

## THE UNIQUE WORK IN THE LORD'S RECOVERY

(Friday—First Morning Session)

### Message Four

#### **Ambassadors of Christ with the Ministry of Reconciliation and Co-workers of God with an All-fitting Life**

Scripture Reading: 2 Cor. 5:4, 9, 14-16, 18-20; 6:1; 7:2-3

- I. We need to be ambassadors of Christ with the ministry of reconciliation:**
- A. The ambassadors of Christ are ones who represent Christ, the highest authority in the universe:
    - 1. God has given all authority in heaven and on earth to Christ—Matt. 28:18.
    - 2. God has appointed Christ to be the King of kings and the Lord of lords—1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14.
  - B. The ambassadors of Christ do not live by what they are or by what they can do but by the immortal life, which is Christ Himself within them—2 Cor. 5:4:
    - 1. Whatever we can do, whatever we are, and whatever we have are going to die; this is why we should not have any trust in what we are—1:8-9.
    - 2. We need to realize that Christ as the immortal life is within us; we should trust in this life, live by this life, and work by this life—13:3.
  - C. The ambassadors of Christ are determined to gain the honor of being well pleasing to Him—5:9:
    - 1. To be determined is to be zealous with a strong aim, striving earnestly to be well pleasing to the Lord—Col. 1:10; Heb. 11:5-6.
    - 2. If we are going to represent Christ to be His ambassadors, we should pray, “Lord, I call the heavens and the earth to witness that my ambition is one—just to please You.”
  - D. The ambassadors of Christ are constrained by the love of Christ to live to Him—2 Cor. 5:14-15:
    - 1. To be constrained is similar to being carried away by a tide of water; the love of Christ is as strong as a tide of water that overcomes us and carries us away.
    - 2. The love of Christ constrains us to live to Him and not to ourselves:
      - a. To live to ourselves means that we are under our own control, direction, and governing and that we care for our own aims and goals.
      - b. To live to the Lord is to be absolutely under His control, direction, and governing; it means that everything we do is to fulfill the Lord's purpose and desire.
      - c. To live to the Lord means that we seek to please the Lord in every aspect of our daily life.
      - d. Living for the Lord means that I and the Lord are still two; living to the Lord indicates that I am one with the Lord, as the wife is one with the husband in married life.

- E. The ambassadors of Christ do not know people according to the flesh but according to the spirit—v. 16:
  1. We need to recognize things and realize persons not according to the outward appearance in the flesh but according to the measure of Christ in the spirit.
  2. People may be known according to their profession, position, talents, and capabilities, but in the church we should know others according to the inner man, according to the spirit.
- F. The ambassadors of Christ carry out the ministry of reconciliation:
  1. The ministry of reconciliation is not only to bring sinners back to God but also to bring the believers into God and to make them absolutely one with Him—vv. 18-20.
  2. Only when we have been fully reconciled to God are we fully saved—6:1-2; Rom. 5:10; Heb. 7:25.
  3. The extent to which we can bring others to God is always measured by where we are with respect to God; the more we are in Him, the more we can reconcile others into Him—2 Cor. 12:2a; 5:20.

## **II. We need to be co-workers of God with an all-fitting life:**

- A. We need to work together with God by a life (not by any gift) that is all-sufficient and all-mature, able to fit all situations, able to endure any kind of treatment, to accept any kind of environment, to work under any kind of condition, and to take any kind of opportunity, for the carrying out of our ministry—6:1a.
- B. If we have been fully saved and have an all-fitting life, then any situation or circumstance is right for us to minister life to others—Phil. 1:20; 4:22; 2 Tim. 4:2a; cf. 2 Chron. 1:10.
- C. If we would have an all-fitting life, we need an enlarged heart, a heart to embrace all of God's people—2 Cor. 6:11-13; 2 Chron. 1:10; 1 Kings 4:29:
  1. To be enlarged by growing and maturing in life is equivalent to being fully reconciled to God.
  2. With an enlarged heart we are able to embrace all believers regardless of their condition, and with an opened mouth we are free to speak to all believers frankly concerning the real situation into which they have been misled—Matt. 5:7; 6:14-15; 7:1-2.
- D. We need to be enlarged to have the intimate concern of the ministering life—2 Cor. 7:2-3; 1 Thes. 2:8; Phil. 2:19-20:
  1. If we have the ability to carry on a work but lack an intimate concern, our work will be fruitless; our not having the loving and forgiving heart of our Father God and the shepherding and seeking spirit of our Savior Christ is the reason for our barrenness—cf. Luke 15.
  2. Eloquence, gift, and power can never touch people as much as our concern for them—cf. 1 Cor. 12:31b; 2 Tim. 1:7; Philem. 9-12.
  3. How fruitful we are does not depend upon what we are able to do but on whether or not we have an intimate concern—2 Cor. 12:15; 1 Cor. 9:22; Matt. 9:12.
  4. A ministering life is a life that warms up others by cherishing them in the

humanity of Jesus to nourish them in the divinity of Christ with the riches of Christ—Eph. 5:29; Prov. 25:15.

