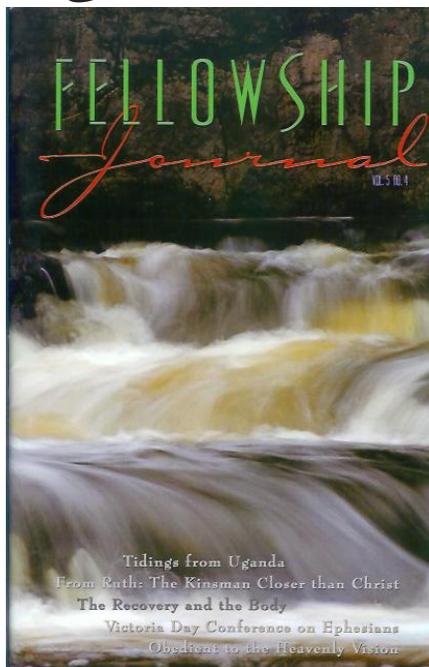


# FELLOWSHIP *Journal*

VOLUME 5, NO. 4 • JULY 2006



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## **UPCOMING EVENTS:**

### **Mountaintop: "Living Out Loud"**

July 20-23

Columbus, Ohio

Information can be found at:

[www.youngseekers.com](http://www.youngseekers.com)

### **College-Age Conference: (Ruth... Elijah & Elisha... David...)**

**MOSES**

July 26-31

Montreal, Canada

Information can be found at:

[www.youngseekers.com](http://www.youngseekers.com)

### **Gospel Odyssey!**

August 4-12

Cleveland area

[www.youngseekers.com](http://www.youngseekers.com)

### **THE LABOR DAY CONFERENCE**

Cleveland, Ohio

Information to be found at:

[www.clevelandonline.org](http://www.clevelandonline.org)

## Disciple Camp Testimony

*A short while ago, a brother submitted a testimony of how he was helped at a “disciple camp” to freshly experience the Lord. Since then other testimonies have been submitted, but the original one seemed sufficient to convey something of what has been going on among many of the Chinese-speaking as they have been pursuing the Lord together in this way. May the Lord bring in such an increase in pursuing the Lord among **all** of us! - Editor*

Hallelujah for the Spirit working within us! It is truly beyond what we can describe.

During the disciple camp, I was enlightened by the practice of the spiritual exercises of saying Amen, calling upon the name of the Lord, fellowshiping with the Lord, enjoying the word of God, singing joyfully and praising the Lord. When I heard of these practices, my first response was that I knew these exercises already. I really saw then that this is a problem in my Christian living! I knew, rather than practice these exercises. We need to be in these things and continue in them (1 Tim. 4:15-16)! I asked myself, how much time did I actually practice these things? I did not have to go any farther because I knew the answer was, “Very little, and sometimes not at all”. No wonder when I encounter some problems in my life, I try to seek a solution without first coming to the Lord! Sometimes, I even use the problem as an excuse to skip a meeting. I truly believe that by entering into such spiritual exercises on a daily basis, I will learn to put the problems before the Lord and let the Lord have the first place in dealing with all my problems. In 1 Timothy 1:16, Paul says that “...in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you”. For example, after recently enjoying Isaiah 12:2-3 by pray-reading them, the verses really stood out to me:

**“God is now my salvation; I will trust and not dread; For God, Jehovah is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. Therefore you will draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.”**

These verses really have shown me how I need to live my Christian life in the days to come. Before I came to the disciple camp, I came down with a bad cold for two days. I told the brother that I was afraid I would expose the saints to my illness, but the brother still wanted me to attend. During the practice of the spiritual exercises, the Lord truly imparted the verses into my being. Most of the time when I had faced a problem, instead of trusting the Lord or taking the problems to the Lord, I feared doing so. So as a result, I looked at my problem without noticing that I had allowed the problem to occupy my being, rather than trusting in the Lord and allowing Him to be my springs of

salvation! Instead, I had been cheated by Satan. I truly thank the Lord for giving me the opportunity to draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation during the disciple camp. The more I practice to draw water from the spring of salvation, the more I will put the Lord first. When I do this, problems do not have the first place any longer!

I have made a commitment that I will bring these exercises to the ones I am caring for and, most importantly, practice them with my wife. I believe that by practicing these exercises my living will be revolutionized. Praise the Lord!

H.C. Toronto



Saints at a recent “disciple camp”  
held at Huntington House

For further help along the lines of enjoying the Lord as encouraged in these times of training, you may want to go to [www.clevelandonline.org](http://www.clevelandonline.org) under the LIFE heading where you will find “Practicing to Live with the Present Christ”

# 2006 Victoria Day Conference Abstracts

## Message One: GOD'S MASTERPIECE

*In Toronto, May 20-22, there was a time of fellowship that continued earlier fellowship on Ephesians. During this time, Titus Chu shared on Ephesians chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3.*

In this series of messages we will cover the matters of God's masterpiece, the new man, the building, and the stewardship, as found in Ephesians 2 and 3. The first three (the masterpiece, new man, and building) must become both seen and experienced by us. When this is so, we may live upon the earth as the Lord's stewards, which is the crucial need today!

The church being God's masterpiece is something towards God; the new man is a matter of our being and existence; the building is a matter of our practical church life; and the stewardship has to do with our operation. To understand the matter of stewardship is not so simple a matter, but once we do see it, our entire Christian existence becomes different!

### THE CHURCH: GOD'S MASTERPIECE

Ephesians 2:10 tells us, "We are His masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, in order that we would walk in them." If you were to ask this very God who created, upholds and sustains so many millions of things what was most precious to Him, what would He reply? Throughout eternity, He has only had one burden, one desire, and

one operation—to produce the one thing that is for His satisfaction. What is this thing? It is His masterpiece!

Many times we ask the Lord, "Do you love me?" I ask my baby granddaughter this, and she dutifully replies yes, but I would much rather she responded more strongly! Why? Because I love her! If I were to ask someone on the street if they loved me, they would think I was a mental case. God and we, however, have something between us. We ask God whether He loves us, and sometimes we sense God is asking us the same question. And when we answer, "Yes, God, I really love You!" we sense He says, "I love you, too!" This is the most satisfying moment of our lives. Why is this such a supreme experience? Because you simply have Christ, and Christ has you! However, God still would say, "This is wonderful, but this is not yet My masterpiece. This masterpiece is something that is in My heart, with My being; something I have been focused on for eternity. For this I have created all things. For this I have been incarnated, lived a human life, and carried out redemption. Now, finally, I am achieving it!"

This word masterpiece, in the original language, is "poema" from which

we get our word “poem,” a word depicting the highest form of art. The Lord loves us individually, but we must realize that there is something beyond us as individuals that we are a part of, and that is God’s masterpiece.

This is no simple “poema” that God is producing! Consider the author: all-knowing, all-powerful, existing from eternity to eternity. Furthermore, He is totally righteous and holy. All that He wants to express must be expressed. What kind of masterpiece is such a marvelous God able to produce? How grand shall it be? This is the church, and nothing can prevent Him from producing it!

#### THE EPIC OF EPICS

To appreciate the masterpiece, we must first appreciate its originator. Do we realize, for instance, how great is God’s ability in any situation we may face? We may feel our problems are very great, yet they are so insignificant when compared to the grand scale of God’s operation. How then can we fail to trust Him in our little things? We must be able to experience Him in such things to be part of His masterpiece.

How many “stanzas” this “poem” has! In the beginning, there should be a declaration of who this God is. There are so many items! He has so many attributes! There should be a lot of “selahs” for our consideration, then stanza upon stanza which may contain the phenomenal creation of the universe and the earth, and then another section where we see God forming man from the dust and making a woman from what is taken from his side. Then another, where God de-

clares, “Let Us make man in Our image and after Our likeness! And let them have dominion over all the earth!” All this is still preliminary, having His real masterpiece in view! Then the tragedy of the fall...how Eve became attracted to the serpent and lis-

What kind of masterpiece is such a marvelous God able to produce? How grand shall it be?

It is the church, and nothing can prevent Him from producing it!

tened to his words, and eventually took of the tree and ate, and gave also to Adam, ushering in death and ruin! Yet even this heightens our ultimate appreciation of what God will accomplish as His masterpiece.

There is stanza after stanza, some uplifting, some bringing near despair. Eventually, all the depths and heights help illumine all the many facets of this masterpiece God is creating.

Seeing all this, shouldn’t we realize that God is in control? He is in control of not only our situation, but also the situations of millions of other believers as well. He is not only after you or me; He is after all the believers together to be His masterpiece as the Body of Christ. The completion of this masterpiece is what will satisfy Him.

Therefore, how we see ourselves is very different from how God sees us, and how we see the church-life is also very different from how God sees it. We see ourselves as imperfect, but God sees us as someone who is in the process of gaining Christ. He is even happier, however, when He sees us with other believers, for He knows that only Christ can put us together. In the genuine church life, there is no other way but to become a part of this masterpiece! This makes God so joyful! Is there anyone here that, looking at themselves or their situation or their church life, can say, "I don't think I need Christ"? Therefore, each one of us is becoming a long stanza in this poem! Some aspects will reveal our neediness, and other parts will be very joyful, but when you put all these "stanzas" together throughout the globe, what a masterpiece they will present! God is writing in us and in so many others until this masterpiece is complete. Every day this masterpiece is becoming deeper and higher. Every day more Christ is being added. If someone were to ask the Lord, "Isn't it wonderful that You gained me? I was on the way to becoming president of the United States!" the Lord would say, "What are you talking about? The only thing I value is My masterpiece! You should be so happy that you are a part

of it!" Praise the Lord! This should be our boast: "I, along with so many others, am a vital part of God's masterpiece!"

#### UNWORTHY MATERIAL

How is it that such a masterpiece could come into being? This is what Paul explains to us in Ephesians 2. This masterpiece is created using fallen man!

To gain my wife was an honor to me, because she was so beautiful, such a good student, and so pleasant. I, on the other hand, was not! God says to us, however, "Do you not realize that you, as My masterpiece, began as something so terrible?" Every young lady is attractive to the one who desires to marry her,

but the Lord loved us even when we were ugly sinners. He says, "I want you to be My match, to be the same as Me, but you must realize who you are and from where you came." This chapter starts with "And you, though dead in your offenses and sins..." ("And" indicates that whatever Christ is and has in the first chapter,

such as His being raised from among the dead and seated in the heavenlies [1:20] is also ours [2:6]!) We have seen something so marvelous in chapter 1, but we must remember that we were not that marvelous.

God loves us with a great love, which was able even to overlook our offenses, our ugliness, and our rebellion. His love compelled Him to come down to our low situation and to lift us...

We were dead in offenses and sins, and, furthermore, we were walking according to the age of the world, according to the authority of the air—Satan—the spirit who is operating in all the sons of disobedience (v. 2). Being dead is even worse than being in sins and offenses, for it implies we did not even have any feeling about our sin and offenses, and the fact that we walked according to the age of the world indicates we were fully in the realm ruled by Satan. (The age of the world is just the portion or stage of it that our generation experiences. The songs I enjoyed as a teenager were quite different than the songs teenagers enjoy today!)

This world has three aspects, each corresponding to the three parts of our make-up. First, there is the sinful world, which is designed with our fallen and sinful flesh in view. The second aspect of the world is the material aspect, which seeks to satisfy our soul. The third aspect of the world is the religious aspect, which corresponds to our innermost being that wants God. All three of these branches of the world have to do with Satan, and all three branches of the world are advancing age by age. The sins that were available for me to commit as a young boy are not the same sins that confront young people today, because the age has advanced! In our “digital age,” cell phones and computers have provided new avenues for sin. The material world also changes with each age. When I was a boy, to eat white bread was a great treat, but in the current age the brown bread we detested is now the bread of choice. The religious world is also here, providing ways for us to do the things of God without

God.

Therefore we were in a world that was in rebellion against God, dead, ugly in sin, and doing things that offended God. This is our background. We all have this as our background. In verse 3, we are told that we conducted ourselves in the lusts of the flesh, and did the desires of the flesh and the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath, no different than anyone else around us. How hopeless we were! Consider the woman who stares at a dress in a shop window, even though it isn’t something she could or would wear, or the man who goes into a Best Buy, attracted by all the gadgets he cannot afford and does not need. We totally live by our own thoughts and desires, rather than God’s.

“BUT GOD...”

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us.” (v. 4) Hallelujah! We were without hope! We were doomed! We were worthy of condemnation! “BUT GOD, being rich in mercy...” Mercy means we can be reached and rescued, no matter how low we are. Were you not very low? I was. But God descended, and came to us where we were, because of His great love for us. How rich is His love! On the whole globe, there may be a few people who really love you, but even though they love you, they cannot be with you all the time, or reach you wherever you are. Yet God can. God loves us with a great love, which was able even to overlook our offenses, our ugliness, and our rebellion. His love compelled Him to come down to our low situa-

tion and to lift us, not merely to restore us as a human beings, but to bring us into another existence by giving us His life.

We used to be dead in offenses, but now, if there is sin in our life, we have a lot of feeling about it. This is because we have been made alive with Christ! (v. 5) We are now in resurrection! Resurrection is a realm as well as an event. By the event of His resurrection, Christ produced the realm of resurrection for all of us to dwell in. We may be surrounded by a world where death

abounds, and there may be problems even within us, but there is a seed of resurrection abiding in us. Nothing can limit, bind, confine, or defeat this element of resurrection!

#### RAISED TO BE A TESTIMONY

For over fifty years I have been following the Lord. I have to confess that, from one angle, nearly every day I have experienced some kind of defeat. Yet I can also confess that, despite being defeated quite frequently, I am still here, going on. We can all testify that we often are defeated, and sometimes feel hopeless, yet for some reason we have not given up or gone back to become professional sinners

again. Why is this? It is because within us there is something that continually

lifts us back up, something elevating us, something taking us up higher! For some reason, we still love Jesus! We are in resurrection. We are now sitting with Christ in the heavenlies. According to verse 6, God has raised us up and seated us together with Christ that He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness to us who believe. This is His masterpiece. In this masterpiece, in spite of all the apparent frustrations, we are able to bear His testimony and be His

satisfaction. We see mud, but in the mud we also are able to see the nature of the diamond, which can never be defeated by any kind of muddiness. It is always growing, always shining. This is the miracle of miracles. We are becoming a display to the ages, for by grace we have been saved, by faith (v. 8). We were so hopeless, so offensive, so sinful, and so “muddy,” yet God was rich in mercy. Now we are in resurrection, a realm for us to live and walk in. Furthermore, the resurrection life operates in us. Thus, eventually, in the church life we are sitting together with Christ, ruling for Him as His co-kings.

