 4:11; 21:1-2, 9-11

I. We need to understand what the will of the Lord is—Eph. 5:17; Col. 1:9.

II. God's will is what He wants and what He intends to accomplish—Eph. 1:5, 9, 11:

- A. God has an eternal will, which is the source of His eternal purpose—v. 11; 3:11.
- B. Since God is eternal, without beginning or ending, His will is also eternal; it lies at the heart of the origin of the universe—Rev. 4:11.
- C. God created all things for His will so that He might accomplish and fulfill His purpose—Eph. 3:11.
- D. The will of God is concentrated in Christ and is for Christ to have the first place in all things; Christ is everything in God's eternal will—Col. 1:15-18; 3:4, 10-11.
- E. God wants to have Christ with the church; the will of God is to obtain the church as the Body of Christ—Eph. 5:32; 1:9, 22-23; 2:21-22; 4:16.
- F. God in Christ as the Spirit is now working within us to accomplish His eternal will to have the New Jerusalem—the wife of the Lamb filled with the glory of God for His eternal expression in the new heaven and new earth—Phil. 2:13; Eph. 3:14-21; Rev. 21:1-2, 9-11.

III. According to the good pleasure of His will, God predestinated us unto sonship—Eph. 1:5:

- A. God has a will, in which is His good pleasure; God's good pleasure is of His will and is embodied in His will, so His will comes first—vv. 5, 9, 11.
- B. God's good pleasure is what makes God happy—it is the desire of His heart; the living, loving, and purposeful God surely has a heart's desire—v. 5.
- C. God predestinated us to be His sons according to His pleasure, according to the desire of His heart—v. 5:
 - 1. Before the foundation of the world, God chose us to be holy; to be made holy—to be sanctified by God through His dispensing Himself into us and then mingling His nature with us—is the process, the procedure—v. 4.
 - 2. To be sons of God is the aim, the goal, and is a matter of our being joined to the Son of God and conformed to the image of the firstborn Son of God so that our whole being may be "sonized" by God—v. 5; Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15.

IV. We have been "predestinated according to the purpose of the One who works all things according to the counsel of His will"—Eph. 1:11:

- A. God's will is His intention, and God's counsel is His consideration of the way to accomplish His will, His intention.
- B. According to His will, a council was held by the Trinity before the foundation of the world to make a counsel, a decision, which is His determined will—1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8; Eph. 1:11.

V. God's will was hidden in Him as a mystery, so Ephesians 1:9 speaks of "the mystery of His will":

- A. In eternity God had a will, but this will was hidden in Him; hence, it was a mystery—v. 9; 3:3-5, 9.
- B. In the pleasure of His heart and in His wisdom and prudence, God made this hidden mystery known to us through His revelation in Christ, that is, through Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension—1:9; John 1:14; Rom. 1:3-4; 4:25; 8:3, 34.

VI. Ultimately, God's will in the universe is to head up all things in Christ through the church as the Body of Christ—Eph. 1:10, 22-23; Rev. 21:1-2:

- A. God's eternal intention is, in the economy of the fullness of the times, to head up all things in Christ, who has been appointed to be the universal Head—Eph. 1:10, 22.
- B. Through the dispensations of God in all the ages, all things will be headed up in Christ in the new heaven and new earth; this will be God's eternal administration and economy—Rev. 21:1-2.
- C. Satan's goal is to corrupt God's creation and to cause confusion—Rom. 8:19-23:
 - 1. The entire universe is a heap of collapse caused by Satan injecting himself as the factor of death into God's creation—Heb. 2:14; Rom. 8:20-21.
 - 2. God is working to liberate His creation from bondage and to bring it into liberty by heading up all things in Christ—Eph. 1:22, 10.
 - 3. We all need to be delivered from the heap of collapse and headed up in Christ—Col. 1:12-13.
 - 4. God's salvation is to save us not only from our fallen, sinful condition but also from the heap of collapse—vv. 12-13; Eph. 2:1-8, 21-22.
- D. God will subject all things under Christ by heading up all things in Christ through the church as the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 15:20-28:
 - 1. God is heading up His chosen ones to be the Body of Christ with Christ as the Head—Eph. 1:4, 22-23:
 - a. Christ's headship is being transmitted to the church; this means that, in a sense, we can share the headship of Christ over all things.
 - b. The church is under nothing but Christ Himself; we are above everything else because we are the Body of the One who is over all things.
 - c. The first step in the heading up of all things in Christ is for God to bring His chosen ones, His sons, out of the universal collapse and to place them under the headship of Christ—v. 22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:10, 19.
 - 2. When the church takes the lead to be headed up in Christ, God has a way to head up all other things—Eph. 1:22-23, 10:
 - a. The church is the vessel used by God to solve His problems and to fulfill His purpose, which is to manifest Himself through man by mingling Himself with man—3:9-11.
 - b. Eventually, the Body with Christ as the Head will be the universal Head over all things—1:22-23.
 - 3. The church life is a life of being headed up—4:15; 1 Cor. 11:3:
 - a. In the proper church life we are being headed up in Christ.
 - b. If we do not know what it is to be headed up in Christ, we cannot know the church.
 - c. In the church life we are taking the lead to be headed up in Christ; for this we need to grow in life—Eph. 4:15.

- d. We are headed up through the divine dispensing—1 Tim. 1:4; 3:15; Eph. 1:1; 3:2, 9, 16-17.
 - e. God is working Himself into His chosen and redeemed ones through an administration that is a sweet dispensing, an intimate stewardship, a comfortable household arrangement—1:10; 3:2; 1 Tim. 1:4; 3:15.
- E. The heading up in the church life is by life and light— John 1:4; 8:12:
 - 1. God's way of recovery is Christ versus Satan, life versus death, light versus darkness, and order versus confusion.
 - 2. The collapse comes from the factor of death; the heading up comes from the factor of life—Ezek. 37:4-10.
 - 3. God's way to recover the oneness among His creation is to impart Himself into us as life—Rom. 8:6, 10-11, 19-21.
 - 4. In order to be delivered from the heap of collapse in a practical way, we need to grow in life; the more we grow in life, the more we will be headed up and the more we will be rescued from the universal collapse—Eph. 4:15; Col. 2:19.
 - 5. When God comes into us as life, the light of life shines within us— John 1:4; Eph. 5:8-9:
 - a. This life swallows death, and this light dispels the darkness— John 8:12.
 - b. If we are in the life and under the light, we will be delivered out of confusion and brought into order, harmony, and oneness.
- F. In the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem as the center, all things will be headed up in Christ; this will be the complete fulfillment of Ephesians 1:10—Rev. 21:2-3, 23-25; 22:1-2a:
 - 1. In the New Jerusalem everything will be saturated with life and will be under light— v. 1; 21:23.
 - 2. In Revelation 21 we see the Head, the Body surrounding the Head, and all the nations walking in the light of the city; the whole universe will be headed up in the light shown through the transparent city—v. 18.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE MYSTERY HAVING BEEN HIDDEN THROUGH THE AGES

In this message we come to the mystery of God's will. God's will has a mystery, a mystery that has been hidden through the ages (Eph. 3:5; Col. 1:26). The universe is a mystery. Why is there a heaven, and why does the earth exist? Why are there so many millions of items in the universe? Why is man here on earth? All these questions are mysteries and have given rise to many different philosophies. The mystery, which is the will of God, has been made known to the church through the apostles. A will is an intention, and the will of God is God's intention. God's intention is intimately related to the desire of His heart. Thus, the mystery of the universe is a matter of God's will, which is related to the desire of God's heart. We need to know the mystery, the will of God, and the desire of God's heart.

Some may say that God's will and intention is to have the church and that the church is the desire of His heart. This is correct, but we need to ask what the church is. Many Christians, including Christian teachers, do not have a clear understanding concerning the church. The church is not simply a group of people. In ourselves we are not the church; we are pitiful sinners. The only way we can become the church is for God in His Son to work Himself into our being. Most Christians today do not see the crucial and vital matter that God in His Son is working Himself into His chosen and redeemed ones. They may know about God's selection and redemption, and they may realize that they are the

chosen and redeemed ones. But they do not see that the very God who has chosen and redeemed them desires, in the person of the Son, to work Himself into them. Neither selection nor redemption is the goal. Both are steps toward the goal. God's goal is to work Himself into our being.

I realize that such a word may sound strange to many. For years I was in various branches of Christianity: fundamental Christianity, the Brethren assemblies, the inner-life practices, and the Pentecostal movement. But I was never told that in the person of the Son, God is working Himself into His redeemed ones. Nevertheless, this is the mystery of the universe.

The New Testament proves that God is working Himself into us. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all in us (Eph. 4:6; 2 Cor. 13:5; John 14:17). According to 1 John, we are in God, and God is in us (4:15). Furthermore, we abide in Him, and He abides in us (John 15:4). In Philippians 1:21 the apostle Paul could even say, "To me, to live is Christ." In Galatians 2:20 he said that he lived no longer but that Christ lived in him. All these verses indicate that God in the Son is working Himself into us...

The mystery of the universe is the church, and the church is a group of people into whom God is working Himself. Eventually, the church will be fully saturated with God and will consummately become the holy city, the New Jerusalem. The church will not only be saturated with God but also mingled with Him. This does not mean, however, that we shall become the Godhead. No, this is neither what we say nor what we mean. Nevertheless, as those who are being saturated with God and mingled with Him, we shall become the very expression of God. The New Jerusalem will be the corporate expression of God. As we have pointed out a number of times, both God on the throne (Rev. 4:3) and the New Jerusalem (21:11) have the appearance of jasper. This means that the entire city has the appearance of God and is the expression of God. This is the mystery of the universe.

What a deliverance it would be for Christians if they could only see this! Many know only about being saved, being regenerated, becoming the children of God, and going to heaven some day. But the concept of being saved for the goal of going to heaven is much lower than the mystery of God's will. The mystery of God's will is to have a church constituted with those who have been saturated and mingled with God...

The mystery of the universe is that God is working Himself into us. Everything is working together for this purpose (Rom. 8:28). All things serve this goal. Everything is for God's working of Himself into our being. This is much different from merely having a happy life. You may be very happy today but not tomorrow. You may be happy in a meeting, but when you return home, your wife or husband may give you a difficult time. The mystery of God's will is not that we are becoming happy people. Today is not the time for us to be fully happy, because the time is not yet ripe. Because many do not have the adequate vision or revelation, they do not know what is actually taking place in the church life. They think that we are simply here to have a good time. But this is not the mystery of God's will. This mystery is that God is dispensing Himself into us to produce the church for Himself. This is a mystery hidden through the ages.

GOD'S WILL BEING GOD'S INTENTION TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT HE DESIRES FOR HIMSELF

God's will is God's intention to accomplish what He has purposed in eternity past and what He desires for Himself for eternity future. He purposed and He desires to have the church. This is His will and intention.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL HAVING BEEN MADE KNOWN TO US BY REVELATION

Ephesians 1:9 says that God has made known to us the mystery of His will. To make known to us the mystery of His will is one item of God's wisdom and prudence. In eternity God planned a will. This will has been hidden in Him; hence, it was a mystery. In His wisdom and prudence He has made this hidden mystery known to us through His revelation in Christ, that is, through Christ's incarnation,

crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. It was the pleasure of God's heart to reveal to us the mystery of His will.

ACCORDING TO GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE

God's good pleasure is the desire of His heart, that is, to have the church, and God's revelation of His hidden will is according to this desire of His heart. This is according to His good pleasure.

GOD'S GOOD PLEASURE HAVING BEEN PURPOSED BY GOD

In Himself

God's good pleasure has been purposed by God in Himself. This means that God Himself is the initiation, origination, and sphere of His eternal purpose. God has a plan, a desire, and according to His plan, He has a purpose. The existence of the universe is according to God's purpose. Heaven, earth, millions of items, and the human race are all according to God's purposed desire. Eventually, all these things will issue in God's desire. In the universe there is a desire, God's desire. Because this desire has been purposed by God, no one and nothing can overthrow it. Everything that takes place on earth is for this purpose. We, the sons of God, in whom God's grace abounds, are the focal point of His purpose, and everything is working for us. God has purposed this desire in Himself. He did not take counsel with anyone else regarding it.

God's good pleasure is what He has purposed in Himself for an administration (v. 10). The entire universe will eventually be under one administration. The Greek word rendered "administration" is *oikonomia*, from which we get the English word *economy*. God has purposed to have an economy. All the kingdoms in the universe—the angelic kingdom, the demonic kingdom, the human kingdom, the animal kingdom, and the plant kingdom—are for this economy, this administration, and are moving toward it. For example, today's world situation, the center of which is the Middle East, is according to the Bible. Since the reformation of the nation of Israel in 1948 and especially since the return of Jerusalem to Israel in 1967, the Middle East has become the center of international relations. This is altogether according to the Bible, and it is a sign that the universe is moving toward God's administration. Such an administration is what God has planned and purposed according to His desire. All the kingdoms will be under this unique administration, which is to head up all things in Christ. (*Life-study of Ephesians*, pp. 64-69)

THE HEADING UP OF ALL THINGS

In Ephesians 1:10 Paul says, "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." We need to note that it is in Christ that God intends to head up all things. The word *Christ* here literally means "the Christ"; it refers to the One mentioned in verse 1 and verse 3, the One in whom are the spiritual blessings of God and in whom are the faithful saints, who participate in the blessings. He is a particular One; hence, He is called "the Christ."

The Greek word rendered "economy" in verse 10 is *oikonomia*, which means "house law, household management, or administration," and derivatively, "administrative dispensation, plan, or economy." The economy that God, according to His desire, planned and purposed in Himself is to head up all things in Christ at the fullness of the times. This is accomplished through the dispensing of the abundant life supply of the Triune God as the life factor into all the members of the church that they may rise up from the death situation and be attached to the Body.

The expression *the times* in verse 10 refers to the ages. The fullness of the times will be when the new heaven and new earth appear after all the dispensations of God in all the ages have been completed. Altogether there are four ages: the age of sin (Adam), the age of the law (Moses), the age of grace (Christ), and the age of the kingdom (the millennium).

God's eternal intention is to head up all things in Christ, who has been appointed to be the universal Head. Through all the dispensations of God in all the ages, all things will be headed up in Christ in the new heaven and new earth. That will be God's eternal administration and economy. Thus, the heading up of all things is the issue of all the items covered in verses 3 through 9. God chose us to be holy, predestinated us unto sonship, accomplished redemption for us through the blood of Christ, graced us in the Beloved, and caused grace to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence in order that He may head up all things in Christ.

Ephesians 1:22 says that God gave Christ to be Head over all things. This reveals that the heading up of all things is to the church so that the Body of Christ may share in all that is of Christ as the Head, having been rescued from the heap of the universal collapse in death and darkness, which was caused by the rebellion of the angels and the rebellion of man. In Christ God is in the process of heading up all things in heaven and on earth. However, without the church as the Body to match Christ as the Head, it will not be possible for God to head up all things in Christ. The heading up of all things is accomplished by the Head, but it cannot be accomplished without a Body for the Head. Whether Christ can be the Head over all things, whether all things can be subjected to the authority of Christ, and whether all things can be headed up in Christ completely depend upon whether or not the church has been produced and has grown up (4:14-16; Col. 2:19). When the church is fully grown, God is able to subject all things to the authority of Christ. By means of the church, Christ is able to be the Head over all things. Eventually, the Body with Christ as the Head will be the universal Head over all things. When everything is headed up in Christ, there will be absolute peace and harmony (Isa. 2:4; 11:6; 55:12; Psalms 96:12-13), a full rescue out of the collapse. This will begin from the time of the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21).

When God created the universe, everything of the universe was in oneness; all things in it were in harmony, not in chaos. God and the universe were in harmony. This harmony is the great oneness of the universe. All things related to the universe depend on God, who is one, as the factor of their oneness. The center of the universe is God Himself; hence, the oneness of the universe is God Himself. There was oneness in the creation of the universe, and in this oneness there was no confusion. Yet because of Satan's rebellion, which was followed by man's fall, this original oneness in creation was ruined so that the entire universe was brought into confusion. Satan damaged the oneness of the universe in creation by introducing death into all creation, which death severed the Creator's relationship with creation. In other words, when Satan brought death into the universe, the universe was separated from God, and the oneness of the universe was lost. Thus, there is not the full harmony in the universe.

Yet God had an eternal plan to head up all things in Christ, that is, to make Christ the Head of all things and the Head above all things. God's way to recover the oneness among His creation is to impart Himself in Christ into us as life (Rom. 8:6, 10-11, 19-21). The Triune God as life brings in light, and light issues in harmony and brings all things into oneness. Hence, the believers participate in this heading up by growing in life, by being headed up in the proper church life, and by living under Christ's light (John 1:4; Rev. 21:23-25). The more we grow in life, the more we will be headed up and the more we will be rescued from the universal collapse (Eph. 4:15; Col. 2:19). This process of heading up all things in Christ is still continuing, and the heading up of all things will be fully accomplished and manifested when Christ finishes His work to bring forth the new creation out of the old creation through all the dispensations of God. It is through this new creation that Christ will head up all creation and bring it into the universal oneness; this will issue in the new heaven and the new earth. In the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem as the center, all things will be headed up in Christ; this will be the complete fulfillment of the heading up of all things spoken of in Ephesians 1:10. In Revelation 21 we see the Head, the Body surrounding the Head, and all the nations walking in the light of the city. The whole universe will be headed up in the light shown through the transparent city (v. 18). (*The Conclusion of the New Testament*, pp. 3341-3344)

THE WILL OF GOD

(Friday—Second Morning Session)

Message Two

Knowing and Participating in God's Great and Lofty Will to Head Up All Things in Christ

Scripture Reading: Eph. 1:9-10; 4:15-16; Col. 2:19; 1 Cor. 8:1b

I. “Making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, 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. 1:9-10:

- A. The economy, or dispensation, that God, according to His desire, planned and purposed in Himself is to head up all things in Christ at the fullness of the times.
- B. This is accomplished through the dispensing of the abundant life supply of the Triune God as the life factor into all the members of the church so that they may rise up from the death situation and be attached to the Body.
- C. *The times* refers to the ages, and the fullness of the times will be when the new heaven and new earth appear after all the dispensations of God in all the ages have been completed:
 - 1. A dispensation is the act or instance of dispensing, and it refers to God's dispensing of Himself into His chosen people; we need the element of God with His life and nature to be wrought into our being.
 - 2. Altogether there are four ages: the age of sin (Adam), the age of the law (Moses), the age of grace (Christ), and the age of the kingdom (the millennium).
 - 3. God dispensed Himself into Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with Joseph; He had an even greater dispensation with Moses and, of course, with the Lord Jesus.
 - 4. This dispensing continues in the New Testament Epistles; God's dispensation is even greater than it was at the time of the apostle Paul; today there is a deeper, higher, and wider dispensation of the grace of God—cf. Eph. 3:2; 1 Pet. 4:10.
 - 5. This dispensation will continue through the millennium until the fullness of the times; the ultimate, the consummate, dispensation will be the dispensing of the Triune God into the whole city of the New Jerusalem—Rev. 22:1-2.
 - 6. We enjoy a miniature of this consummate dispensation in the church life today; as we enjoy the Spirit as the living water and eat Christ as the tree of life in the church life, we await the consummate dispensation, in which we will be fully saturated with the Triune God—1 Cor. 10:3-4; 12:13; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14; John 6:57.
 - 7. Where life is, there is light also (1:4; 8:12); because the New Jerusalem is saturated with light, it has no need of the light of the sun; the glory of the Triune God will be our shining and controlling light (Rev. 21:23).
 - 8. In the New Jerusalem there will be no night, no death, and no darkness; instead, there will be life and light, causing everything to rise up and be in good order and thus be fully headed up in Christ (v. 24; Eph. 1:10).
 - 9. When we are fully headed up in Christ in the New Jerusalem, that will be God's eternal administration and economy.
- D. The heading up of all things in Ephesians 1:10 is the issue of all the things covered in verses 3 through 9—God has chosen us, predestinated us, redeemed us, forgiven us, and

- graced us for the purpose of heading up all things in Christ.
- E. Verses 22 and 23 reveal further that this heading up is “to the church” so that the Body of Christ may share in all that is of Christ as the Head, having been rescued from the heap of the universal collapse in death and darkness, which was caused by the rebellion of the angels and the rebellion of man; to be rescued from the collapse is to be headed up.
 - F. When everything is headed up in Christ, there will be absolute peace and harmony (Isa. 2:4; 11:6; 55:12; Psa. 96:12-13), a full rescue out of the collapse; this will begin from the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21).
 - G. The picture in Ezekiel 37 of the dead, dry, and scattered bones shows that the unique way to have the Body, the church, and the house of God in the genuine oneness is the way of life:
 - 1. When the breath entered into the dead ones, it became life to them, and they lived and stood up in oneness to become an exceedingly great army.
 - 2. The dead bones were enlivened and became one as the issue of the dispensing of life and the growth in life—vv. 1-14.
 - 3. God’s way to head us up is to work Himself as the factor of life into us so that we may rise up and be attached to one another in the Body.