5. Paul shepherded the saints as a nursing mother and an exhorting father—1 Thes. 2:7-8, 11-12; Acts 20:19-20, 27, 31.
6. Paul came down to the weak ones' level so that he could gain them—2 Cor. 11:28-29; 1 Cor. 9:22; cf. Matt. 12:20.
7. As a lover of the church in oneness with the church-loving Christ, Paul was willing to spend what he had, referring to his possessions, and to spend what he was, referring to his being, for the sake of the saints in order to build up the Body of Christ—Eph. 5:25; 2 Cor. 12:15; 11:28-29.

### **Excerpts from the Ministry:**

#### **THE MINISTERS OF THE NEW COVENANT**

Chapter seven is...part of the section in 2 Corinthians concerning the ministers of the new covenant. In this section Paul portrays the kind of life lived by the ministers of the new covenant. In this message we shall seek to touch the feeling in Paul's spirit as expressed in 7:2-7. In reading 7:2-16, the crucial matter is to touch Paul's feeling and also his spirit. However, it is not easy to do this.

#### **THE INTIMATE CONCERN OF THE MINISTERING LIFE**

What we have in 7:2-16 is the intimate concern of the ministering life. Every believer who loves the Lord and who wants to come up to God's standard should become a minister of the new covenant. As long as we are believers in Christ, we should be New Testament ministers, no matter whether we happen to be apostles, evangelists, elders, or deacons. Such a minister is a person who supplies Christ to others for the building up of the church, His Body. When I was young I heard that every believer should be a preacher of the gospel. Now we see that we should be not merely gospel preachers, but ministers of the new covenant, those who minister Christ as life so that the church may be built up as the Body of Christ. This ministry should be carried out not only by apostles and elders; it should be carried out by everyone in the church.

The goal of the Lord's recovery today is to recover this ministering of Christ by all the believers so that the church may be built up. This understanding is based on Paul's word in Ephesians 4, where he says that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers perfect the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ. For us all to be church builders, to minister Christ for the building up of the church, we need a ministering life. In order to be new covenant ministers we need such a ministering life. We need to live a life of ministering Christ to others for the church.

Many years ago I read various books that encouraged believers to be spiritual, holy, and victorious. But I never read one book charging us to live a ministering life. Many of us have read books on how to be spiritual, how to live a holy life, or how to be victorious. But have you ever read a book telling you how to live a ministering life? I do not believe any of us has read such a book.

In my travels over a period of about fifty years, I have met many different kinds of Christians. In particular I have met some who had a reputation for being spiritual. But to my registration even these so-called spiritual ones did not have a proper ministering life. They lived in a very careful manner in order to be "spiritual," "holy," and "victorious." But they did not

live in such a way as to be ministering ones. By the Lord's grace, not by our own efforts, we all should endeavor to live a ministering life.

#### **A FRUITFUL LIFE**

The ministering life we see in 2 Corinthians is a fruitful life. We may be "spiritual," "holy," and "victorious" and yet not be fruitful. There are problems with that kind of spirituality, holiness, and victory. It is questionable whether those qualities are true and genuine. Is it not unusual that one could be "spiritual" without being fruitful? According to the Bible, being spiritual is for the purpose of being fruitful. In the Gospel of John the Lord does not tell us to be spiritual, holy, and victorious. Rather, in John 15 He charges us to bear fruit, even to bear much fruit, abiding fruit. This is to live a ministering life.

Around my home there are a number of fruit trees—peach, lemon, and orange. For quite a long period of time, certain trees did not bear any fruit. Because of the lack of fruit, we were considering whether we should remove them. Although these trees did not bear fruit, they continued to grow quite well. In fact, they were green and flourishing, full of leaves. Nevertheless, the more they grew in that way, the more bothered I was concerning them. Sometimes when I looked at those trees I said, "What are you trees doing here? You are full of green leaves, and your branches are spreading forth, but you are not bearing any fruit." We may take this as an illustration of believers who may be "spiritual," "holy," and "victorious," but are fruitless. They do not bear fruit because they do not have a ministering life. It is very important to see that we all must have a ministering life.