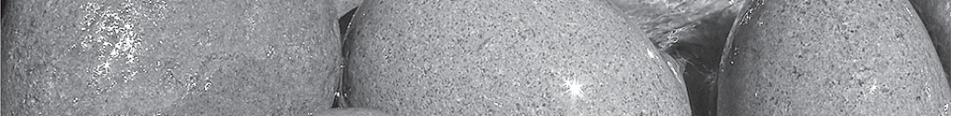
- Titus Chu

God has raised us up and seated us together with Christ that He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness to us who believe.

This is His masterpiece.

# 2006 Victoria Day Conference Abstracts

## Message Two: THE ONE NEW MAN



In this message our focus is the new man mentioned in Ephesians 2:15, which is a further development of the masterpiece mentioned in 2:10. How can we prove this? Both were created in Christ. Creation implies something from nothing. Man was made, not created, of dust, and woman was built from something taken from Adam. The woman, however, is not the final product, even though she was built from what was taken from man. The final product is God's masterpiece, the new man! We are raw materials. The new man and the masterpiece, however, are created in and with Christ, meaning that they are totally something of Christ.

In verse 15, we do see that God creates the new man using the Jews and Gentiles as "raw" materials. God used them, but He did not use them, because the new man is created. Since the new man as God's masterpiece is created, we bear just about zero responsibility. If it were our responsibility to become or produce these things, it would be too discouraging. It would simply be an impossibility for us to become God's masterpiece, but God says, "I am responsible for this. I will use you, and I will not use you. You

will be part of the masterpiece, but only if you allow what is you to be taken away!" Our feeling might have been, "I have come to be part of Your masterpiece, O God! It says here that this masterpiece was created for good works, so tell me, what should I do for You?" God would reply, "You are a product of some dirt; how can I use you as the material to gain My holy testimony? I will use you, but I will not use you. I will reduce you so I might gain the increase. You will become Mr. Zero, and I will become the Fullness. Isn't that marvelous?" Therefore, in this process, we can tell the Lord, "I do not know how I am qualified to be a part of this process, but I worship You. My beauty, if I have any, only fades, like the flower of the grass. How incredible it is that You have a way to use me for Your masterpiece!" When I was very young, I told the Lord that He should be happy that He gained me. I think His reply was, "Yes, I am happy; because I have you and now I can bring you to zero!" Whatever is of this masterpiece is created in Christ Jesus. Whatever we have will be eliminated. We say, "I am ready to serve!" The Lord says, "Are you ready to be reduced? Are you ready to be made

nothing?" In this masterpiece, nothing other than God is of value. God created this masterpiece and God created the new man. In verse 15, Paul wrote "that He might create the two [Jew and Gentile] in Himself into one new man." In a sense, God doesn't care for Jew or Gentile. Here today in our gathering we have every race represented, but God doesn't care about our race or nationality.

For instance, it matters among Chinese if you are from the mainland or from Taiwan. Even after becoming American citizens, there is a great deal of pride in our place of origin. Sometimes I am asked whether this is an ethnic church or a Canadian church. Those who ask may see many people here as Chinese, but those who are Chinese here should see such people as Christians, and themselves as Christians as well. Isn't that enough? Why must we add all the differences?

#### USING US BY NOT USING US

In the new man we can see something further about God's masterpiece. A masterpiece is not an entity that is normally thought of as having a soul, but as the new man, there is the matter of person. A man must have a personality. Without a personality, a man is a vegetable; and if he has more than one, he has another kind of mental problem! Here God desires His church, His Body, expressed through all the local churches, just to possess this one Person. This Person is the Triune God, this Person is Christ Himself. We are all brought together through His mercy to be His masterpiece, and we advance to become the new man having Christ as its unique

Person. Therefore in the church life, Christ counts. There is no "right" way and there is no "wrong" way to do things in the church life. In a meeting, one brother may call one kind of song, and another may call a song with a totally different feeling. Who is right? The Lord within is right. If I see the new man, I will only care for Christ. If one song brings us to a joyful expression in the Lord, we appreciate that, and if another brings us into the inner chamber to soberly enjoy the Lord's presence, we enjoy that. We are not a people for one kind of mood or another; Christ creates the people of different backgrounds and personalities in Himself into one new man. Christ is the person of the new man.

#### THE NEW MAN'S MARK: PEACE

Eventually, the mark of the new man is peace ("that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, *so making peace*"). I appreciate Watchman Nee. He knew how to take Christ in every situation, so he always was experiencing peace. When he was excommunicated from the church in Shanghai he moved to another city. The elders there told him they had no problem with him, and they welcomed him. In his conscience, however, he felt he could not partake of their Lord's table as long as the church in Shanghai had problems with him. Therefore they asked him whether he could help a few of them study the Bible, which he was glad to do. Eventually, a brother who was there told me he became very burdened for that meeting, and was contented with it. I like this kind of peace. Wherever we go, we should avoid causing issues,

because Christ created in Himself this one new man, and in this one new man there are no issues. Instead, there is peace.

#### NEW IN NATURE, QUALITY AND FORM

The new man is also mentioned in Colossians 3:10, where we are told that the new man is “being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him”. The word “new” in this verse means new in time, while the “new” in “new man” in Ephesians 2:15 means new in nature, regardless of the passage of time. It is ever new! A Chinese philosopher once said that the day of your birth is the beginning of your death. The new man, however, will always be new, regardless how long it has existed. Isn’t this marvelous? Our face will change as we age, because we are not forever new. But the church, God’s masterpiece, the Body of Christ, is new in nature—forever new.

Therefore it is also ever new in quality and form. Isn’t this good?

How quickly we deteriorate. Even after a wonderful meeting, we quickly are removed from that enjoyment to something else. Yet every time we call on the Lord and touch Him, we experience the newness and freshness again. “O Lord! Amen! JESUS!” Just now, as we call on the Lord together,

we realize there is something “ever-new”. This new man with Christ as his Person is ever new! Wherever Christ is, newness is.

One day, even our bodies will be in resurrection and our cells will become ever-new! Even now, however, we are in the new man, in resurrection. Two thousand years ago the church began, and today it is just as new. The newness they enjoyed at the beginning is the same quality of newness we are still enjoying. The new-

ness we enjoy today is also the same in quality as enjoyed during every great revival in church history. In the church life, we not only partake of the divine nature, but also of this divine quality of newness!

If you have just come into the church life, I am sure everything to you seems wonderful. I, however, was saved during a three-day gospel campaign, and baptized along with nearly eight hundred others. Perhaps you were simply baptized in a bathtub

with a few others standing by. If I talk too much about the “good old days” I have experienced, it may cause you to feel that your experience is somehow inferior to mine, but this is not the case! In the eyes of Christ, the new man is ever-new, and this should be our realization as well. There is something present of the Triune God. The new man is always new in nature,

Wherever we go, we should avoid causing issues, because Christ created in Himself this one new man, and in this one new man there are no issues. Instead, there is peace.

quality and form. Praise Him! We are all in the new man!

#### EXPPELLING WHAT IS NOT OF CHRIST

What does “new in form” refer to? For one thing, being new in form means that the new man has a strong expelling ability. The form will not receive whatever man tries to push in. If someone tries to bring man’s way in, it may appear to succeed for awhile, but eventually the quality of newness will expel it.

When I heard of the young people’s events, at first I tried to adjust the young saints who were planning them. When I found there was a band right on the platform, I asked them to at least move it off to the side. Later, I asked them to lower the sound level. Eventually, the Lord told me, “Do you not know the new man? Leave them alone. Whatever is not of Christ will eventually be rejected.” I was truly scared by this last event in Toronto, because it caused a stirring up of opinions among the saints. I was also afraid we would have something new in activity, but not according to the new nature! From around the globe, I hear of people’s concerns about this matter. Therefore I asked the elders how the young people were doing, and they assured me they are doing fine. Saints, there is one thing we have to learn, and that is to allow the newness to reject what is not of Christ and receive and confirm whatever is of

Christ.

The newness does not depend upon what we do; it depends upon what God is doing. God created something that is forever new. The divine nature is in this new man. Therefore, it is new in quality and new in form. We can be sure that everything will be adjusted and modified and brought into what is healthy. In whatever we do in the church life, especially in regular matters, we may become overly ex-

perienced, feeling that we know what to do. We should be charged, burdened, exercised, and insistent that Christ be our enjoyment, realizing that whatever is not of Christ will ultimately be modified or rejected.

Watchman Nee made a statement

that has affected my entire life. He said that in nearly anything we do, it is possible to err in going beyond what should have been done, but there is one thing we can never over-do, and that is to love the Lord. We can never give ourselves too much to love and serve the Lord. Eventually, this new man with his newness of nature, quality and form will take care of anything else that is “extra”. There was a time I gave up food and sleep to read the Bible, but the life of the new man eventually modified that. In the process there may be excesses, but ultimately we will be blessed in the new man with this ever-new Christ. For this to happen, however, we must give ourselves, or the new man can do little.

We can never give ourselves too much to love and serve the Lord. Eventually, this new man, with his newness of nature, quality and form, will take care of anything else that is “extra”.

- Titus Chu

# 2006 Victoria Day Conference Abstracts

## Message Three: THE BUILDING



The topic of building is somewhat different than that of the masterpiece and the new man. It is more difficult to cover, because it cannot simply be said "The building is this." It is something related to the local church life, the local churches together, the relationship between a local church and the servants of the Lord, and a local church's relationship to the headship of Christ. In the last message we stated that the newness of the new man has to do with being new in nature. Therefore, when you look at the church, which is the Body of Christ and the new man, you see nothing old. Instead, there is a vibrancy and vital function which eventually drives out anything present of the old man. Whatever is old will be replaced with the element, essence, and substance of the new man.

This is why when you look at Christian history, you have to be amazed. Everyone involved is a defeated person. Even Paul, a person who had been granted much, was given a thorn in his flesh so that he might have a weakness, and the Lord told him that he must boast in his weakness, rather than in the ascendancy of his visions (2 Cor. 12:1-9). Even such a brother

as Paul was not allowed to elevate himself. God is very jealous, He will not allow anyone to be perfect, or else people would not be brought to Christ alone. Christ alone is the new man, and we are the Body of Christ, the expression of the new man. By means of the creation of the new man in Himself, He has made peace, so peace becomes a very crucial thing. In the local church life, we must realize that whenever peace is absent, the work of Christ is being denied. When the accomplished work of Christ is realized in the church life; when Christ is honored as the unique Head of the Body; when Christ is appreciated as the essence, element, and substance of the Body, then there is peace. If this peace is lacking, it could be due to someone's fallen flesh, or it could be due to someone's strong personality. The most damaging reason, however, would be if a teaching or practice has come in to replace Christ. Such things may even be very profound or seem heavenly and enlightening, but when these things are stressed, Christ and His peace disappear. The oneness and the peace, therefore, will not easily be found among just any group of Christians!

Paul wrote that the Lord had made peace by creating Jew and Gentile into one new man and reconciled both in one Body to God through the cross, having slain the enmity (Eph. 2:16). This verse can be applied to anything any group holds onto or insists upon. Eventually the Lord will deal with any such thing, so that we might all be reconciled in one Body. This is marvelous! The Body is universal, organic, mystical, saturated with the divine life; the Body is unique. There is one Body in this universe, and in it we are reconciled to one another. Five brothers from five different ethnic backgrounds were standing and singing together earlier. That was a beautiful sight. Five races from five different countries, yet in Christ they are all reconciled in one Body.

This reconciliation took place through the cross. On the one hand, we gain salvation through the Lord's cross. On the other hand, the cross crosses us out. Everything that promotes differences was dealt with on the cross—the British-ness, the Chinese-ness, anything that frustrates the full expression of Christ as the Person of the Body. When we are with the saints, what we see must be Christ as the one who is testified, Christ as the one who is magnified, and Christ as the one who is lived out and glorified. Through the experience of the cross in all the members, all the other elements are denied. We all are different, but let us remember that God has reconciled us all in one Body. In this unique, universal, mystical, life-containing Body, we all are one, and we all are members of the new man.

Through the cross, the Lord slew all the enmity that separated the peoples (v. 16). This is wonderful, because there are so many enmities between peoples, even between northern Chinese and southern Chinese. But in the new man, there is no northern Chinese or southern Chinese; there is only Christ! Enmity between Jew and Gentile came in because of God-ordained things. Therefore even things from the Lord can produce enmity whenever we insist on them.

Whenever enmity is present, it is impossible to be close to those you are at odds with. It indicates there is distance separating you from someone else, because of a difference in practice or understanding. Yet the Bible tells us the enmity has been slain!

#### RELIGION AND IDEOLOGY

#### THWARTING THE ACCOMPLISHED PEACE

Paul reminded the Gentiles that they were called the “un-circumcision” (v. 11). What was circumcision? It was something God had given to be the seal of His people. He commanded it of Abraham's descendants. This should reveal that even what is genuinely of God can become something of religion. When we do something for or even of God without God, that is religion. When God gave the commandments concerning the tabernacle, the feasts, the offerings and so forth, there was no thought of religion. The living God was with His people! How sad it is, then, that by Paul's time, the word “religion” came to be applied to it (ie, Acts 26:5; James 1:26). In the Old Testament, there is no such use of this word. There is just the Lord and His working and speaking. With

His presence, everything becomes healthy. Apart from Him, when we remember His commandments and try to practice them, even insisting on it, that is religion. Religion is simply doing things without the presence of Christ.

