

# THE EXPERIENCE, GROWTH, AND MINISTRY OF LIFE FOR THE BODY

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

## Message Four

### **Growing in Life by Dealing with the Spirit**

Scripture Reading: Psa. 51:10b, 12, 17a; Prov. 16:18-19; Isa. 57:15; 66:1-2;  
1 Pet. 3:4; Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 4:21; Matt. 5:3; Luke 9:54-56

- I. To deal with the spirit is not to deal with the spirit itself but to deal with the passage of the spirit—Luke 9:54-56; 1 Pet. 3:4:**
- A. The regenerated spirit, the innermost part of our being, is pure and undefiled; however, surrounding the spirit are the soul and the body, both of which have been mixed with the wicked elements of Satan and are thus filthy and corrupt.
  - B. Therefore, when the spirit comes forth and passes through the soul and body, it becomes contaminated by this filthiness and corruption; hence, when being manifested, the spirit bears certain filthiness, corruption, impurity, impropriety, and various other undesirable conditions.
  - C. We judge the characteristics of the spirit by the characteristics of the things that are attached to it; the kind of person we are produces the kind of characteristics our spirit carries; when our spirit is released, it expresses the tastes and colors of our very person; thus, the quality of a man determines the quality of his spirit.
  - D. If a person is proud in his soul, the spirit also manifests itself in pride; if a person is angry in the flesh, his spirit also reveals the anger.
  - E. We often encounter the spirit of anxiety, the spirit of jealousy, a rebellious spirit, a coarse spirit, a crooked spirit, a boastful spirit, a dominating spirit, or a rude spirit, all of which are not the problems of the spirit itself but the defiling influence of the undesirable elements of the soul and body upon the spirit as it passes through them; we can tell the kind of defilement from the kind of spirit, and the kind of spirit reveals the kind of man.
  - F. If our motive is impure, the spirit is also impure when released; if our intention is not clean, the spirit coming forth is also not clean; with the purpose of heart for self-glory, the result is a showy and boastful spirit; a competitive motive causes others to touch a competing and striving spirit.
  - G. Whenever we are about to act or speak, not only do we need to inquire whether what we are about to do is right or wrong, good or bad, but we must also discern whether or not our inner intention is clean, our motive is pure, and our aim is wholly for God.
  - H. We need to check if there is any selfish purpose behind our action or any self-inclination; this kind of dealing is dealing with the spirit.
  - I. For this reason we need not only to have our flesh, self, and natural constitution broken so that the spirit can come forth, but we must go one step further and deal with all the negative purposes of the heart, undesirable intentions, impure inclinations, improper will, and mixed emotion to the end not only that

the spirit can come forth but also that it may come forth in an upright, clean, and pure manner.

- J. The practical way to deal with the spirit is to condemn all the mixtures, to remove them by the power of the Holy Spirit, and to take the initiative to apply the cross and crucify the passages of the spirit, including our flesh, our self, our natural constitution, our purpose of heart, aim, intention, inclination, motive, etc.—Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:24.
- K. God arranges all circumstances and things in our environment for the purpose of dealing with the self and destroying it; in this way, by the discipline of the Holy Spirit, the quality of our spirit is enhanced and purified—Matt. 10:29-31; Rom. 8:28-29.
- L. If all the brothers and sisters have an excellent, sterling, pure, weighty, and noble spirit in its quality, they will mutually supply one another, and the church will be rich—cf. Dan. 5:12; 6:3.

