

THE VISION, PRACTICE, AND BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

Crucial Experiences in the Practice of the Church Life

(1)

Our Soul Being Subdued and Saturated with Christ as the Spirit and Christ Being Released from the Imprisonment of the Soul

Scripture Reading: Eph. 3:8-11, 16-21; Col. 3:11; 1 Thes. 5:23; 2 Cor. 4:16; Heb. 4:12

I. The church life is Christ realized, experienced, and expressed by all the saints in a corporate way—Eph. 3:16-21:

- A. God planned the church for the purpose of expressing Christ; thus, the church is the expression of Christ—vv. 9-11, 21.
- B. The church life is nothing other than the all-inclusive Christ with His unsearchable riches experienced and enjoyed by us and expressed through us—vv. 8, 21.
- C. If we would have such a church life, we need to be constituted with Christ until all that we are and have is simply Christ Himself, who is all and in all; this is the essence and the substance of the church life—Col. 1:12; 2:9-10, 16-17; 3:4, 10-11; 4:15-16.

II. In order to have a church life to express Christ according to God's eternal purpose, our soul must be subdued and saturated with Christ as the Spirit—1 Thes. 5:23; Eph. 3:17a; Gal. 4:19; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:17:

- A. On the one hand, the growth of the divine life is the expanding of the ground of the Holy Spirit within us; on the other hand, the growth of life means that every part of our soul is being subdued—1 Thes. 5:23:
 1. The more our soul is subdued, the more life grows; and the more our soul decreases, the more life increases; this is a certain fact.
 2. The part of a person's soul that is particularly strong and outstanding is the part by which that person lives; when he encounters things, he uses that part to deal with them—1 Cor. 2:14.
 3. After we have received sufficient dealings of the cross, every part of our soul is subdued; our mind, emotion, and will are subdued and no longer stand out as before—cf. 2 Tim. 1:7.
 4. Song of Songs reveals that after we have been attracted by the Lord's beauty to love Him, we must learn one unique lesson—the subduing of our will—1:9-11:
 - a. The more our will is subdued, the more we will be transformed—4:1, 4; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2.
 - b. A person's will can be said to be his true self, the person himself, because the will represents the person—James 4:13-15; 1 Cor. 4:19; Acts 18:21.

- c. In addition to God giving us eternal life in Christ, the return of our will to God is the greatest work of salvation—Phil. 2:12-13.
 - d. The most important and most complete union with God rests in the union of our will with God’s will—Matt. 7:21; 12:50; Rom. 12:2; Col. 1:9; 4:12.
- B. For the church as the expression of God, we must allow Christ as the life-giving Spirit to live in our inward parts and saturate them with Himself—Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:16-17a:
- 1. We need to be constituted with the divine reality in our inward parts, that is, in the parts of our soul—Psa. 51:6:
 - a. The divine reality is the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—becoming our constituent—John 14:6; 16:13; 1 John 5:6.
 - b. The Spirit of reality guides us into all the reality—what the Father has, what the Son has, and what the Spirit receives of the Son and of what the Father has—John 16:13.
 - c. As the Spirit of reality guides us into the divine reality by transmitting this reality into us, the divine reality—the processed and consummated Triune God—becomes the essence of our being—1 John 4:13-14; 5:6.
 - d. The divine reality should become our reality, life, and living, and this reality should be applied to our entire being in everything and in every way to become our reality in our daily walk—3 John 3; John 4:23-24.
 - 2. “The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, / Searching all the innermost parts of the inner being”—Prov. 20:27:
 - a. Our spirit is God’s lamp within us, and the light shining within our regenerated spirit is God Himself—John 3:6; 1 John 1:5.
 - b. When God’s Spirit as the oil soaks (mingles with) our regenerated spirit as the “wick” (cf. Rom. 8:16) and “burns” together with our spirit (12:11), the divine light shines in our inward parts.
 - c. The Spirit wants to enlighten all our inward parts, shining on our thoughts, feelings, motives, and intentions.
 - d. If we are vessels open to the Lord, opening all the innermost parts of our being to Him, we will experience the shining of the divine light within us—2 Cor. 4:6-7.