Religion produces ideology, and when ideology is present, enmity will be also, because those caught in ideology insist on certain things, and consider those who do not go along with them as being "off". Instead of fellowship, distance comes in. When one brother sees another, rather than enjoying fellowship with him, he avoids him. But the Lord has destroyed the enmity through the cross, and He "announced peace as the gospel to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near" (2:17)! The Lord did not say here that He announced Himself as the gospel, but peace. The application here is to the local church life. The real gospel is not how much you talk about Christ; the real gospel is you mentioning peace. Peace is a matter of our enjoyment of the accomplished work of Christ. I am in peace because of what Christ has accomplished. There is no need to add anything further or to demand anything more. When we brothers are together, from near or far, the fact that we all have Christ should be adequate. Therefore, in the glorious church life, as we preach Christ, we must preach His accomplished work, and the reality of His accomplished work, which is peace. How good this is! When so many saints can be together from so many backgrounds abiding in this peace instead of experiencing enmity, that very peace becomes the element of the gospel. Christ tells us, "You must

be in peace. Abide in peace. Enjoy peace. Realize I have accomplished everything. I am the element of peace, the source of peace and the substance of peace. You and all those you are with in the church life must have peace with Me and peace with one another."

Therefore, we must seek to escape having ideology in the church life! When someone says that we should work to gain "Americans" in America, or "Canadians" in Canada, and not more Chinese, we should be on guard. It is crazy *not* to preach to Americans or Canadians if you are in America or Canada, but what is wrong with a Chinese person getting saved? Does the Lord jump up and clap when an American or a Canadian is saved, but act disappointed when a Chinese person is saved? Beware of ideology. We should be happy to see anyone come into the church life. Ideology damages the church life more than we realize. When someone says, "This is the only way," can we reply, "This is the only Christ"? What we must have is not a certain way, practice or ideology; what we must have is Christ! Then the church life can abide in peace. Christ preaches peace, and the church preaches Christ out of the peaceful situation. How peaceful our church life is will determine how prevailing our gospel will be. The more peaceful the situation among the saints, the more prevailing the local church life will be.

#### FELLOW CITIZEN, FELLOW MEMBERS

According to verse 18, through Christ we all have access in one Spirit unto the Father. The entire church life is under the corporate operation of

the Triune God! Then, verse 19 tells us “So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God.” In this one Body the saints are fellow citizens, and in this Body they are also members of the household of God. Citizenship is something related to nationality. People are loyal to their nation. You defend your nation, because your nation is your testimony. We are now citizens of the heavenlies. We are of a heavenly kingdom, and the king of this kingdom is Jesus Christ, and He rules this kingdom with His divine life in His divine attributes with His human virtues. This country is not governed by outward laws. No, we exercise our citizenship by partaking of the divine life with all its divine attributes and exercising in the church life in human virtue. Therefore, we should realize that to criticize even those who damage the church through their ideology is not something according to this citizenship. Such saints may not be right, but for you to criticize them is even more wrong. In the church life, the humanity of Jesus must be exhibited, and it is an exhibition that is only possible as we partake of the life of the divine kingdom, which is the life of Christ Himself. The different ideologies should not frustrate us. Yes, the church pays a price because of the opinions of the saints, yet at the same time they need to be cared for with the humanity of Jesus.

There is not one brother you cannot love or be with. Physical brothers may fight and argue, but even harboring such memories, they still love each other. The love never reduces an ounce. Yes, there may be a history of

offense or something we hold on to, but Christ has slain the enmity. We may have ideologies among us, but love should prevail. If you desire to build up the church life, you should learn to drop ideology. It is not healthy for anyone to promote ideology in the church life. In the church life, we only care for Christ, and we should only give one another Christ. Our topic is Christ. But if someone becomes caught with an ideology, do not criticize such a one. Instead, love him or her. Care for such ones.

#### ITS FOUNDATION AND CORNERSTONE

This building must take place upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (v. 20a). The foundation of the building is just Christ, but to say the foundation is Christ can be very theoretical, so we need the apostles and prophets to help us to know Christ. These persons are not the foundation, but their revelation that brings us Christ is. The transmission of the revelation of Christ causes them to be the foundation. When Peter told the Lord, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” in Matthew 16, the Lord became very excited, because the Father had revealed who He was to a human being! Then the Lord told Peter, “Upon this rock, this revelation of Me, I will build my church!” I feel this was the only time in the Gospels that Jesus became so happy, for this revelation is the foundation of His church.

There are many apostles and prophets who have received a revelation of Christ. Paul tells us, however, that Christ Jesus Himself is the cornerstone (v. 20b). In other words, Christ Himself is the testing point of all the

revelations. Any revelation must have Christ as its essence and element. It must match Christ Himself. Maybe I am not able to sleep and begin to think about the Bible. Suddenly, I may have a peculiar “revelation” that many angels were used to rapture Elijah, and therefore we must appreciate the angels if we want to be raptured someday. Such a “revelation” does not match Christ Jesus as the cornerstone, and must be rejected from being foundational for the church’s building. God only cares for Christ, and Christ only cares for God’s economy. The building of the church is something that is for God’s economy, and the building is tested by the cornerstone. I could give many testimonies about miracles I have experienced, but the cornerstone is not miracles—it is this Christ who is for His economy.

#### GROWING INTO A HOLY TEMPLE

Paul also tells us that all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord (v. 21). How is the building being fitted together? Through the growth in life of all the saints. We are all so different. How is it that we could ever be fit together for God’s building? By us growing up together. The growing is the fitting, and the fitting is the growing. I have seen that the saints here have grown in the last few years. (I say this with tears.) How does the church grow? By means of the apostles and prophets infusing the revelation of Christ into the saints. Eventually, revelation after revelation is infused into the saints for their growth. Eventually, the saints grow according to the unique cornerstone. Oh, we are not living a

life that passively waits for the Lord’s blessings! We are building the church according to the revelation of the apostles and prophets! Christ is the cornerstone of the building, and with all the others who are involved we are being fitted and growing together into a holy temple in the Lord.

#### “YOU ALSO”

Verse 22 says, “In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.” Who is this “you also”? “You also” here indicates the local saints who received Paul’s letter. The “you” here is whoever is gathered together in a locality. In verse 21, the temple denotes the universal Body, while the “you” in verse 22 denotes a local church. By growing together, we are being built into a dwelling place for the Lord in our locality. The church in Toronto is now more of a dwelling place than it was some years ago. Praise the Lord! Many more can testify that they are home, together with Christ, in the church here. Remember, though, it is all a matter of being in spirit! We need to be in spirit to be in the practicality of the church life, being built practically together in all the localities. Building is growth.

It is the person of Christ who is the measuring line for what is growth and what is not. Every local church should say, “We need to be built together every day and every week. We seek after growth, and we are being built together into a dwelling place of God where God and man find a mutual abode.” What a blessing!

- Titus Chu

## 2006 Victoria Day Conference Abstracts

### Message Four: STEWARDSHIP



This is a profound matter. We have arrived at it after sharing on chapters one and two of Ephesians at previous conferences. Chapter one concluded with Christ ascended as head over all things to the church, which is described as His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. Therefore the church as the Body is the fullness of Christ.

#### THE CHURCH, THE BODY, THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

The word “church” is somewhat a mystery, and has been applied in many ways: as a chapel, a congregation, as something related to Christianity...yet here it indicates something much deeper. According to the Greek, Ephesians 1:22 says God gave Christ to be head over all things to the called-out ones. The Greek word indicates an assembly. In Acts 19, the word is used to refer to an assembly of unbelievers in Ephesus. How then should we understand the church as the Body of Christ? First, it is a called-out congregation. It does not refer to any physical building or institution. It refers to a group of people who have been called by God with something great in view. God loves

them, takes care of them, saves them, redeems them, and calls them to Himself, causing them to become this kind of Body. The stress is upon the members, hence the church is also called the Body of Christ. It is nothing of institution.

We are quite marvelous, but not by ourselves alone. By ourselves, we are simply members. But when we are with all the other members, together we become a called-out testimony to display this Christ! This Body is the Body of Christ. How rich is the Body of Christ? It is the fullness of the one who fills all in all. Look at the universe. All the positive things within it exhibit this very Christ. By the Lord’s mercy, we are becoming the Body of such a marvelous person! Therefore, every time we mention the church, we must have something this grand in view. The God of the universe has an economy, and this economy is focused upon us, who were fallen human beings, but who were found by God and saved and redeemed and made members of His Body to exhibit all His fullness.

#### STEWARDS IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Thus, Paul says the church is God’s

masterpiece, and even the new man. Paul also says we need to be builded. There is a progression. By the end of chapter two, it seems we have reached quite a peak already. But Paul realizes that if he had stopped there, it all would have still been somewhat in the air. It needed to be carried out, so Paul goes on to tell us that there is a need for some whom he calls stewards, those who exercise “stewardship” (Eph. 3:2).

In the original language, “stewardship” is *oikonomia*, used also in Ephesians for God’s dispensation or economy (1:10; 3:9). Literally, the word is composed of the Greek word for “house” (*oikos*) and the Greek word for “law” (*nomos*). What is the stewardship? It is the responsibility to administer God’s riches to His household. (“Nomos” is derived from “nemo,” which means to shepherd to pasture.) Who are the stewards? Firstly, they no longer are for themselves; they are above all for the family. If you are your own boss, you can never exercise stewardship. Furthermore, a steward is someone who has a full understanding of the operating laws and administration of the household. In God’s house, this stewardship is carried out by shepherding and dispensing.

“FOR THIS CAUSE...”

Chapter 3 begins with “For this cause, I Paul...” (Paul wrote Ephesians in a way that goes straight through. In this book, one thing leads directly to the next. At the beginning of chapter 2, we have “And you...” It likewise is a continuation of a previous statement. Chapter 3 is the same.) We have been

given to see the church, the Body, the masterpiece, the new man, and the building. If we have seen these things, then the time has come to do business. Now Paul talks about the fact that these things have become the cause driving his existence. To him, it was not simply a good message he was giving. What he was speaking about affected his living. “For this cause,” he had become a prisoner of Christ Jesus!

Many among us might say, “For this cause, I go enjoy my life”. If you can go and do so many things outside of the church life, it simply indicates you have not yet seen the church. Anyone who has not seen the church can still be free. You can plan your life around some other kind of vision you have for yourself. But some can say, “I am a prisoner of Christ Jesus. If the Lord tells me to work, I work. If the Lord tells me to quit my job, I quit my job.” If you do see the church, the masterpiece, the new man, and the building, you will say, “For this cause, I became a prisoner. If I go to college, it is because the Lord has told me to. The major I choose is up to the Lord, not me. If I work little or much, it is a matter under the Lord’s direction. Not only am I a prisoner of Christ; my living, existence, and being is all for God’s economy, for the church life.”

STEWARDS OF THE GRACE OF GOD

What kind of prisoner was Paul? He was a steward of the grace of God (v.2). Many times we cannot afford to be defeated, because then we would be swallowed up in self-pity. Then, if we are excited by something, we feel fine again. This is not how the stewardship is carried. Some people oper-

ate well with a lot of encouragement, but it is not out of grace. Some feel whatever they say has value, because others claim to appreciate it. To serve the Lord is not simple. People will respect you and they will despise you. Paul served as one who had good report and evil report (2 Cor. 6:8). He served as a prisoner with the stewardship of the grace of God “for you” so that all the saints might realize the riches he had covered in Ephesians. Paul’s existence was to see these riches realized

Paul served as one who had good report and evil report.... He served as a prisoner with the stewardship of the grace of God “for you” so that all the saints might realize the riches...

in the saints. Therefore, how much he needed grace! Because he was in grace, he could dispense grace. Only a person in grace can lead the church in grace.

This stewardship (*oikonomia*) is of the grace of God. Because of this, when I exercise it, I must be a person saturated with grace! Then when I am with the saints, grace is present. Apart from grace, there is no real stewardship. Therefore, we all need to abide in grace.

STEWARDS OF THE CHURCH:  
THE HIDDEN MYSTERY

Paul then said that the stewardship is a matter of “the mystery” (v.3). The mystery had been made known to Paul by revelation. God is not someone who has everything laid out on the surface. There is a mystery hid-

den in Him, and this mystery was made known to Paul. We may marvel at many other things that we consider mysterious in the universe and

in the human experience, but to God these things are nothing compared to the mystery that He has hidden in Himself. What is this mystery? It is Christ! Christ is the mystery of God. And if you were to ask Christ what His mystery is, He would say it is the church! Therefore Paul’s writings about the “called-out ones,” the Body, the masterpiece, the new man, the household, the kingdom—all these things

were aspects of the mystery that had been made known through Paul’s writing (v.4). By revelation, all these things had been made known to Paul. Now, after this weekend, we can all say, “Praise the Lord, I have seen a little bit more of the mystery of Christ, and I give myself to the church a little bit more, because I see this is what is hidden in Christ’s heart. This is what He cares about! This is His mystery!”

In the following verse Paul tells us that this mystery had not been known in other generations as it had been revealed in those days to the holy apostles and prophets (v.5). In other words, Adam had no idea why God had created him, nor did he have any idea why God made him such a beautiful wife. Abraham was called, but did not know what the full meaning of God’s promise to him was. Moses came to bring the Law, and the chil-

dren of Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness, but they had no idea of the purpose of their generation. Paul, however, was given to know what the purpose was. He was even caught away to the third heaven and to paradise, and heard unspeakable things. If I were Paul, I believe I would be walking three feet off the ground wherever I went. But Paul did not boast in what the Lord had shown him. Instead, he said, “the mystery has been revealed to the holy apostles and prophets”. He refused to single himself out as the greatest servant of the Lord. As he exercised his stewardship according to his revelation he also recognized that there were other apostles and prophets who possessed the same revelation. I do not believe he was being political; I believe this was the case. He realized Christ was not confined. Christ could work with him, and Christ could also work with other apostles and prophets.

What is this revelation? “That in Christ Jesus...” (v. 6). What Paul saw was that everything about the church as the mystery of Christ was in Christ Jesus. It is the Body of Christ. As the masterpiece and as the new man it was created in Christ Jesus (2:10, 15). Now Paul is saying, “With all these riches, a stewardship is needed.” What kind of a person can be a steward? One who is a slave of Christ Jesus, serving His household; one who does not have a work nor one who rules over others, but rather one who is for the saints. The saints are Christ’s, not ours. Paul’s vision is that all is in Christ Jesus. The steward sees that everything in the church must be Christ. Therefore he struggles to bring about the reality of the church being the called-out ones

for the growth and building of the church as the Body, the masterpiece, the new man, the household of God, and the kingdom.