II. In order to be headed up in Christ, we need to grow up into Christ, the Head, in all things—in *all things* means in everything big or small in our daily life and in our work—Eph. 4:15; Zech. 4:10:

- A. The organic building up of the Body is the growth of the Body, which is the growth of God, the increase of God as life, in all the members—Eph. 2:21-22; 4:16; Col. 2:19.
- B. The growing members are the building members; to grow in life is to have more of God in us; our problem is that we are short of God—Eph. 4:16; cf. Job 1:1-5; 42:1-6.
- C. In order to grow up into the Head, we must hold to truth in the element and sphere of the divine love; *truth* in Ephesians 4:15 means things that are true—Rom. 3:4:
 - 1. We need to hold to God’s eternal economy—1 Tim. 1:3-4:
 - a. This is the economy of the mystery hidden in God—Eph. 3:9.
 - b. This economy is to have the church as the organic Body of Christ to consummate in the New Jerusalem for the manifestation of Christ as God’s multifarious wisdom—vv. 10-11; 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 1:30.
 - 2. We need to hold to the all-inclusive Christ—John 14:6; Eph. 1:23:
 - a. His measure is immeasurable—3:18.
 - b. His riches are unsearchable—v. 8.
 - c. His love is knowledge-surpassing—v. 19.
 - 3. We need to hold to the church as the Body of Christ—1 Tim. 3:15:
 - a. The Body of Christ is the corporate Christ—Acts 9:4; 1 Cor. 12:12.
 - b. The Body of Christ is the fullness, the expression, of Christ and of God—Eph. 1:23; 3:19.
- D. We grow up into the Head through acknowledging the authority of the headship of Christ—Col. 2:19; cf. Josh. 9:14; 1 Pet. 5:3; Matt. 20:25-27; 23:10-11:
 - 1. Christ is the Head of everyone—1 Cor. 11:3.
 - 2. Christ is the Head of the church—Eph. 5:23.
 - 3. Christ is the Head of all things—1:22, 10.
- E. The believers participate in Christ’s heading up by being willing to be headed up in the church life, that is, by growing in life and by living under Christ’s light—John 1:4; 8:12; Eph. 4:15-16; 5:8-9; Rev. 21:23-25.
- F. We grow up into the Head by allowing Christ to increase and grow in all the inward parts of our being:

1. In order to grow in life, we must pay attention to our spirit (Rom. 8:6); we must know, we must use, and we must exercise our mingled spirit (1 Tim. 4:6-8):
 - a. Ephesians 1:17 shows that we need to pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation to fully know Christ and God's economy.
 - b. Ephesians 2:22 says that all the believers are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.
 - c. Ephesians 3:5 says that the mystery of Christ has been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit.
 - d. Ephesians 3:16 shows that we need to pray to be strengthened into the inner man, which is our regenerated spirit with God's life as its life.
 - e. Ephesians 4:23 tells us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind.
 - f. Ephesians 5:18 tells us to be filled in spirit.
 - g. Ephesians 6:18 tells us to pray at every time in spirit.
2. In order to grow in life, we must feed on the milk and food of the holy Word, as the embodiment of Christ, the living Word of God—1 Pet. 2:2; Heb. 5:13-14.

III. As we grow up into the Head in life, our function will come out from the Head for the building up of the Body—Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:19:

- A. When we allow Christ to be the Head in everything and when we grow up into Him in all things, we will be supplied with the riches of His life, receiving something from Him to transfuse into other members of the Body—1 Cor. 14:4b; John 7:37-39:
 1. To build up the Body of Christ is to minister Christ as the life-giving Spirit into the saints for their growth into Christ—2 Cor. 3:6, 8.
 2. We must help the saints learn to enjoy the Lord and be nourished by the Lord so that they can grow—Phil. 1:25; 2 Cor. 1:24.
- B. Under Christ's headship all the Body causes the growth of the Body of Christ—Eph. 4:15-16:
 1. This growth is through every joint of the rich supply—all the particular gifts in the Body of Christ—vv. 11-12.
 2. This growth is through the operation in the measure of each one part—every member in the Body of Christ—vv. 7-8.
- C. The building up of the Body of Christ under His headship is in love and by love:
 1. Love is the most excellent way to be anything and to do anything for the building up of the Body of Christ; nothing but love can keep us in a proper relationship with the Lord—1 Cor. 12:31b—13:13.
 2. The goal of the book of Ephesians is to bring us into love as God's inner substance (1 John 4:8, 16) so that we may enjoy God as love and enjoy His presence in the sweetness of the divine love and thereby love others as Christ did (Eph. 5:25; 6:24; 1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2).
 3. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1b); this refers to the building up of the corporate Body of Christ under the headship of Christ.
- D. To grow in life is to grow up into the Head, Christ, but to operate in the Body of Christ is to operate out from Him; first, we grow into the Head, and then we have something that is out from the Head for the building up of the Body; this is to participate in God's great and lofty will to head up all things in Christ—Eph. 4:15-16.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE MEANING OF DISPENSATION

Now we need to understand what a dispensation is. According to one teaching, a dispensation

refers to an age. However, this understanding is not accurate. Another teaching is that a dispensation refers to the way God deals with people during a particular period of time. For example, in the dispensation of innocence God dealt with man in one way, and in the dispensation of conscience He dealt with man in another way. Likewise, God deals with people in different ways in the ages of human government, promise, law, grace, and the kingdom. This understanding of dispensation is not incorrect, but it falls short. A dispensation is the act or instance of dispensing. It refers to God's dispensing of Himself into His chosen people. Although I have studied this matter of the dispensations for many years and have studied a number of diagrams, I have never been told that God's dispensation is the dispensing of Himself into His people. We need to forget all the diagrams and remember one basic point: God is now dispensing Himself into us.

THE DISPENSING OF LIFE

As we have pointed out, when Satan, the power of death, injected himself into man, Satan became death and darkness to man. Death brings in corruption, and darkness brings in confusion. Satan's goal is to corrupt God's creation and to cause confusion. But praise the Lord that where death abounds, life abounds all the more! After Satan came in to deaden, God came in to enliven, to impart life. Where there is life, there is light also. Death ruins, but life heals; darkness brings in confusion, but light brings in the proper order. We need to keep in mind that Satan came in to deaden God's creation and that death ruins and darkness confuses. God, however, has come in to enliven the deadened creation and to bring in order. In this order all things are headed up in Christ.

God's dispensation is the dispensing of life into people who have been deadened. Although Adam had become deadened, God came in to dispense something of Himself into Abel. He did the same with Enosh and Enoch. Do not think that in himself, a deadened person, Enoch was able to walk with God for three hundred years (Gen. 5:22). This was possible only through God's dispensing of Himself into him. The same was true of Noah. Noah walked with God and had strong faith because God was dispensing Himself into him. God's dispensing of Himself began with Abel and has increased with each generation. Thus, the dispensation with Enoch was greater than with Enosh and greater with Noah than with Enoch. With Abraham it was still greater. Acts 7:2 says that the God of glory appeared to Abraham. That appearing certainly was a dispensing. Abraham could have faith in God because God had been dispensed into him.

The same thing happened to us when we heard the gospel and repented. As we were repenting and confessing our sins to God, God was dispensing Himself into us, although we might not have been conscious of God's dispensing at the time. As we recall our experience, however, we realize that this was the case. On the day I repented and made confession to God of my sinfulness, something was dispensed into my being. I wept, but inwardly I was on fire. This was God's inspiration and also His dispensation. When God comes to inspire us, He dispenses Himself into us. Nothing can change us like God's dispensation. It can transform a robber into a saint, because it dispenses the holy nature of God into him. I encourage you all to go to the Lord for thirty minutes for His dispensation. During that time, forget your problems and your environment. Simply open to Him and confess your shortcomings and wrongdoings. The more you confess to Him, the more the way will be open for Him to dispense Himself into you.

No matter what term we use—*dispensing*, *inspiring*, *transfusing*, or *infusing*—the experience is the same. I do not care for terminology; I care for the divine element being imparted into you. We need God to get into us. We need the element of God to be wrought into our being. This is the meaning of dispensation.

There is a shortage of this dispensation of God into man among most Christians today. Many teach about the seven dispensations but never tell people that a dispensation denotes God's dispensing of His life and nature into His chosen people. Our burden today is not to teach doctrine; it is to dispense God's life and nature into His people. Please do not bring to this ministry your opinions or

concepts. If you do, you will be wasting your time. We are not interested in arguing doctrinal points or concepts. Our burden is to transfuse God into you. You may know a great deal of doctrine but be very short of the divine element. What you need is the dispensing of the element of God into your being. I was with the Brethren for years and eventually became bored with their disputes over doctrine. We may not be short of doctrine, but we are short of the divine element. God's dispensation is to impart His very element into us.

THE ULTIMATE DISPENSATION

We have seen that God dispensed Himself into Abel, Enosh, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. He had an even greater dispensation with Moses and, of course, with the Lord Jesus. The dispensing continues in the New Testament Epistles. It may surprise you to know that God's dispensation at the present time is even greater than it was at the time of the apostle Paul. I doubt that when Paul was on earth there was a congregation who had the privilege of hearing the things that you are hearing today. Today there is a deeper, higher, and wider dispensation of the grace of God. This dispensation will continue through the millennium until the fullness of the times. The dispensation of the fullness of the times will be the highest and the broadest. This dispensation will be in eternity, as revealed in Revelation 21 and 22.

In these chapters we have a new environment, the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21:1 says, "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." In the Bible the sea signifies death. For there to be no more sea means that there will be no trace of death. By that time death will have been swallowed up. At the end of the millennium, death, the last enemy, will be abolished and cast into the lake of fire. In place of death, there will be a new environment, a new sphere, a new circumference, in the center of which will be the New Jerusalem.

If you read the book of Revelation carefully, you will see that the New Jerusalem is actually a great mountain with a height of twelve thousand stadia, more than thirteen hundred miles. At the top of the mountain there is the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1). Out of the throne flows the river of water of life; it flows down the mountain and reaches the twelve gates of the city. The water of life is for drinking, for the life supply, not for bathing or for baptizing. In the water of life grows the tree of life (v. 2). This indicates that when you drink the water of life, you eat the tree of life. Therefore, when you drink the water, you receive the life supply. Here we see the ultimate, the consummate, dispensation: the dispensing of the Triune God into the whole city of New Jerusalem. This will cause the city to be filled, saturated, permeated, and soaked with the water of life. This is the highest dispensation purposed by God for the fullness of the times.

THE MINIATURE IN THE CHURCH LIFE

We enjoy a miniature of this consummate dispensation in the church life today. In the church we have the flow of life, we drink the water of life, and we eat the tree of life. This is God's dispensation in the church life. However, it is not the highest dispensation, the dispensation of the fullness of the times. As I enjoy the living water in the church, I am awaiting the ultimate dispensation. We shall all be in this consummate dispensation, and we shall be fully saturated with the Triune God.

God on the throne refers to the Father, the Lamb refers to the Son, and the river of water of life refers to the Spirit. John 7 reveals clearly that the river of life denotes the Spirit. Thus, in Revelation 22 we have God the Father, God the Son as the redeeming One, and God the Spirit flowing with God the Son as the tree of life to be our life supply. This is the dispensation of the Triune God, the top dispensation, the dispensation of the fullness of the times.

This dispensation began with Abel and has been increasing throughout the ages until it eventually will reach the dispensation of the fullness of the times. We are getting close to that dispensation. If we realize this, we shall be beside ourselves with joy. Not even the apostle Paul was as close to the

ultimate dispensation as we are. Hallelujah, we all shall share in the consummate dispensation! In the Lord's recovery we have in the church life a miniature of that coming dispensation. How wonderful! This is why we enjoy singing these lines from *Hymns*, #1151:

Drink! A river pure and clear that's flowing from the throne;
Eat! The tree of life with fruits abundant, richly grown;
Look! No need of lamp nor sun nor moon to keep it bright, for
Here there is no night!

Oh, in the church life we drink the water of life and eat of the tree of life! By eating and drinking, we become saturated with God's very life through His dispensation. The more life that is dispensed into us, the higher we rise up. This is the heading up in Christ.

THE LIGHT OF LIFE KEEPING EVERYTHING IN ORDER

Where life is, there is light also. John 1:4 says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." This light is the light of life (8:12). In Revelation 21 we have both life and light. Because the New Jerusalem is saturated with light, it has no need for the light of the sun. Revelation 21:23 says, "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." In the New Jerusalem we shall have the glory of the Triune God as our shining light. In the new heaven and new earth with the New Jerusalem there will be no night, no death, and no darkness. Instead, there will be life and light. This will cause everything to rise up and be in good order.

Wherever there is light, things are kept in order. Suppose there were no lights in the city of Los Angeles. What darkness and confusion there would be! Life regulates, and light controls. In the church life we do not have regulations, but we do have the regulating life and the controlling light. When the church is full of life, it is also full of light. Then everyone in the church is regulated by the inward life, not by outward regulations; and everyone is controlled and kept in order by the light of life. Here in life and in light, we are headed up. In Revelation 21 we see the Head, the Body surrounding the Head, and all the nations walking in the light of the city (v. 24). This will cause the new heaven and the new earth to be a bright sphere. Therefore, in the new heaven and the new earth with the New Jerusalem as the center, all things will be headed up in Christ. This will be the fulfillment of the heading up of all things in Christ spoken of in Ephesians 1:10.

In order for this to take place, we need the dispensation of life. The life that is dispensed into us eventually becomes the light of men. In the dispensation of the fullness of the times, all the nations will walk in the light of the city. This means that there will be no death, no darkness, no corruption, and no confusion. Instead, everything will be in good order, headed up under Christ, the unique Head, to express the Triune God in eternity. This heading up of all things will be an eternal expression of the Triune God. Today's church life is a foretaste of this. It is a miniature of the new heaven, the new earth, and the New Jerusalem. As those in the miniature, we are enjoying the dispensation of life with light, and we are being headed up in Christ. (*Life-study of Ephesians*, pp. 90-96)

THE WILL OF GOD

(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Three

Praying for God's Will to Be Done on Earth

Scripture Reading: Matt. 6:10; Luke 11:1; 1 John 5:14-15; John 15:4-5, 7

I. Although God has a will for everything, He does not act independently; rather, He wants the human will on earth to echo His will before He does anything—Matt. 6:10; 1 John 5:14-15:

- A. In the universe there are three wills: the divine will, the satanic will, and the human will; God wants man's will to be joined to Him and be one with Him so that man may express and echo His will back to Him in prayer for the good pleasure of His will—Eph. 1:5, 11; Isa. 44:12-15; Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 26:39; Phil. 2:13.
- B. God will not act independently, and He will not accomplish His will alone; instead, He will accomplish His will only when His people agree with Him and are one with Him—Col. 1:9; 4:12:
 - 1. If there is only a will in heaven, God will not move; the will in heaven is accomplished on earth only when we, His people, want the will in heaven to be done on earth—Matt. 6:10.
 - 2. Because God acts according to laws established by Him, He will not annul man's will on earth by His own will; He will not usurp man's will and act independently—Josh. 24:15, 22.
 - 3. Everything related to God's move and work on earth can be accomplished only when there is a will on earth that cooperates with Him—John 7:17.
 - 4. God cannot do what He wants by Himself; He does it only with the cooperation of the church; He accomplishes His will through the church.
 - 5. Whenever God's people place their will in harmony with God's will, the will of God will be done on earth as in heaven—Matt. 6:10.

II. God's intention is to accomplish His will through the believers' prayer in union with Him—v. 10; John 15:7:

- A. God's people must pray before God will move on earth to accomplish His will.
- B. The prayer that is most pleasing to God is the prayer that asks for the accomplishment of His will—1 John 5:14.
- C. God wants us to work with Him to accomplish His will; the way to work together with Him is to pray—Luke 11:1; 18:1; 1 Thes. 5:17:
 - 1. The purpose of prayer is that we be one with God's will so that God can work on earth to fulfill His purpose—Rom. 8:26-29.
 - 2. If we do not work together with God in prayer for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, He cannot move on earth to accomplish His will—Matt. 6:10.
 - 3. If we are one with the Lord, we want what God wants, and our will becomes one with God's will—John 15:7.
 - 4. The prayer for the accomplishment of God's will is not asking God to accomplish what we want Him to do but asking God what He Himself wants to do; such prayer is the outlet of God's will on earth—1 John 5:14-16.
- D. Prayer for God's will to be done on earth consists of four steps—Matt. 6:10:
 - 1. God intends to do something according to His will—Eph. 1:5, 11.

2. He reveals His will to us through the Spirit for us to know His will.
 3. We return and echo His will back to Him through prayer—1 John 5:14.
 4. God accomplishes His work according to His will—v. 15.
- E. God needs us to exercise our spirit with our resurrected will to pray according to His divine will for Christ to be manifested and enjoyed by us, for the Body life to be practiced by us, and for the Body of Christ to be built up through us—Heb. 10:5-10; Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 1:4-6, 9, 11, 22b-23; 3:16-19; 4:16:
1. A genuine man of prayer is one whose desires are fully blended into God's desires and whose thoughts are fully one with God's thoughts; he is a man in whom God's desires are imprinted, a man of revelation whose heart is a duplication of God's heart—1 Sam. 2:35; 3:21; 12:23.
 2. When we come to the Lord in prayer, we need to allow the Spirit to mingle our desires with His desires, lead our thoughts into His thoughts, and imprint His desires and thoughts into us; then the prayers that we utter to God with His inward desires will be precious, weighty, and valuable to Him and will cause Satan to suffer loss—Rom. 8:26-27; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2, 12; Mark 9:28-29; Eph. 6:10-20.

III. Effective prayers for God's will to be done on earth are the expression of God's desire and intention and are the issue of our abiding in the Lord and of His words abiding in us— John 15:4-5, 7:

- A. Prayer is God's heart's desire passing through us and returning to God:
1. The desire in our prayers does not originate with us; it originates with God and is an expression of what God desires—Eph. 1:5, 11.
 2. God's desire and intention are anointed into us through the Spirit and thus become our desire and intention, which we express to God in prayer—1 John 2:20, 27; 5:14-15.
 3. Our prayer, therefore, is God's desire and intention coming out from God, passing through us, and going back to Him—vv. 14-15.
- B. All prevailing prayers—prayers that can be counted effective before God—are the result of our abiding in the Lord and allowing His words to abide in us— John 15:4-5, 7:
1. When we abide in the Lord and His words abide in us, we touch God's feeling and understand His desire—v. 7.
 2. After we touch God's feeling and understand His intention, we will spontaneously have His desire that comes out of His words in us—v. 7.
 3. His desire will become our desire, what He wants will be what we want, and then we will pray according to this desire.
 4. The Lord will answer this kind of prayer, and thus the will of God “will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth”—Matt. 6:10.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE EARTH CONTROLS HEAVEN

After we know God's will, we can say to Him, “God, we want You to do this. We are determined that You should do this. God, You must do this.” We can utter such strong and powerful prayers before God. We have to ask God to open our eyes to see the kind of work He is doing in this age. In this age all His work is based on this position. Heaven may want to accomplish something, but heaven will not do it alone; heaven waits for the earth to do it first, and then heaven does it. Although the earth stands in the second place, at the same time, it also stands in the first place. The earth must move before heaven will move. God wants the earth to move heaven.

HARMONY OF WILL

Some may ask why God would want the earth to control heaven. If we want to understand this, we have to remember that our God is limited by time. Time refers to the section between the two eternities. There is an eternity past and an eternity future. Between these two eternities, there is time. Within this section called time, God is limited. He cannot work as freely as He wants to. This is a limitation God encountered in the creation of man. According to Genesis 2, God gave man a free will when He created him. God has a will, and man has a will. Whenever man's will is not one with God's will, God is limited. In this room, there is a table, chair, floor, and ceiling. If a man comes in, he can do whatever he wants and not be restricted. The table, chair, floor, and ceiling will not be able to restrict him. God is a powerful God; He can do anything. If the earth was filled with spiritless material, God would be without restriction. But one day, God created man. The man He created was not like a piece of stone or wood; he was not a table or a chair, which could be placed here or there by God at will. The man that God created had a free will. Man could choose to obey God's word, and he also could choose to disobey His word. God did not create a man who was obligated to obey Him. He created a man with a free will, one who could obey or disobey His word. After God created a man with a free will, His power was limited by this man. He could no longer act according to what He wanted. He had to ask whether man wanted the same thing and whether he was willing to do the same thing. God cannot treat man like a stone, a piece of wood, a table, or a chair, because man has a free will. Since the day God created man, man could choose to allow God's authority to be carried out or to be blocked. This is why we say that within time, the period between the two eternities, God's authority is limited by man.