III. In order to have the church life to express Christ according to God’s eternal purpose, Christ needs to be released from the imprisonment of our soul through the breaking of the outer man for the release of the spirit—1:9; 4:16; Heb. 4:12:

- A. We have Christ in our spirit (1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:22), but there may be no room or ground for Him in our mind, emotion, and will:
 - 1. If this is our situation, our spirit is not a residence for Christ but a prison to Him; Christ is imprisoned by our soul.
 - 2. Christ is indwelling our spirit, but He may not be occupying all the inward parts of our soul; this is a very vital matter.
 - 3. Christ is in us as the hope of glory (Col. 1:27), but our soul is too strong, natural, earthly, and human; therefore, whether intentionally or unintentionally, we imprison Christ by our soul.

4. The church life is Christ coming out of the saints for His corporate expression; however, if Christ remains imprisoned within us, we cannot have the church life—Eph. 3:16-17, 21.
- B. We all need to experience the breaking of the outer man for the release of the spirit so that Christ may be expressed in a corporate way—Heb. 4:12:
1. Breaking removes what we originally have in our natural being, changing our original appearance and altering our original condition.
 2. The extent to which we are broken is the extent to which we can cooperate with God—Phil. 2:12-13.
 3. Whatever is broken by God will enter into death in order to pass through death; once it passes through death, it will enter into resurrection, and once it is resurrected, it can attain to God’s goal—2 Cor. 1:8-9; Phil. 3:10-11.
 4. The more breaking we receive, the more our spirit will be released; in whatever matter we experience the breaking, our spirit will be released in that matter—2 Cor. 4:16; Heb. 4:12.
- C. When our soul is subdued and broken, Christ will be expressed; in this expression of Christ we are one, and we will have the church life as the corporate expression of Christ—Eph. 3:21; 4:3-6; John 17:22.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

DEALING WITH THE EMOTION, MIND, AND WILL

To perfume or permeate any object without any life or personality is quite easy. A ball of cotton put into a bottle of red ink will soon be permeated with the red ink. This is simple. But suppose someone tries to put you as a living person into red ink. Surely you will fight against it. This is why the Lord has a hard time trying to permeate us with Himself. We have our own personality, our own will, and we do not want to lose them.

Therefore, we see in [Song of Songs] that the Lord first touched the emotions of the seeking one. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! / ...Draw me; we will run after you.” The Lord touched her emotions, and she began to love Him, even though she was as strong as a mare. Then, as she came into the presence of the Lord and began to appreciate the Lord’s sweetness and beauty, she was transformed by the renewing of her mind. Her perceptions and her concepts were changed. The Lord first touched her emotions; then He renewed her mind. But this is not all. She still had a strong will. Her emotions were touched, and her mind had been transformed, but her will was still strong. It took a much longer time for the Lord to deal with her will. But eventually, her will became the locks as a flock of goats feeding on Mount Gilead. This was the complete subduing of her will by the cross. Then, in resurrection, her will became as strong as the tower of David to be the arsenal for God.

It was by dealing with the emotion, the mind, and the will that the Lord was able to work Himself into His seeking one. If we take this merely as a teaching, it will mean nothing to us. By His mercy we must realize that the Lord is speaking to us today. We must begin to love Him with our emotions. Then we will seek Him,

find Him, and have sweet fellowship with Him. In the fellowship we will have the appreciation and the enjoyment of Him. Then something of the Lord will get into us to permeate us. This permeating work will transform us and subdue our will. Then we will be willing to let the Lord do whatever He wants. He will put us into the “red ink,” and we will be permeated and perfumed. We will be saturated until we have lost our character, our personality, and our will in Him. Then we will really have Him as our person.

A mare has an exceedingly strong personality, but the palanquin does not have any personality of its own, though it does have a personality. Its personality is just the living person it carries. This is why the Lord Jesus wants to work Himself into us to such an extent.

After reading these things, we must not try to work them out ourselves. We should not attempt to change our mind or subdue our will. We simply cannot do it. There is only one way to change our mind: by appreciating the Lord. The more we appreciate Him, the more our concept will be changed. Formerly, the movies and all the worldly things seemed attractive to us. Though they have not changed, we simply are not attracted to them anymore. They have not changed, but we have changed. Our concepts have been changed by our appreciation of Jesus. The sweetness and beauty of Jesus have changed our insight. The more we appreciate Him, the more our mind will be changed.