### **FELLOW HEIRS, FELLOW MEMBERS, FELLOW PARTAKERS**

How does Paul once again define this reality? That “in Christ Jesus the Gentiles and the Jews would be fellow-heirs and fellow members of the Body and fellow partakers of the promise through the gospel” (v.6)! If we want the reality of all the other foregoing aspects, we must realize three things: we are heirs, we are members of the Body, and we are partakers of the promise. This is not individually so, but corporately. In this one Body we all are heirs, members, and partakers.

### **FELLOW HEIRS OF OUR FATHER**

Being heir to a rich fortune affects the way that a person lives his life. We have a life-relationship with the Triune God as His sons, and thus we are His heirs! Our Father, of course, cannot die, and thus our inheritance only grows richer and continues to accumulate. I am so happy that from the first day I came to the Lord, over fifty years ago, until today, He has been my inheritance, infusing Himself into me. Therefore I can say that with each passing day and week and year, my Christ has become richer, fresher, and more bountiful. If you were to ask me why I want to live longer on this earth, my answer would be simple: so I may inherit more of Christ! If any day you do not enjoy Christ as your inheritance, that is a day gone to waste.

Because we are the Lord's heirs, He is our benefactor. He really takes care of us! He has an eternal, universal "business," and as His heirs we are partakers in this business. Isn't it foolish to consider other pursuits as being worthy of our time? No other business is like God's business, and we have been made co-heirs with Christ of our Father (Rom. 8:17)! If the Father has an economy, we are spontaneously a part of it, for we are His heirs, working together with the Father and all the other heirs for this economy. If the Father desires a kingdom, you are in this kingdom! The most precious thing is not merely to be under God's care; the most precious thing is to be operating together with God in His operation. What is our business? Our business is only His work! (Hymns #904). We do what He does! If we were heirs to some earthly throne, we would be involved in what our father was doing as he ran his kingdom. We would represent him and help him carry out whatever was necessary for the business of that kingdom. It should be the same with us as the heirs of God!

#### FELLOW MEMBERS OF HIS BODY

Furthermore, we are also members of His Body. A person's body functions as an organic unit, and exhibits and expresses that person as his or her visible testimony. If a person is a sober person, you will be able to see this when you physically see him, because our personalities are expressed through our bodies. Often you can tell just by looking whether a person is anxious, aggressive, warm-hearted, etc. The Body of Christ bears

His testimony. When we consider the church, we must realize that it is the Body, and we are members of it. Therefore, when people see us, they should see Christ!

Another feature of a body is that all the members are in good "fellowship". In my body, there is a good circulation! When all the members in Christ's Body are healthy, there is a sweet fellowship. When something creeps in not of the Body, however, problems arise. There are pains. It is normal for fellow members of the Body to have sweet fellowship, even though they may not be familiar with each other. If, when we meet, we cannot fellowship, it means that something foreign or unnecessary has crept in. Anything that is not necessary to the Body eventually causes problems in the Body and will frustrate the Body from its purpose to display Christ.

How should we treat members that bring such difficulties and "headaches" into the Body life? When a finger brings pain to your body, you do not cut it off, am I right? If this were your policy, you probably would have very few members left before long! When your finger hurts, you lovingly care for it. No one should chase anyone out of the church life. We all are members of Christ! A good steward enhances this realization. A good steward encourages the saints to participate in their inheritance by enjoying the Father's care and getting involved in the Father's operation. A good steward also exhorts the saints to bear no other testimony besides Christ, because Christ's Body expresses only Christ; and, as members in this Body we must maintain a sweet fellowship

with one another, allowing nothing “extra” to creep in. A good steward also lets us know that we must love those who are with us, whether or not they seem to frustrate us. Members of the Body can always have fellowship. And members of the Body always need fellowship!

#### FELLOW PARTAKERS OF THE PROMISE

The third thing that Paul mentions in verse 6 is that, whether Jew or Gentile, we all are fellow-partakers of the promise. God promised much in the Old Testament. The key promise was the one He made to Abraham, which was concerning Christ Himself. This promise was that Abraham would receive a land, and that he would receive a seed. Both are Christ. Today, we need to arise, and walk through the land (Gen. 13:18)! We have received the promised Christ as our great and all-inclusive blessing! We need to look to the east, to the west, to the north, and to the south in this great land! We need to be fruitful and multiply so that this promised blessing might be fully realized. This, brothers, is the work of the stewards. They stir others up to take the land. When I was in a certain country, I had a vision of local churches filling that land. We are not timid people! All the land

is ours! The stewards help us see what they have seen, and experience what they have experienced.

This is a steward. A steward belongs to the house. He doesn't have a church; he doesn't have a work. The church is Christ's, and the work is Christ's; he is only a slave of Christ Jesus. He has a revelation, he also realizes many have revelations. His labor is to realize the Body of Christ by helping the saints to be heirs, members of the Body, and partakers of the promises of God. How marvelous! Do you desire such a stewardship? Such saints do not go to the meetings simply

It is normal for fellow members of the Body to have sweet fellowship.... If, when we meet, we cannot fellowship, it means that something foreign or unnecessary has crept in.

to listen to messages. They have a commitment. They realize they owe their whole being to the Lord, and that they belong to His household, which they desire to serve. Therefore in this household they dispense His riches and shepherd the saints to be healthy heirs, healthy members, and healthy partakers of the promises. May we all pray, “Lord, make us healthy stewards. Not only will You be our blessing, but we also will become Your blessing.”

The Lord, I believe, has spoken the proper thing to us at the proper time. May we take care of this fellowship and begin to practice these things.

- Titus Chu

# Against the Wind

## Scripture Verses:

**“This you know, that all who are in Asia turned away from me.”**

(2 Timothy 1:15a)

**“For Demas has abandoned me, having loved the present age, and has gone to Thessalonica.”**

(2 Timothy 4:10a)

**“The cloak which I left in Troas with Carpus, bring when you come, and the scrolls, especially the parchments.”**

(2 Timothy 4:13)

Second Timothy was the last epistle that Paul wrote. He wrote from a Roman prison and, according to 2 Timothy 4:6, he already sensed his pending martyrdom. He had labored and suffered much due to his faithfulness to the heavenly vision given him from the Lord. Now, at the end of his life, when he should have been able to see the fruit of his labor, he instead saw a very bleak picture.

**“All who are in Asia turned away from me.”**

Paul wrote to Timothy, *“This you know, that all who are in Asia turned away from me”* (2 Tim 1:15a). This would have included the churches in Ephesus, Colossae, and Troas, as well as others. Paul had labored in Ephesus for three years with tears (Acts 20:31). The church in Colossae included Philemon with whom Paul had such dear feelings. The saints in Troas heard Paul preach until midnight and witnessed Paul raise one of their own from the dead. In a very real sense, Paul had given birth to them and was their spiritual father. What could have caused churches such as these to turn away from the one who had labored so much on their behalf?

The book of 2 Timothy was written around 67 A.D. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the Christians in Jerusalem were by this time leaving the city in large numbers. The Lord Jesus had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem with its temple, and this prophecy was detailed in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 24:1-2), which was in circulation at the time.

As the political situation between Israel and Rome worsened and the armies of Caesar marched closer, they could all see the inevitable. By the time of the actual destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Josephus tells us that virtually all the Christians were gone.

It is safe to say that many of those who scattered from Jerusalem ended up in the churches of the Gentiles, including those in Asia. It is also safe to say that they brought their doctrine and church practices with them. Jerusalem was the church where James boasted to Paul years earlier, *“You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed; and all are zealous for the law”* (Acts 21:20b).

Thus the Asian churches were flooded with those who considered that they had come from the “mother church,” and who boasted that they had been trained by James and the original Apostles. They carried an authority and weight that the simple brothers who had been raised up by Paul could not resist. It did not take long for the churches to leave Paul and go the way of Jerusalem.

**“Demas has abandoned me, having loved the present age.”**

Paul specifically lamented the departure of Demas in 2 Tim 4:10, saying that he had *“abandoned me, having loved the present age, and has gone to Thessalonica.”* In Philemon 24, Paul calls Demas his fellow worker, and also mentions him positively in his letter to the Colossians (Col 4:14). Demas was therefore known by the

saints in Colossae. Perhaps he had labored there, and, like Paul in Ephesus, shed many tears as he struggled to raise them up. He would have cared deeply for them.

How discouraged he must have felt as he saw the saints in Colossae leave the gospel that he and Paul had presented to them and take the way of Jerusalem. He could have had the same feeling that Paul expressed to the Galatians when he wrote, *“I marvel that you are so quickly removing from Him who has called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, Which is not another gospel, only there are some who trouble you and desire to pervert the gospel of Christ”* (Galatians 1:6-7).

Such discouragement may have been the reason Demas left the work and went to the world. It would be hard to see those you love turn their back on you. It would be easy to give up. In some ways, Demas’ case is more sad than that of the churches who turned away.

**“Bring... the scrolls, especially the parchments.”**

Paul had strong feelings about the departure of the churches, and of Demas, but he would not allow himself to be swallowed up by discouragement and give up. Neither would he compromise his stand. After all, he had received a heavenly vision from the Lord Himself, and he could not be disobedient to that vision (Act 26:19). Even when everything seemed against him, even when he knew that his martyrdom was eminent, he still

chose to labor on. He told Timothy, *"The cloak which I left in Troas with Carpus, bring when you come, and the scrolls, especially the parchments"* (2 Timothy 4:13). The cloak was for his physical comfort while in prison, but the scrolls and the parchments were for his continued labor. He was not about to give up. Success was not up to him, but up to the Lord who had called him. Paul genuinely lived a crucified life, and nothing outward would stop him from fulfilling his ministry.

Paul never lived to see that success. He could not have foreseen during such a dark time that it was his writings that would eventually win the day. Eventually it was his letters, most of which were written under the most trying of circumstances, that would overcome. Long after his death, the Lord used the great truths that they contained to point His church in the direction of grace.

So we see that when the winds of teaching come in, there can be at least three reactions. Many, if not most, will be taken away from the simplicity of the gospel. They will abandon the vision they have received from their spiritual father to follow "a different gospel." Others, out of discouragement, will sadly give up and go back to the world. But the Lord will keep some who are grounded in the truth faithful to Himself. He will use these to build His church.

- Dave Shields



# Ruth

## *Growth Unto Maturity*

(The following excerpt from pages 79 through 90 in the book of the above title helps clarify a topic found throughout this issue of the *FJ*. Anyone who loves the Lord and seeks oneness with Him should be benefited by it.)

### **BROUGHT INTO UNION WITH CHRIST**

We now come to the fourth and final chapter of this wonderful book. As chapter three ended, Naomi said that Boaz would not rest until he had finished what he must do that day. Chapter four thus begins with Boaz's dealings with Ruth's nearest kinsman, the man who had the first claim upon Ruth and her inheritance. According to Deuteronomy 25:5 and Numbers 36:7-8, the nearest kinsman was responsible for marrying the dead man's wife to raise up children in the name of the deceased. Otherwise his inheritance in the land of Israel might be lost from his tribe. This is the purpose of this transaction.

### ***A Closer Kinsman***

The question now is: who does this nearest kinsman represent? It may be argued that Ruth is primarily meant to be a beautiful story, and that doctrines are not a feature of this book. According to this view, when Boaz says, "There is a kinsman closer than I am," it just introduces more tension and romance to the story. However, Boaz clearly represents Christ, and Ruth represents us. Therefore, it must be significant that someone is more closely related to Ruth than Boaz is, even though Ruth's desire is toward Boaz, and she has given herself to him.

### *The Natural Man and Its Pursuit*

Brother Lee has interpreted this closer kinsman to be the natural man. This is a great light, particularly when we understand its application. This nearest relative has the right to declare possession over Ruth. If this is so, how can

she offer herself to Boaz at all? If our natural man is the closest kinsman to us, and if he has the first right of ownership over us, how could we ever be released so that we might be joined to Christ?

This matter of the nearer kinsman is particularly manifested in what the natural man is after. What your natural man and my natural man are pursuing may be very different things. It matters what the natural man sees as being in its own best interest. If you are bright, your natural man will point you to certain things. If you are ambitious, it will cause you to pursue something else. If you are lazy, it will find you another avenue. The entire world is developed in response to all the different kinds of people with their abilities and interests. The many different fields in the world correspond to the various kinds of abilities within individuals. In this way, the world corresponds to the natural man. Saints, we each have such a kinsman who is closer to us than Christ, and this kinsman has to be dealt with before we can fully enter into the union we desire with the Lord. Christ as the close relative is in our spirit. Our natural man, however, as our closest kinsman, is in our soul, and our natural man desires something from God. Our spirit surely desires God Himself. In our soul, however, is something called the soul-life, which wants both God and the world, for the world exists to match all the desires of the three sections of the natural man: our mind, our emotion, and our will. It is our mind and our emotions that determine which of these two kinsmen will be closer to us.

### *The Three Sections of the World and Our Natural Man*

The world is also of three sections: the sinful section, the material or physical section, and the religious section. The sinful world appeals to our fallen flesh, while the material world appeals to our natural man when we are not focused on Christ alone. Many, for instance, pursue a certain job with a certain company in order to have a certain type of comfortable life. The sinful world, as pictured in Ruth, was dealt with in chapter one when Ruth told Naomi, "Wherever you go, I will go...and your God will be my God" (v. 16). The material world was dealt with in chapter three, when Ruth wholly offered herself on the threshing floor of Boaz.

Because you are someone who has been redeemed by Christ, in principle your natural man will no longer choose the sinful aspects of the world. Nor, in principle, will your natural man desire the material aspect of the world, if you have consecrated yourself to the Lord. What aspect of the world remains for a person such as you? You may be surprised. It is the religious world that has the ability to prevent us from enjoying total union with Christ.