God is willing to be limited in time because He wants to gain a harmonious will in the second eternity. He wants man's free will to be harmonious with His will. This is a glory to God. If you put a book on the table, it remains on the table. If you put it on the shelf, it remains on the shelf. It is very obedient to you. But even though it is obedient, you are still not satisfied, because it does not have a free will; it is completely passive. God does not want the man He created to be like a book that can be shuffled around at will. Even though God wants man to be fully submissive to Him, He also gave man a free will. God's intention is that man's free will would choose to obey Him. This is a glory to God! In eternity future the free will of man will be joined to God's eternal will. That will be the time for God's eternal will to be fulfilled and for man's free will to become harmonious with God's eternal will. Every man has a free will. In eternity future man will still have a free will, but it will stand on God's side. He will still have the ability to oppose God, but he will not oppose Him. Hallelujah! Even though man will have the freedom to oppose God, he will not oppose Him. He will do what God wants. This harmony of will is a glory to God!

In eternity future, although man's will is free, it will be in conformity to God's will, and there will be no will that is not subordinate to God's authority. However, in time, God is limited by man. Man does not do what God wants, or man does only a little of what God wants. God may want something to be big, yet man may want it to be small. Or God may want something to be small, yet man may want it to be big. God has no freedom at all! God's move is controlled by man in time. This speaking is in reference to the church. All of God's moves are limited by the church in time because the church represents man in eternity future. The church is standing on the earth today for God's will. If the church comes up to the standard of God's will, He will not be limited. But if it does not come up to the standard of His will, God will be limited. God is doing what He wants to do through the church. Today the church is taking the position that man will take in eternity. Then, even though man's will is free, it will stand completely on the side of God's eternal will. The church is taking that position ahead of time. Just as God will express Himself in eternity through the New Jerusalem, the Lamb's wife, He also is expressing Himself today through the Body of Christ. Although the church has a free will, it submits this will to God's authority as if no other will existed. This allows God to do whatever He wants to do. When the church places its will under God's will today, He will move in the same way that He will in eternity; He will move as if no other will were opposing Him. This is a glory to God!

Now we can see the church's position before God. We cannot make the church so low by

suggesting that it is merely a meeting. No, the church is a group of people who have been redeemed by the blood, who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who have committed themselves to God's hand, and who are willing to take God's will, do His will, and stand for God on earth for the sake of maintaining His testimony.

We have to see that God works according to a law. Since there is free will on earth, God will not annul man by His own will. Brothers and sisters, do not think that this is a strange thing. This is a fact. God is in heaven. Yet all His works on earth can be accomplished only when there is a will on earth that agrees with and decides to do the works. He will not put aside man's will on earth. He will not usurp man's will on earth and act independently. Everything related to Him can be accomplished only when there is a will on earth that cooperates with Him. When the earth works, God works. When the earth decides, God acts. God must have man's will in harmony with His will. This harmony in will is a great glory to God!

THREE GREAT PRINCIPLES

We have said that God has a will for everything. Yet God does not act independently; He will not do anything by Himself. Even though God has a will, He wants the free will on earth to echo His will before He does anything. If there is only a will in heaven, God will not move. The heavenly move is accomplished on earth only when the earth wants the same thing as heaven. Today this is called the ministry of the church. Brothers and sisters, the ministry of the church is not only the preaching of the gospel. This does not mean that we should not preach the gospel; it means that the ministry of the church is not merely the preaching of the gospel. The ministry of the church is to bring the will in heaven to earth. How does the church bring the will in heaven to earth? It is by prayer on earth. Prayer is not as small and insignificant as some may think. It is not something that is dispensable. Prayer is a work. Prayer is the church saying to God, "God, we want Your will." Prayer is the church knowing God's heart and opening its mouth to ask for what is in God's heart. If the church does not do this, it does not have much use on earth.

Many prayers for spiritual edification, prayers for fellowship, and prayers for supplication cannot replace prayers that are in the nature of work or ministry. If all your prayers are prayers for spiritual edification, fellowship, and supplication, they are too small. A prayer that is in the nature of work or ministry is one in which you stand on God's side, wanting what God wants. Brothers and sisters, if a prayer is uttered according to God's will, it is the most powerful thing. For the church to pray means that it finds out God's will and speaks out this will. Prayer is not just asking God for something. For the church to pray means that it stands on God's side to declare that man wants what God wants. If the church declares this, the declaration will be effectual.

Now let us consider three great principles in ministerial prayer from Matthew 18:18-20.

Speaking Out God's Will

In verse 18 the Lord said, "Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven." Who is the "you" here? It is the church, because verse 17 mentions the church, and verse 18 is a continuation of verse 17. Whatever the church binds on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever the church looses on earth will be loosed in heaven. This is a very important principle: today God works through the church. God cannot do anything at will; He has to do everything through the church. Without going through the church, God cannot do anything. Brothers and sisters, this is a very sober principle. God cannot do anything by Himself today. There is a free will besides His will. If this will does not cooperate with Him, He cannot do anything. The amount of power that the church has expresses the amount of power that God has because His power is expressed through the church. God has placed Himself in the church. The height and extent that the church reaches is the height and extent that God's power reaches. If the power of the church is small and restricted, God cannot express the height or extensiveness of His

power. The water department's reservoir may be great, but if you have only a small tap in your house, a great amount of water will not flow out. If you want more water in your house, you have to install a larger pipe. Today the capacity of the church determines the degree to which God's power is expressed. This can be seen from God's expression in Christ; the capacity of Christ is the degree of the manifestation of God. Today God is expressed in the church; the capacity of the church determines the degree of the expression of God and also the amount of knowledge one can have about God.

God wants to do many things on earth today. But He must have the church stand on His side before He can accomplish these things through the church. God cannot do what He wants to do by Himself; He has to do it with the cooperation of the church. The church is the means through which God expresses Himself. Let me repeat: the church is like a water tap. If the tap is small, the amount of water flowing through the tap will not be great, even if there is as much water as the Yangtze River. God truly wants to work in heaven, but He has to wait for the earth to move before He can work. There are many things that God wants to bind in heaven, and there are many things that God wants to loose in heaven. God wants to see many people, objects, and things contrary to Him bound, and He wants to see many spiritual, valuable, beneficial, and holy things that are of Him loosed. The question is whether or not there are men on earth to bind what God wants to bind and loose what God wants to loose. He wants the earth to control heaven. God wants the church to control heaven.

This by no means says that God is not omnipotent. God is indeed omnipotent, but He needs a channel on earth before He can manifest His omnipotence. We cannot increase God's power, but we can hinder His power. Man cannot increase God's power, but he can block His power. We cannot ask God to do what He does not want to do, but we can limit what He wants to do. We cannot ask God to do something that He is not willing to do, yet we can stop Him from doing something that He wants to do. Brothers and sisters, have you seen this? There is a power in the church that puts God's power under its control. It can allow God to do what He wants to do, and it can stop God from doing what He wants to do. Our eyes have to be opened to see the future. One day God will expand the church to become the New Jerusalem. God's glory will be manifested from the church without any hindrance. Today He wants the church to first loose on earth before He looses in heaven. He wants the church to first bind on earth before He binds in heaven. Heaven will not take the initiative to work; it follows the earth's work. God will not take the initiative to work; He follows the church's work. Brothers and sisters, since this is the case, how great is the responsibility of the church!

We have seen that Matthew 18:15-17 speaks of a particular case and that the great principle is given in the following verses. When a brother sins against another, he may not confess his sins or mistakes. When the church reproves him, he still may not listen. If this happens, the church will consider him as the Gentile and the tax collector. The sinning brother may say, "Who are you? How can you make me as the Gentile and the tax collector? I will just stop coming to your meeting. If I cannot come to this place, there are many other places I can go to." However, what did the Lord Jesus say after this? "Truly I say to you, Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven." Hence, if the church decides to consider a man a Gentile, God in heaven will consider him a Gentile also. If the church considers a man a tax collector, God in heaven will consider him a tax collector also. In other words, God will do in heaven what the church does on earth. If the church considers a brother a Gentile and a tax collector, God in heaven will consider the same brother a Gentile and a tax collector. Not only does this case follow the principle, a thousand other matters follow the same principle. This case is only an example. It shows us how much the church can do. Then it shows us the greatness of the principle.

The church is God's chosen vessel. God has placed His will in this vessel so that it will declare God's will on earth. When the earth wants something, heaven also wants it. When the church wants something, God also wants it. Hence, if God's demand is rejected in the church, God will not be able to accomplish what He wants to accomplish in heaven.

Many brothers and sisters are bearing a burden day and night. They are bearing the burden

because they have not prayed. Once the tap is turned on, water flows out. Once it is turned off, the water is blocked. Is the water pressure strong when water is released or when it is blocked? We all know that when water is released, the pressure decreases. When water is blocked, the pressure increases. When the church prays, it is like turning on the tap; the more the tap is turned, the less the pressure becomes. If the church does not pray, it is like a tap being turned off with pressure building up. When God wants to accomplish something, He puts a burden in a brother, sister, or the whole church. If the church prays and fulfills its duty, it will feel relieved. The more the church prays, the more relieved it will feel. As it prays once, twice, five times, ten times, or twenty times, it feels more and more relieved. If the church does not pray, it will feel stuffed and burdened. If the church continues to not pray, it will suffocate to death. Brothers and sisters, if you feel heavy and pressed within, you have not fulfilled your ministry before God; God's pressure is upon you. Try to pray for half an hour or an hour; the pressure will be released, and you will feel relieved.

What then is the prayer ministry of the church? It is God telling the church what He wants to do and the church praying on earth what God wants to do. This prayer is not asking God to accomplish what we want Him to do but asking God to accomplish what He Himself wants to do. Brothers and sisters, the church's responsibility is to declare God's will on earth. On earth the church declares for God, "This is what I want." If the church fails in this matter, it will not be of much use in God's hand. Even if everything else is good, it will not be of much use if it fails in this matter. The greatest use of the church lies in the fact that it stands for God's will to be done on earth. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 22, "The Prayer Ministry of the Church," pp. 138-147)

THE WILL OF GOD

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

Living a Life according to God's Heart and Will

Scripture Reading: Acts 13:22, 36; Eph. 1:9-11; 3:9-11; Heb. 10:5-10; Rom. 12:1-21

- I. **The Old Testament contains a portrait of David—a man according to God's heart, who did the will of God and served his own generation by the counsel of God (Acts 13:22, 36); it was in David's heart to build a house for the name of Jehovah the God of Israel; today God is blessing us in every way for the fulfillment of His economy to build up the Body of Christ (1 Sam. 13:14a; 1 Kings 8:17; 1 Chron. 22:7; 28:2; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 2:20-22; 4:16).**
- II. **God's great will in His New Testament economy, God's good pleasure, the counsel of His will, and His purpose are to have a Body for the enlargement and expression of Christ, the embodiment of the processed Triune God— 1:9-11, 22-23; 3:9-11:**
 - A. The heavens are for the earth, the earth is for man, man is for the producing of the church, and the church is the enlargement and expression of the processed Triune God; God's great will is to have a Body composed of human beings who are regenerated, sanctified, renewed, and transformed into the image of the processed Triune God—Zech. 12:1; John 1:12-13; Eph. 5:26; 2 Cor. 4:16; 3:18.
 - B. God's great will is also to have a church to be the organic Body of Christ for the manifestation of His multifarious wisdom—Eph. 3:9-10.
 - C. Each chapter of the book of Ephesians unveils the mystery of God's will (1:9), the mystery of the Body of Christ as the organism of the Triune God, from a particular point of view:
 1. Ephesians 1 reveals that the Body of Christ is the issue of the dispensing of the processed Trinity and the transmitting of the transcending Christ.
 2. Ephesians 2 reveals that the Body of Christ is the masterpiece of the Triune God as the new man—vv. 10, 15-16.
 3. Ephesians 3 reveals that the Body of Christ is the fullness of the Triune God by our being supplied with the riches of Christ and by Christ's making His home in our hearts—vv. 8, 14-19.
 4. Ephesians 4 reveals that the Body of Christ is the mingling of the processed Triune God with the regenerated believers and that this one Body is built up by the one ministry—vv. 4-6, 11-16.
 5. Ephesians 5 reveals that the Body of Christ is composed of the children of light to be the bride of Christ for the satisfaction of Christ—vv. 8-9, 25-27.
 6. Ephesians 6 reveals that the Body of Christ is the corporate warrior of the Triune God for the defeating of God's enemy—vv. 10-20.
 - D. God has blended the Body together (1 Cor. 12:24); the word *blended* also means "adjusted," "harmonized," "tempered," and "mingled":
 1. In order to be blended in the Body life, we have to go through the cross and be by the Spirit, dispensing Christ to others for the sake of the Body of Christ.
 2. Blending means that when we are about to do something, we always stop to fellowship with others.

3. The blending is for the building up of the universal Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23) to consummate the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2) as the final goal of God's economy according to His good pleasure (Eph. 3:8-10; 1:9-10).

III. God's great will is to have Christ as the replacement for all the sacrifices and offerings in the Old Testament so that we may enjoy Him as our all in all— Heb. 10:5-10; Psalms 40:6-8:

- A. As the unique sacrifice of the new covenant, Christ is the factor that enacts God's New Testament economy (Matt. 26:28) so that He may be its centrality and universality for the producing and building up of the church as His organic Body, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem.
- B. Christ's replacing of all the Old Testament offerings, taking away all the Old Testament types and establishing Himself as everything to us, is God's great will; hence, Christ has changed the age for the consummating of God's new creation out of God's old creation (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15); His changing the age is greater than the creation of the universe mentioned in Genesis 1:
 1. The Old Testament predicted in Isaiah 53 that Christ would come to be the sacrifice for sin in order to replace and terminate the Levitical sacrifices (vv. 6, 11-12); God prepared a body for Christ so that He could offer Himself to God to replace all the offerings (Heb. 10:5).
 2. Christ took away "the first," the sacrifices of the old covenant, that He might establish Himself as "the second," the sacrifice of the new covenant—v. 9:
 - a. As "the second," Christ is everything—v. 9.
 - b. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of Christ's body once for all so that we may enjoy and partake of Him as our everything—v. 10.
- C. Christ is the reality of the offerings so that we may worship God in spirit and truthfulness (the divine reality becoming our genuineness and sincerity for the true worship of God)—John 4:23-24:
 1. The burnt offering, which was wholly for God's satisfaction, typifies Christ as God's pleasure and satisfaction, the One whose living on earth was absolutely for God—Lev. 1:3; Num. 28:2-3; John 7:16-18.
 2. The meal offering typifies Christ in His perfect humanity as food for God and for those who have fellowship with God and serve Him—Lev. 2:1, 4; John 7:46; 18:38; 19:4, 6.
 3. The peace offering typifies Christ as the Peacemaker, the One who became the peace and the fellowship between us and God by dying for us, enabling us to enjoy Christ with God and to have fellowship with God in Christ for our mutual satisfaction with God—Lev. 3:1; Eph. 2:14-15; John 12:1-3; 20:21.
 4. The sin offering typifies Christ as the One who was made sin for us and who died on the cross to deal with the sinful nature of our fallen being—Lev. 4:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:3; John 1:29; 3:14.
 5. The trespass offering typifies Christ as the One who bore our sins in His own body and was judged by God on the cross to deal with our sinful deeds that we might be forgiven in our sinful conduct—Lev. 5:6; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; Isa. 53:5-6, 10-11; John 4:15-18.
 6. The wave offering typifies Christ as the resurrected One in love—Lev. 7:30; 10:15.
 7. The heave offering typifies the powerful Christ in ascension and exaltation—7:32; Exo. 29:27; Eph. 1:21.
 8. The drink offering typifies Christ as the One poured out as wine before God for His

satisfaction and also as the One who saturates us with Himself as heavenly wine to be poured out for God's enjoyment and satisfaction—Lev. 23:13; Exo. 29:40; Num. 28:7-10; Isa. 53:12; Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6; Judg. 9:13.

- D. We need to live a life according to God's heart and will by daily enjoying Christ as the reality of all the offerings for the divine goal of the Triune God, which is to bring us all into Himself that we may take Him as our dwelling place and allow Him to take us as His dwelling place for His universal, enlarged, divine-human incorporation—John 14:23; Rev. 21:3, 22.

IV. God's great will is to have the believers in Christ practice the Body life, that is, to have the living of the Body of Christ—Rom. 12:1-21:

- A. We are "one Body in Christ," having an organic union with Him; this union makes us one in life with Him and with all the other members of His Body—vv. 4-5:
 - 1. Two words from Romans 12:5 indicate the organic union—*in Christ*; *in Christ* always implies the thought or the fact that we are organically one with Christ.
 - 2. The actuality of the Body is the remaining in the organic union with Christ; this is why John 15 charges us to abide in Him; to abide in Him simply means to remain in the organic union.
- B. For the church life, the life of the Body of Christ, to be realized, our entire being is needed; a presented body, a transformed soul, and a burning spirit are indispensable to a proper church life—Rom. 12:1-2, 11:
 - 1. We need to present our bodies as a living sacrifice for the church life:
 - a. *Bodies* in Romans 12:1 is plural, and *sacrifice* is singular; this indicates that although many bodies are presented, they become one sacrifice, implying that although we are many, our service in the Body of Christ should not be many individual services, separated and unrelated.
 - b. All our service should constitute one whole service, and this service must be unique because it is the service of the one Body of Christ.
 - 2. After presenting our body, we need to have our mind renewed—vv. 2-3:
 - a. The renewing of the mind, which results from setting the mind on the spirit (8:6), is the base for the transformation of our soul; our mind is the leading part of our soul, and as it is renewed, our will and emotion automatically follow to be renewed also.
 - b. To be renewed means that a new element is wrought into our being; this produces an inward metabolic transformation, making us suitable for the building up of the Body of Christ, which is the practice of the church life.
 - 3. We must be burning in spirit that we may be stirred up and encouraged to go on in the church life in a positive way; dead, vain knowledge and doctrinal forms can make us degraded and lukewarm; we need to repent of our lukewarmness and be zealous, boiling, burning, that we may regain the enjoyment of the reality of Christ—12:11; Rev. 3:16, 19-22.
- C. When Christ as grace comes into us, this grace brings with it the element of certain skills and abilities, which, accompanying our growth in life, develop into the gifts in life that we may function in the Body of Christ to serve God—Rom. 12:4-8.
- D. Verses 9 through 21 show the normal Christian life that is the necessary base for the practice of the church life and that matches the church life; this is a life of the highest virtues for the Body life; we can have such a living for the Body life only by reigning in life—5:17.
- E. God's complete salvation (vv. 10-11) is for us to reign in life by the abundance of grace

(God Himself as our all-sufficient supply for our organic salvation) and of the gift of righteousness (God's judicial redemption applied to us in a practical way); when we are all reigning in life, living under the ruling of the divine life, the issue is the real and practical Body life.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE TOP REVELATION OF THE BIBLE— THE BODY OF CHRIST

Prayer: Lord, thank You for Your move among us and even for Your move within us. Lord, we believe that this recovery is Your testimony at the end of this age. Lord, we thank You for the environment. Oh, we thank You for arranging everything that we could come together. O Lord Jesus, in this dark age You have captured us, and You have put us together to come together all the time for Your Word. Lord, we believe that tonight You are one with us. Lord, You know that we do have a desire to be really one spirit with You. We do have a standing to believe that You are really one with us, even one with us in this matter of training. Lord, we do consecrate this Perfecting Training to You, and we offer ourselves to You anew. Lord, thank You for such a new start. Thank You that You have gained so many saints in this area who are seeking after You. Lord, we thank You that You have opened up Your Word so much more than ever before. Lord, we trust You for this year's Perfecting Training. Do grant us to have a good start, a glorious new beginning. Lord, come again to visit everyone tonight and reach everyone and touch everyone and grant everyone Your grace. Lord, this is all that we need. Anoint everyone. Anoint every part of the training meeting. Rescue this meeting out of any forms, any rituals. We like to get out of any forms, any rituals, and just to be in the spirit. Oh, do cover us. We again realize that this is a fighting for Your recovery and for Your testimony, so hide us and fight the war for us. We trust in You. Thank You, Lord, in Your precious name, Amen.