## **II. To be useful in building up the Body of Christ, we need to have a proper spirit:**

- A. In Luke 9 James and John asked the Lord whether they should command fire to come down from heaven and consume the village of the Samaritans who had rejected Him (v. 54); but the Lord rebuked James and John, saying, “You do not know of what kind of spirit you are. The Son of Man has not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them” (vv. 55-56):
  - 1. The disciples were wrong in their spirit because their motive was one of hatred; the Lord’s spirit is a spirit of saving men’s lives, not destroying them.
  - 2. Brother Watchman Nee said that a person should not only do the right thing but also do the right thing in the right way and in the right spirit.
  - 3. For our conduct to be constructive, edifying, and useful in building up the Body of Christ, we must be right in the thing that we do, right in our way, and right in our spirit; whenever we are about to do anything, we should ask ourselves what kind of spirit we have.
- B. A seeking saint should be poor in spirit and pure in heart—Matt. 5:3, 8; Isa. 66:2:
  - 1. To be poor in spirit means that we are humble, acknowledging that we have nothing, know nothing, can do nothing, and are nothing; without Christ as the life-giving Spirit, we are nothing—cf. Gal. 6:3.
  - 2. To be poor in spirit is to be emptied in our spirit, having nothing preoccupying us in the depth of our being; to be pure in heart is a matter of motive; it is to be single in purpose, to have the single goal of accomplishing God’s will for God’s glory—1 Cor. 10:31.
- C. We must have a steadfast spirit—Psa. 51:10b:
  - 1. A steadfast spirit is a spirit that is immovable, unshakable, standing constantly as something firm and steady—cf. 1 Cor. 15:58.
  - 2. In his repentance and prayer for restoration, David prayed that the Lord would renew such a spirit within him.

3. We need a steadfast spirit, which is always firm, constant, immovable, and unshakable, so that we can never be tempted, seduced, or misled.
- D. A repentant believer has a willing spirit—"Restore to me the gladness of Your salvation, / And sustain me with a willing spirit"—Psa. 51:12:
1. As a believer, we should always have a willing spirit for the things of the Lord and for the things of the church.
  2. A willing spirit in the things of the Lord's interest depends upon the joy of salvation; when we have the joy of salvation, we spontaneously will have a willing spirit to go along with the Lord; what the Lord wants, what the Lord desires, what the Lord asks of us, we will have a willing spirit to answer, to obey.
  3. When we have joy in God's Spirit, we will be happy to do whatever can please the Lord—Rom. 14:17.
- E. In Psalm 51:17a David said that the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
1. A broken spirit is a spirit that repents, that feels very sorrowful for any sinfulness; in other words, a broken spirit is a real repenting spirit.
  2. To be broken means not to be whole; it means that you do not consider yourself as being whole, perfect, and complete; when your spirit is repenting, your spirit is broken, contrite, and sorrowful.
- F. We need to have a meek and quiet spirit:
1. First Peter 3:4 says that the hidden man of our heart is a meek and quiet spirit; Galatians 6:1 says that we need to restore a fallen brother in a spirit of meekness; in 1 Corinthians 4:21 Paul asked the Corinthians if they wanted him to come to them with a rod or in a spirit of meekness.
  2. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"—Matt. 5:5:
    - a. To be meek means not to resist the world's opposition but to suffer it willingly; the world's way is to fight, to strive, and to defeat others to gain some possession, some inheritance.
    - b. Regardless of the situation, we should be meek, not fighting against others; meekness means not fighting for ourselves.
- G. God desires to dwell with people who have a contrite and lowly spirit—Isa. 57:15; 66:2; cf. Prov. 16:18-19:
1. If we are contrite and lowly in our spirit, we are broken in our spirit, and we can enjoy God's presence; God is then with us and even dwells with us.
  2. "Thus says the high and exalted One, / Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: / I will dwell in the high and holy place, / And with the contrite and lowly of spirit, / To revive the spirit of the lowly / And to revive the heart of the contrite"—Isa. 57:15.
  3. "Thus says Jehovah, / Heaven is My throne, / And the earth the footstool for My feet. / Where then is the house that you will build for Me, / And where is the place of My rest? / For all these things My hand has made, / And so all these things have come into being, declares Jehovah. / But to this kind of man will I look, to him who is poor / And of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word"—66:1-2.
  4. The dwelling place that God desires to have is a group of people into whom He can enter, a group of people with a contrite and lowly spirit:

- a. God intends to have a dwelling place in the universe that is the mingling of God and man, in which God is built into man and man is built into God, so that God and man, man and God, can be a mutual abode to each other (John 14:2, 20, 23; 15:4; 1 John 4:13); in the New Testament this dwelling place, this house, is the church, which is God's habitation in the believers' spirit (Eph. 2:22).
- b. The ultimate manifestation of this universal building, this universal house, is the New Jerusalem; in this city God is in man, taking man as His dwelling place, and man is in God, taking God as his habitation—Rev. 21:3, 22.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**THE QUALITY OF THE SPIRIT**

**Motive and Spirit**

*Watchman Nee:* Today we will pick up from where we left off yesterday. The second question Brother Lee asked yesterday was how one can tell the difference between his motive and his spirit. Many Bible translators use the word *heart* instead of *spirit* in Luke 9:55. Some may think that the spirit here refers to a man's attitude. They think that to be right in spirit is actually to be right in attitude. But there is a big difference between spirit and attitude.