From appreciating the Lord, we must go on to enjoy the Lord. The more we take Him in, the more He will be the permeating element within us. In Him is the myrrh, the frankincense, the clefts of the rock, and the covert of the precipice. All these elements are in His person, and they will be wrought into us until we are transformed and our stubborn will is subdued. The more we feed upon Him and take Him in, the more He will saturate us until our will is completely subdued. This is why the Lord appraised her hair as a flock of goats “that repose on Mount Gilead.” Gilead is a place for feeding the flock. “Shepherd Your people... / The flock of Your inheritance, / ...Let them feed in...Gilead / As in the days of old” (Micah 7:14). “I will bring Israel back to his habitation, / And he will feed on Carmel and Bashan, / And...in Gilead / His soul will be satisfied” (Jer. 50:19). There is no other way that our will can be subdued except by feeding on the Lord.

We must not try to subdue our will by ourselves. We must simply learn to feed upon Christ. We must pray-read His Word in a living way, and we must tell Him, “O Lord Jesus, I love You! I take Your very element into me. I feed upon You as the living Word.” If we will do this, spontaneously the Lord will permeate our being and subdue our will. Our emotion will be touched, our mind transformed, and our will subdued. Then the Lord will have full freedom to saturate us with Himself. We will no longer be a mare but a palanquin and a crown. When anyone asks concerning us, the answer will be that we are simply Christ with the crown. We have been wrought into Jesus, and He has been wrought into us. We are fully one with Him for His move on the earth. (*Life and Building as Portrayed in the Song of Songs*, pp. 73-75)

RELEASING CHRIST FROM THE IMPRISONMENT OF THE SOUL

There is no doubt that we have Christ in our spirit, but there is much doubt as to whether Christ has any place in our soul. There may be no place, no room, and no ground for Christ in our mind, emotion, and will. If this is the case, our spirit is not a residence for Christ but a prison to Him. Christ is imprisoned by our soul. At the time we believed, we exercised our mind to repent. We turned our mind, which means that our mind was open. At the same time we also confessed our sins. Along with our believing there is always our confessing. In this way both our mind and our conscience were opened, so we received the Lord Jesus, and He came into us. After this, however, many believers close their mind and conscience. The Lord Jesus came into them, but they enclose Him within their spirit. To say it in another way, they imprison Him by their conscience, mind, emotion, stubborn will, and self. Christ is in our spirit, but He may be imprisoned. This is the reason why the apostle Paul, after revealing the vision of the Body in the first part of Ephesians, realized that we need our inner man, our spirit, to be strengthened that Christ may make His home in all the parts of the heart—the mind, the emotion, the will, and the conscience. This means that Christ will occupy all the inward parts of our human being and settle down in them.

In recent years both here and in the Far East, brothers and sisters have been speaking much about Christ as life and the building up of the church. However, my observation and impression cause me to be sorrowful. Unless the soul is broken and transformed, there is no possibility of having the real church life. This is the reason why even up to the end of his ministry Brother Nee still spoke on the breaking of the outer man for the release of the spirit. The outer man, the soulish man, needs to be broken so that the inner man, the spirit, can be released. People today appreciate Brother Nee's book *The Normal Christian Life*, but that is only the "ABCs." Those were the messages he gave more than twenty-five years ago. In the early years, the first years after I met him, he always stressed those matters. After this, however, he was placed into trials for a long time, and following the Second World War his messages almost always stressed the breaking of the outer man.

Before Brother Nee returned to the public ministry after the war, he had a number of times of fellowship with a few brothers. In those long talks he stressed only one thing. Whenever I or someone else raised a question, he always answered in one way—the outer man must be broken. All the problems come from the fact that the outer man, the soul, is not broken. The soul is too strong. The mind is too natural, the emotion is too worldly, and the will is too human.

Christ is indwelling our spirit, but He may not be occupying all the inward parts of our soul. This is a very vital matter.