THE BODY

To begin this meeting I would like to ask a question: What is the top revelation in the holy Word? We know that the Bible has sixty-six books and that they were written over a period of at least sixteen hundred years. These sixty-six books cover a lot of things from eternity past to eternity future. They cover creation, salvation, and many other things. Bible students and Bible teachers have picked up a lot of subjects from the Bible, but we all have to see that the Body is *the* top point. Among all the thousands of words in the Bible, the *Body* should stand out to us. The biggest word in the Bible is the *Body*.

You have to realize that the most missed and neglected and lost point in the Bible is that the church is the Body of Christ. Many of you came from the background of Christianity. I do not have the confidence that you ever heard an adequate teaching concerning the Body while you were there. I was with the Brethren for seven and a half years. They were very famous fifty years ago for knowing the Bible. Every week I went to five of their meetings. I never heard one message concerning the Body, but I heard many messages concerning ten horns and four beasts. I never heard one message teaching me that Christ has a mystical Body—that besides His personal body, He has a mystical Body.

After the war, at the end of the 1950s I came to this country. I heard a lot of talk about the Body. I heard terms such as *Body life* and *Body ministry*. I went to visit all those who were talking in this way. I discovered that nearly no one knew what they were talking about. At least there was no Body. Today the most missed item of the revelation in the Bible is this one thing—the Body.

In the last two years we have stressed very strongly that Paul's ministry is the completing ministry to complete the divine revelation. Suppose you remove not all the writings of Paul but only Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians from the Bible. Then the Bible would have a big gap. If you took away some other books, you might not feel that there was such a big gap, but Paul's

writings are the completion of the divine revelation. You have to realize that this completing ministry is altogether focused on the Body. Even in these four books, if you take away Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 1 and 4, and Colossians 1 and 2, you take away the chapters concerning the Body of Christ from Paul's writings. From these chapters you can see the top point, the ultimate point, of God's divine revelation, the Body.

Have you ever considered what is the top item produced by God in this universe? The heavens were produced, the earth was produced, man was produced, and even thousands of items were produced. God worked in creation, and God has been working through all the generations. God is still working, and we do not know how long His working will last, but eventually, what will be the ultimate item that comes out of God's working? We have to see that it is the Body. You have to be deeply impressed that what will ultimately come out of God's working through all the centuries and all the generations will be a Body. Who is the Head of this Body? Christ is the Head. What will come out is just the Body. The Body is the ultimate item of God's continual working, so the Body is the top point of God's entire revelation. You have to realize that not only has this matter been missed in Christianity, but even among us in the Lord's recovery we could not see too much actuality of the Body. If you go to the Christian bookstores and pick up different expositions on Romans, you will see that one may stress justification, and another may go on to say something about sanctification, but it is hard for you to get one exposition on Romans that stresses the Body adequately. Some expositions may have taught something concerning the government in chapter 13, but they have not said much concerning the Body in chapter 12.

What about 1 Corinthians? When I was young, I learned that some Christians appreciated a book written by one of the Brethren teachers on 1 Corinthians. That book mainly says that 1 Corinthians solves ten problems among the believers. Although this book talks a lot about these ten problems, it does not talk about a particular positive thing, that is, the Body in chapter 12. By reading chapter 12 carefully, you could see that two-thirds of that chapter is occupied with the Body. Today many teachers and expositors of the Bible talk a lot about other points, but they do not talk about the Body. Why? Because it is surely easy to see divisions or fornication or lawsuits or marriage and so forth, but it is hard for people to apprehend the Body. Of course, a lot of books were put out concerning the physical body of the Lord Jesus, which is signified by the bread in the bread-breaking meeting. Many of these were written especially against the heretical teachings of the Catholic Church, which say that that piece of bread becomes the actual physical body of Christ. But not many of the good writers talk about the other aspect of the Lord's body. One aspect of His body is His physical body; the other is the mystical Body. Very few have paid adequate attention to the mystical Body of Christ. When I was young, I saw all the so-called holy communions in Christianity. I would say that of the people who partook of the "holy communion," not one out of one hundred realized that the loaf also signifies the mystical Body of Christ. Rather, they simply realized that the loaf signifies the physical body of Christ broken on the cross for us.

It is so good that we can see what is the top thing in the Bible, the Body. But the question is: How could we sinners become the Body of Christ? It is not that difficult. We may use the example of a denture. Even the very best denture is not a real part of the body; rather, it is an artificial part and may be considered as foreign matter put into your body. How then can all the parts of your body be your body? Anything that is in your body must be organic. Recently, one young sister received a kidney transplant. Her brother's kidney was removed from him and transplanted into her body. That was not like the fitting of a denture. Transplanting the kidney into the sister's body was something altogether organic.

ORGANIC MEMBERS

First of all, we have to realize that we redeemed sinners have all been made part of Christ's Body. Also, we have to realize that all the parts of Christ's Body are organic. They are not only

organic but also properly organic. The sister who received a kidney transplant passed through a lot of things. In other words, she passed through a lot of adjustment because the kidney was not properly organic. The surgeons had to do a lot of adjustment to make that kidney properly organic. To be properly organic in the Body does not mean that you simply get baptized and that you get into a so-called church, and then you become a member of the Body of Christ; rather, it means that you must be organically united with Christ. You must be a part properly planted into Christ's Body organically. Then you will have a proper organic union with the Body of Christ. Then you will become a part of the Body. Every British subject is a member of the Church of England, but we would say strongly that that is not the church, because it is not something organic.

Many Christians today teach about regeneration, but they never tell people that regeneration brings you into an organic union with Christ, making you a part of Christ. What verses or what portions of the Bible tell us that such an organic matter makes us members of His Body? Only four books in the entire Bible have verses that mention the Body of Christ. In the first four books of the New Testament, the Gospels, there is no mention of the Body of Christ. Even in the book of Acts, which is very much related to the establishment of the church, there is no mention of the Body. Even in 2 Corinthians, which is deeper than 1 Corinthians, there is no mention of the Body. In no other Epistles does Paul mention the Body besides these four books. Furthermore, only the apostle Paul reveals the Body to us. Peter, John, James, and Jude do not mention the matter of the Body. Only the minister who completed the revelation, the apostle Paul, talks about the Body. And even among his fourteen books, only four mention the Body.

We need to ask a further question: among these four books—Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians—which touches the matter of the organic union? Even as the four Gospels show us one person from four different angles, so these four books view the Body from four different directions. Each of these four books has its own angle of viewing the Body. Two words from Romans 12:5 indicate the organic union—*in Christ*. “In Christ” is a matter of the organic union. “We who are many are one Body in Christ.” Just this one little phrase tells us from which angle Romans 12 speaks of the Body. It speaks from the angle of the life union, from the angle of the organic union. How then could we get into Christ? We were not born in Christ; we were born in Adam, but by being reborn we have been transplanted into Christ. We were dead in Adam, and God took us out of Adam and transplanted us into Christ by rebirth. This little phrase *in Christ* has been used many times in the New Testament. Whenever you read *in Christ*, you must remember that this indicates the organic union with Christ. *In Christ* always implies the thought or the fact that you are organically one with Christ.

Why does Romans 12 talk about the function of the Body? Because it talks about the Body based upon the organic union we have in Christ. In this union with Christ there is life. Dentures may be put into my mouth, but there is no organic union. The denture will not function in an organic way because there is no organic union. We have to see that Romans 12 talks about the Body of Christ from the angle of the organic union, from the uniting life, from a life that unites us together not only with Christ but also with all the other members of Christ. Today the Christians know the Bible too superficially. Many teachers talk about Romans 12, but hardly one would tell you that Romans 12 talks about the Body from the angle of the organic union.

If we could not see the organic union that we have with Christ, we could never understand what the Body is. The Body does not mean simply that you love me and I love you. That is a society. In 1963 I was invited to visit many places throughout the U.S.A. Many small groups were “hot” at that time; they all liked to hug one another. Although that did not scare me to death, that bothered me with a kind of stinking odor. That was just a kind of hugging society.

When I was with the Bible-teaching assembly, I heard a lot of messages out of Ephesians 4 mostly concerning humility, the bond of love, meekness, and so forth. But for some reason there was hardly a message on the Body. Although they even talked about the oneness, they did not speak concerning the Body. Even if we are meek and humble and all really love one another, is that the

Body? Even Confucius taught some of these things: you must be meek; you must be humble. Confucius taught meekness, humility, and kindness, but he never touched the organic union with Christ that we all may become the Body.

We all have to realize that the Body of Christ is altogether a matter of life that keeps us in an organic union with Christ. When we remain in this organic union, we are in the Body. When we do not remain in this organic union, we are out of the Body. You need to check yourself for one day to see how much time you remain in this organic union. You will have to admit that you do not remain very much in this organic union. Occasionally, we get there, but quite often we get out of there, so we are not in the Body. The actuality of the Body is the remaining in the organic union with Christ. If we are going to be actually living in the Body life, we must remain in the organic union with Christ. In other words, we must be remaining in Christ. So John 15 charges us to abide in Him. To abide in Him simply means to remain in this organic union. When we remain in this organic union, we are actually living in the Body. If we do not remain in this organic union with Christ, we have left the Body. As long as you say something by yourself, you have left the Body. This means that your gossip, your free talk, your loose conversation, is a strong sign that you have left the Body.

The Body is not an organization or a society. The Body is not just a bunch of Christians coming together. The Body is something that is held together by the organic union with Christ. When we remain in the organic union with Christ, we are just living in the Body. Otherwise, we leave the Body. If we talk by ourselves, it is a strong sign that we have left the Body. So the Body is altogether a matter in the organic union with Christ. We are many yet one Body in Christ (Rom. 12:5). *In Christ* implies an organic union.

If you read Ephesians and Colossians carefully, you could see that Ephesians tells us that the church is the fullness of Christ, the new man, the household of God, the commonwealth, that is, the citizenship of God, and the habitation of God. The church is also the bride and the warrior. But you have to realize that the basic item is the Body, and all the other items are subsidiary. Actually, Ephesians does not talk about the new man; it talks about the Body as the new man. It does not talk about the fullness of Christ; it talks about the Body as the fullness of Christ. All the other terms are subsidiary. The basic term is only one—*the Body*. The Body is the house of God. The Body is the commonwealth of God. The Body is the bride. The Body is the warrior. It is not so good to turn it around and say that the warrior is the Body or that the house is the Body or that the new man is the Body. The Body is the main point, and all these other terms are subsidiary. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee*, 1980, vol. 1, “Perfecting Training,” pp. 249-255)

IN CHRIST

[Previously,] I gave you that little phrase *in Christ*. This little phrase indicates the organic union that we have with Christ. As we are in Christ, surely there is a kind of union. When the Bible was being translated into the Chinese language, this term, *in Christ*, bothered the translators to the uttermost. Nearly all of them said that there was no way to translate the Bible into Chinese. In the Chinese language there is not such an expression to say that you are in someone. Humanly speaking, we would not say that one person is in another person. But the Bible has this expression, that we are in Christ. Even this kind of expression was first used by the Lord Jesus in John 15 where He said that He is the vine, we are the branches, and we should abide in Him (v. 5). Due to our background, we Christians take this kind of expression for granted. We never bothered to check it out. Even before I was saved, I heard messages concerning abiding in Him. Sometimes I did not pay attention to what they were talking about, but at other times I did pay attention and asked, “How could you abide in Jesus?” No doubt this expression strongly indicates that there is a kind of organic union, which spontaneously implies mingling. When you put tea into water, could you say that the tea abides in the water just in a kind of union without mingling? Likewise, how could we just be in union with Christ without mingling?

In Christ is a short phrase, but do not consider that this is a small expression. This is a great expression because it reveals such a great thing—that between you and Christ there is an organic union. If you do not have such an organic union, I would not call you a brother. A brother or a sister must be one in this organic union. Do not take this phrase, *in Christ*, for granted.

SUPPORTS OF THE FOCAL POINT

The Bible has a principle: every book in the Bible has a focal point, which is supported by many verses. These supports may be considered like the four legs supporting a table. Even a small table has four legs supporting it. To find out the supports of a focal point in a certain book, you have to take care of the context of the entire book. In Romans the expression *in Christ* does have adequate support. What are the verses that are the supports of this organic union “in Christ” found in Romans?

In chapters 1 through 4 it is hard to find any support of the organic union. But in chapter 5 there are several supports. Verse 10 says that we are saved in His life. We were justified, reconciled, through the death of Christ, but we will be saved much more in His life. Then verse 17 says, “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.” Martin Luther stressed the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness very much, but I doubt whether he stressed that the abundant grace and the gift of righteousness are for reigning in life. To reign in life is much higher than being saved in life. Then verse 18 uses the term *unto justification of life*. This means that justification is for life or unto life. Verse 21 goes on to say that grace might reign unto eternal life. *Unto* means “with a view to” or “resulting in.” Grace reigns with a view to or resulting in life. In chapter 5 *life* is mentioned at least four times: first, we need to be saved in life; second, we need to reign in life; third, we are justified for life; and fourth, grace reigns, resulting in life. So according to chapter 5, life, not justification, is the focus.

Now let us go on to chapter 6. Verse 3 says, “All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death.” Many teachers have stressed that we are baptized into His death, but they have not stressed adequately that we have been baptized into Christ. That we have been baptized into Christ Jesus is the strongest support of the phrase *in Christ*. How did you get into Christ? You have been baptized into Christ. Although I do not like to speak concerning others’ shortage, I must point out that many Christians today stress the tail more than the head. They pick up the tail and forget about the head. Many teachers have stressed that we have been baptized into His death. I have never heard a message at a baptism telling people that they have been baptized into Christ. They always said that we are baptized into the death of Christ. But this verse concerning being baptized into Christ is the strongest support of the thought of the organic union in Christ.

Verse 4 goes on to say that we “might walk in newness of life,” and verse 5 says that “if we have grown together with Him in the likeness of His death, indeed we will also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” This indicates a process of growth where we are growing into His death and through His death into His resurrection. This is an organic union in which growth takes place so that one partakes of the life and characteristics of another. In 6:5 there is an organic union. This growing together with Christ is a kind of organic union. In this organic union the life grows. Growth takes place. One part partakes of the life and characteristics of the other part. That means we partake of the life and characteristics of Christ. This is the organic union.

Verse 8 goes on to say that “we will also live with Him.” If we are not one with Him, how could we live with Him? It does not mean that we simply stay together with Him; it means that we live together with Him. Verse 11 says that we are “living to God in Christ Jesus.” Verse 13 says that we need to present ourselves to God as alive from the dead. This also indicates our union with Christ. The last verse in this chapter also is a support for the organic union: “The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 23).

Today the Pentecostal people often ask, Have you received the “gift”? My answer would be,

What kind of gift do you mean? This would open their eyes. When they speak of receiving the “gift,” they are referring mainly to speaking in tongues. But I have received a bigger gift than a tongue. I have received the eternal life. This is a much bigger gift. This shows the superficiality of today’s Christians. We have received the gift of eternal life. This means that the organic union is a free gift.

Chapter 8 also has some strong supports for this matter of being in Christ as an organic union. Verse 2 mentions the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Here is life, here is the Spirit of life, and here is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. This is a strong support. Verse 6 says that “the mind set on the spirit is life and peace,” and verse 10 says that “the spirit is life because of righteousness.” In the *Life-study of Romans* we pointed out that these verses in chapter 8 reveal four layers of the matter of life. First, God’s Spirit is life. Second, our human spirit is life. Third, the mind is life, and finally, our body is life. This life first is the life of the Spirit. Then this life comes into our being, into our spirit. Then it saturates our soul and, eventually, saturates our body. This is the organic union.

Chapter 11, revealing the grafting, also is a strong support of the organic union. All of us were wild branches, yet thank the Lord, His grace has grafted us into Christ! Again, it is ridiculous to say that mingling is a heresy. The branches grafted into a tree are not only united but mingled. To say that they are only united and not mingled is terrible. They are not like two iron bars. Two iron bars may be united, but they are not mingled. But if a branch is grafted into a tree, no doubt the two are mingled. The two bars of iron can only have a kind of connecting. They do not have the organic union. An organic union is a matter of mingling.

From chapter 11 we go to chapter 12. Chapter 12 indicates that we need to consecrate our bodies so that our minds may be transformed to see and discern the will of God, which is just to have a Body for Christ produced out of the organic union. Verse 5 says, “We who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” This verse means that we who are many are just one Body in Christ, in this organic union. Have you seen all these supports of this one focal point—in Christ? Chapter 12 continues by saying that as a believer, based upon the organic union in Christ, you need to realize the Body life by having all three parts of your being exercised. Our body is mentioned in verse 1 where we are told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice. So our body needs to be offered. Then in verse 2 we need to have our mind renewed. Our mind represents our soul. It is the main part of our soul. So this refers to the transformation of the soul for the Body life. The body needs to be presented, and the soul needs to be transformed. Then in verse 11 we have to be burning in spirit. This refers to the exercise of the human spirit, the mingled spirit, for the Body life. For the Body of Christ we have to offer our body. Then our soul needs to be transformed, and our spirit needs to be on fire. Thus, all three parts of our human being are exercised. In order to realize this focus of the Christian life, that is, the Body of Christ, we need to fully experience the organic union in Christ with a thorough realization that we are organically one with Christ in life.

To practice this Body life, you must first have your body offered to God. After having your body offered to God, you must have your soul transformed. You must be transformed in your soul by the renewing of your mind. Rarely can you hear teaching concerning this point among today’s Christians. You can hardly hear a message on transformation or on the renewing of the mind. In the past twenty years we have put out many messages on transformation. This is absolutely and thoroughly needed. Our body must be offered and consecrated, and our soul must be transformed by the renewing of our mind. Then our spirit has to be burning, to be on fire. If this is your case, I have the full confidence that you are now practically in the Body life. If you do not realize the organic union in Christ and you do not have your body offered, your soul transformed by the renewing of the mind, or your spirit burning, you are just outside the Body and apart from the Body, practically speaking.

AN ENTRANCE INTO THE PRACTICAL BODY LIFE

From now on we will spend much of this Perfecting Training on Romans. If you have some leisure time, think about Romans, and pray about the Body of Christ. Restrict your consideration, your

feeling, and your sensation about the Body of Christ to Romans. If time and occasion allow, I also hope you would fellowship with some others. It is best to fellowship with only two or three or at the most four. We, the married people, do have a privilege in that we always have at least two. Fellowship about this, and pray. This is not a small thing. We need a strong revelation, and we need a stronger vision to see this matter. It is too mysterious. The mystical Body of Christ is too mysterious for us human beings to grasp. Yet we do have the life of this Body, and we also have the Spirit of this Body. Thank the Lord for this. So pray and exercise your inner being to think over this book concerning the Body. Also remind yourself of what we have covered in the past two Perfecting Training meetings. Do not consider that these are simply doctrines. You must consider that these are precious light from the very heart of God. They are altogether worthy of our thinking, considering, praying, and fellowshiping. This Perfecting Training has no intention to pass on to you mere doctrine. We have the heavy burden to help all of us enter into the practical Body life. We all need an entrance into the practical Body life. If we can have this kind of life, this kind of vision, of the Body, we will be able to enter into the practical Body life. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1980*, vol. 1, "Perfecting Training," pp. 260-264)

THE WILL OF GOD

(Saturday—Second Morning Session)

Message Five

The Will of God—Our Sanctification

Scripture Reading: Heb. 2:10-11; 12:10, 14; Eph. 1:4-5; 5:26;

1 Thes. 4:3a; 5:23-24; John 17:17

- I. The will of God is our sanctification; 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 Thes. 4:3a; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Eph. 1:4-5; 5:25-27.**
- II. Ephesians 1:4-5 and Hebrews 2:10-11 show that sanctification is for sonship; actually, sanctification is God’s “sonizing”:**
 - A. We were chosen in eternity past “to be holy...unto [for, or, resulting in] sonship”—Eph. 1:4-5; Rev. 21:2, 9-11.
 - B. The resurrected Christ is the Captain of our salvation, leading many sons into glory by sanctifying them—Heb. 2:10-11.
- III. There are three aspects of sanctification in the Scriptures:**
 - A. There is the Spirit’s sanctification in seeking the God-chosen people before they repent and believe—1 Pet. 1:2.
 - B. There is the positional sanctification by the blood of Christ at the time of the believers’ believing—Heb. 13:12; 9:13-14; 10:29.
 - C. There is the Spirit’s dispositional sanctification in the believers’ full course of their Christian life—1 Thes. 5:23-24; Rom. 15:16b; 6:19, 22; cf. 5:10; Rev. 22:14; 2 Pet. 1:4.
- IV. 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:**
 - A. 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.
 - B. We say that sanctification is the holding line because every step of God’s work with us is to make us holy—John 17:17; Eph. 5:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:3b; Heb. 12:4-14; Rom. 8:28-29; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thes. 5:19; Rev. 2:7a; Psalms 73:16-17, 25-26:
 1. The seeking sanctification, the initial sanctification, is unto repentance to bring us back to God—1 Pet. 1:2; Luke 15:8-10, 17-21; John 16:8-11.
 2. The redeeming sanctification, the positional sanctification, is by the blood of Christ, to transfer us from Adam to Christ—Heb. 13:12.
 3. The regenerating sanctification, the beginning of dispositional sanctification, renews us from our spirit to make us, the sinners, sons of God—a new creation with the divine life and nature—John 1:12-13; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15.
 4. The renewing sanctification, the continuation of dispositional sanctification, renews our soul from our mind through all the parts of our soul to make our soul a part of God’s new creation—Rom. 12:2b; 6:4; 7:6; Eph. 4:23; Ezek. 36:26-27; 2 Cor. 4:16-18.
 5. The transforming sanctification, the daily sanctification, reconstitutes us with the

element of Christ metabolically to make us a new constitution as a part of the organic Body of Christ—1 Cor. 3:12; 2 Cor. 3:18.