Attitude issues from motives in the heart. What then is the difference between one's spirit and his motive? Before a man is saved, he can have motives in his heart, but he does not have a spirit. A believer has motives, and he also has a spirit. It is easy for a saved person's spirit to be affected by the motives in his heart. We have said that man's spirit is neutral. A young man has to pass through thirty years of his Christian life before he realizes that his spirit is neutral. The longer you are a Christian, the more you will realize that your spirit is neutral; it has no characteristic of its own. It draws its characteristics from your very person. The spirit is neutral; it is like pure water. When you add different things to water, it assumes the characteristics of the added elements. Suppose you add soy sauce to water; the water will assume the characteristics of soy sauce. The same can be said about the human spirit. Different persons have different characteristics in their spirit. The spirit that God has given us is the same. However, our spirit becomes impure when it is released because we have impure motives in our heart. If our motive is for ourselves or for our own future and business, this motive will taint our spirit, and our spirit will carry the characteristic of this motive. The Lord said to the disciples that their spirit was wrong; their spirit was different from His. The Lord does not want anyone to die from his sins. The Son of Man came not to destroy, but to save.

The world is a strange place. No one in this world has the kind of feeling the Lord has for human life. Everyone in this world is selfish in his motive. Suppose you cannot rank first in school. When the one who ranks first in school goes into the hospital to have an operation, you want to see him die. Should this man die just because he is more intelligent than you are? Such things are commonplace in

politics. If a man cannot climb to a high position, he would rather see his political opponents die. When business competition becomes fierce, some also wish that their competitors' managers would die. The disciples were wrong in their spirit because their motive was one of hatred. The Lord would not allow them to pray the way they wished. The Lord's spirit does not think that anyone deserves to die. This is the reason He said that He came to save, not to destroy. This is the Lord's heart. This is His spirit.

The disciples were wrong in their heart. This is the reason they were wrong in their spirit. The unbelievers only have a heart; they do not have a spirit. Their heart is hidden within them; it cannot show. But a saved person's spirit can flow out, and his heart can flow out with his spirit. You can guess the motive of an unbeliever from his speaking. But with a Christian, it is not a matter of guessing. Something definite comes out of his being, and all who are experienced can identify it. The heart is hidden within an unsaved person, but a Christian's heart flows out with his spirit. When a Christian's spirit is released, another Christian touches something if he is exercising his spirit. A man can deceive others with his words, but his spirit cannot hide from an experienced person.

#### **How to Have a Right Spirit**

How can we have a right spirit? A man's spirit carries his own taste and color. When our spirit is released, it expresses the tastes and color of our very person. In order to be right in our spirit, we have to go through dealings. The quality of a man determines the quality of his spirit. When a man is regenerated, the new spirit that God gives him is the same in quality as that which is given to any other person. If a man learns little and goes through few dealings, his spirit will remain in darkness. Doctrinally, this matter is very simple. A man with a good mind can repeat the content, tone, teaching, and style of a preacher. He may think that he has the right spirit by doing this. But we can observe a very interesting thing among Christians. They can pick up others' doctrines, yet their spirit remains unchanged; the two will not mix. A brother can be the same as others are in words and tone, but his spirit will remain the same as before. There will not be any advance; his spirit will not be any purer. If a man does not have a pure spirit, he will find that his spirit is incompatible with the good words released from those with a pure spirit. He can give another person's message, but he will not have the other person's spirit.