The sinful world is a very close friend of the material world, but the religious world seems separate from the sinful and material world, at least in appearance. Initially, believers struggle with the sinful world, and they are repeatedly defeated until they give up. When they give up, however, they seem to find the secret, and thus they are delivered from that aspect of the world. As long as we have the fallen flesh, the allure of the sinful world will remain. However, it will not be the primary thing to which our natural man is attracted. The next level of the world, and one we will find more acceptable, is the material world. Even though we are the Lord's followers, it will still seem reasonable to pursue a career, a better lifestyle for our family, and so on. A Chinese proverb says that the older you become, the more you will care about money and the less you will care about other things. (In my old age what tempts me is the desire for peace and quiet. It would be so pleasant to be delivered from all the turmoil and bothersome things that surround me.) But such desires do not own us. We are for Christ.

What is the struggle that will always confront those who have given themselves to Christ? It is the natural man's inclination toward the things of the religious world. We know that the sinful world and the material world are not of Christ. What draws our natural man now is that world where Christ is talked about, where Christ is spoken of, and yet where Christ is absent. The world of religion can fill us with something that is related to Christ, after the living Christ has left. In this way our natural man, with its continual inclination toward religion, is our closest kinsman.

Simply put, we are controlled by our natural man, and our natural man is controlled by religion. More accurately, when we in the churches are living by our natural man, we are bound to religion rather than Christ. Religion makes people lose some of their ability to reason, for it is governed by zeal, not intellect. Politics has this effect on people as well. Someone said that those who get involved with religion or politics forfeit 60% of their IQ. It seems that this statement is true. Apparently religion should bring people to Christ. However, when people focus on religion, Christ disappears along with reason. In this way, our natural man's involvement with religion becomes our closest relative, even when we desire that our closest relative should be Christ.

### ***The Religious World's Claim on the Natural Man***

In religion, Christ is preached and spoken about, yet apart from Christ Himself. What is it about religion that inclines our natural man so strongly toward it? What makes it so captivating?

First of all, religion seems to give us an easy way to please God apart from Christ. We may call this the law. (The only way to come out from under the law is to be crucified with Christ. This is seen in Romans, chapters six and seven. The law cannot rule over a dead person. Praise the Lord for this!) Within every Jesus-lover's natural man there is a strong inclination toward the law. The natural man says, "I love the Lord. I know what I shall do. I shall memorize so many verses every year." Is there anything wrong with this? In one sense no, for our attempt to keep this sort of law will expose our actual situation. After the Israelites at Mount Sinai told Moses, "All that Jehovah has spoken we will do" (Exo. 19:8), they ended up dancing around the golden calf before Moses came back down from the mountain (32:1-6). This exposing feature is one of the positive functions of the law.

### *1. Through the Law*

You may say, "What then shall we do if we cannot use something of law? If we do not serve the Lord practically, we do not feel satisfied that we are doing what we should. What is wrong with memorizing 1,000 verses a year?" If you are set on this, you will touch Christ in the Word, and you will be exposed and have to come to Christ and confess your need for Him. But if you are able to memorize only five verses this month out of the 85 scheduled, you should not fall under the law's condemnation. The natural man seeks justification before God by seeking to fulfill the law. The law, however, brings you to Christ through your failure. In this way it is a child-conductor to bring you to Christ (Gal. 3:24). Yet many continue to be held in bondage under the law, even after they have Christ.

### *2. Through Ideology*

The second thing the natural man derives from religion is ideology. Christ has given us Himself and so many riches of the truth concerning Himself. Yet it is easy for Christians to take what Christ gives, apart from Himself, and form it into an ideology. Once something we have received becomes an ideology, we have departed from Christ.

The Plymouth Brethren are a good illustration of this. In the early days, they received so many riches from the Lord. So much light came forth from the Word, and so many rich hymns were written by them. But when what the Lord gave them became an ideology, they lost the living Lord. In Plymouth today, a gathering that once brought the blessing of Christ to thousands has now become a meeting of a faithful few who are holding onto something with their natural man. That which they are faithfully holding is not Christ, but rather a collection of teachings that have become their

ideology.

We also have to be careful of this tendency, for ideology develops so easily. For some reason we find it much easier to hold onto an ideology than to hold onto Christ. Once ideology is in control, Christ is not. Some may hold onto ideology to the point that they ignore or deny the reality of the Body of Christ. For instance, some Christians say they are Lutherans due to their ideology. In fact, they are believers, but they have exchanged the reality of the Body of Christ for an ideology. This is why the local churches are so precious in the sight of God. They express only the reality of the Body of Christ.

Sometimes someone will check with me to see if something I said was as Brother Lee taught it. My response to this is that I have grown up as a believer exclusively with the riches of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, and I know nothing else. Whether or not something is specifically as taught by these servants who have led us, I often have to say I honestly do not know, for I no longer have a good memory, nor am I the kind of person who is research-oriented. Anyway, why should this be an issue as long as something is being ministered that is plainly of Christ and the truth? Even among us, I am concerned that ideology may become a kinsman closer to us than Christ Himself.

### *3. Through Self-Confidence and Satisfaction*

The third thing of the religious world that matches your natural man is your desire to develop who you are. Perhaps another way to say this is that the natural man inclines toward self-confidence, and our inclination toward self-development finds satisfaction in doing things of religion. Religion is very good at encouraging you to develop yourself, and your natural man yearns for such development.

The disciples, in their arguments over who would be greatest among them, were a good illustration of this. Also, when Peter said he had left all to follow the Lord, and asked what he would receive in return, that indicated that he wanted something for himself (Matt. 19:27). Peter's boat and house were no doubt of very little value, even when compared to other boats and houses, yet it seems that he felt no shame in asking what he would get in return for his meager sacrifice. This has always puzzled me. Why are we Christians like this? And why does the Lord receive it from us? We tell Him how much we love Him, and that we will give up everything for Him. Although He could, He never says, "You are lying." We shed tears and confess our love to Him and then immediately leave His presence to do something separate from Him. Yet He continues to love us, whether or not we know how to love Him properly in return.

In spite of your behavior, for some reason you are very sure of yourself. This self-confidence displaces Christ. You trust in your own ability to follow Christ, thinking that you know how to satisfy Him and how to serve Him. Brothers, you don't. Instead, there is a closer kinsman than Christ, someone closer to whom you yield. That is your natural man, who is attempting to please Christ. You are not relying upon Christ to please Him; therefore, by default, your natural man is your closest kinsman.

So these three aspects of the religious world, to which our natural man is inclined, form our closest kinsman, even when we desire Christ to be the closest One to us. First of all, there is our desire to fulfill the law. Second, there is our desire to hold onto and defend an ideology. In his book, *The Speciality, Practicality, and Generality of the Church*, Witness Lee wrote that we as the church should only defend the common faith that is adhered to by all genuine believers, as it is revealed in the Bible. Anything else can become an ideology. Third, we trust ourselves that we can do something for Christ or that we can do what we desire toward Christ. Because of all this, we need Christ as our Boaz to do something for us if we are ever to be His alone.

### *Boaz Confronting the Closer Kinsman*

Now we come again to Ruth chapter four. Boaz goes to the gate of the city, and this closest kinsman of Ruth appears. Boaz has him sit down, and he has the elders of the city sit down. I like this picture. The Lord is in charge, and all must obey Him. Even ideology cannot argue in the Lord's presence. Boaz then rehearses how Naomi has returned from the country of Moab after losing her portion of the land. (Although they had sold their portion in the land, in reality they had only lost their "lease" until the coming of the next 50-year jubilee. The more serious issue was that there were no male heirs, in which case they would really lose the land.) Boaz presses the issue and says, "If you are going to redeem this for Naomi, redeem it, for you are the closer kinsman." When we read this, we may get a little nervous, for what would happen to Ruth if this closer kinsman agreed to this? And that is what happens, for this kinsman seems happy to take this property and add it to his own. Boaz reminds him, however, that if he does this, he must also marry Ruth and through her raise up a son in her dead husband's name so that his name and inheritance may not come to an end. Hearing this, the closer kinsman balks and realizes that he cannot fulfill his duty. At this point he surrenders the right to Boaz. Praise the Lord!

This is the situation. When the Lord comes in and confronts our natural

man, we listen, but still with our laws, ideology, and self-confidence firmly in place. The Lord says, "You must do this for yourself if you wish to fulfill what is right before God," and initially we are inclined to think we can do it. We see the profit in view. But we do not realize that law, ideology, and self-confidence do not really have our best interest at heart. Rather, we are just a means for the religious world to reach its own ends. Those under law realize that the law cannot perfect them. It is just a means to itself. And under ideology, we have something in view that controls us, but it requires that we cleave to something other than Christ to accomplish it. It needs followers, it needs us to be comrades, it needs allegiance if it is to be maintained. Among those controlled by ideology, there is no true love which seeks what is best for one another. So religion rears up joyfully to lay hold of what seems possible for its profit through the name of Christ in this individual, until the Lord says, "Wait. You must also raise up children to this brother for the sake of his place in this land."

Up until this time, the closest relative must have felt very fortunate that Boaz was bringing all this up. It seemed very much to his benefit. But when the Lord brings up what is really profitable for Elimelech and Naomi, this closer relative falls apart. He only cares for his own profit, and not for the profit of those he is bound in name to take care of. It is the same with religion's relationship to our natural man.

If the closest kinsman were to have a son by Ruth, it would be required that such a son would belong to Mahlon, the son of Elimelech, and not to himself. That child would be raised up in Elimelech and Mahlon's name, and would return to the recovered portion of the land that had belonged to Elimelech. The closest kinsman felt that such a thing would mar his own inheritance (4:6). In other words, the closest kinsman only cared for what he could gain from his association with Ruth. He did not care for her, even though he was closely related to her.

### ***Christ vs. Religion: One Caring for Us, and the Other Using Us***

The religious world uses us; it does not care about us. The Lord, on the contrary, cares about what would most bless us. He fights for what would be a blessing to us. He is here struggling for us to mature. He is not using us for His purpose in the way that some may think. We are His purpose, and our obtaining Him is what becomes our highest blessing. Religion only seeks to thwart this so that it may maintain its own existence and be enlarged, with its laws, ideologies, and exaltation of the self.

So the kinsman who had been closer surrendered his right by drawing off his sandal and passing it over to Boaz. This was a custom of the time,

and I do not think we need to look for any particular significance of why a sandal was used, and so on. Symbolically, it just meant, "I'm out of this, and I release all my claims upon it." Boaz then said, "You are witnesses today, that I buy from Naomi's hand all that was Elimelech's and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's. Furthermore Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, I acquire as my own wife so that I may raise up the dead man's name upon his inheritance and the dead man's name may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his place" (4:9b-10a). This reveals that Boaz would accomplish something for Naomi and for Ruth that would require much labor, and he would seemingly receive nothing in return. Boaz was doing something that was not for himself, but for the sake of someone else.

When the Lord took us upon Himself, it appears He didn't get anything but a lot of hard work. But at least He got us. The Lord's way is always to pour Himself out and to suffer on our behalf, that we may attain the ultimate blessing. To all this the elders and those present said, "We are witnesses." Perhaps they did not understand why Boaz would do such a thing. Ruth was young and possibly beautiful, but what Boaz was entering into was something that would not bring him any profit in the long run, for whoever was born of their union would end up being credited to Mahlon. Boaz would have to work for someone else's profit, on someone else's behalf, and raise up something for someone else. How upright, kind, and proper Boaz was! I hope we all would have such a heart to fight for one another's good rather than simply for our own.

Sometimes I have heard a brother speak critically of someone for having left the church life. First of all, in every such case can we say they have really left the recovery? And second, this does not represent God's heart, for God hates to see anyone lose his portion of the enjoyment of Christ. We should not speak of such ones in this way. Are we somehow heroes since we are thus far able to enjoy the church life? We know it is the Lord's mercy. As those standing for the oneness of the Body of Christ, we are not a sect, yet at times we can make ourselves very narrow.

### ***The Blessing upon Ruth and Boaz***

Eventually all the people blessed Boaz with an interesting blessing. They said, "May Jehovah make the woman who has come into your house like Rachel and like Leah." At this I would be insulted, for although Rachel means "lamb" in Hebrew, Leah means "weariness." This is like saying, May your bride be like a lamb and like being tired! These, however, are the two that built the house of Israel (4:11).

Brothers and sisters, if we desire to build up the Lord's testimony, we must experience what is signified in the names Rachel and Leah. On the one hand, we are those who have consecrated ourselves to the Lord for His purpose. Sometimes we are strong in declaring ourselves for Him. On the other hand, we are so weak that it seems we cannot rise up at all. But because of our submission to the Lord, our weakness is seen as that of a lamb. Because we know Him, and because we know ourselves, the Lord has a way to build up His kingdom through us. The Lord's kingdom is not primarily established through prevailing exercise. No. More often, the Lord's kingdom is built up as we are trusting in Him in the midst of our limitation, in our weakness. Although we are weak, we are His lambs. Praise the Lord for Rachel and Leah!

Then they continued, "And prosper in Ephrathah, and gain a name in Bethlehem. And may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, through the seed that Jehovah gives you by this young woman" (vv. 11b-12). "Perez" means "birthing through." Something was limited and held back, but now it has come forth! Then they brought up the matter of Tamar and Judah, which was something very shameful. Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law who dressed up like a prostitute and had a child through Judah. If I were Boaz, I would have been insulted if someone likened my wife-to-be to such a woman. However, this case actually was meant as an encouragement to Boaz, for though Ruth as a Moabitess came from a black background, so also the birth of Perez came as a birthing through a dark background and became a blessing in Israel. Eventually both Perez and the child born of Boaz and Ruth would become the means for Jesus Christ to come in the flesh (Matt. 1:3, 5).

### *Naomi's Blessing in Ruth and Boaz*

The women then told Naomi how blessed she was, saying, "Blessed be Jehovah, who has not left you today without a kinsman; and may his name be famous in Israel. And he will be to you as a restorer of life and a sustainer in your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has borne him" (vv. 14-15). This book is called the book of Ruth, but it begins and ends with Naomi. She is no longer Mara (bitter; see 1:20), for now she is truly blessed. Through Boaz, Naomi is blessed as well as Ruth, and she even gains a restorer of life in her old age. If you follow the Lord, you should never be discouraged. There is always something of the Lord to sustain you. Ruth herself has become better to Naomi than seven sons. The Lord would much rather have one such over-comer than seven church-goers.