6. The conforming sanctification, the shaping sanctification, shapes us in the image of the glorious Christ to make us the expression of Christ—Rom. 8:29.
 7. The glorifying sanctification, the consummating sanctification, redeems our body by transfiguring it to make us Christ's expression in full and in glory—Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:23.
- C. The divine, dispositional sanctification is carried out by Christ as the sanctifying Spirit in our spirit—15:16b; 8:4.

V. In order to live a holy life for the church life, we need the Lord to establish our heart blameless in holiness—1 Thes. 3:13:

- A. Our heart is a composition of all the parts of our soul—the mind, the emotion, and the will (Matt. 9:4; Heb. 4:12; John 14:1; 16:22; Acts 11:23)—plus one part of our spirit—the conscience (Heb. 10:22; 1 John 3:20).
- B. The heart is the entrance and exit of life, the “switch” of life; if the heart is not right, life in the spirit is hindered, and the law of life cannot work freely and without obstruction to reach every part of our being; though life has great power, this great power is controlled by our small heart—Prov. 4:23; Matt. 12:33-37; cf. Ezek. 36:26-27.
- C. God is the unchanging One, but according to our natural birth, our heart is changeable, both in our relationship with others and with the Lord—cf. 2 Tim. 4:10; Matt. 13:18-23.
- D. There is no one who, according to his natural, human life, is steadfast in his heart; because our heart changes so easily, it is not at all trustworthy—Jer. 17:9-10; 13:23.
- E. Our heart is blamable because it is changeable; an unchanging heart is a blameless heart—Psa. 57:7; 108:1; 112:7.
- F. In God's salvation the renewing of the heart is once for all; however, in our experience our heart is renewed continually because it is changeable—Ezek. 36:26; 2 Cor. 4:16.
- G. Because our heart is changeable, it needs to be renewed continually by the sanctifying Spirit so that our heart can be established and built up in the state of being holy, separated unto God, occupied by God, possessed by God, and saturated with God—Titus 3:5; Rom. 6:19, 22; 2 Cor. 3:16-18; Matt. 5:8; Psa. 51:10-12.
- H. As our heart is being established blameless in holiness by the continual renewing of the sanctifying Spirit, we are becoming the New Jerusalem with the newness of the divine life, and we are becoming the holy city with the holiness of the divine nature—Rev. 21:2; 1 John 5:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:4.

VI. “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. Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it”—1 Thes. 5:23-24:

- A. The God of peace is the Sanctifier; His sanctification brings in peace; when we are wholly sanctified by Him from within, we have peace with Him and with man in every way—vv. 23, 13; 2 Thes. 3:16.
- B. God desires to sanctify us, and He Himself will do it as long as we are willing to pursue Him as holiness and cooperate with Him; in this way we can be holy as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16); without holiness we cannot see Him (Heb. 12:14).
- C. By sanctifying us, God transforms us in the essence of our spirit, soul, and body, making us wholly like Him in nature; in this way He preserves our spirit, soul, and body wholly complete—1 Thes. 5:23:

1. Through the fall our body was ruined, our soul was contaminated, and our spirit was deadened; in God's full salvation our entire being is saved and made complete and perfect.
2. For this, God is preserving our spirit from any deadening element (Heb. 9:14), our soul from remaining natural and old (Matt. 16:24-26), and our body from the ruin of sin (1 Thes. 4:4; Rom. 6:6).
3. Such a preservation by God and His thorough sanctification sustain us to live a holy life unto maturity so that we may meet the Lord in His coming.
4. Quantitatively, God sanctifies us wholly; qualitatively, God preserves us complete—that is, He keeps our spirit, soul, and body perfect.
5. Although God preserves us, we need to take the responsibility, the initiative, to cooperate with His operation to be preserved by keeping our spirit, soul, and body in the saturating of the Holy Spirit—1 Thes. 5:12-24.

VII. In order to cooperate with God to preserve our spirit in sanctification, we must keep our spirit in a living condition by exercising our spirit—1 Tim. 4:6-7:

- A. In order to preserve our spirit, we must keep our spirit living by exercising it to have fellowship with God; if we fail to exercise our spirit in this way, we will leave it in a deadened situation—2 Tim. 1:6-7; cf. Jude 19:
 1. To rejoice, pray, and give thanks are to exercise our spirit; to preserve our spirit is first of all to exercise our spirit to keep our spirit living and to pull it out of death—1 Thes. 5:16-18.
 2. We need to cooperate with the sanctifying God to be separated from a spirit-deadening situation—cf. Num. 6:6-8; 2 Cor. 5:4.
 3. We must worship God, serve God, and fellowship with God in and with our spirit; whatever we are, whatever we have, and whatever we do toward God must be in our spirit—John 4:24; Rom. 1:9; Phil. 2:1.
- B. In order to preserve our spirit, we need to keep it from all defilement and contamination—2 Cor. 7:1.
- C. In order to preserve our spirit, we must exercise ourselves to have a conscience without offense toward God and men—Acts 24:16; Rom. 9:1; cf. 8:16.
- D. In order to preserve our spirit, we must take heed to our spirit, setting our mind on the spirit and caring for the rest in our spirit—Mal. 2:15-16; Rom. 8:6; 2 Cor. 2:13.

VIII. In order to cooperate with God to preserve our soul in sanctification, we must clear the three main “arteries” of our psychological heart, the parts of our soul—our mind, emotion, and will—cf. Psalms 43:4; Nehemiah 8:10; 1 John 1:4; Jeremiah 15:16:

- A. In order for our soul to be sanctified, our mind must be renewed to be the mind of Christ (Rom. 12:2), our emotion must be touched and saturated with the love of Christ (Eph. 3:17, 19), our will must be subdued by and infused with the resurrected Christ (Phil. 2:13), and we must love the Lord with our whole being (Mark 12:30).
- B. The way to unclog the three main arteries of our psychological heart is to make a thorough confession to the Lord; we need to stay with the Lord for a period of time, asking Him to bring us fully into the light, and in the light of what He exposes, we need to confess our defects, failures, defeats, mistakes, wrongdoings, and sins—1 John 1:5-9:
 1. In order to unclog the artery of our mind, we need to confess everything that is sinful in our thoughts and in our way of thinking.

2. In order to unclog the artery of our will, we need to confess the germs of rebellion in our will.
3. In order to unclog the artery of our emotion, we need to confess the natural and even fleshy way that we have expressed our joy and sorrow; also, in many cases we hate what we should love, and we love what we should hate— cf. Rev. 2:4, 6.
4. If we take the time necessary to unclog the three main arteries of our psychological heart, we will have the sense that our entire being has become living and is in a very healthy condition.

IX. In order to cooperate with God to preserve our body in sanctification, we must present our body to Him so that we may live a holy life for the church life, practicing the Body life in order to carry out God's perfect will—Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Thes. 4:4; 5:18:

- A. Our fallen body, the flesh, is the “meeting hall” of Satan, sin, and death, but by Christ's redemption and in the regenerated spirit as the “meeting hall” of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, our body is a member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit—Rom. 6:6, 12, 14; 7:11, 17-25; 8:2-3; 1 Cor. 6:15, 19.
- B. To preserve our body is to glorify God in our body—v. 20.
- C. To preserve our body is to magnify Christ in our body—Phil. 1:20.
- D. To preserve our body, we must not live according to our soul, the old man; then the body of sin will lose its job and become unemployed—Rom. 6:6.
- E. To preserve our body, we must not present our body to anything that is sinful but instead present ourselves as slaves to righteousness and our members as weapons of righteousness—vv. 13, 18-19, 22; 1 Thes. 4:3-5.
- F. To preserve our body, we must buffet it and lead it as a slave to fulfill our holy purpose to become the holy city—1 Cor. 9:27; Rev. 21:2.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

**GOD THE FATHER'S DISPENSING
IN CHOOSING THE BELIEVERS TO BE HOLY
BY PREDESTINATING THEM UNTO SONSHIP**

The first item of the spiritual blessings is the Father's choosing. We may think that God's choosing is one thing, and God's predestinating is another thing, but this is wrong. We need to look at the grammar of Ephesians 1:4-5. These verses say, “Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” These verses do not say that He chose us *and* predestinated us. Instead, they say that He chose us, predestinating us. *Predestinating* in verse 5 modifies the predicate *chose* in verse 4, so these are not two things. These are one thing. God chose us. How did He choose us? God chose us by predestinating us, by marking us out. To predestinate is to mark out. God chose us to be holy for the sonship. The choosing of God's people for them to be holy is for the purpose of their being made sons of God, participating in the divine sonship.

For a person to have sons, he has to beget them by imparting his life into them. This imparting is dispensing. Without the dispensing of life, no children can be produced. Without God's dispensing, how could God have sons? For God to have sons means that there has been the dispensing of His life. This is fully unveiled in John 1. Christ came to be received. Whoever receives Him, He will give that one the right, the authority, to become a child of God. The right, the authority, to be a child of God is the very divine life dispensed into us. We receive the life of God, and this life is our authority to be the sons of God. We are sons of God because His life has been dispensed into us.

God dispenses Himself in a sanctifying way. God's chosen ones are made His sons by His sanctifying Spirit. God sanctified us to become His sons. He chose us to be holy for sonship. John Wesley said that sinless perfection is holiness, but the Brethren showed that this was wrong. They taught that holiness, sanctification, is not sinless perfection but is a transfer of our position. In Matthew 23 the Lord Jesus said that the gold is made holy, sanctified, by the temple (v. 17) and that the gift is made holy, sanctified, by the altar (v. 19). When the gold was in the market, it was common and worldly. But when the gold was separated unto God through the temple, it was sanctified because its position changed. Likewise, when the gift's location changed from a common place to a holy place, it was sanctified. The teaching of the Brethren concerning positional sanctification is scriptural, but this is not the entire truth concerning sanctification.

Sanctification is to separate God's people unto God for God to work on them and to work in them to make them His sons. God had an intention and made an economy to get many sons. Then the Spirit came to separate the chosen ones unto God so that God could beget them. First, they were sanctified unto God; then through this sanctification they became the object of God's begetting. God came to beget them, making them His sons, and this was through the sanctification of the Spirit. Verse 4 of Ephesians 1 says that God chose us to be holy. Then verse 5 says that He did this by predestinating us unto sonship. Thus, sanctification is unto sonship, for sonship. First, the Spirit comes to sanctify God's chosen people. Then they are ready to be begotten by God into His sonship.

For us to be holy and for us to be sons both require God's dispensing. Without God dispensing His holy nature into our being, how could we be holy? God is the only One who is holy. For us to be holy we need a holy element dispensed into us. When the Holy Spirit comes into us, He brings God's holy nature into us, and that holy nature becomes the holy element with which the Holy Spirit sanctifies us. Stanza 1 of *Hymns*, #841 says, "By Thy holy nature / I am sanctified; / By Thy resurrection, / Vict'ry is supplied." His holy nature makes us holy, and His resurrection power makes us victorious. We have God's holy nature imparted into our being, and this holy nature becomes the holy element with which we are made holy. Our being made holy is for us to be sons. The imparting of God's holy nature into us and His begetting us are His dispensing.

SANCTIFICATION FOR SONSHIP IN OUR DAILY LIFE

We may wonder what sanctification has to do with our daily life. This is my burden. We have to realize that sanctification for sonship is still going on. It is not a once-for-all matter. Every day we have to remember that God the Spirit is sanctifying us for God to impart more of His holy nature and holy life into our being to cause us to grow. We all have to grow in the divine life.

Now we need to consider how we can grow. In order for us to grow physically, we need the life within plus the nourishment. A young child has inherited a life from his parents. In other words, his parents have imparted their human life into this child. Then the mother feeds him every day, and he grows with the nourishment in the human life. In principle it is the same in the Christian life. We were born of God. God has imparted Himself into us as life. Now we need to grow by being nourished in the life of God. Our birth is a beginning, not a graduation. After our birth we need to grow in the life of Christ, in the divine life, in the eternal life, with the proper nourishment in the Spirit.

Both sanctification and the sonship are always carried out by the Spirit. This is why Ephesians 1:3 calls this a spiritual blessing, a blessing by the Spirit. Today we must learn to live by the Spirit, to act according to the Spirit, to have our being altogether by the Spirit, with the Spirit, and according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4). As long as we have our being by the Spirit and act according to the Spirit, we are ready to grow in the divine life. Then we need some nourishment. We can be nourished in these three ways: by reading the holy Word, by listening to the spiritual speaking, and by coming to the meetings. This nourishment causes us to grow.

I am concerned that many dear ones among us are seeking after the Lord, but they still are not on the way of the growth in life. If we are driving a car for a long distance, we need to find the freeway

and get on it. Once we get on the freeway, we have to be careful about the direction we take. If we get on the right freeway with the right direction, then our driving is okay. We need to get on the way of the growth in the divine life in the right direction. We still need some revelation to see the right way to grow in the divine life according to the New Testament teaching.

In order to grow, we must deal with the Spirit. We must get ourselves right with the Spirit. We must have our entire being in the Spirit, and walk, behave, and act according to the Spirit all day long. When the parents are with their children, they have to behave themselves according to the Spirit in order to be kept in the divine life. Many times the parents are too free and unrestricted in what they say to their children. They may be afraid of making mistakes when they talk to others, but they do not have any care when they speak to their children. This is wrong. We should not say anything according to our taste. Instead, we have to be regulated, corrected, and adjusted by saying everything and doing everything according to the Spirit.

It is the Spirit who sanctifies us unto sonship. It is the Spirit who begets us that we may be born of God (John 3:6). God chose us to be sanctified unto sonship. To be sanctified unto sonship is altogether a matter by the Spirit, in the Spirit, and with the Spirit. I am concerned when I see a number of dear saints who have been in the recovery for many years with no growth. Although they may meet, read the Bible, and listen to the messages, they do not care for the Spirit. Instead of taking care of the Spirit when they speak, they freely gossip and criticize others. Although they say that they love the Lord, love the recovery, and love the church life, they do not care a bit for the Spirit. This is wrong. We have to take care of the Spirit. Today this Spirit, who is wrapped up with sanctification and with God's sonship, is in our spirit (Rom. 8:16; 1 Cor. 6:17). If we desire to take care of the Spirit, we should first take care of our spirit.

The Bible says that we should not provoke our children to anger (Eph. 6:4). When we are angry with our children, we often provoke them. In dealing with our children, we have to take care of our spirit. We need to check, "Does our spirit agree with us, or are we acting according to our emotion?" We should deny our emotion and turn to our spirit. Then in our spirit, the Spirit will speak to us. When we are becoming angry with our children, the Spirit may say, "Go into your room and pray. Don't talk to your children at this time." That is a kind of sanctification. When we pray, the speaking Spirit will continue to speak. He may lead us to read a portion of the Word. Then we are nourished, and we grow in the divine life with the spiritual nourishment. If we do not care for our spirit in our family life, we surely cannot have a pleasant household, and God cannot sanctify us for His sonship and His household.

We need to take care of our spirit in everything. When a brother buys a necktie, he should not buy it according to his taste. If he buys it according to his taste, this is wrong. Even in buying a tie, he should take care of his spirit. What would our spirit say to us when we go shopping? If we would listen to our spirit, the Holy Spirit will speak more in us.

Today we are promoting the prophesying of all the saints. We want to see the saints speak for the Lord. Some saints, however, have determined not to speak in the meetings. They come to the church meetings, but they sit at the back in silence. The leading ones who are taking care of the saints may be afraid to say anything to these ones about speaking, because they are afraid they will stop coming to the meetings. Thus, they may come to the meetings for years without speaking anything for the Lord. They have been regenerated, and they love the Lord, love the recovery, and love the church, but they just would not speak. Be assured that if this is your case, you will not grow at all in the Lord.

You must take care of your spirit. Get down on your knees in your bedroom to pray, and see what your spirit would say to you. Your spirit will tell you that you are stubborn and that you should go along with the church to speak for the Lord. If you take care of your spirit, the divine Spirit will take the opportunity to speak many more things to you. Then you will come to the meeting by taking care of your spirit. You may even confess to the saints, "Dear saints, I regret that I have not spoken for the Lord in the meetings." The whole church will be happy. Then as you continue to speak, the Holy Spirit

will speak to you so that you have even more to speak. Then you will see that the speed of your growth in life will fly like an airplane. Within half a year, you will grow much in Christ and be much more sanctified unto much more sonship. By your growth in life, you will become not just a son but an heir of God to inherit the riches of God (Rom. 8:17). Then you will be so useful in the church life. You will become a supplier to supply, to minister, the bountiful supply of the Spirit to all the congregation.

Dear saints, this is my burden. We should not think that Ephesians 1:4 and 5 transpired once for all. Sanctification for sonship is still going on. Day by day, however, we do not live in our sonship, because we do not care for the sanctifying Spirit speaking and working in our spirit. We must turn to our spirit, realizing that we have been sanctified and regenerated by the Spirit. This sanctifying and regenerating Spirit has much to say to us. He still wants to sanctify us more and more so that we may participate in the sonship more and more. Then we will grow, and the Father will have a pleasant household. If we care for our spirit and let the Spirit speak to us, we will grow as sons to become heirs, grown-up persons, to inherit all the riches of God. Then we can be a part of His pleasant household. The blessings in Ephesians 1 start from God's choosing for us to be sanctified that we might be more and more in the sonship of God. This should be a daily matter.

CONCLUDING NOTES

(1) Without dispensing His holy element into our being, how could God make us holy? Especially for God's sonship, there is the need for God to dispense His life and nature into our being.

(2) The Father's dispensing in His choosing and predestinating of the believers issues in His sonship through His sanctifying of His chosen people, making them holy as He is in His life and in His nature, to make them like God in the divine life and nature but without His unique Godhead. This is the divine sanctification unto (for) the divine sonship. This is the center of the divine economy and the central thought of the revelation in the New Testament. Such a divine sanctification is carried out by the sanctifying Spirit (Rom. 15:16). The divine sonship is accomplished by the regenerating Spirit, who is the Spirit of the Son of God (Gal. 4:6). (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993, vol. 2, "The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity and the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ," pp. 478-483*)

THE DIVINE SANCTIFICATION FOR SONSHIP

We also have seen something further concerning the truth of sanctification. This has been a great subject among us in the recovery for the past seventy years. We studied and investigated this, spending much time to get into others' writings. But we were not fully satisfied with what we had seen. It was not until this year, 1993, that I saw the full intrinsic significance of sanctification. I saw this when the church in Anaheim was spending time to review our life-study on Hebrews, which was given in 1975. That life-study was very thorough, yet I did not see fully at that time how the sanctification of the Spirit is related to the sonship. Hebrews 2:10 says that the Lord as the Captain of God's salvation will lead many sons into glory. Then verse 11 speaks of the One who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified. When I considered these two verses, my eyes were opened to see that sanctification is for sonship. This is new light.