The Lord has given me a burden to test whether the young workers are qualified to work for the Lord. Most brothers and sisters think that in working for the Lord the main thing is to have right teachings. But I only pay ten percent of my attention to a person's message. I pay ninety percent of my attention to his spirit. A man can give a logical message but have a rebellious, coarse, nit-picking, evil, proud, or hardened spirit. The unbelievers can only be proud; they cannot have a proud spirit. A Christian can have a proud spirit. When he opens his mouth, he releases his spirit. If a Christian has a wrong motive in his heart, the spirit he releases will be wrong. A young person can pray for breaking; he can give a message on breaking, but his very person may still not be broken. It is possible for a man to deceive himself, but

it is not easy to deceive God and the church. The church can tell where a person is from his spirit.

A man's spirit is the place where God works and dwells. God leaves His imprint in a man's spirit. A brother once wrote to me, saying, "All the brothers and sisters say that I am wrong. Even you say that I am wrong. It seems that everyone is right and I am always wrong. Since all of you say that I am wrong, I will just say that I am wrong." Such a word conveyed a hardened spirit. After I read the letter, I wrote back to him, saying, "The more you are smitten, the harder you become. The more you are dealt with, the less you submit. Your words and conduct may be right, but your spirit is wrong." A few months ago, I saw this brother again. His spirit was changed. He had not picked up more doctrines, but the quality of his spirit was enhanced. We have the same opportunity to exercise our spirit as any other brother or sister. When a certain person has greater wisdom, eloquence, ability, and gift than you do, he does not necessarily have greater opportunity to exercise his spirit. God arranges all circumstances and things with the goal of dealing with us and training our spirit. For this reason, we have to give in more to the discipline of the Holy Spirit.

Here we need to speak about the discipline of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not only in us as our life; He is ordering our circumstances for the purpose of training us. He knows the kind of environment that is best for us. This is the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Every environment that comes upon us has been measured by our God. The unbelievers have accidents and coincidences, but not a Christian. The Lord Jesus tells us that every hair on our head is numbered by the Father. A sparrow may not be worth much. If a man buys four, he gets one extra for free. But without the Father's permission, not one will fall to the ground. We are more precious than the birds (Matt. 10:29-31). Everything that is happening to us in our environment, even the falling of a hair and the grounding of a bird, is under God's sovereignty. The purpose of this sovereignty is to perfect us. The daily discipline of the Holy Spirit is for the purpose of dealing with the self and destroying it. In this way the quality of the spirit is enhanced and purified. If we seek for ease and comfort and run away from the Spirit-ordered environments, we may reduce our troubles, but the quality of our spirit will not be enriched and purified.

Those who have an impoverished spirit were not impoverished at the beginning; they became impoverished because they refused to allow the Lord to work in them. If we are willing to submit ourselves to the discipline of the Holy Spirit, our spirit will become strong and pure.

A person may be a Christian for twenty or thirty years. He may even have been a revivalist conducting revivals for thirty years. These things do not impress me at all. With some people we do not sense any noble quality in their spirit. If a man's spirit is good, we will feel refreshed and anointed as soon as we touch it. All the lessons that we have learned are impregnated in our spirit. It is impossible to pretend. The more we try to pretend, the more our falsehood will be exposed. Many people like to pretend to be spiritual in front of me; they want my approval. A sister in Shanghai once said that Brother Nee never praises anyone. She thought that no one was up

to my standard. Actually, the only One who is qualified to approve of anyone is the Lord. A spiritual man will find the Lord's approval automatically. If your spirit is wrong, what use is there for me to say that I like you or that I approve you? Some people hate with all their heart but say that they love with their mouth. What comes out of the mouth is love, but what comes out of the spirit is hatred. If we are experienced, we will know as soon as we touch one's spirit. A man can pretend and cheat others, but he can never hide his spirit.

Many people are right in their words and thoughts, but they are wrong in their spirit. The quality of our spirit is governed by the extent of discipline of the Holy Spirit we have received. When the Holy Spirit condemns something, we should go along with Him and condemn the same. If we accept the discipline of the Holy Spirit every day and learn to deal with our self, we will advance every day. We may not be conscious of our own progress, but others will know. In Shanghai people often knock on my door and ask to see me. When they see me, they ask, "Brother Nee, has my spirit made any progress?" Those who ask such questions usually have not made any progress. Progress is not something that we can easily detect in ourselves. Others know how our spirit is, but we do not need to know, and it is best that we not know. Moses' face shone, but he did not know it. It was the Israelites who saw it (Exo. 34:29-30). Suppose a man looks into a mirror all the time. Do you think he will find himself greatly changed from the day before? Do you think that he will know whether or not he has grown? I have never seen such a person. No one should consider his spiritual condition all the time. All we need is to learn as much as we can in our spirit.