In my early days, I heard several messages on 2 Corinthians 7. The emphasis of those messages was on sorrowing according to God. Those messages pointed out that if we sorrow according to God, we shall not regret being sorrowful. But although I heard some messages on this point, I was not told anything about Paul's feeling and spirit in this chapter. Here we see his intimate concern.

#### **THE NEED FOR GENUINE CONCERN**

It is possible to become knowledgeable in spiritual matters and powerful in preaching and yet still be unfruitful. In fact, instead of being fruitful and ministering life, such a person may cause others to suffer death. A brother may even visit another locality and hold a conference, but the results of that conference may be that many are killed. They are killed not by wrong words, but by right words. Furthermore, in the shepherding of the saints, it is also possible that we may kill others. The reason for this killing, this fruitlessness, is the lack of intimate concern. A brother who has a conference with a particular church may be concerned only for the giving of messages; he may not have any genuine concern for the church in that locality. Likewise, we may visit a family to shepherd them, but we may not have any loving concern. Rather, our motive may be to display our knowledge, spirituality, gift, or capability. The result is a killing.

Some mothers seem to be short of wisdom. Yet even though they are not clever, they raise their children in a very good way because they have a loving concern for them. Such mothers have a tender, intimate concern for their children. On the contrary, some step-mothers may be knowledgeable, gifted, and clever; however, they lack the necessary concern for the children. In taking care of children, what is most important is not knowledge or ability—it is an intimate concern. The same is true in taking care of churches or in shepherding the saints. What is needed is the intimate concern of a ministering life. The brothers who hold conferences with churches must have a genuine concern for the churches. They should not merely be interested in giving excellent messages as a display of their knowledge, talent, or capability.

When I was young, I was somewhat troubled by chapter seven of 2 Corinthians. I regarded the Bible as a sacred, classical book, and it seemed to me that 2 Corinthians 7 was not a classical writing. I could understand why chapters like Romans 5 and Romans 8 were in the Bible, but I did not know why a chapter like 2 Corinthians 7 was included. In verse 6 Paul says that he was encouraged by the coming of Titus, and in verse 7 he goes on to say, "And not only by his coming, but also by the encouragement with which he was encouraged over you, informing us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal on my behalf, so that I rejoiced the more." It seemed to me that such a verse should not be in the Bible. Have you ever checked why 2 Corinthians 7 is in the New Testament? If you have never thought about it, this may indicate that you are somewhat careless in reading the Word. I can testify that the more attention I pay to this chapter, the more I love it, and the more I learn from it and am affected by it.

This chapter reveals that we need an intimate concern. If we have ability to carry on a work but lack an intimate concern, our work will be fruitless. What is needed to establish a good family life and church life is intimate concern. How fruitful we are, how much fruit we bear, does not depend on what we are able to do. It depends on whether or not we have an intimate concern.

Brother Nee told us that in preaching the gospel we need to have a genuine concern for others. As long as we have the proper concern for people, we are well on our way to be qualified to be used of God for their salvation. A very good testimony of this is in the book *Seen and Heard*. In that book, the writer, James M'Kendrick, tells us of standing in front of a group of unbelievers and weeping, without saying a word. Nevertheless, a number were saved, for he had a deep concern. Eloquence, gift, and power can never touch people as deeply as your concern for them.

In 1 Corinthians Paul was like a father disciplining his children. But even this discipline came out of a deep, intimate concern. For example, a mother may spank one of her children. But while he is receiving that spanking, the child realizes that the mother is disciplining him with a loving spirit and attitude. Thus, even when she is spanking her child, she can love him. Children can tell whether or not their parents discipline them out of a spirit of love. It was with a loving, concerned spirit that Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians. To be sure, in 2 Corinthians as a whole, and especially in chapter seven, we see Paul's intimate concern for the believers.