## *The Continuation: Obed, Jesse, and David*

So Boaz and Ruth were finally married, and they had a child. In verse 16, Naomi took the child and lay him on her bosom and became his nurse. Then something interesting happened. It seems it was the neighbors who came into the house who gave this child his name. They named him Obed, which means “to serve” or “to worship.” It is very meaningful when these two can come together in one person. Obed became the father of Jesse (“Jehovah Is”), who was the father of David (“Beloved”). The word that forms the root of David’s name is used very much in the Bible.

There are three places in the Bible where ten generations are mentioned. The first is in Genesis 5, which goes from Adam to Noah. The second is in Genesis 11, which goes from Shem to Abraham. The third set of ten generations is here in Ruth chapter four. The first set of ten generations covers the experience of redemption, the second covers the experience of God’s calling, and this third one covers the experience of being brought from regeneration into the kingdom of God.

I hope we are all impressed with this matter of Christ as our near relative and religion as another even closer relative. Perhaps if we were to see these two —Boaz and this nearer kinsman—they might appear nearly identical. How close was Boaz to this other relative? Perhaps very close, so close that it was difficult to differentiate between the two. What differentiates them? One desires to take what you have, and the Other wants to give Himself to you because He cares about your ultimate profit. May we all give our hearts today to the Lord as Ruth gave herself to Boaz, so that the Lord may fully expose to us both who He is, and who it is that competes with Him for our heart and mind. May the Lord have mercy on us as we pursue after Him as the unique One that we desire, until He and we are truly joined as one.

Lord, this is our desire.

-Titus Chu, from pp. 79-90, *Ruth: Growth Unto Maturity*

“Life shouldn’t be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather, to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly shouting, ‘Wow! What a ride! Thank You, Lord!’” -anonymous



## UGANDA news

### **Makerere University**

Since January 2005 over 620 people have been contacted at or around Makerere University. Many of those contacted have attended at least one church gathering or Bible study. Makerere University has also now become a regular meeting place of the church. On the Lord's Day morning, for example, 40 to 60 (mainly students) gather to remember and enjoy the Lord at the university's art gallery. In addition to Sunday morning, there are also several weekly small group gatherings in and around campus. One of the small groups meet at Makerere University Business School (a branch campus) on the other side of the city. There are also a prayer meeting and Saturday night Revelation Study at our apartment. Recently several from the campus have been saved and baptized.

### **Naguru Go-Down**

One of the poorest communities in Kampala is Naguru Go-down. Many who were from northern Uganda and displaced by war and poverty have migrated to Naguru. A temporary structure made of polar timbers and iron sheets was constructed by the church as a meeting place for the church. Brother George Kiiza faithfully labors and now lives in Naguru Go-down. While practical needs and severe poverty abound in Naguru, nothing can take away the simplicity, love, and joy these saints have for the Lord Jesus. They are so happy to be part of the church and know they are necessary members of the body of Christ. Their remembrance of the Lord is in the local Ugandan language and includes worship with traditional song and instruments. Between 40 and 60 adults and many children gather together in Naguru every Lord's Day.

### **Other Communities**

In addition to Makerere and Naguru, we also labor regularly with at least two other communities (Kireka and Bukoto) who are also now meeting as part of the church in Kampala. Severe poverty and cultural and tribal diversities, along with other barriers, make weekly travel and gathering together a real challenge, even if it is just from one end of the city to the other. Rather than forcing the various communities to come together every week, we instead encourage them to meet in their own community. Then about every six to eight weeks we all come together as the church in the city. We have only done this twice so far. Our last corporate church meeting had over 320 in attendance from six different communities. That was so encouraging and inspiring. New ones were able to witness a fuller picture of the church. There was a real testimony of the oneness of the church when the various communities all came together.

## **A much needed visit from the brothers in the USA**

In April, brothers Vern Yoder and Mike Samulak visited Uganda to help in the labor. It was Mike's first visit. We much appreciated their coming as they were able to carry much of the burden for the regular meetings of the church as well as conduct some special events which included: a conference on the book of Psalms, a grand opening event in Naguru Co-down, ministry at the church corporate gathering, and an outdoor music sing-along at Freedom Square (a central meeting spot at Makerere University).

Their visit was timely. It provided me with a badly needed rest and enabled us to develop a long range plan for Uganda and East Africa.

## **Graduates from the First Discipleship Program**

On May 24, six participants received certificates for their participation and completion in the first ever discipleship program. The program was conducted three mornings per week over a four month period. In addition to learning to come to the Lord through prayer, spiritual songs, and hymns, there was coursework in both the Old and New Testaments. Subjects included: The Person and Work of Christ, The Church-Vision and Practice, Cutting Straight the Word of God, Gospel Preaching, Ministering, and Prominent Characters from the Old Testament.

In addition, participants memorized key passages from the Bible, attended a mission trip to a high school in Bweyogerere, and had regular field experience in gospel preaching.

The program was kicked off by John Myer in February and concluded with visits from Vern Yoder and Mike Samulak in May.

## **A 10 Month Training to begin in August 2006**

A 10 month full-time training will begin in August 2006 and run until June 2007. One of the goals of this training is to equip future leaders for the going on of the church in the city of Kampala and the spread of the churches throughout Uganda and East Africa. So far 14 have expressed an interest in attending. Our hope is that many will be able to participate. This training will require extensive preparing and financial support. Please bring this training before the Lord in prayer as we feel this will pave the way for the Lord's continual move here in Africa.

## **We'd love to hear from you**

While the Lord is doing much among the Ugandan people, receiving a letter from you all is a real encouragement and supply to the labor here. You can contact us by email at: [ugandankeith@yahoo.com](mailto:ugandankeith@yahoo.com) or mail us at:

Keith and Tina Miller, PO Box 10704, Kampala, Uganda AFRICA.





## A DAY IN THE LIFE...

Keith Miller was asked to write something about a typical day so we might get a better understanding of what he and Tina's daily experience is like in Kampala. This is what he emailed me. It has only been lightly edited. - *Editor*

"John, there is so much to tell. The example I am including here is more on the practical side. It is a pretty typical Saturday. There is no gospel story or amazing event. I have many of those kinds of stories but I did not include them this time. I think this one may portray an ordinary, uneventful day...

Your brother, Keith"

### **A Day in the Life- by Keith Miller**

Well it looks like another sunny day here in Uganda. The birds woke us again with their high pitched, almost painful cries. Tina calls them flying roosters because they let out an eye opening screech as they fly. This starts just after sun-up (7am every morning). No matter, we have to get up anyway, the saints will be arriving soon for the 9am weekly Saturday morning prayer meeting. After a little time with the Lord and a cup of coffee, I'll run across the parking lot to the canteen and pick up a few samosas (small fried meat pies shaped in a triangle shape) and chapottes (fried Ugandan flat bread) for those coming to pray. For some, this will be the only breakfast they will have this week. My friend George runs the canteen. He seems to always be there. His canteen is open till midnight every day and I have never heard him complain.

At the prayer meeting we enjoy some good singing and prayer after which we plan out the rest of the day for ourselves and some of the serving brothers. Some will stay after the prayer meeting to talk with me about personal needs and situations. After that I will need to take care of a few practical matters myself. Today, for example, I will need to get more drinking water and get to the bank before they close. Cash goes quickly in a society where it is all you can use for every purchase you make. There are no credit cards, no checks, no debit cards. This day I'll need to see a teller as the amount I need exceeds the maximum at the ATM. That could potentially be a problem if you're in a hurry.

Anyway, off I go. When I reach the parking lot I find my car is sparkly clean. It has just been washed by one of the security people. The wiper blades are upright and he is standing nearby just to let me know he is waiting for his money. The fee for washing my car is 2000 shillings (\$1.10). I have my car washed at least once a week. There is so much dust in Uganda that you don't

have much of a choice.

Today, traffic is bad. I hope someone will let me in, but not today. Not a problem, I will use the car that just pulled up next to me as a blocker. I'll wait for him to pull out into steady traffic, stop the flow of cars, and squeeze in. I hate to say it, but I almost like the rules of the road here in Uganda. There is what I call a "respectful aggressiveness". You have to be aggressive, but if you lose the battle for position you back off; there is no need to get mad. Respect the man that stole your position. If you win, however, be assured that almost



### **Traffic in downtown Kampala**

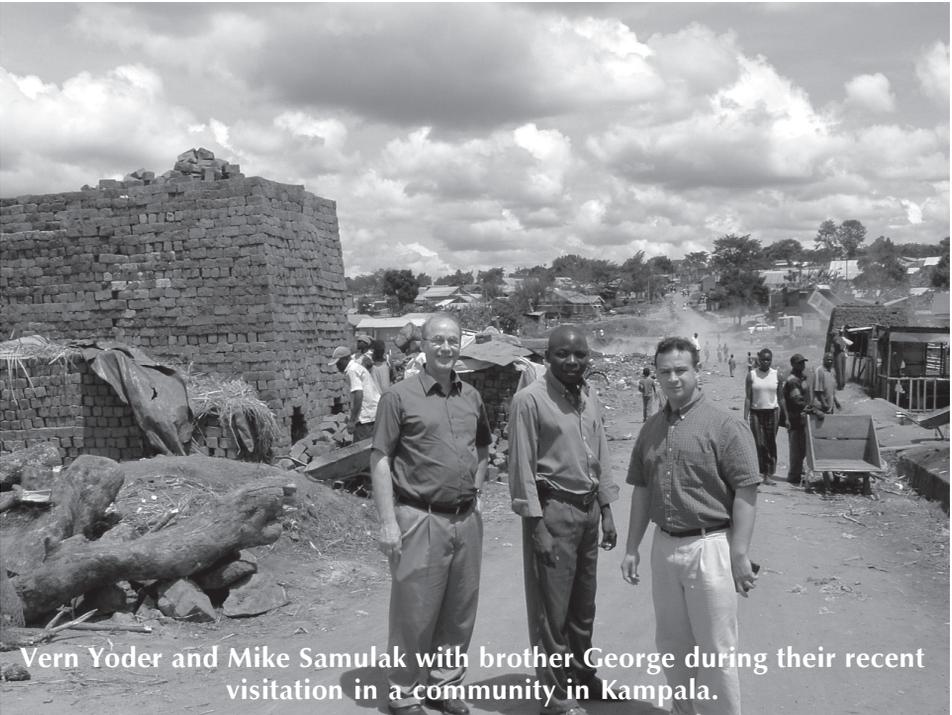
no one will be upset about it. They will respect your victory. Regardless, driving can be tiresome, even for short trips. This is because you must be constantly vigilant. Finding a cow in the road and goats crossing the street are not uncommon sights. Whatever you do, watch out for the man carrying sugar cane stalks across his bike as he walks it on the side of the road! There are also numerous people walking and riding bikes or motor cycles along a road riddled with pot holes and washed-away shoulders.

On the way to the bank there is an intersection with a traffic light, one of the few in the city. Today I am stuck in traffic but that is not a problem, because when there is stopped traffic, people come by selling fruit and vegetables from car to car, and today I need some. I sometimes say a few phrases in Luganda just to let them know I am a local here and know the real price of things. Most of the vendors, however, know me so they don't try and cheat me with el-

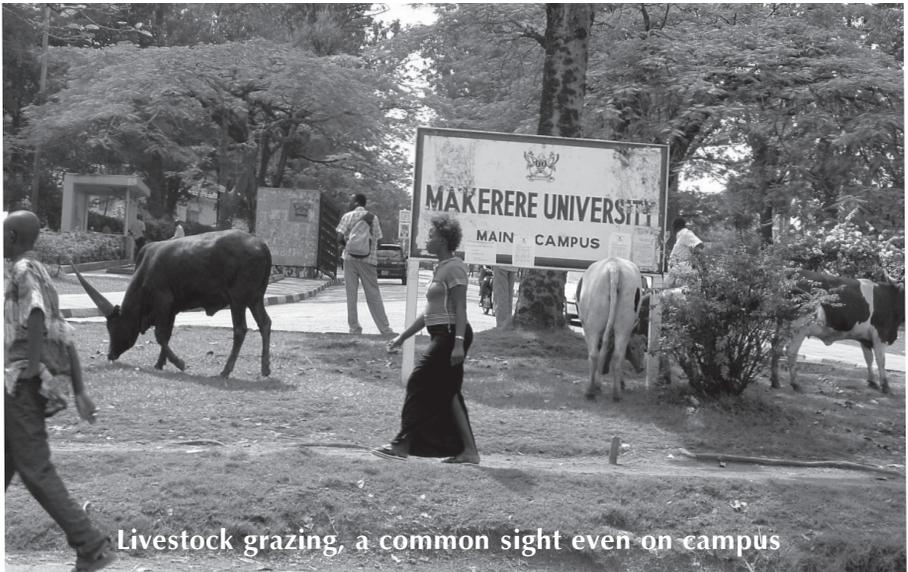
evated prices anymore. Every day I watch as vendors selling locks, TV antennas, pictures, tool sets, jumper cables and more pass by my car. I decline the passion fruits and oranges and wait for the carrots, peas and beans. Finally they come, and the price is right. For 1000 shillings (55cents) I have purchased about 2 to 3 lbs. of carrots. Fruits and vegetables are in abundance here, including fresh pineapples, and very reasonably priced.

At the bank I wait with some 30 or 40 others in a tiny, hot lobby for nearly 45 minutes to get my cash. After that it's a stop to purchase fuel for nearly \$5.00 per gallon then off to another store to purchase drinking water. By the time I reach home it is 1:30 and time for lunch, which is the main meal of the day. Today Tina and I will go to the café across the street and get the local plate. For about \$1.36 we get a large portion of food consisting of Matoke (Uganda's staple—a type of steamed and smashed green banana), rice, sweet potatoes, greens, posho (a type of white corn meal), cassava (a plant root), and some boiled meat. What a delicious meal! We would be hard-pressed to prepare a meal that nice at home for less.

After lunch we quickly stop by the open market in our neighborhood, Wandegeya, for a few produce items I wasn't able to buy from my car. By now the clouds are stacking up and the sky is darkening. We quickly head home to beat the rain. It begins to fall just as we reach the door. Then it lets loose and for about 45 minutes the city stands still and waits for the rain to subside. After the rain, the sunshine and heat return. Within an hour or two it will be hard to tell that it has even rained.