### **The Purpose of Having a Good Spirit**

What is the result of having a sterling spirit? If all the brothers and sisters in the church have a pure and noble spirit, they will mutually supply one another, and the church will be rich.

I became a Christian at the end of 1919. At the beginning of 1920 I met a sister, Miss M. E. Barber, from whom I received much help. This help did not come merely from her words. Through meeting with her, staying or walking with her, my spirit was nourished. With some people one receives the supply only when they speak. With Miss Barber this was not the case. She only needed to sit in front of you, and you would receive nourishment and the anointing. This is the genuine spiritual supply. It is not a matter of doing something or saying something. Whoever learns more lessons has more spiritual deposit and can render more supply to others.

### **IN ORDER TO SERVE, WE MUST FIRST LEARN TO EXERCISE THE SPIRIT**

We are learning to serve as the church. We must have proper spiritual feelings. We must contact the spirit all the time. Otherwise, all the so-called services to God will be nothing but self-deceptions. Our service to God must be the result of our spiritual response to Him. When spirit touches spirit, there is a spiritual response. In order for our spirit to be touched, others' spirit must first touch us. A man's joy, tears, or words cannot touch our spirit. Only spirit can touch spirit. In order to serve

God and to receive His leading, we must open our spirit to God to touch His Spirit and others' spirit. Every service that is void of the spirit carries no value before God. In order for the whole church to have a service that is spiritual, we must have a right spirit. When my spirit opens up and the spirits of all the brothers and sisters open up, and when all of us touch God and serve Him in our spirit, we have the service of the whole church. If we serve according to our mind, wisdom, and emotion, our spirit will be closed. The exercise of the spirit is a great matter in our meeting and service. We must all learn to walk according to the spirit.

How do we know if something is done correctly in the church? It depends on how our spirit reacts and judges it. Our judgment and fellowship are based on the spirit, not on the preponderance of opinions. In preaching the gospel, if our speaking only issues from our "wonderful" mind, we will only touch others' mind; we will not touch their spirit. In order to touch man's spirit, we have to learn to not use words from our mind. We should not use words that the spirit does not use. If we continue to reject what the spirit rejects, our spirit will be high.

In the coming days, our judgment of a co-worker's message, our evaluation of the brothers' and sisters' testimonies, and our assessment of the sermons of the revivalists should be based on the spirit of the speakers. We should ask if there is a supply of the spirit. Once a blind man sees, he will exercise his other faculties less and use his eyes more. We can say the same thing about our spirit. We have to learn to use our spirit more and our mind less. The more we use the organs in our body, such as our arm and muscles, the stronger they become. The same is true with our spirit; the more we use it, the stronger it becomes.

Let me say this to the young brothers and sisters: If you sense much prompting in your spirit while you pray, you can pray more. But if there is little prompting in your spirit, your prayer should be short. We can learn by checking with the older brothers and sisters every time after we pray. After we have learned this a few times, we will know the true condition of our spirit, and we can pray according to the spirit. When we pray and hear many "amens" around us, it does not mean that we are necessarily right. Of course, if there is no "amen," we should put a question mark on our prayer and should try to determine whether or not it was of the spirit. Short prayer is not necessarily right; neither is long prayer. Much noise may not be right, and silence may not be right either. If our speaking and silence are not under the control of the Holy Spirit, they are both an offense to the Spirit. The young brothers and sisters are inexperienced in their learning. Therefore, they must learn to humble themselves and ask. If the saints feel that someone's prayer or speaking is out of place, they should point this out to the speaker in an honest way. If they do not tell the speaker, but "send telegraphs" by glancing around behind his back, they are forming parties in the church.

We must not coordinate together in an outward way. Our spirit must be weighty and excellent in its quality. May God be merciful to us so that we may learn more lessons this way. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 62, pp. 453-460)