#### **WARMING OTHERS**

In 2 Corinthians 7 Paul was very emotional. In verse 13 he says that he "rejoiced more abundantly over the joy of Titus." J. N. Darby points out that it is not possible to render exactly in English the Greek idiom for "more abundantly." Paul was very human and emotional in his ministering of life. Paul was so emotional because his concern was so deep and intimate. Without this kind of concern, we could never be abundantly rejoicing in the way Paul was. Instead, we may be as cold as a freezer, altogether lacking in concern for the saints. Instead of warming up others, we make them even colder. Nothing can grow when it is in such a frozen condition. We need the weather of spring to come to thaw us out and warm up our life. Once again there is a need for a ministering life. Do you know what a ministering life is? It is a life that warms up others. Learn to warm others. This is to have an intimate concern for them.

Many have read 2 Corinthians 7 without touching the matter of Paul's intimate concern. If we do not have this kind of concern for others, we shall not be fruitful. If I would minister life to the saints, I must have a genuine concern for them, a concern that is emotional, deep,

and intimate. I must be so concerned that, at times, I may appear to others to be foolish or beside myself.

#### **PAUL'S ENTREATY**

In 7:2 Paul says, "Make room for us; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one." The frank exhortation from 6:14 through 7:1 is given parenthetically to bring the distracted believers back to their holy God from being touched by something that has defiled them, so that they may be fully reconciled to Him. Hence, 7:2 is actually a continuation of 6:11-13, entreating the believers to have their heart enlarged toward the apostles, to make room for them. From this verse to the end of this chapter the apostle in his entreating expresses his intimate concern for the believers, that they may be consoled and encouraged to go on positively with the Lord after being fully reconciled to Him.

When Paul says, "Make room for us," he is actually saying to the Corinthians, "Brothers, I want to enter into you and dwell in you. But you are narrow and have shut yourselves up. You don't have an enlarged heart to receive us. I love you, and I am concerned for you. This is why I urge you to open up and make room for us so that we may come into you and dwell in you."

If you visit the church in another locality without the kind of spirit Paul has in verse 2, you may have the unconscious feeling that you are more knowledgeable concerning spiritual things than others and have something to minister to them. This is not the kind of attitude we need. But suppose you appeal to the saints the same way Paul does in verse 2, urging them to make room for you in their hearts so that you may dwell in them. Surely this will touch others very deeply.

In verse 2 Paul says that they wronged no one, corrupted no one, and took advantage of no one. It seems that Paul is vindicating himself, but his vindication is in a way that is intimate and lovely.

In verse 3 Paul continues, "I do not say this to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together." Here we have an expression of an intimate relationship, not polite, courteous talk. Paul is frank in the way he speaks, but also very intimate and touching. For Paul to speak to the Corinthians in this way shows that between him and them there was an intimate relationship. Only to those with whom we are intimate can we speak in this way.

In verse 3 Paul even says that the Corinthians were in the apostles' hearts to die together and live together. Here Paul seems to be saying, "I do not say this to condemn you, for I have already said that you are in our hearts. Since we have you in our hearts and our hearts are enlarged, we appeal to you to enlarge your hearts and make room for us. Corinthians, you are in our hearts to die together and live together." What deep, tender, intimate words! How deeply touching!

#### **ENCOURAGED AND JOYFUL BECAUSE OF A DEEP CONCERN**

Verse 4 continues, "Great is my boldness toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf; I am filled with encouragement, I overflow with joy in all our affliction." The Greek here literally means the encouragement and the joy, pointing to the particular encouragement and the particular joy. Here also Paul's words are intimate and touching.

In verse 5 Paul says, "For also when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no relief, but we were afflicted in every way; without were fightings, within were fears." The flesh here refers to the outward man, including the body and the soul. The fightings were without and

the fears were within. These fightings and fears involved the body outwardly and the soul inwardly. To have no relief in the flesh differs from having no relief in the spirit.

Verse 6 says, “But He Who encourages those who are cast down—God—encouraged us by the coming of Titus.” Because of his deep concern for the Corinthian believers’ response to his first Epistle, Paul, having no relief in his spirit (2:13), even very much weighed down by his concern, was anxious to see Titus for information concerning their response. Now Titus not only comes, but brings glad news of their positive response. This is a great encouragement to the apostle.

In verse 7 Paul continues, “And not only by his coming, but also by the encouragement with which he was encouraged over you, informing us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal on my behalf, so that I rejoiced the more.” Here again Paul is very emotional because of his concern.

We all need to be enlarged in our hearts, reconciled fully to God. Then we shall have a life that is a ministering life, a life that can bear much fruit. Only the ministering life enables us to bear fruit. Fruit-bearing is the issue of a ministering life. (*Life-study of 2 Corinthians*, pp. 379-386)