When I saw this, I entered into a fuller understanding of Ephesians 1:4-5. Verse 4 says, "To be holy," and verse 5 says, "Unto sonship." We need to put these two phrases together—to be holy unto sonship. This shows again that sanctification is for sonship. The Greek preposition for the word *unto* is very profound. It means "resulting in." To be holy results in the sonship. God's sonship comes to us through the Holy Spirit's sanctification. The concluding notes [in the previous "Concluding Notes"] point out that the divine sanctification is unto the divine sonship. I hope that the Lord will have mercy on all of us to pick up this thought. Divine sanctification is not for sinless perfection, nor is it merely for a change of our position. It is for the sonship and results in the sonship. We call it the divine sanctification because it is a matter of the Spirit Himself. It is a matter of the Triune God.

Now I would like to present a full view of the divine sanctification as unveiled in the holy Word. God has a desire. Based upon His desire, He made an intention with a purpose. This is His eternal economy, *oikonomia* (Gk.). This economy was made by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and carried out and applied to us by the Spirit. The carrying out of the eternal economy of God is by the Spirit's sanctification. The Spirit's sanctification is the carrying out of God's eternal purpose in four steps.

Seeking Sanctification

The first step of the divine sanctification by the Spirit is His seeking sanctification. This is the Spirit's coming to seek out God's chosen people who became lost. The seeking sanctification is fully unveiled in the second parable in Luke 15. There the Spirit is likened to a woman seeking a lost coin by lighting a lamp and sweeping the house (v. 8). She sought this lost coin finely. Eventually, she found it. Actually, the lost coin was the prodigal son. Due to the Spirit's seeking and finding, the prodigal son woke up. He came to himself (v. 17). He made the decision to rise up and go back to his father to repent.

John 16 goes on to show that this seeking Spirit is also the convicting Spirit. He convicts all the lost sinners of sin in Adam, of righteousness in Christ, and of the judgment for Satan (vv. 8-11). Man's full repentance is the result of the work of the seeking and convicting Spirit.

First Peter 1:2 tells us that this seeking and convicting of the Spirit is the sanctification of the Spirit before the sprinkling of the blood upon the repentant sinners. This shows that the seeking sanctification was before our repentance and believing in Christ. Actually, our repentance and believing were due to the seeking Spirit, the convicting Spirit. We were lost in sin and among a heap of sinners, but the seeking Spirit came to seek us out. As a result, we woke up, repented, returned to God, and asked Him to forgive us. This was the result of our Father's choosing with His predestinating in eternity past along with His Spirit's coming in time to seek us out and convict us. This seeking, this convicting, is the seeking sanctification.

Regenerating Sanctification

At the juncture we repented and believed in the Lord Jesus, the same Spirit, the seeking Spirit, sanctified us further by regenerating us. We were born of the Spirit (John 3:5), and God as the Spirit came into our spirit (Rom. 8:16; 2 Tim. 4:22). Now we are the sons of God, the children of God. The seeking Spirit woke us up and brought us back to the Father. We repented and believed in the Lord Jesus. We received Christ, and the Spirit sanctified us further, making us the children of God. This is the second step of the divine sanctification, the regenerating sanctification.

The Father put Christ's redeeming blood upon us, just like the loving father put the best robe upon the returned prodigal son (Luke 15:22; Heb. 13:12). Also, the sanctifying Spirit entered into our spirit with God's life to make us children of God. Now we have the blood of Christ without and the life of God within. All our offenses have been forgiven through the blood, the redemption of Christ, and our spirit has been regenerated. The Spirit's regenerating sanctification transpired in our spirit (John 3:6).

Transforming Sanctification

After regeneration, the next step of the Spirit's sanctification is His transforming sanctification. This takes place in our soul. Our regenerated spirit has never been a problem to us. Our problems always come from two sources: our soul (comprising our mind, emotion, and will) and our body. Our untransformed mind, emotion, and will give us much trouble. Following the regeneration of the sanctifying Spirit in our spirit, the sanctifying Spirit carries out His continuous sanctification to transform us in our soul. We were regenerated, sanctified unto God, in our spirit, but we need the sanctifying Spirit's further work to sanctify our soul. This is the transforming sanctification.

This transformation implies renewing and conformation to the image of Christ. While the sanctifying Spirit works to sanctify us, we are being transformed. Second Corinthians 3:18 tells us clearly that transformation is by the Lord Spirit. This is a strong proof that the Spirit's transformation is His work to keep sanctifying us. Romans 12:2 says that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The transformation of the sanctifying Spirit first renews our troublesome mind. For us to be transformed, we need some new element added into us to carry away our old element and replace us with the new element. This is a kind of metabolism, which results in a metabolic change within us. Thus, we become another person in our thinking, in our feelings, and in our intentions. The Bible says that we are being transformed from the old man into the new man. This is a further step of the sanctifying Spirit, the transforming sanctification. Now we have the seeking sanctification, the regenerating sanctification, and the transforming sanctification, which includes the renewing and the conforming to the image of Christ.

Glorifying Sanctification

Our full transformation will one day consummate in our glorification. That will be the work of the sanctifying Spirit to glorify us in our body. Another thing that bothers us besides our soul is our poor, vile body. Lust, weakness, sickness, and death are present in our corrupted body. Our body is really vile, but one day we will be glorified and transfigured in our body (Phil. 3:21). Our spirit has been regenerated, our soul is being transformed, and our body will be transfigured, changed into a glorious body with no more lust, weakness, sickness, or death. This is the glorifying sanctification.

When all these four steps of the divine sanctification (seeking sanctification, regenerating sanctification, transforming sanctification, and glorifying sanctification) take place, we will be glorified. We will be qualified to meet the Lord. By that time we will be able to shout, "We have been fully sanctified!" Today we are like a butterfly that is still in the cocoon. Eventually, we will come out of the cocoon. We will not walk on this earth; we will fly. This is the consummating sanctification. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993*, vol. 2, "The Issue of the Dispensing of the Processed Trinity and the Transmitting of the Transcending Christ," pp. 487-491)

THE WILL OF GOD

(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Six

Doing the Will of God in the Kingdom of God under the Government of God for the Church as the Israel of God

Scripture Reading: 1 John 2:17; Matt. 7:21; 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:24; 5:6-7, 10; Gal. 6:10, 15-16

I. We need to do the will of God in the kingdom of God—Matt. 7:21; 12:50:

- A. “He who does the will of God abides forever”—1 John 2:17:
 - 1. The world is against God the Father, and the things in the world are against the will of God—vv. 15-16:
 - a. On the positive side, we have the Father and His will.
 - b. On the negative side, we have the world and the things in the world.
 - 2. We need to do the will of God habitually and continually, not just occasionally; this is indicated by the fact that the Greek verb for *does* in verse 17 denotes doing (things) habitually and continually by abiding (in the things).
- B. In order to enter into the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens in the coming age, we must do the will of our Father in this age—Matt. 7:21-23; 6:10; 12:50; Rev. 4:11; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 1:5, 9, 11; 5:17; Col. 1:9; 4:12:
 - 1. The kingdom is absolutely a matter of God’s will and completely fulfills God’s will; in fact, the kingdom is God’s will—Matt. 6:10.
 - 2. The ultimate issue of the constitution of the kingdom of the heavens is the will of the heavenly Father—7:21.
 - 3. As the kingdom people, we are on earth to do the Father’s will—v. 21; 12:50.
 - 4. In order to do the will of the Father, we need to enter in through the narrow gate and walk on the constricted way—7:13-14:
 - a. The narrow gate excludes the old man, the self, the flesh, the human concept, and the world with all its glory; only that which corresponds with God’s will can enter in.
 - b. As we walk on the constricted way, we are restricted by a mysterious, invisible, inward control, and we live under this control.
 - 5. Whoever does the will of the Father is a relative of the Lord Jesus—12:50:
 - a. Christ, the heavenly King, always submitted to the Father’s will, taking God’s will as His portion and not resisting anything—11:28-30; 26:39.
 - b. Whoever does the will of the Father is a brother who helps the Lord Jesus, a sister who sympathizes with Him, and a mother who tenderly loves Him.
 - 6. The Father’s eternal will is to build up the church upon Christ the Son as the rock—16:18; Eph. 2:21-22; 4:16.

II. In order to do the will of God in the kingdom of God, we must live the Christian life under the government of God—1 Pet. 1:17; 2:24; 5:6-7, 10:

- A. In his writings Peter combines the Christian life and God’s government, revealing that the Christian life and the government of God go together as a pair— 1:17; 2:21, 24; 3:15; 4:17; 5:5-8:
 - 1. The subject of 1 Peter is the Christian life under the government of God, showing us

- the government of God especially in His dealings with His chosen people—1:2.
2. The subject of 2 Peter is the divine provision and the divine government, showing us that as God is governing us, He supplies us with whatever we need—1:1-4; 3:13.
 3. God governs by judging; this judgment of God is for the carrying out of His government—1 Pet. 1:17; 4:17.
 4. The judgment in 1 Peter 1:17, which is carried out by the Father, is the present, daily judgment of God's governmental dealings with His children.
 5. God judges everything that does not match His government; therefore, in this age we, the children of God, are under the daily judgment of God—v. 17.
- B. As believers in Christ and children of God, we should live a Christian life under the government of God—John 3:15; 1:12-13; 1 Pet. 4:13-19; 5:6-7:
1. The Epistles of Peter reveal the Christ who enables us to take God's governmental dealings administered through sufferings—1 Pet. 1:6-8; 2:3-4, 19, 21-25; 3:18, 22; 4:1, 15-16; 5:8-9.
 2. In the death of Christ we have died to sins so that in the resurrection of Christ we might live to righteousness under God's government—2:24:
 - a. To live to righteousness is to fulfill God's governmental requirements—v. 24.
 - b. In our Christian life we should live in a way that matches the righteous requirements of His government—Psa. 89:14; Matt. 5:6, 10.
 3. We should be humbled under the mighty hand of God, which carries out the government of God—1 Pet. 5:6:
 - a. In verse 6 *the mighty hand of God* refers to God's administrating hand seen especially in His judgment—1:17; 4:17.
 - b. To be humbled under God's mighty hand is to be made humble by God; however, we must cooperate with God's operation and be willing to be made humble, lowly, under His mighty hand—5:6.
 4. We should cast all our anxiety on God because it matters to Him concerning us—v. 7.
 5. We should commit our souls to the faithful Creator—4:19:
 - a. God can preserve our soul, and His loving and faithful care accompanies His justice in His governmental administration.
 - b. While God judges us in His government, He cares for us faithfully in His love; as we are suffering His disciplinary judgment, we should commit our souls to the faithful care of our Creator—Matt. 10:28-30; 11:28-29.
 6. As we live under the government of God, the God of all grace will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground us—1 Pet. 5:10.

III. Doing the will of God in the kingdom of God under the government of God issues in the church as the Israel of God—Gal. 6:10, 15-16:

- A. God's New Testament economy is not only to make us sons of God but also to make us the Israel of God; the real Israel, the spiritual Israel, is the church—Eph. 1:5; Heb. 2:10; Rom. 8:14, 19; Gal. 3:26; 4:6-7; 6:16; Matt. 16:18.
- B. We need to become such an Israel, a prince, to execute God's government on earth—6:9-10.
- C. The apostle Paul considered the many believers in Christ—who are the household of the faith, the new creation—collectively the Israel of God—Gal. 6:10, 15-16; 3:7, 29.
- D. In God's New Testament economy we have been made both the sons of God and the Israel of God—v. 26; 6:16:
 1. We are sons of God, members of God's family, for His expression—v. 10.
 2. We are kings-to-be, those destined to be kings; kingship is related to the Israel of

God—Rev. 5:10.

3. Our destiny is to be sons of God expressing God and also kings reigning in the kingdom of God—21:7; 22:5b; 12:5a.
- E. As the Israel of God, we represent God, exercise His authority, and carry out His administration on earth for the fulfillment of His purpose—Gen. 1:26, 28; Luke 10:19; Rev. 12:5, 7-11:
1. God wants His creature *man* to deal with His creature *Satan* in order to bring the earth back to God—Psa. 149:7-9.
 2. God needs man to do the work of God—to reign over His creation, to proclaim His triumph, and to cause Satan to suffer loss—Gen. 1:26.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE MEANING OF DOING GOD’S WILL

Accomplishing the Will of God

“I do not seek My own will but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 5:30).

Doing the will of God means to not seek, follow, or accomplish our own will but to only seek, follow, and accomplish God’s will. People often say that they have prayed and that they are clear that the will of God is for them to go to a certain place or for them to do a certain thing. Some say that it is God’s will for them to run a business. Some say that it is God’s will for them to get married. But is this reliable? Is the one who thinks that he is acting according to God’s will consecrated to God, and is he living for God? Is he truly not seeking, following, or accomplishing his own will but seeking, following, and accomplishing God’s will? This is not a small matter. Many who claim to be acting according to the will of God are not truly practicing the will of God, because they have not consecrated themselves to Him to live for His will. They still hold on to themselves, keep things in their own hands, and live according to their own will.

A person who truly does the will of God does not seek his own will. He only seeks the will of God. This was the Lord Jesus’ pattern when He was on earth as a man. In all human history, only Jesus the Nazarene sought only the will of God and not His own will. Although He was one with God and equal to God, He willingly came to earth and stood in the position of one who was sent to do the will of God. In all things He only sought the will of Him who sent Him; He did not seek His own will. This is the meaning of doing the will of God.

“Behold, I have come (in the roll of the book it is written concerning Me) to do Your will, O God” (Heb. 10:7).

When He came to earth, the Lord spoke the words in this verse to God. This shows that the Lord did the will of God according to what was written in the Scriptures. Consequently, we should realize that any practice of the will of God must be according to the Word of God, the Bible. The Bible reveals the entire will of God in all its aspects. Whatever He wants to complete in us, whatever He wants us to do, and how He wants us to do it are revealed, in principle, in the Bible. If we truly want to do the will of God, if we truly want to seek His will, we must know the Bible and consider what the Word of God says concerning every matter. We must find God’s will, in principle, concerning every matter from the Bible. Those who want to do the will of God and act according to God’s will cannot be sloppy with the Bible but must spend a considerable amount of time to read it carefully.

If we want to do the will of God, we cannot simply do what we think is the will of God. We cannot simply pray a few times and say with certainty that this or that is the will of God. Such a way is not reliable and is quite dangerous. We often are easily deceived by our own opinions and captured by our own thoughts and views. We must bring our opinions, thoughts, and views before the Bible and let them be judged by the Word of God. Whoever is not willing to let his “in my opinion,” “I think,” and “to my point of view” be conquered by the Word of God cannot do the will of God. We must put our

own things aside in everything and see what the Word of God says and commands. In some things God tells us His will in detail; in others He reveals it only in principle. For example, the Word of God contains a great principle that believers should not be dissimilarly yoked with unbelievers. Consequently, we can know the will of God in many things related to this principle. In marriage, we know that a believing brother should not marry an unbelieving woman, and a believing sister should not be given in marriage to an unbelieving man. If we practice according to God's Word, we will be able to practice the will of God.

“Not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord prayed these words as He was about to be betrayed and killed. He prayed that He would accomplish God's will, not His own will. The Lord's prayer tells us what it means to do the will of God. To do the will of God is to do God's will, not our own will. After the Lord prayed this three times, He clearly knew that God's will was for Him to die on the cross. Therefore, He willingly obeyed. Whether or not we suffer, die for the Lord, or are even martyred, it should be according to the will of God, not our own preference or enthusiasm. Enthusiastically volunteering to suffer and to be martyred for the Lord cannot replace the will of God, nor is it necessarily God's will. Anything that is according to the predisposition and pleasure of the self cannot be regarded as the will of God. When the Lord clearly knew that God's will included His death, He was willing to drink the cup that the Father gave Him.

“The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11).

The cup of the Father in this verse refers to the Lord's death on the cross, including all its suffering. Since God had given a cup to Him, the Lord said that He could not refuse to drink it. This tells us that the Lord's death was not according to His preference, although He willingly accepted it. The cup given to Him by God was the portion God measured to Him. By accepting the cup, He accomplished the will of God and did the will of God. The Lord's death is the highest example of doing the will of God. It shows that the criterion for doing the will of God is not doing good things but accepting what God has measured to us. God has not necessarily measured many good things for us to do; consequently, good things should not be considered as the will of God. Even preaching the gospel, casting out demons, and works of power should not be counted as the will of God if God has not measured them to us. We should not think that good or even spiritual things are automatically the will of God. These things cannot replace the will of God. While the will of God is good and spiritual, good or spiritual things are not necessarily the will of God. The will of God can only be what God has particularly measured to us. Anything that is good and spiritual must be measured to us to do; it must be assigned to us by God in order for it to be God's will for us. Even our love for the brothers should be according to God's assignment and God's measure; otherwise, it may be excessive. Only God's measure and appointment for us are the will of God. When we do what He has measured and appointed, we are doing the will of God.

One who follows the Lord certainly must deal with sin and do away with all lawlessness and unrighteousness. However, doing lawful, righteous acts is not necessarily doing the will of God. We must do what God wants us to do and what He measures for us to do in order for it to be considered as doing the will of God. When we first begin to follow the Lord and desire to please Him, our standard is typically what we consider to be good, but slowly the Lord shows us that we need to take God as our standard. The Lord wants us to be His slaves, receiving His direction and not deciding anything according to our opinion or others' perceptions. As long as something is according to the Lord's desire, we should do it even if we as well as others may think that it is wrong. This is doing the will of God. On Mount Sinai, God ordered the Levites to kill their brothers. From the human viewpoint, this seems wrong, but God wanted them to do it. When they did as God directed, they were doing the will of God, and they pleased God. In doing God's will, God is the only standard, and His intention is the only rule. Neither goodness nor morality is the criterion. Neither our own preference nor our human view is the deciding factor. We should not live under man's evaluation or be influenced by man but live under

God's enlightenment and governance.

“Setting your mind on the things of God...Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Matt. 16:23-24).

To follow the Lord is to set our mind on the things of God. According to what the Lord said in these verses, the requirements for setting our mind on the things of God are to deny our self and take up our cross. Verse 25 shows that denying our self and losing our soul-life are absolutely related to one another. The self is the soul, or soul-life. The important components of our soul are the mind, the will, and the emotion. The soul has the functions of thinking, willing, and feeling. Therefore, to deny the self is to deny the things of the soul. This is to deny our own thoughts, that is, our own views; to deny our own will, that is, our own decisions; and to deny our own emotion, that is, our own likes and dislikes. We must deny and reject whatever is of our own thought, view, will, decision, predisposition, and likes in order to set our mind on the things of God and to follow the Lord and do the will of God.

The Lord spoke this word after He told the disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to die. After hearing the Lord's word, Peter exhorted Him, saying, “God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!” (v. 22). Then the Lord said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men” (v. 23). Peter's human concern and love for the Lord had an element of Satan in them. Satan can cause people to love the Lord from their self, which keeps them from setting their mind on the things of God. Instead, he causes them to set their mind on the things of man. Satan does not cause people to do the will of God; he causes them to do their own will. Satan uses good things to influence and enter into people's opinions, and then he stirs up the self to cause the self to be active to hinder the will of God. This is the reason that the Lord spoke of denying our self, giving up our self, and denying our own will, especially in good matters. Good things are opposed to the will of God. They serve only as a means for a display of our self and our will. Satan uses good things to ruin God's will. Therefore, if we want to do the will of God, we must guard against our self, that is, our views and our intention to do good.

Many think that taking up the cross means to suffer or to suffer for the Lord. However, to suffer—even to suffer for the Lord—is not necessarily to set our mind on the things of God or to do the will of God. Suffering—especially suffering for the Lord—can sometimes be according to our own will, preference, or choice and thus is not the will of God. If it is not what God has ordained for us or what God has measured to us, it comes from our self. To truly take up the cross is to set our mind on the things of God and to do the will of God. The will of God always kills our self-life. Therefore, taking up the cross is not about suffering but about denying the self. It is not about causing the self to suffer but about putting the self in the position of death, because the goal of the cross is death, not suffering. When the Lord was crucified, we were crucified with Him on the cross. Now we need to not only confess this death but to remain in the death of the cross. Through the death of the cross, we can stand in the position of death to deny everything of the self, including our will, view, preference, and choice. This is the taking up of our cross. When we take up the cross, we follow the Lord, set our mind on the things of God, and do the will of God...

