

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

(Saturday—Evening Session)

Message Six

## The Ministry of Life

Scripture Reading: 1 John 5:14-17; 2 Cor. 3:6; 4:1, 12; Jer. 2:13

### **I. The churches in the Lord's recovery need the ministry of life—1 John 5:14-17; 2 Cor. 3:6; 4:1, 12:**

- A. Ministry is based on constitution; we need to be constituted with what Christ is, with what He has done, with what He has attained, and with what He has obtained—Eph. 3:8, 17:
  - 1. The ministry is brought forth as a result of being constituted with the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit; Christ, with all that He is, has, and has attained, must be constituted into our being; this is the only way to have a ministry.
  - 2. The new covenant ministry is not only a matter of life; it is a constitution in life and of life—2 Cor. 4:12.
  - 3. The Spirit, who is the ultimate expression of the processed Triune God, imparts the divine life, even God Himself, into the apostles and all the other believers, making them ministers of a new covenant, the covenant of life; hence, their ministry is one constituted with the Triune God of life by His life-giving Spirit—3:6; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Rom. 8:2, 11.
  - 4. The ministry of the new covenant is of the Spirit who gives life, because the new covenant brings in God's righteousness unto life—5:17, 21.
- B. The ministers of the new covenant experience God as the God of resurrection and minister Him to others as the God of resurrection—2 Cor. 1:8-10.
- C. The ministry of the apostle John, the ministry with which the Bible concludes, was a mending ministry of life—Matt. 4:21; John 1:4; 10:10; 11:25; 20:31.

### **II. We who have eternal life and experience and enjoy eternal life may minister this life to other members of the Body—1 John 1:2; 5:14-17:**

- A. To minister life is to impart life; when we have a surplus of life, we can minister from this supply to others—v. 16.
- B. In 1 John 5:16 *he shall ask* and *he will give life* refer to the same person, that is, to the one who sees his brother sinning and asks concerning him:
  - 1. Such an asker, who is abiding in the Lord and who is one with the Lord, becomes the means, the channel, by which God's life-giving Spirit can give life to the one for whom he is asking; this is the ministering of life in the fellowship of the divine life—1 Cor. 6:17; 1 John 1:3, 7.
  - 2. To be one who can give, impart, life to others, we must abide in the divine life and live, walk, and have our being in the divine life—John 15:4-5, 7; 1 John 1:1-7.
  - 3. We need to experience and enjoy the eternal life within us, and we need to minister this life by being a channel through which eternal life can flow to other members of the Body—5:16.

**III. In the ministry of life we need to be one with the Lord to encourage the saints to experience and enjoy God as the fountain of living waters, taking Him as their unique source—Jer. 2:13; Rev. 7:17:**

- A. God's intention in His economy is to be the fountain, the source, of living waters to satisfy His chosen people for their enjoyment—Jer. 2:13; Psa. 36:8-9:
1. God wants us to take Him as the fountain of living waters, the unique source of our living—Rom. 11:36:
    - a. God does not want His chosen and redeemed people to take anything other than Himself as the source—1 Cor. 8:6; Jer. 2:13.
    - b. We should take God as our source to be one with Him and to receive whatever issues from Him—Rom. 11:36.
  2. God's aim in His economy is to have a group of human beings who have His life and nature inwardly and His image and likeness outwardly; this group of people is a corporate entity, the Body of Christ, to be one with Him and live Him for His corporate expression—Gen. 1:26; Eph. 1:10; 3:9; 4:16.
  3. God's goal in being the fountain of living waters is to produce the church as His increase to be His fullness for His expression; this is the heart's desire, the good pleasure, of God in His economy—1:5, 9, 22-23:
    - a. God needs to be the fountain of living waters to His elect because He has an economy, and His economy is to produce a counterpart, a bride, for Himself—John 3:29a; 4:14; Rev. 19:7-8.
    - b. God's purpose in wanting to be the fountain of living waters for His elect to drink is that He would be increased and enlarged—Jer. 2:13.
    - c. God's economy is to dispense Himself as the living water to produce His increase, His enlargement, for His expression—Col. 2:19.
    - d. Our drinking of God as the fountain of living waters is for the church as His increase; our drinking is for the producing of His enlargement, His fullness, for His expression—John 4:14; 3:29a; 1 Cor. 12:12-13.
    - e. Nothing apart from God as the fountain of living waters can quench our thirst and satisfy us; nothing apart from God dispensed into our being can make us His increase for His expression—Rev. 22:1, 17.
  4. God's desire is to be everything to His chosen people so that they may trust in Him and rely on Him for everything; if they do this, they will receive God's dispensing—Jer. 17:7-8.
  5. The only way to take God as the fountain of living waters is to drink Him; by drinking Him, we take into us the living water that issues from God as the fountain of living waters—John 4:14; 7:37; Jer. 2:13.
- B. The Triune God has been processed and consummated in order to dispense Himself into our tripartite being—John 7:37-39; Rom. 8:11:
1. God's economy is to dispense Himself into our being so that our being can be constituted with His being; this can be accomplished only by God putting Himself into us as the divine life—vv. 2, 6, 10-11.
  2. By dispensing Himself into us as life, God is accomplishing His economy, that He may have a corporate expression of Himself for eternity—Rev. 21:9-10; 22:1.