Vern Yoder and Mike Samulak with brother George during their recent visitation in a community in Kampala.



Livestock grazing, a common sight even on campus

I spend some time in the afternoon reviewing what I will share for the 6pm Revelation meeting while Tina prepares some snacks. As the meeting is beginning the power goes off. It is a planned blackout called “load shedding”. Every community has to bear this. It occurs less often in ours, however, because we are on the same electrical grid as the hospital and the university. Some communities load shed for 12 hours a day! We light up our candles and turn on our small electric lanterns but our power comes back after just a couple hours. After the gathering we eat the snacks. Often people will stay till 11pm. Some of the best fellowship takes place after the gathering one-on-one. After everyone is gone, I still need to prepare for the Lord’s Day morning meeting.

There is a valley across from our apartment that is used for wedding receptions, parties and so forth. The music begins at about 7pm and lasts until 3 to 4 in the morning! It is very loud at times as we lay down to sleep, but we have gotten used to it and sometimes even enjoy it (depending on the type of music).

It has not been a day of great works, yet our hearts and hands feel full. We pray, “Thank You, Lord, for Uganda. Bless Your people here Lord and use us as much as You are able.”

This article has been included so that those of us who live in the West might appreciate something further of what they are experiencing. The testimony of all those who have been in Uganda is how impressed they are with the caliber of its people. The point of this article is not to suggest that life in Uganda is “backward,” but simply to impress us that as we follow the Lord, we must be willing to make adjustments! Are we willing? - Editor

# “THE BODY EQUALS THE RECOVERY”: GOING BEYOND WHAT HAS BEEN WRITTEN?

For Christians, the Bible is the “canon” [from Greek *kanon*, a measuring rod or rule] – the unique standard of truth for our faith and walk. If we go “beyond what has been written”<sup>1</sup> in the Scriptures, we risk deviating from the apostles’ teaching and the divine revelation. Here we pose the question: **Has recent teaching concerning “the Body” gone “beyond what has been written”?** Has there been a divergence from the Scriptural truth concerning the Body, brought to us by Brothers Nee and Lee? The “Blended Co-workers” are on record equating the Body of Christ with those believers within the Lord’s recovery. One “Blended Brother” has said, “*I would say that practically speaking, for us the Body today is just the Lord’s recovery. ...In Brother Lee’s understanding, **the Body equals the recovery**. We know that the mystical Body of Christ includes all the believers, all of the redeemed ones in time and in space, but ***practically for us today, the recovery is the Body.***” (*The Ministry* magazine<sup>2</sup>)*

***“The Body equals the recovery”***

This statement acknowledges the

Scriptural definition of the universal Body, which includes all believers. Yet, it drastically re-defines “the Body” with the words, “***the Body equals the recovery***” and “***the recovery is the Body.***” Among us the term “recovery” refers to those Christians who are endeavouring to return to God’s original intention. The statement,<sup>3</sup> “*we in the Lord’s recovery today,*” is typically understood to mean those believers meeting practically in the local churches. It follows that “the recovery” refers to a minority of believers, a small sub-set of the Body of Christ. **The recovery and the Body are not equal.** Yet this assertion, “***the Body equals the recovery***” and similar statements, such as “***practically for us today, the recovery is the Body***” have been spoken and published,<sup>4</sup> after passing through LSM’s “discerning check.” It is surely a matter of great importance to diminish Christ’s universal, mystical Body, composed of millions of genuine believers, down to the 300,000 believers currently in the Lord’s recovery around the globe. This reduces something as “innumerable as the stars of heaven” (Gen. 22:17; Gal. 3:29) to a finite number equal to the population of a small-sized city or

town.

We know of no precedent either in the Bible, or in the ministries of Brothers Nee and Lee, for such an **exclusive definition of the Body as entailed in the statement— “the Body equals the recovery.”** Brother Lee clearly taught that<sup>5</sup> “*The church is ... an organic Body constituted of all the believers, who have been regenerated and have God’s life...*” Moreover, he says,<sup>6</sup> “... *through the centuries, all God’s chosen people were, are, and will be brought into not only the reality but also the practicality of the Body of Christ...*” These statements recognize the universality of the Body in both time and space.

### Going Beyond what has been Written?

Brother Lee’s teachings concerning the Body and the recovery are crystal-clear. How then could a “Blended Co-worker” conclude that “***In Brother Lee’s understanding, the Body equals the recovery?***” This statement is based upon Brother Lee’s speaking:<sup>7</sup> “*Without the backing of the Body, without the backing of the recovery, we have no way to practice the local churches.*” It appears that the brother implicitly **assumes** that the two phrases — “*Without the backing of the Body*” and, “*without the backing of the recovery,*” — **are in apposition**, so that “*the backing of the Body equals the backing of the recovery,*” **Based upon this implicit assumption**, he concludes that, “***In Brother Lee’s understanding, the Body equals the recovery.***” However, this extrapolation of Brother Lee’s word “goes beyond what is written” both in the New Testament,

the teaching of Brothers Nee and Brother Lee’s own teaching.

Let us revisit Brother Lee’s statement. In our view, it is equally reasonable to assume the two phrases are **not in apposition**. In that case, Brother Lee’s sentence consists of two distinct phrases: “*Without [1] the backing of the Body,[and] without [2] the backing of the recovery, we have no way to practice the local churches.*” With this understanding, Brother Lee’s speaking **does not imply that the Body equals the recovery**. More importantly (we would argue) both the Scriptures and Brother Nee and Brother Lee’s teaching concerning the Body and the recovery, **require this latter interpretation**. Surely we should understand one sentence of Brother Lee’s writing in the light of all his teaching on that subject, rather than re-interpreting his entire teaching based upon one sentence! Moreover, if “***the Bible is our unique standard,***” all our teaching should be measured by the rule of the Scriptures. Decades ago the local churches declared,<sup>8</sup> “*All teachings... which claim the Holy Spirit as their source must be checked by God’s revelation in His Word.*” We do not have the liberty to extrapolate from Brother Lee’s words to a teaching “beyond what has been written” in the Bible.

### An Exclusive Definition of The Body

The statement, “***the Body equals the recovery***” is elitist, excluding from Christ’s Body believers outside the Lord’s recovery. If this view is adopted, all the believers not practically meeting in the local churches are not rec-

ognized as belonging to Christ's Body. According to this assertion, millions of genuine believers in denominations are not members of Christ's Body. Doesn't this teaching provide support for denominational critics who charge:<sup>9</sup> *"the Local Church ...treats fellow members as if they were not [legitimate member(s) of the body of Christ]?"*

From the start of the Lord's recovery in North America, this statement—**"the Body equals the recovery"**—was neither our stand nor our teaching. As early as 1968, Brother Lee acknowledged that, together with **"all the dear saved ones outside the local churches,"** we **"are all of one Body."** To quote the wider context, he said,<sup>10</sup> **"This is our attitude toward all the dear saved ones outside the local churches. Although they may be in a denomination or sect, we all have the saving faith, we all have been redeemed by the Lord's precious blood, and we all have the divine life."** He continued, **"We may be quite different from other Christians in background and in many other things....But regardless...as long as we believe in Jesus Christ...we are all redeemed, justified, regenerated, and saved. And we all have the divine life within us. Therefore, we are all of one Body."** This accords with the Bible, which says the Body is inclusive. The apostle Paul wrote, "For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free..." (1 Cor. 12:13). Christ's Body includes all genuine believers, both inside and outside "the recovery;" inside and outside the denominations. We reject the exclusivism embodied in the state-

ment: **"the Body equals the recovery,"** as sectarian.

### **The local church includes all believers in that place**

On occasion, Brother Lee talked of the Body as the aggregate of all the local churches. Concerning the local and universal aspects of the Church, he said,<sup>11</sup> **"All the local churches are part of the universal church, not something in addition to it or apart from it. All the local churches added together equal the universal church."** Yet, in this context, Brother Lee surely intended we would regard the "local church" as inclusive of all the believers in that place. Hence elsewhere, he wrote,<sup>12</sup> **"The church in the locality is not narrow. It includes all the believers in that locality." The Beliefs and Practices** clearly states this inclusive stand:<sup>13</sup> **"we recognize all the blood-redempted and Spirit-regenerated believers in Christ as members of the one church in each city."** The genuine local church, as the practical expression of the universal Church, is not exclusive. The local church includes all believers in that place. Hence it is possible to say: "all the local churches added together equal the universal church, the Body." In this context, both the local church and the Body are inclusive.

### **"Seven times a year... for the speaking to the entire Body"**

Over the past decade "the Body" has been emphasized repeatedly in messages given by the "Blended Co-workers." Yet, what exactly do they mean by "the Body"? We feel the

statement, "***the Body equals the recovery,***" reveals the actual concept underlying much of their speaking about the universal Body. If this assertion was merely an isolated incident, it could be dismissed as an unfortunate miss-speaking. That, however, is not the case. This teaching has appeared in ***The Ministry*** magazine after passing through LSM's "discerning check." Moreover, the same concept appears to underlie another "Blended Co-worker's" speaking concerning "*the Lord's leading in the Body universally*" when he says,<sup>14</sup> "***The seven times a year that we come together are for the universal Body, for the speaking to the entire Body and for the Lord's leading to the whole Body.***"

### **Today, Speaking to the Universal Body is Impossible**

If the universal Body includes all the believers throughout the age of grace, "*speaking to the entire Body*" (as claimed by this "Blended Co-worker") **is impossible for any minister today.** Hence Watchman Nee says,<sup>15</sup> "*the church here [in Matt 18] is local, not universal, for no one could speak at one time to all the children of God throughout the universe. It is only possible to speak at one time to the believers living in one place.*" Yet this "Blended Co-worker" claims to do what Brother Nee says is impossible – to speak to the entire universal Body of Christ! Simple logic shows the impossibility. The universal Body includes all the believers since Pentecost. Perhaps the apostle Paul, through the legacy of his epistles, could "speak" to all the following generations of believ-

ers. However, today no one can speak *retroactively* to the saints in Paul's time or Luther's era. Even speaking to all the believers currently living around the globe is impossible. How then can we "***come together...for the universal Body, for the speaking to the entire Body?***"

It seems this contradiction arises from differing concepts of the Body. In our view, Brother Nee holds the Scriptural concept of the universal Body. However, it seems for the "Blended Co-workers," "***the Body equals the recovery.***" In the latter case, to address the "entire Body" merely requires gathering all the local church believers to Anaheim or to the web-cast and video, where (according to this "Blended Co-worker"<sup>14</sup>) "***we come together...for the universal Body, for the speaking to the entire Body and for the Lord's leading to the whole Body.***"

Yet, as we understand it, the Bible never teaches that "***the Body equals the recovery,***" nor that "***the recovery is the Body.***" Neither have we found this concept in Brother Lee's writings. To us this is "going beyond what has been written." Furthermore such a divergence from the scriptural truth concerning the Body, brought to us by Brothers Nee and Lee, may have serious consequences. If we adopt this narrow and exclusive definition of "the Body," (differing from the Bible and Brothers Nee and Lee), we risk producing something other than the goal of God's economy. We fear this exclusive definition of Christ's Body will produce a "virtual body," an entity which is in fact nothing more than a global organization.

- Nigel Tomes

## NOTES:

1 This phrase occurs in 1 Cor. 4:6 where Paul warns the Corinthian believers not to go beyond what he has written concerning himself, Apollos and other servants of the Lord. Concerning this phrase, Brother Lee writes, "Paul said that they did not do anything that was beyond what was written in the Bible (1 Cor. 4:6)... Anything that goes beyond the teachings of the New Testament would damage and jeopardize a person's leading. The apostle's leading must always be according and limited to the Word of God." W. Lee, *One Accord for the Lord's Move*, p. 72

2. Quote from: *The Ministry*, vol. 7, no. 6, Aug. 2003, p. 196 (emphasis added). To give the wider context of this quotation: "We need to consider all the time how the Body would feel about what we are doing. **I would say that, practically speaking, for us the Body today is just the Lord's recovery.** We need to ask ourselves how what we do would affect the Lord's recovery as a whole. This is practical. Brother Lee continues, 'The biggest problem, the unique problem, is not knowing the Body and not caring for the Body. If we take care of the Body and are concerned for the Body, there will be no problems. We are here for the Body. Without the backing of the Body, without the backing of the recovery, we have no way to practice the local churches.' [W. Lee, *The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*, pp. 34-5]

*In Brother Lee's understanding, the Body equals the recovery. We know that the mystical Body of Christ includes all the believers, all of the redeemed ones in time and space, but practically for us today, the recovery is the Body.* We have no way to practice the local churches without the backing of the recovery. 'If we practice the local church life and neglect the view of the Body, our local church becomes a local sect.'" [ *The Ministry*, v. 7, no. 6, Aug. 2003, pp. 196-7, emphasis added.] Through-

out this article, references appear in the footnotes.

3. E.g., *The Beliefs and Practices of the local churches*, (1978) p. 6. As a further example, "We in the local churches are for God's recovery." (p. 5)

4. *The Ministry*, vol. 7, no. 6, Aug. 2003, p. 196 (emphasis added). The need for a "discerning check" was strongly emphasized by the "blended co-workers" in *Publication Work in the Lord's Recovery* (LSM, June 30, 2005)

5. Witness Lee, *The Conclusion of New Testament*, p. 2245

6. Witness Lee, *The Conclusion of New Testament*, p. 2106

7. Witness Lee, *The Problems Causing the Turmoils in the Church Life*, p. 35

8. "The Co-workers in the Lord's Recovery," *The Beliefs and Practices of the local churches*, (LSM, 1978) pp. 8-9

9. This statement in its larger context appeared in *Christianity Today's* editorial: "the Local Church implicitly sabotages its argument—that it is a legitimate member of the body of Christ—when it **treats fellow members as if they were not**, by taking them to court." *Christianity Today*, March 2006, Vol. 50, No. 3, Page 27 (emphasis added)

10. Witness Lee, *Practical Expression of the Church*, Anaheim, CA, The Stream publishers, (1970) pp. 102-3. As quoted in "The Truth Concerning Exclusivism" on the internet at [www.contendingforthefaith.com](http://www.contendingforthefaith.com).