Proving the Will of God

“That you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well pleasing and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

Understanding the will of God involves proving. To prove is to search for the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God in everything. In order to prove the will of God, we need to stand in a position of consecration, to not follow the age of the world, to be renewed in our mind according to the Word of God, the Bible, and to understand the sense in our spirit and the condition of our environment. Searching out God's will in everything involves discerning the motive, goal, and nature of things. Therefore, we must stand on God's side in the reality of our consecration, be absolutely outside this

age, and see God's view according to a mind that has been renewed and taught by God. We must always use the clear teachings, principles, and examples of the Bible to measure and prove the will of God and to see whether or not our ways are one with the will of God. We must use the sense in our spirit to test and judge what is according to the will of God. We also should consider whether or not the environment confirms what we have realized. If we are willing to prove the will of God in this manner, it will not be difficult for us to understand the will of God.

Having a Heart to Do the Will of God

“If anyone resolves to do His will, he will know” (John 7:17).

If anyone resolves—has a heart—to do God's will, he will know God's will. If we want to understand the will of God, we must not only have a heart to understand but also a heart to do His will. God is not willing to reveal His will to those who do not have the heart to understand, nor does He want to reveal His will to those who have the heart to understand but not a heart to do it. Only those who have the heart to both understand and do the will of God can gain a revelation of God's will from Him. Therefore, we must resolve to do God's will if we want to understand the will of God. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1932–1949*, vol. 3, “Crucial Truths in the Holy Scriptures, Volume 2,” pp. 442-447, 450-451)

THE WILL OF GOD

(Lord's Day—First Morning Session)

Message Seven

Taking the Lord's Yoke (the Father's Will) upon Us and Learning from Him to Find Rest for Our Souls

Scripture Reading: Gen. 1:26, 31; 2:1-2; Matt. 11:28-30;
Exo. 31:12-17; Isa. 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; 15:1

I. “Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light”—Matt. 11:28-30:

- A. To toil here refers not only to the toil of striving to keep the commandments of the law and religious regulations but also to the toil of struggling to be successful in any work; whoever toils thus is always heavily burdened.
- B. After the Lord extolled the Father, acknowledging the Father's way and declaring the divine economy (vv. 25-27), He called this kind of people to come to Him for rest.
- C. Rest refers not only to being set free from the toil and burden under the law or religion or under any work or responsibility, but also to perfect peace and full satisfaction.
- D. To take the Lord's yoke is to take the will of the Father; it is not to be regulated or controlled by any obligation of the law or religion or to be enslaved by any work, but to be constrained by the will of the Father.
- E. The Lord lived such a life, caring for nothing but the will of His Father (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38); He submitted Himself fully to the Father's will (Matt. 26:39-46); hence, He asks us to learn from Him:
 - 1. The believers copy the Lord in their spirit by taking His yoke—God's will— and toiling for God's economy according to His model—11:29a; 1 Pet. 2:21.
 - 2. The Lord, who was submissive and obedient to the Father throughout His life, has given us His life of submission and obedience—Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 5:7-9.
 - 3. Christ was the first God-man, and we are the many God-men; we have to learn of Him in His absolute submission to God and His uttermost satisfaction with God.
 - 4. God is doing in us that which is well pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ that we may be able to do His will (13:20-21); God operates in us both the willing and the working for His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).
- F. To be meek, or gentle, means not to resist opposition, and to be lowly means not to have self-esteem; throughout all the opposition the Lord was meek, and throughout all the rejection He was lowly in heart.
- G. He submitted Himself fully to the will of His Father, not wanting to do anything for Himself or expecting to gain something for Himself; hence, regardless of the situation He had rest in His heart; He was fully satisfied with the Father's will.
- H. The rest that we find by taking the Lord's yoke and learning from Him is for our souls; it is an inward rest; it is not anything merely outward in nature.
- I. We learn from the Lord according to His example, not by our natural life but by Him as our life in resurrection—Eph. 4:20-21; 1 Pet. 2:21.
- J. The Lord's yoke is the Father's will, and His burden is the work of carrying out the Father's will; such a yoke is easy, not bitter, and such a burden is light, not heavy.

- K. The Greek word for *easy* means “fit for use”; hence, good, kind, mild, gentle, easy, pleasant—in contrast to hard, harsh, sharp, bitter.
- L. If we take the Lord’s yoke (the Father’s will) upon us and learn from Him, we will find rest for our souls; the yoke of God’s economy is like this; everything in God’s economy is not a heavy burden but an enjoyment.

II. In Exodus 31:12-17, after a long record concerning the building up of God’s dwelling place, there is a repetition of the commandment to keep the Sabbath; according to Colossians 2:16-17, Christ is the reality of the Sabbath rest; He is our completion, rest, quietness, and full satisfaction—Heb. 4:7-9; Isa. 30:15a:

- A. The fact that the insertion concerning the Sabbath follows the charge for the building work of the tabernacle indicates that the Lord was telling the builders, the workers, to learn how to rest with Him as they worked for Him.
- B. If we only know how to work for the Lord but do not know how to rest with Him, we are acting contrary to the divine principle:
 - 1. God rested on the seventh day because He had finished His work and was satisfied; God’s glory was manifested because man had His image, and His authority was about to be exercised for the subduing of His enemy, Satan; as long as man expresses God and deals with God’s enemy, God is satisfied and can rest—Gen. 1:26, 31; 2:1-2.
 - 2. Later, the seventh day was commemorated as the Sabbath (Exo. 20:8-11); God’s seventh day was man’s first day.
 - 3. God had prepared everything for man’s enjoyment; after man was created, he did not join in God’s work; he entered into God’s rest.
 - 4. Man was created not to work first but to be satisfied with God and rest with God (cf. Matt. 11:28-30); the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27).
- C. Exodus 31:17 says, “In six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed”:
 - 1. The Sabbath was not only a rest to God but also a refreshment to Him.
 - 2. God rested after His work of creation was completed; He looked upon His handiwork, at the heavens, the earth, and all the living things, especially at man, and said, “Very good!” (Gen. 1:31).
 - 3. God was refreshed with man; God created man in His own image with a spirit so that man could have fellowship with Him; man, therefore, was God’s refreshment—v. 26; 2:7; cf. John 4:31-34.
 - 4. God was a “bachelor” before He created mankind (cf. Gen. 2:18, 22); He wanted man to receive Him, love Him, be filled with Him, and express Him to become His wife (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25); in eternity future God will have a wife, the New Jerusalem, which is called the Lamb’s wife (Rev. 21:9-10).
 - 5. Man was like a refreshing drink to quench God’s thirst and satisfy Him; when God ended His work and began to rest, He had man as His companion.
 - 6. To God, the seventh day was a day of rest and refreshment; however, to man, God’s companion, the day of rest and refreshment was the first day; man’s first day was a day of enjoyment.
- D. It is a divine principle that God does not ask us to work until we have had enjoyment; after a full enjoyment with Him and of Him, we may work together with Him:
 - 1. If we do not know how to have enjoyment with God, how to enjoy God Himself, and how to be filled with God, we will not know how to work with Him and be one with Him in His divine work; man enjoys what God has accomplished in His work.
 - 2. On the day of Pentecost the disciples were filled with the Spirit, which means that

- they were filled with the enjoyment of the Lord; because they were filled with the Spirit, others thought that they were drunk with wine—Acts 2:4a, 12-13.
3. Actually, they were filled with the enjoyment of the heavenly wine; only after they were filled with this enjoyment did they begin to work with God in oneness with Him; Pentecost was the first day of the eighth week; therefore, concerning the day of Pentecost, we see the principle of the first day.
 4. With God it is a matter of working and resting; with man it is a matter of resting and working.
- E. In doing God's divine work to build the church, typified by the work to build the tabernacle, we must bear a sign to indicate that we are God's people and that we need Him; then we will be able to work not only for God but also with God by being one with God; He will be our strength to work and our energy to labor:
1. We are God's people, and we should bear a sign that we need Him to be our enjoyment, strength, energy, and everything so that we may be able to work for Him to honor and glorify Him.
 2. The Sabbath means that before we work for God, we need to enjoy God and be filled with Him; Peter preached the gospel by the infilling God, the infilling Spirit; therefore, Peter had a sign that he was God's co-worker, and his gospel preaching was an honor and glory to God—v. 14.
 3. As God's people, we must bear a sign that we rest with God, enjoy God, and are filled up with God first, and then we work with the very One who fills us; furthermore, we not only work with God but also work as those who are one with God.
 4. In our speaking to God's people, we must always seek to bear a sign that our Lord is our strength, our energy, and our everything for ministering the word—2 Cor. 13:3; Acts 6:4.
- F. Keeping the Sabbath is also an eternal agreement, or covenant, that assures God that we will be one with Him by first enjoying Him and being filled with Him and then by working for Him, with Him, and in oneness with Him—Exo. 31:16:
1. It is a serious matter to work for the Lord by ourselves without taking Him in and enjoying Him by drinking and eating Him—cf. 1 Cor. 12:13; John 6:57.
 2. As Peter was speaking on the day of Pentecost, he was inwardly partaking of Jesus, drinking and eating Him.
- G. The Sabbath is also a matter of sanctification (Exo. 31:13); when we enjoy the Lord and then work with Him, for Him, and by being one with Him, spontaneously we are sanctified, separated unto God from everything that is common and saturated with God to replace everything that is fleshly and natural.
- H. In the church life we may do many things without first enjoying the Lord and without serving the Lord by being one with the Lord; that kind of service results in spiritual death and the loss of the fellowship in the Body (vv. 14-15).
- I. Everything related to God's dwelling place leads us to one matter—to the Sabbath with its rest and refreshment of the Lord; in the church life we are in the tabernacle, and the tabernacle leads us to rest, to the enjoyment of God's purpose and of what He has done!

III. The Lord's yoke (the Father's will) is easy, and His burden (the work to carry out the Father's will) is light; we must always serve with a burden from the Lord:

- A. An open spirit to God is the condition for receiving burdens from God; we must learn to receive burdens and release burdens through prayer in our intimate fellowship with the Lord—Luke 1:53; Psalms 27:4; Isaiah 59:16; Colossians 4:2.

- B. 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:
 - 1. 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.
 - 2. 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.
 - 3. 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.
- C. The greatest problem in the administration of the church and in the ministry of the word is not having a burden from the Lord:
 - 1. Without a burden, all our activity will be dead and ineffective; with a burden, we will be living and flourishing.
 - 2. 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.
 - 3. If we serve according to obligation instead of serving with a burden, such service will cause us to lose the Lord's presence—cf. Deut. 4:25.
 - 4. Whenever our service becomes a matter of fulfilling an obligation, our service has already degraded—Mal. 3:14 and footnote 1.
 - 5. The building work of the tabernacle and all its furniture (typifying the work of the Lord to build up the church) should begin with the enjoyment of God and continue in intervals with the refreshment by enjoying God; this will indicate that we do not work for God by our own strength but by the enjoyment of Him and by being one with Him; this is to keep the principle of the Sabbath with Christ as the inner rest in our spirit.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

PROBLEMS IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHURCH AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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, we will see that our messages are 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 Second Problem— Lacking a Feeling for Coordination

Another problem among us is that although the serving ones are capable, they do not have a feeling for coordination in their spirit when they come together to serve. It seems as if everyone is able to serve without others. Consequently, few among us have the spirit of a learner and the spirit of needing help. Those who truly coordinate in spirit should have a strong feeling that they cannot do anything without the help and coordination of others. Our present coordination is one of formality. We do our part without needing anyone else. We may not argue, but there is not much interdependence in spirit. This shows that our spirit of service is improper.

This is the situation of those who work with the young people and the children. The coordination is formal; everyone does what he should do when it is his turn. This is cooperation, not coordination. Coordination means that we cannot do anything without one another. There is a sense that we need others and that others need us. Those who work with young people should be like this; all the service of the church should also be like this. It is normal when the deacons and elders mutually need one another, and the saints feel that they cannot do anything without the elders and deacons.

Today we have rules and arrangements. The elders do things pertaining to elders, and the deacons do things pertaining to deacons. Everyone works when it is his turn. However, we do not have a deep feeling that we cannot go on without the elders and deacons in our service. Some brothers not only lack a sense of the need for the elders and deacons, but they even think that elders and deacons are unnecessary. This is dangerous.

Having the Greatest Form of Pride

Those who live in the workers' home are bright and capable. They seem to be independent and do not need others. This is very dangerous because it is the greatest form of pride. If four brothers are living in the workers' home, they should depend on one another, and others should sense their dependence on one another. Sadly, this is not the atmosphere among us. For example, if it is my turn to preach the gospel, I will either do everything or do nothing. From the human perspective this may be considered to be coordination, but this coordination is according to regulation and arrangement. There is no sense of needing others in spirit. Some may think that coordination is unnecessary and troublesome and that it is better to not coordinate.

Those who do not need to coordinate are dry, lack blessing, and are useless. The fact that we are clever, capable, and do not need one another's help is a great danger. This is a sad and pitiful situation. The fearful thing is that this situation is hidden and not very apparent. This situation can be compared to leprosy. If it is manifested, it is easier to deal with it.

This shows that we lack the fellowship of the Body. When we come together, we seldom have thorough fellowship. For example, when saints from other cities visit Taipei, we sit together for a meeting. After the meeting, however, we all go our separate ways without fellowshiping. This was not our situation during our first six years in Taiwan. In those years, whenever we had a conference, we came together and had much fellowship. Now we are all capable, brilliant, and knowledgeable. We do not need one another; we do not need to fellowship. This is the greatest form of pride. It is the most offensive thing to the Lord and to the Body. We should humbly minister to others and restrict our cleverness through coordination.

Needing Fellowship and Coordination in the Body and in Life

If we lose the principle of coordination and dependence in the Body, we will not be strong in our administration of the church and ministry of the word. Once we lose this principle, we will not have much blessing. Our coordination should not become mechanical, and we should not work only when it is our turn. We should have the feeling that we cannot do anything without others, that we truly need one another. If we come together and assign work, with each doing only his own work, our situation is similar to the division of labor in a civic organization or a large institution. This lack of the flavor of coordination among the members of the Body must be dealt with.

What does it mean to see the Body? The greatest indication that we see the Body is that we cannot be independent. We feel that we need the Body, that we need the brothers and sisters. Presently, however, our coordination can be compared to work in an organization. It seems that we are moving like a machine and that we lack the sense of the fellowship of life.

The Lack of Coordination Producing Criticism

If we lack coordination with others, we will always criticize what they do. Even if we do not express it, we are filled with criticism, and we disapprove of what others do. Such people are narrow and pitiful. In our service we should not expect others to be like us, nor should we expect to be like others. However, because we lack coordination in our service and do not rely and mutually depend on one another, we often step on others. We either do not walk, or we step on others when we do walk. We either do not work, or we do the job of others. We either are not concerned, or we criticize the work of others. When a certain matter is in others' hands, we are not able to do anything, but when an opportunity comes to us, we do it according to our way and discard the help of others. Although this condition is not apparent among us, it will be in our future, because we are not willing to submit to others. This is a foolish way.

Not Requiring Others to Be the Same as We, but Respecting What Others Do

We should not require others to be the same as we are in everything. We should not discuss the way others give messages, visit people, or live. Even if we are not pleased with the way others live, we cannot set standards for others, nor are we qualified to judge others. Only the Lord is the criterion and the Judge. We need to learn to respect what others do. When we speak of being zealous, we should respect others' quietness; when we speak of being calm and joined to the Lord, we should not criticize those who are busy. If everyone is the same as we are, there will not be the Body. There would be only one member. This is not the church. If everyone is like us, there would be only we ourselves and not the church. The church is composed of many kinds of people. This can be compared to the human body having different members. The hands look like hands, the feet look like feet, the ears look like ears, and the eyes look like eyes. Even the member who seems to be the most uncomely is necessary in the Body.

Hence, we should learn not to step on others. When it is our turn to work, we should not criticize what others have done. It is a blessing to respect the work of others and to add our work to theirs. We should be positive when we speak with others, not negative. It is unwise to say that others are wrong. As long as these negative factors exist among us, the administration of the church will have problems, and the ministry of the word will not be strong. Many saints from different places serve together in the church. They have different dispositions and family backgrounds, and they also have different spiritual backgrounds and training. Therefore, we cannot expect everyone to be like we are. We need to learn not to step on others. When we take a step, we should not step on others. We should especially avoid stepping on others when we minister the word.

For example, when speaking about prayer, we should not criticize those who speak about meditation, because the saints may need both. We should simply speak positively about prayer without criticizing others' speaking concerning meditation. When we serve together, we must absolutely avoid criticizing others in the ministry of the word. Some may speak about prayer and others about meditating; some may speak of being zealous and others of being in the Holy of Holies. These are not heretical teachings; they are merely different in emphasis. Criticizing others shows that we are narrow, and this will lead to division. If this is the way we work, there will be no building among us; on the contrary, there will be destruction.

We should simply labor positively and learn to receive help from others. We should realize that no one can do our part. Even the apostle Paul could not do what we can do. However, we also need to admit that we cannot replace others. Every person has his own function. When we minister the word, fellowship, and pray, we should not criticize others. In particular, when we pray with others, we should avoid praying in a contradictory manner.

Not Insisting on Our Own Way

The elders once felt that a certain group meeting should study the Gospel of John. One of the responsible brothers in that meeting, however, felt that John was too long and wanted to study 1 Thessalonians instead. He felt this would help those who did not normally read the Bible. Since he insisted, the elders eventually agreed with him even though his burden for 1 Thessalonians was not proper. This brother did not have a proper burden. He simply thought that the saints would be afraid of a book with twenty-one chapters, and he allowed his opinion to trample the feeling of the other brothers. Unless this brother was truly burdened for 1 Thessalonians, he should not have presented it in the service. We should not do things that we have no burden for, and we should not abandon things for which we are burdened; we must serve according to burden. To do otherwise violates a spiritual principle. This responsible brother had not learned the lesson in spiritual matters, and he was inexperienced in the way he conducted himself. If our fellowship is a matter of spiritual burden, there should be no problem with proposing a change, and we should not criticize the burden. However, if we simply want to change others' ways, we should not do this.

We need to respect the ways of the ones with whom we serve. Even though the elders will not

force a group to study a certain book or speak certain things, we should not casually change what they commit to us. Strictly speaking, it is all right to study either John or 1 Thessalonians; it does not matter which book is studied. It is possible to minister to the brothers and sisters through 1 Thessalonians and through the Gospel of John. In our service we should always avoid changing the ways of others.

We should realize that when we change others' ways, they might not accept it, because they feel that it is inappropriate, and if they accept our change, there is not a sweet feeling. Because of this kind of problem, our service in the administration of the church and the ministry of the word is not strong. Even in the world, when people work together, it is not easy to change one another's ways. If we truly have a skill, it will be manifested if we work according to their way. If we have spiritual content, we can minister to the saints through 1 Thessalonians and through the Gospel of John. No matter the book, we should be able to minister the spiritual content. What we should fear is not having spiritual content to minister to people; however, if we have spiritual content, we will be able to minister and develop any book of the Bible. Therefore, changing the way others do things indicates that we have not learned many spiritual lessons. It also indicates that we are inexperienced in the way we conduct ourselves.

Some brothers lead the saints to serve fervently, hoping that they can spend more time to learn to fellowship with the Lord and to know the indwelling Spirit. We should not change their practice. We should even praise them, saying that it is good to love the Lord and be fervent. However, our praise should not be insincere. It should positively supplement their labor. We always need to have an attitude of respect, cooperation, and coordination with others. We should serve according to our portion and honor the portion of others, because both portions have been entrusted by the Lord. Everyone should have the humility to not regard his portion higher than another person's. We should take care of others' feelings. Unless they speak heresy and create problems for the work and the church, we should always respect them, be accommodating toward them, and receive help from them.

May the Lord grant us grace to see that this is a matter of life that involves being broken and being humble. Those who can reach a goal without forcing others to take their way are truly humble. As those who love the Lord, we desire to live for Him and build up the church. These goals are right, but there are many ways to reach these goals. For example, preaching the gospel with a brother is a good goal that can be done according to his way or according to our way. We receive the blessing when we do not force others to do things our way. If we have spiritual content, we can minister his way, and if he has spiritual content, he can minister our way. Both ways are acceptable; it is not necessary to adhere to a certain way.

Preserving the Consciousness of the Body and Being Built Up in Our Service

The brothers need to learn the lesson of being broken, accommodating others, and respecting others' function. Our Lord is great, and His work has many aspects. Thus, we must be faithful to what the Lord has entrusted us with and learn to work in coordination with others, respecting what they do. Unless they speak heresy, we should not interfere, intervene, or criticize. Only in this way can we preserve the consciousness of the Body and produce the building among us.