- C. We need to drink of God as the fountain of living waters so that He may increase for the fulfillment of His economy to have His expression through His counterpart—Jer. 2:13; 1 Cor. 12:13; John 4:14:
1. When we drink of God as the fountain of living waters, He becomes one with us, and we become one with Him—Psa. 36:8-9.
  2. The more we drink of God, the more He is one with us and the more we are one with Him and constituted with Him in His life and nature to be His corporate expression, His counterpart, for the fulfillment of the desire of His heart and the consummation of His eternal economy—John 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:4; Eph. 1:5, 9; 5:27.

**Excerpts from the Ministry:**

**THE MINISTRY**

Second Corinthians speaks concerning the ministry, which is constituted with, and produced and formed by, the experiences of the riches of Christ through sufferings, consuming pressures, and the killing work of the cross. The ministry is not merely a matter of gift. A person may be able to speak fluently and eloquently and give many good illustrations and proverbs, but this is just a gift. What the church, the Body, needs today is the ministry. The Body needs some brothers and sisters who have been thoroughly wrought by God and with God so that they may have something of Christ, not merely in their mentality as knowledge to teach others but as the very riches of Christ in their spirit and in their entire inward being to pass on to others. I expect that these ones will go out to certain places to have contact and fellowship with people. Eventually, we will see the growth in life and the building of the saints in the places that these ones visit. Today there are many teachings, much knowledge, and many gifts, but there is a great shortage of the ministry. We have to be desirous of this kind of ministry. We need to pray, “Lord, be gracious to me so that I might be delivered out of my concept concerning the gifts. How I long to be wrought through with something of God in Christ as the Spirit. May I have something of the divine element wrought into me to minister to others that I may have a divine ministry of Christ.” The church needs the ministry much more than the gifts.

**COMFORTED BY GOD**

Second Corinthians 1:4-6 says, “Who comforts us in all our affliction that we may be able to comfort those who are in every affliction through the comforting with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For even as the sufferings of the Christ abound unto us, so through the Christ our comfort also abounds. But whether we are afflicted, it is for your comforting and salvation; or whether we are comforted, it is for your comforting, which operates in the endurance of the same sufferings which we also suffer.” Pray-reading these verses again and again will help us to see that what the church needs today is the ministry. God comforts us in all our affliction for a purpose—that we may be able to comfort others. The Greek word for *comfort* in verse 4 also means “consolation.” To be comforted by God means to be consoled by God.

## THE WORKING OF THE CROSS

The more that the sufferings of Christ abound unto us, the more comfort or refreshment we will be able to enjoy. If we are going to minister something of God in Christ to others, we have to suffer to have the experience. It is by the way of the cross that we may have some riches of Christ to minister to others. The ministry comes out in no other way but by the working of the cross.

Paul told us that God put him into a situation where he was “pressed out of measure” (v. 8—KJV), or “excessively burdened” in order that he might be able to comfort others. You may have asked yourself why you have so many troubles. You may have trouble with your spouse, with your children, and even with your physical body. Have you noticed that in this book there is the phrase “excessively burdened,” or “pressed out of measure”? You may be pressed, but are you pressed out of measure? This means the working of the cross has terminated you, has brought you to an end.

Paul told us that he and his co-workers were excessively burdened, beyond their power or strength, so that they “despaired even of living” (v. 8). Many of the young brothers have strength. But sooner or later the Lord will press you again and again, and you will be trying to endure the suffering. Eventually, you will say, “Lord, I give up my enduring because Your pressure is something far beyond my strength.” When you are under a certain kind of suffering, never try to exercise your own strength to endure it by yourself. Never try to overcome it by yourself. You have to realize that eventually the Lord will press you beyond your strength. When the pressure comes, you may exercise all your strength—physically, mentally, and spiritually. But the more you exercise your strength, the more you will be pressed. Eventually, you will concede that the pressure is far beyond your strength. Praise the Lord for the pressing out of measure, beyond our power!

After Paul told us that he and his co-workers were so burdened that they despaired even of living, he said, “Indeed we ourselves had the response of death in ourselves, that we should not base our confidence on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead” (v. 9). When the apostles were under the pressure of affliction, despairing even of living, they might have asked themselves what the issue of their suffering would be. The answer or response was “death.” The experience of death, however, ushers us into the experience of resurrection. Resurrection is the very God who resurrects the dead (John 11:25). The working of the cross terminates our self so that we may experience God in resurrection. The experience of the cross always issues in the enjoyment of the God of resurrection. Such experience produces and forms the ministry (2 Cor. 1:4-6). This experience is further described in 4:7-12.