Colossians 1:27 says, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." There is no doubt that Christ is in us, but our soul is too strong, natural, earthly, and human. Therefore, eventually, whether intentionally or unintentionally, we imprison Christ by our soul. It is the same with all of us. We all have Christ, but our Christ has been imprisoned within us. The church life is Christ realized, expressed, and experienced by all the saints in a corporate way. This Christ comes out of all the persons and mingles us

together. However, if Christ is imprisoned by the soulish life in you, and He is imprisoned by the soulish life in me, how can we have the church life? Christ is within us, but He cannot be expressed, and He cannot be realized by us because of our soul. One person's soul is strong, and another person's soul is even stronger. One person exercises his mind, and another exercises his mind even more. Yes, we are brothers, and we are the members of the Body, but all these members are covered and concealed with a layer of soulish "wax." This soulish "wax" is very strong. We are too strong in our mind, in our emotion, and in our will. This is why we need to be strengthened into our inner man. Then Christ will fill us and spread from within to take over our heart. Then the soul will be subdued and broken, and all the parts of the soul will be renewed. Then Christ will be expressed, and it is by this Christ that we are one. (*The Vision, Practice, and Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ*, pp. 75-78)

HOW TO RECEIVE THE BREAKING

Concerning our receiving of the breaking, there are three points or stages to our experience. First the Lord's enlightenment, second our receiving or our executing, and third the coordination of the circumstances. What does breaking mean? Suppose there is a glass that was whole originally but now has been smashed into pieces. This is to be broken. This should be clear to all of us. Consider yourself. Your natural life, your temperament, your disposition, and your flesh all are whole. However, now that you have been saved, Christ's life has entered into you. That life needs to be released from your spirit, yet it has been surrounded. By what is it surrounded? It is surrounded by your natural life, your flesh, your temperament, and your disposition. All that you have surrounds the life of Christ, preventing it from being released. Therefore, all that you have in you that is whole needs to be broken. Only when all these things are broken can Christ's life be released.

First, God will shine His light in you to show you that all that you have, including your natural life, your flesh, your temper, and your disposition, are enemies of the life of Christ and are frustrations and limitations to the life of Christ. God will also show you that all these things have already been crucified because they are things rejected by God, they are enemies of God, and they are frustrations to the life of Christ. After you have seen such a light, immediately the Holy Spirit in you will come and execute this light in all matters big and small in your daily life. Before you saw this light, you had no feeling or sense of condemnation when you lost your temper and acted in a fleshly way, but now after seeing the light, the Holy Spirit in you executes this light with you. When you act in your natural life and lose your temper, the Holy Spirit gives you the sense that this is your flesh, your natural life, your self, and your temper, all of which should be condemned because they were already put to death on the cross. Then by the power of the Holy Spirit you condemn these things, executing the crucifixion over them. At this time, crucifixion is not merely an objective truth on the cross but a subjective experience in you. This is the putting to death of the practices of the body mentioned in Romans 8:13. This is also the death that causes the putting to death of Jesus to operate in us, as referred to in 2 Corinthians 4:11-12.

We know that the life of Christ has the element of death, and when this element passes through us, it does a killing work in us. This is similar to our blood cells, which have at least two functions. The first function is to kill the enemies of our body—the bacteria; the second function is to simultaneously supply our body with the necessary nutrients. We saw this light a few years ago but did not speak about it because we did not have the boldness to say that in the life of Christ there is the effect of death. However, in our experience we gradually have become more and more clear about this. Recently we saw that Brother Andrew Murray also said the same thing. He said that in the life of Christ there is a killing power, an element of death, an effect of death.

Once the Holy Spirit has gained a place in us, He will lead us daily to put to death our natural life and our flesh. This putting to death, this killing, is the breaking. Furthermore, in order to help us, God also gives us the discipline of the Holy Spirit on the outside by arranging our circumstances so that He can work in us in a joint effort within and without. The life of Christ works on the inside while the circumstances work on the outside. When we have the desire to receive the breaking, immediately there is the coordination of the things on the inside and the outside, and the Holy Spirit begins to carry out the breaking work in us. However, if our heart's desire and our spirit do not go along with the Holy Spirit to execute the killing, then all the circumstances, regardless of how many there are, are of little use. The outward circumstances work in coordination with the Holy Spirit within us, and in between these two factors there is a third necessary factor—our receiving.

The Spirit is on the inside, the circumstances are on the outside, and in between these two we have to be the receiving ones, the executing ones. In this way, day by day and time after time, our natural life, our flesh, and our self will be broken. Eventually, when we are about to lose our temper, we will no longer be able to do it, because we have been broken and have many wounds in us. (*How to Be Useful to the Lord*, pp. 71-73)