The seeds of these problems are sown among us and have already produced some negative situations. Since we are serving the Lord together in His work and sharing this work together, we must rise up to utterly condemn such situations. These matters are intimately related to us and will manifest how much we have been dealt with before the Lord and the lessons of life we have learned. If we have grown in life, been broken, and learned some lessons, we will be saved in all these matters. When the elders suggested studying the Gospel of John and the responsible brother for the home meeting said that it was too long, insisting that the elders accept his way, the feeling of coordination was weakened. Once the feeling of coordination is weakened, we cannot expect the building of the Body to be strong.

If this brother continues to oppose the proposals of the elders, the brothers and sisters in his meeting will eventually rise up to oppose him, because he took the lead to oppose others and give his

opinions. If he continues in this way, how can he lead the brothers and sisters in his home meeting to have a strong service in coordination and a good building? We all need to learn a serious lesson. In the coordination of the Body, everyone needs to function and respect what others do. We should not criticize others but should join their labor so that the Body of Christ can be supplied, not damaged. In this way the feeling of coordination in the Body will be sweet, and the building up of the Body will be strong. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1957*, vol. 2, “The Administration of the Church and the Ministry of the Word,” pp. 233-246)

THE WILL OF GOD

(Lord's Day—Second Morning Session)

Message Eight

Meeting to Know and Do the Will of God

Scripture Reading: Matt. 7:21; 12:50; 18:20; Eph. 3:8; Col. 1:12; 1 Cor. 14:26; Heb. 10:25

I. To meet is to know and do the will of God; our goal, our purpose, on earth is to do the will of the Father, and we do this by coming to the meetings of the church—Heb. 10:25.

II. We need to realize that besides our inner life with the Lord, nothing is as crucial, important, and profitable as the church meetings—1 Cor. 14:23-26:

- A. As indicated by the Greek word *ekklesia*, the church—the dwelling place of God—is a meeting or an assembly of the called-out ones—Matt. 18:17-20:
 - 1. The church is a gathering of the believers, a meeting of a collective people.
 - 2. When God's called-out ones meet together, this is the church—Acts 2:42; 8:1.
 - 3. Our Father has predestinated us to meet together; coming to the meetings is God's will—Eph. 1:5; Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 14:26.
- B. The Christian life is a meeting life—Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 14:23-26:
 - 1. Much of the grace that we receive is in the meetings, and much of the work that the Lord does is also in the meetings—Acts 4:33; 13:1-2.
 - 2. Since the Christian life is a meeting life and much of the Lord's work is carried out through the meetings, we should regard the meetings as being of great importance—Heb. 10:25.

III. In the meetings God makes His will known to us—Psa. 73:16-17:

- A. Doing God's will depends on knowing His will—John 7:17.
- B. In our meetings there are many wonderful things underneath the surface, one of which is knowing God's will.
- C. When the psalmist went into the sanctuary of God, he was able to know God's will—Psa. 73:16-17:
 - 1. God's sanctuary, His habitation, is in our spirit and in the church—Eph. 2:22; 1 Tim. 3:15.
 - 2. In order to go into the sanctuary of God, we need to turn to our spirit and go to the meetings of the church.
 - 3. Once we are in the sanctuary—in the spirit and in the meetings of the church—we receive another view, a particular perception, of our situation—Psa. 73:16-20.
 - 4. God's way is made known in the sanctuary of God—v. 17:
 - a. In our spirit and in the meetings we receive divine revelation—Rev. 1:10; Eph. 1:17-18.
 - b. When we exercise our spirit and attend the meetings of the church, God's way becomes clear to us—Psa. 73:17.

IV. Since the will of God is in Christ, concentrated in Christ, and for Christ, and Christ is everything in the will of God, we do God's will through exhibiting Christ in the meetings—Col. 1:9, 15-18, 12; 3:4, 11; 1 Cor. 14:26:

- A. The will of God for us is that we would experience and enjoy the all-inclusive Christ and

- live Him as our life—Col. 1:9, 15-18; 3:4, 11.
- B. Our meetings are to exhibit Christ, so when we come to a meeting, we need to bring with us the Christ whom we have enjoyed—1 Cor. 14:26.
 - C. The proper church life depends upon the church meetings where all the saints exhibit Christ with His unsearchable riches—Eph. 3:8.
 - D. The goal of our meeting is to exhibit Christ, and the Christian meeting is an exhibition of our Christian daily life—1 Cor. 14:26; cf. Deut. 12:5-7, 13-14.
 - E. We exhibit Christ in the meetings by offering to God Christ as the reality of the offerings, enjoying Christ together with God—Heb. 10:8-10, 25; 13:20-21.
 - F. We need to function in the meetings to exhibit Christ—Col. 1:12; 1 Cor. 14:26:
 - 1. Due to the influence of Christianity, many believers do not bear responsibility in the meetings.
 - 2. The concept that we may attend a meeting but are not responsible for the meeting is a fundamental error; it is a ploy of Satan to render the members of the Body of Christ useless so that they do not function.
 - G. As Christians, we are members of Christ, and our most important service is to meet—12:4-11, 14-27; Heb. 10:25:
 - 1. The church meetings are the best opportunity to exhibit Christ—Col. 3:11.
 - 2. As Christians, we are commissioned to exhibit Christ in the meetings and thus do the will of God—Matt. 7:21; 16:18; Eph. 3:8; Col. 1:12.
 - 3. “The Father we would glorify, / Exalting Christ the Son, thereby / The meeting’s purpose satisfy / That we exhibit Christ” (*Hymns*, #864, stanza 8).

V. Since the Father’s eternal will and the desire of His heart are to build up the church as the Body of Christ, we do His will by functioning in the meetings according to the scriptural way to meet for the building up of the Body—Matt. 7:21; 12:50; Eph. 4:16; 1 Cor. 14:26:

- A. The meetings of the believers should always be linked to God’s New Testament economy; we should come to the meetings with a vision of the divine economy, and what we speak in the meetings should focus on the economy of God—1 Tim. 1:4; Eph. 3:9; 1 Cor. 14:26.
- B. The recovery according to the Lord’s mind is to bring His believers out of the clergy-laity system and to replace this system with the scriptural way to meet and to serve for the building up of the Body of Christ—v. 26; Eph. 4:12, 16.
- C. The Lord desires to recover the church meetings in mutuality with all functioning for the building up of the Body of Christ—1 Cor. 14:4b, 24a, 26, 31:
 - 1. When we come to the church meetings, we should have something of the Lord to share with others—v. 26.
 - 2. Before coming to a meeting, we should prepare ourselves for the meeting with something from the Lord or of the Lord, either through our experience of Him or through our enjoyment of His word and fellowship with Him in prayer.
 - 3. We must labor on Christ, our good land, so that we may reap some produce of His riches to bring to the church meeting and offer—Col. 1:12; Eph. 3:8.
 - 4. Thus, the meeting will be an exhibition of His riches and will be a mutual enjoyment of Christ shared with all the attendants before God and with God for the building up of the saints and the church—1 Cor. 14:26.
 - 5. Whatever we do in the church meeting must be for the building up of the saints and the church—vv. 3-5, 12.
- D. In the practice of the scriptural way to meet and to serve, we emphasize prophesying—the excelling gift for the building up of the church—vv. 1, 4b, 24-25, 31:

1. The significance of prophesying in 1 Corinthians 14 is to speak for the Lord, to speak forth the Lord, and even to speak the Lord, to minister, to dispense, the Lord, into others; in the sense of the divine dispensing, the entire Bible consummates in all prophesying—vv. 3, 24-25, 31.
2. Prophesying, speaking for God and speaking forth God with God as the content, ministers God to the hearers and brings them to God—v. 25.
3. God desires that each of the believers prophesy, that is, speak for Him and speak Him forth—vv. 1b, 31; cf. Num. 11:29.
4. The characteristic of prophesying is to minister Christ for the organic building up of the church as the Body of Christ; prophesying is the particular gift for the building up of the church—1 Cor. 14:3-5, 12, 24, 26.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ASSEMBLING TOGETHER OF THE BELIEVERS THEMSELVES

Hebrews 10:25 says, “Not abandoning our own assembling together, as the custom with some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.” The apostle Paul wrote the book of Hebrews to encourage the hesitating, backslidden Hebrew believers to go forward within the veil and to go outside the camp (6:19; 13:13). To go “outside the camp” was to go outside of the old Jewish religion, and to enter “within the veil” was to enter into the Holy of Holies, where Christ is.

We must realize that our proper meeting is the Holy of Holies. To be gathered together in a proper way is to meet in the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies is wherever the Lord Jesus is. The Lord is dwelling in the heavens (Rom. 8:34). The Lord is also dwelling in our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22), which is the Holy of Holies (Heb. 4:12, 16; see footnote 4:161, Recovery Version). Since the Lord is in the third heaven today, the third heaven is the Holy of Holies (9:12; cf. v. 24). Since He is now in our spirit, our spirit is the Holy of Holies. Because the Lord Jesus is in our meeting whenever we meet together, our meeting is also the Holy of Holies (10:22, 25). For the Hebrew believers to forsake their Christian meeting was for them to forsake the Holy of Holies and go back to their religious camp.

The book of Exodus shows us that after the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf (32:8), they became a camp. They had the Lord in name, but in reality they worshipped something else and hence became a religious camp among whom it was impossible to have the Lord’s presence. Moses knew that God, according to His holiness, would no longer stay among the people, for the camp had become idolatrous. Therefore, Moses took his tent, which formerly had been in the camp, and pitched it outside the camp. This tent then became the tent of God, the tent of meeting (33:7). If the people would not go out of the camp but would remain in it, they would not have the presence of the Lord. The presence of the Lord was no longer in the camp but in the tent (v. 9).

When the Lord Jesus was on this earth, there was a separation between the Jewish religionists, the camp, and the Lord Himself, the real tabernacle (John 1:14; 2:19, 21). The Lord Jesus was the very embodiment of God, and the real Holy of Holies was wherever He was. Outside of and around Christ, there was a religious organization, an old religion, a camp, which did not have God’s Holy of Holies. In that religious organization of Judaism, God was not there. At the time the Lord Jesus walked upon this earth, the proper worship was always held in the temple according to the rituals ordained by God. Yet we must ask ourselves who the Lord Jesus is. Actually, He is the very God, the One whom the children of Israel worshipped in their temple.

One day Jesus entered into the house in Bethany (12:1-11). He was in that home, yet the Jewish priests still worshipped God in the temple in Jerusalem. During that time, where was God? Was He in the Holy of Holies within the temple at Jerusalem or in the small home at Bethany? No doubt, He was

in the small home in Bethany. Because God was in that home in Bethany, that home became the very Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies in the temple was forsaken by God because it had become a part of the camp (Matt. 23:38—24:2). At that time, if anyone desired to worship God, they had to forsake the temple and go to that little home in Bethany. That little home was the Holy of Holies.

The principle is the same today. In order to worship God, you have to go outside of the camp of religion and enter within the veil to enjoy Christ in the Holy of Holies. The Lord Jesus as God is not in the old, religious, human organization, which is just a camp. In Hebrews Paul charged the hesitating, wandering, backsliding Hebrew believers to forget about their old religion, old temple, and old ritualistic worship and to go forth outside the camp to enter into the Holy of Holies to enjoy Christ (6:19; 10:22; 13:13). This Holy of Holies is the proper Christian meeting.

The Holy of Holies in Hebrews denotes three things: the third heaven, our spirit, and the Christian meeting. Whenever we come together properly, our gathering is the Holy of Holies. Of the three, which do you prefer, the third heaven, our spirit, or the Christian meeting? The heavens are difficult to reach, and we are often unable to remain in our spirit all day long, day and night. But according to my Christian experience, the meetings keep me in the Lord, in His Holy of Holies. I do not enjoy the Lord's presence elsewhere as much as I do in the meetings. It is enjoyable to be in our spirit, but the meeting as the Holy of Holies is much better and higher.

After some of us attend a ten-day training or a conference, and we are returning to our localities, we may feel that we are in the outer court and not in the Holy of Holies. We may long for the time when we can gather together again. This experience illustrates the reason Paul urged the Hebrew believers not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. If they forsook their assembling together, it meant that they went back to their old religion, their former camp. Thus, Paul charged them to go outside the camp and to enter within the veil. To enter within the veil includes three things: to enter into the heavenly Holy of Holies; to enter into our spirit, which is linked to the heavenly Holy of Holies; and to enter into the Christian meeting. The Christian meeting is the best because it nourishes, strengthens, edifies, and enlightens us, becoming a great spiritual benefit to us. The meetings are wonderful.

The meeting in the New Testament is referred to as a gathering (Matt. 18:20) and an assembly (Heb. 10:25). The assembling together of the believers, the meetings, should not be in the nature of fulfilling mixed purposes. Frequently, in Christianity the meetings are not pure in their purpose. The meetings of the believers should be purely in the nature of carrying out God's New Testament economy. If we were to hold a meeting that is not pure and that has a mixed purpose, it would be difficult to have the Lord's presence. The proper Christian meeting must be pure in its purpose. The essence, the nature, of the meeting must be purely to carry out God's New Testament economy.

God's New Testament economy is to get a people through Christ to be the church so that God may have a corporate expression in His fatherhood. Every Christian meeting must be pure in nature to carry out this economy of God so that God may express Himself as a great Father in all His children. To have a meeting with such a motive and purpose is really pure.

TO HAVE THE FULL MUTUALITY

In Speaking

The Christian meetings should be full of mutuality in speaking (Eph. 5:19). To fill the Christian meetings with mutuality is not very easy, but to have the mutuality is wonderful. Whether we come together with fifty, one hundred, or one hundred fifty, everyone should function. This creates a mutuality that fills up the entire meeting. One speaks for one minute, another speaks for half a minute, another speaks for five minutes, someone may speak for eight minutes, and someone else may speak for ten minutes. By this practice of everyone speaking according to their measure, we all would produce a meeting that is full of mutuality.

I hope that we would improve, grow, and advance to a condition where many would speak. Some would speak for forty seconds, others for four minutes, and another for thirty minutes. We not only need the short speaking; we also need some longer speaking. There may be a meeting in which many speak in a short way and one would speak in a new, living, refreshing, and high way for perhaps forty minutes. This would be wonderful. The first chapter of Luke illustrates this. In this chapter there are three different kinds of speaking. The record of Elizabeth's speaking is the shortest (vv. 42-45). Mary, the mother of Jesus, spoke for a longer time (vv. 46-55). Finally, Zachariah, full of experiences, spoke the longest (vv. 68-79). Zachariah's speaking in Luke 1 contains no wasted words, and it is full of riches. How long you should speak depends upon your age and experience. Your experience and knowledge of the word of God constitute the content and the length of your speaking.

If everyone in the meeting speaks for a short time, and the meeting is full of mutuality, the new ones who come to the meeting will be convinced (1 Cor. 14:24-25). They may be shocked at first, asking what kind of meeting this is. They may have been Christians for many years, but they may never have seen a meeting with such mutuality—with everyone speaking.

We should also learn not to speak lightly. We must speak with weight. Otherwise, some may say that our speaking does not have much content. Our speaking must be with content. This needs the proper learning, practice, and training; therefore, the churches should train the saints to speak with content. If we all learn to give living and weighty words whenever and wherever we speak, we will surely be welcomed by all the churches. On the other hand, if we go to the meetings and only sit without saying anything, we will not be appreciated that much. Learn to speak, but do not speak lightly. This needs our daily practice. Every morning we should contact the Lord, reading a few verses to enjoy the Lord by enjoying His Word. We should pick up something from the Word and practice speaking the Lord the entire day. This will enrich our being, our person, and this will constitute the proper speaking. Then wherever we go, we will have not only the boldness but also the practice and habit of speaking. If I go to visit a church and stay for a few days, I cannot refrain from speaking. I am addicted to speaking. Wherever I go, I must speak—the more, the better. Build up a habit and taste for speaking.

When you speak, you get the firstfruits of the benefit. While I am speaking, you get some benefit, but I get the firstfruits of the benefit. This is why I am so strong. Learn to speak. To merely listen weakens you. On the one hand, listening nourishes you. On the other hand, if you listen only to others' speaking, it does nourish you, but it does not allow you to grow. The more help you receive in this way, the more you will eventually die. We must learn to speak, speak, speak.

It would be marvelous if we would learn to speak every item of the contents of chapter 1 of this book, [entitled "The God-ordained Way to Meet and to Serve as Revealed in the Holy Word"]. We can tell others, "The Christian meeting is linked to the processed Triune God. It is linked to Christ, who has passed through the processes of incarnation, human living, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension." We should learn to speak these things. Chapter 1 of this book is enough for the saints in the churches to speak on for one year, day by day and in every meeting. The contents of all my writings are embodied in this chapter. The husbands should speak concerning these things to their wives, and the wives to their husbands. I have been speaking concerning God's economy and the processed Triune God for nearly twenty-five years in the United States, and I have not yet exhausted this subject. Speaking concerning the Triune God is like cooking American beef in many different ways. The beef is the same, but the ways of cooking and serving it are many. Learn to speak concerning the processed Christ all the time. In other words, learn to speak the same thing all the time (1 Cor. 1:10). In order to fill the meeting with mutuality, the primary thing is speaking. When everyone speaks, the meeting is always full of mutuality.

In Considering One Another and in Exhorting One Another

Hebrews 10:24 says, “Let us consider one another so as to incite one another to love and good works.” *Consider one another* indicates mutuality. I take care of you, and you take care of me—this is mutuality. Exhorting one another in verse 25 also indicates mutuality. In the New Testament, exhortation is mutual; it is not just in one direction. With exhortation there should be a two-way traffic, as indicated by the words *one another* in verses 24 and 25. In the meetings of Christianity exhortation is usually from one direction—from the pastor to the congregation; there is no exhortation that goes back to the pastor. However, when we meet, our exhortation must be among ourselves; it must be mutual.

In Teaching and in Admonishing

Teaching and admonishing are also in mutuality (Col. 3:16). We speak to one another, teaching and admonishing one another. Sometimes the sisters could admonish the brothers. The sisters should not say that because they are not teachers, they cannot speak. They should not teach (1 Tim. 2:12), but they should admonish. We admonish one another because we love one another. We are members of the same Body, so I admonish you, and you admonish me.

When I was young, I discovered that some Christian teachers said that females could teach in the church meetings, but others said that they could not. One day in Los Angeles in 1963, a brother who was knowledgeable of the Bible attended our meetings. When he observed that the sisters spoke in the meetings, he asked me why we allowed the sisters to speak. He said that the sisters should be silent. I responded by asking him whether or not the sisters were silent in his meetings. He said that they were. I then asked him if the sisters sang in his meetings. He affirmed that they did. Then I asked him whether or not singing was a kind of speaking. In other words, as long as the sisters were singing in his meeting, they were not actually silent. Then I asked why the sisters were allowed to sing and were not allowed to pray.

How strange that was! It is strange that the sisters were qualified to sing hymns but not qualified to pray. According to 1 Corinthians 11:5, however, women may pray and prophesy in the meeting, but they must do this under the covering of the brothers. The sisters must be emancipated to speak in the church meeting. They must be encouraged to speak but not in terms of teaching. The sisters should not teach, but they can exhort and admonish. Many times mothers can admonish their children better than fathers; likewise, the sisters are usually very skillful in admonishing. This is because the sisters are fine, not rough or coarse. Brothers, on the other hand, may be rough and coarse. When the brothers say Amen, it can be very rough. However, when the sisters say Amen, it can be like music, very pleasant to our ears. Since admonishing is a fine work, it is sometimes very difficult for the brothers to admonish. As a brother, teaching is very easy for me. But I may not be as qualified to admonish as some of the sisters. When the brothers admonish, the saints may not listen very much. But when a dear sister comes and admonishes, everyone may listen and obey. This illustrates why we need the sisters to speak. As long as they would speak and not teach, everything is fine.

All the sisters should be encouraged to speak. Many of the sisters need to be “emancipated,” not from man’s control but from their own control. Many sisters control themselves too much. It is always good for a sister to be quiet, gentle, and meek. I agree with and appreciate this. But I do not agree that the sisters’ mouths would be shut in the meeting. The sisters need to be gentle and meek but speaking.

PAYING A HIGH PRICE TO REACH THE STANDARD

To reach the standard of these characteristics of the believers’ meetings requires that we pay a high price. We must endeavor to reach this highest standard so that our meetings could be revolutionized, bearing the proper characteristics. Once our meetings are converted from the old way into the new way, the Lord will have something according to His New Testament economy. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1987, vol. 3, “The Scriptural Way to Meet and to Serve for the Building Up of the Body of Christ,” pp. 300-306*)