Paul’s word shows us that we need to be terminated. We need to be brought to an end. Then we will learn not to trust in ourselves but in God. For us to say that we need to trust in God and not in ourselves is easy, but to be wrought through in this matter needs a certain amount of experience. God is working through the cross to terminate us. God is working to bring us to an end, even to bring our spirituality, our spiritual attainment, to an end. We may trust so much in our spiritual attainment, but even that has to be terminated.

In 1:12 Paul said, “For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you.” In his conscience Paul had the testimony that he was walking, moving, having his being, on this earth not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God. To some, wisdom may be a clever way to meet a situation, but this wisdom comes from our flesh. Fleshly wisdom is what we have in order to do something for ourselves. The grace of God is that we do not do anything but that God does everything within us. It is not that we do something to meet the situation but that we let God do everything in us and for us. This is the grace of God.

Paul said that he conducted himself in the singleness and sincerity of God. *Singleness* can also mean “simplicity.” God is simple and God is single. The more we are in the flesh and in the soul, the more complex we are. Then we do not have the simplicity but the complexity. A soulish person is very complex. But the more we are in the Holy of Holies, the spirit, the simpler we become. The more we are in the spirit, the more we are simple and single. We are single in motive, single in aim, and single in all our desires. In 1:12 are the simplicity, or singleness, of God, the grace of God, and the sincerity of God. If we have been dealt with by the cross so that the cross has brought us to an end, we will be peaceful persons who are enjoying and experiencing the grace of God taking care of everything for us. We will be so simple and so single in our motive and in our aim. We will enjoy the grace of God and have the simplicity and the singleness of God.

#### **THE ANOINTING, THE SEALING, AND THE PLEDGE OF THE SPIRIT**

When the cross has been working through us, this working brings in resurrection. Therefore, 1:21-22 says that God has anointed us, has sealed us, and has given us the pledge, the foretaste, of the Spirit. If we are going to minister something of Christ to others, we have to experience Christ by the working of the cross, and the working of the cross is for the anointing, the sealing, and the pledge of the Spirit. The ministry comes out of this experience. We are now in Christ and Christ is our portion, but we experience Christ by the working of the cross. We need the working of the cross because we have the anointing, the sealing, and the foretaste, the pledge, of the Spirit within us. If we have not been brought to an end, it will be very difficult for us to take care of the inner anointing and the inner sealing. It will be hard for us to enjoy the inner pledge of the Spirit. The working of the cross is for the experience of the inner anointing, the sealing, and the inner enjoyment of the pledge of the Spirit. We all need the working of the cross so that we may enjoy the pledge of the Spirit and so that we may experience the anointing and the sealing of the Spirit.

The anointing is first, the sealing is second, and the pledge is third. God has anointed us with Himself. Anointing is like painting. The more a painter paints, the more the paint gets onto the thing that he is painting. Today God is the divine Painter. He paints us with all the elements of Himself. The more He paints us with His divine elements, the more these elements of God will be wrought into us. Thus, God’s anointing us is His imparting of all His divine elements into us. When we

were unbelievers, we did not have the divine elements. We only had the human element. Since we have become believers, God is anointing Himself into us in order that we may have the divine elements dispensed into all our inward parts. God's anointing of Himself into us is so that we may be absolutely mingled with Him, with His divine elements, to be fully one with Him.

The anointing imparts God's elements into us, and the sealing forms the divine elements into an impression to express God's image. If I take a seal and seal a piece of paper with it, the same figure of the seal is left on the paper. The sealing gives us the figure or the image. God has not only anointed us with all of His elements, but He has also sealed us with His own image. The more we are sealed by God, the more we will have the image of God.

Finally, we have the pledge of the Spirit. The pledge of the Spirit is the foretaste of God as a sample and guarantee of the full taste of God. God has put Himself into us as a kind of down payment or foretaste so that we can taste Him within.

We must be impressed that God has anointed us with all His elements, has sealed us with His own image, and has put Himself into us as a kind of down payment for our enjoyment. We must learn how to realize the inner anointing, how to cooperate with the inner sealing, and how to enjoy the inner pledge, down payment, earnest, foretaste, of the Holy Spirit. We do this by the working of the cross. The cross has to bring us to an end. Then we can say, "Lord, now I have the sentence of death. I am despairing of my life. I am through. I am finished." Immediately, we will sense the inner anointing, the inner sealing, and even the inner pledge of the Spirit. Through these three experiences of the Spirit as the anointing, the sealing, and the pledge, with the experience of the cross, the ministry of Christ is produced. By the working of the cross with the inner anointing, sealing, and foretaste or pledge, we will have the adequate experience of Christ. Then we will have the ministry which the Body desperately needs today. May the Lord be merciful to us so that we might be brought into the realization of how much we need the working of the cross to bring us to an end and of how much we need to experience the inner anointing, sealing, and pledge of the Spirit that we may have a real ministry for the Body of Christ. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1967*, vol. 2, "An Autobiography of a Person in the Spirit," pp. 137-142)