11. Witness. Lee, *Life-study of Ephesians*, p. 238 (emphasis added)

12. Witness Lee, *Practical Expression of the Church*, The Stream publishers, (1970) p. 84

13. "The Co-workers in the Lord's recovery" *The Beliefs and Practices of the local churches*, (1978) p. 4 (emphasis added)

14. *The Ministry*, vol. 7, no. 9, (2003) p. 169 (emphasis added)

15. Watchman. Nee, *The Normal Christian Church Life*, pp. 51-2.15. *The Ministry*, vol. 7, no. 9, (2003) p. 169

# THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST IN PHILIPPIANS

## MESSAGE TWENTY-SIX: "BEWARE OF DOGS"

"Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, for me it is not irksome, but for you it is safe. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the concision." -Philippians 3:1-2

The end of chapter two of Philippians seems like an apt conclusion to the book. Paul has spoken of sending some brothers to them (Timothy and Epaphroditus). Yet the book does not end there. Instead, Paul says, "Finally, brothers..." The word "finally" here is not a conclusion, but rather a continuation that opens the door to one of the most profound chapters in the Bible. In this third chapter, Paul gives us his testimony of a brother living a life that is entering into incorporation with God!

PAUL'S GOAL: TO BE ONE WITH CHRIST  
IN LIFE, NATURE, AND PERSON

Paul wanted to show the Philippians what the goal of his living and exercise was. He may have been imprisoned in Rome, but that could not keep him from rejoicing as one who was pursuing Christ! Paul's desire was to tell the Philippians about a life that was entering into complete oneness with Christ. In other words, he was saying, "Saints, let me tell you what a Christian life should be. We are one with Christ in life, we are be-

ing mingled with Him in nature, but even more, we must experience being incorporated with Him in person. A healthy Christian must live a life that is becoming one with Christ. Christ's person must become our person!"

The highlight of this chapter is verse 12, where Paul proclaims, "Not that I have obtained or am already perfected, but I pursue, if even I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus." Paul was saying, "Christ has laid hold of me, now I must lay hold of Christ. He lives in me, and now I must live Him out."

CHRISTIANS REJOICE!

How is such a living of gaining Christ manifested? It is manifested in our rejoicing! This is why Paul begins this chapter with "Rejoice!" Rejoicing should be our hallmark as Christians. This is interesting, because Christians are not rejoicers by nature. If they were, they would never have felt any need to be saved! Instead, Christians are those who are very aware of failure and the fallen situation around them. If, however, we are rejoicing

because Christ is real to us, we may know we are right where we should be as believers—we are pretty “safe”! In other words, if someone asks you, “Are you spiritual?” or whether you are behaving as a Christian should, if you can answer “I am rejoicing in the Lord!” then you can know you are safe.

If we were involved with something other than Christ, even though it may be as wonderful as an attachment to a particular book of the Bible, we need to be brought back to enjoying Christ. If you do not have the joyfulness of Christ in something, no matter how good or spiritual it may be, you should know that it is not “safe”!

The Philippian believers were very dear to Paul. They were faithful and somewhat healthy. Therefore, he wanted to take them forward another step. Yet something was missing; there were few among them who were really happy. There was something lacking in their testimony. This is why he wrote chapter three! The reason so few of them were happy was because they were lacking in the experience of being brought into this life of incorporation with Christ.

THE FIRST MATTER OF CONCERN IF WE  
DESIRE TO GAIN CHRIST:  
DOGS

What hinders such rejoicing? What frustrates us from gaining of this Christ

we desire to gain and know? What prevents us from becoming so one with His very Person? Paul presents us with the obstacles that we must be aware of so that we might be free to

When it comes to religion, we must realize that we are all “doggish” by nature. Therefore, rather than being quick to point our finger at others, we must first apply this word to ourselves.

pursue a life of becoming incorporated with Christ. (Paul surely knew what he was talking about, for this was his experience!) What is the first obstacle, or frustration? Surprisingly, Paul says it is dogs, for he admonishes the believers, “Beware of the dogs!”

Who were these dogs? Paul used three terms to describe them: one term having to do with their person (“dogs”), one having to do with

their operation (“evil workers,” or workers of evil), and one having to do with their practice (“concision,” referring to circumcision). There are no conjunctions separating these three terms, so we know that “dogs,” “evil workers” and “the concision” in verse 2 are all terms applied to the same persons.

The “dogs” Paul refers to are certainly the Judaizers, the Jewish religionists. But when it comes to religion, we must realize that we are all “doggish” by nature. Therefore, rather than being quick to point our finger at others, we must first apply this word to ourselves. Religion is in everyone’s blood! How can we know when we are in religion rather than in Christ? I will give you fourteen points. Of these four-

teen, thirteen should accompany our experience, but they must not replace the reality of Christ, or we shall be in religion! One of the fourteen, however--that of ideology--we have no need of at all. [These fourteen conditions are found in the following article.]

In the Bible, dogs are unclean animals that are said to vomit up their food and then return to eat it again (2 Pet. 2:22). They do not digest things properly. Instead, the same thing passes in and out again and again, but little of it becomes theirs. This is a harsh word Paul uses. Would you like to be called a dog? We would probably rather have written, "Beware of some of the Jews" or "Beware of religious workers". Paul was bold to simply say, "Beware of the dogs." He was telling the Philippians, "In the church life there are some 'brothers' who are very doggish. You need to see what they really are. They are those who have taken the real things, but are unable to digest them, and simply shoot them out again. They are those who are always in the process of taking in the word, but it never seems to become their make-up.

What is holy, after they are finished with it, is transformed into something unclean."

"EVIL WORKERS"

Those whom Paul calls dogs he also calls evil workers. The word "evil" here is not the word used for sinful or openly rebellious deeds, such as gambling and so on. Forms of evil such as these coming from a saint in the church life would not cause much damage, because everyone would recognize it as evil. This word refers to the evil of essentially worthless things being presented in a way that cheats people. There is deception involved. It does not appear to be obviously related to anything evil or satanic. It is presented as having high value, when in fact it takes you away from what is

*truly* of value. This is the result of the operation of these workers. It is a work that produces the evil of defrauding people of Christ. Thus, they are not only unclean dogs, but also evil workers.

"THE CONCISION"

Lastly, Paul refers to these "dogs" and "evil workers" as "the concision". This is a derisive term referring to the cutting of circumcision. In Paul's

mind, the physical circumcision the Judaizers promoted was now nothing but mutilation.

Thus, to Paul, the first matter the believers had to see through when considering the matter of having this life

It is possible to do something in the Lord's name that actually draws people away from Christ as their focus and damages them. Such teachers may be associated with Christ, affiliated with Christ, and even produced according to Christ, but they are not Christ Himself.

of incorporation were these teachers. The saints had to realize they were not clean in nature, doing a wicked work, and damaging others through their practice. This is what being religious can lead us into. It is possible to do something in the Lord's name that actually draws people away from Christ as their focus and damages them. Such teachers may be associated with Christ, affiliated with Christ, and even produced according to Christ, but they are not Christ Himself! If we are not aware of the work of such religionists and are drawn away by their operation, we may not even be aware of when we lost Christ.

When I first came to this country, it was to go to theological school. Forgive me for saying this, but when I was there, I met a lot of "dogs". They were nice and even pious men, but though they seemingly were such great students of the Bible, it appeared they digested very little! One day, in a chapel service, we were told to bow our heads to pray. Something seemed strange about the prayer, so I looked up to see that the person was simply reading the prayer off of a piece of paper! There was no life; that was a doggish activity. If we are not careful, however, we could do the same thing. The Lord has given us no one and

nothing besides Himself. We are here to gain Christ! Yet sometimes, for some reason, when we hear about

Religious teachers... make nonessential things seem essential, and demand unity on these things. Christ and His work alone are essential. We should never allow anything such as a practice or a teaching...take away the love from among us.

Christ, and even enjoy Him, afterwards even that can become something to tell others about, even though very little of that supply really became ours. What we hear of Christ must become ours! Christ Himself must be our focus, our center, and the one we give ourselves to.

Paul had a burden for the saints in Philippi. He knew

that they loved the Lord, and that they loved him. He was saying to them, "Dear saints, as those growing in the Lord and bearing His testimony, let me tell you how to grow so that you can organically participate fully in being incorporated with this Christ! The first thing is to beware of certain ones, because their teaching can cause you to unconsciously become separated from Christ, even while Christ is your goal!"

Such teachers do not come with anything obviously evil, but instead they come with an open Bible. Everything they say is according to the Bible, yet the focus is not Christ, so as you listen you are taken away from the living person of Christ Himself. This is such a serious matter!

PRACTICES AND TEACHINGS MUST NOT  
REPLACE CHRIST

No teaching or practice should

bring us to that teaching or practice itself. All our teaching and practice must bring us to Christ. The goal of everything that happens in the church life should be that we are being brought to Christ! If this is the case, we may know the situation is healthy. On the contrary, when the focus becomes something other than Christ Himself, we become sectarian. More than two

Isn't it much easier to say "I was impressed with what brother so-and-so said yesterday" than "I was impressed with what Jesus said yesterday"? Yet the Lord's desire is that we would know Him!

hundred and fifty years ago, a group of believers took as their guide the phrase "In essentials—unity; in non-essentials—liberty; and in all things—love." This is why these believers, who came to be called Moravians, were able to prevail for so long. Regarding the non-essential things, things not a part of the common faith, we should allow saints to follow the Lord. Religious teachers, however, make non-essential things seem essential, and demand unity on these things. Christ and His work alone are what must be considered essential. We should never allow anything such as a practice or a teaching to become an issue that would take away the love from among us. When no one is competing to have their teaching accepted in such non-essential things, we can be in love, because then we can be focused on Christ alone.

○ PIONEERS: BEWARE OF ANYTHING THAT WOULD DEFRAUD YOU!

Paul's warning about dogs may be one of the most difficult for us to heed, because Christ is in the heavens, and even though He is within us, many saints do not know what it is to follow the Lord. If you were to tell them to follow the Lord or to be one with the Lord, they may not know what you mean. To really gain the Lord and be gained by Him was Paul's goal for

the saints, and the first thing that had to be dealt with was any "crutch" they might have besides Christ. Some such "crutches" are very beautiful, even outstanding. But no "crutch" should be allowed to replace Christ and His economy in our lives. Therefore Paul warned the believers, "As you begin pioneering into this realm of incorporation with Christ, the first thing I must warn you about is that some will come to you as teachers and try to take you away from Christ. Our goal, however, is to be brought into oneness with Him!"

Today we must also take heed in this matter. What was true then is still true today! Many know how to speak the right language, but they do not know how to follow Christ! Even among us, how many are qualified to say, "I am where I am and I am doing what I am doing because the Lord has led me this way!" Religion easily becomes our cover-up. This is why it is so difficult for the Lord to have the preeminence among us. Isn't it much

easier to say we are impressed by what a certain brother said, rather than coming to Jesus for what He is saying? Yet it is the Lord's desire that we would know Him! Paul's goal for the saints was that they would live a life of incorporation with Christ. Our goal is to possess Him not only in life and nature, but also in person!

#### THE STRUGGLE THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

This has been the struggle throughout church history. In two thousand years of history, nearly no group or individual has been able to overcome religion. This is what Paul was confronting. Paul's struggle was with the Judaizers; those who "came from James" (Gal. 2:12). The Judaizers were very powerful "dogs". They could testify how James was with Jesus for thirty years before Jesus began to preach (even though he was never appointed by Jesus as one of His apostles—in man's concept, however, there has to be an inheritor).

Did they not have the Scriptures? They did. Yet through their teaching they brought people away from Christ. How did they do this? By adding in what was nonessential to what was essential. They would say, "Yes, we need Christ, but we also need the Sabbath. Jesus is the Lord, but you also need to be circumcised." Christ became of little or no effect to those who received such teachings and practices (cf. Gal. 5:2-4). Remember this: any practice that you can carry out automatically apart from Christ can be considered as concision, dividing you from Christ. One of Satan's strategies is to offer us teachings and practices as a substi-

tute for seeking and following the present Christ.

#### ARE WE ABLE TO SAY: "THE LORD HAS LED ME"?

Brothers, we must strive to follow the living Christ. If we are asked why we do a certain thing, we should be able to answer, "Because the Lord has told me" or "As we were before the Lord, He led us." It is better to be "wrong" due to the fact we are trying to follow the Lord than it is to be "right" without Him, for He is able to teach us out of our mistakes to know Him more. This is the way to healthiness!

Remember, Paul begins this chapter with "Rejoice!" which is the normal manifestation of a healthy Christian life. Then, he says, "Now, let me tell you how to arrive at the goal for which we have set ourselves—to gain Christ to the uttermost! The first thing you must watch out for are those whose work and teachings bring you away from purely trusting and following Jesus Himself." Paul had seen what had happened to other churches he had raised up. After the "dogs" arrived, the saints became occupied with what they should eat, when it was permissible to meet, what should be practiced, and so on. Those churches became churches in religion, rather than churches bearing the testimony of Christ in joyfulness. In every local church, the realization should be, "We must have Christ as a living person in our midst." So, brothers, we must learn to avoid religion and follow Christ!

-Titus Chu

# FOURTEEN WARNING SIGNS OF BEING IN RELIGION

*This message was given in conjunction with the messages on Philippians 3:1-2. While many of these things, such as teachings, persistence, and virtue, are necessary for our Christian exercise, they cannot themselves be allowed to replace Christ!*

What follows are fourteen points by which we may know whether we are in religion or not. Remember, religion is with all of us. These points will be exposing, but may also help us flee from religion back to Christ!

## **1. People in religion have teachings, but are devoid of the revealed Christ.**

Teachings are good and necessary, but if they are devoid of the revealed Christ, they are something of religion. If there is no revelation of Christ accompanying a teaching, that teaching is just something for itself. The entire Bible was given to reveal Christ. The whole Bible portrays Christ. All of God's work consummates in Christ. Christ is even the end of the Law. Therefore, even a teaching of law should lead you neither to the teaching itself or the teacher, but to Christ.

We have many kinds of study and we teach much. Some of our teaching produces a religion of church history, a religion surrounding the riches among us, and even a religion of how to operate in the church life. What determines whether these things are of religion or not? It is both the speaker and the listeners. If a teacher has as

his aim the teaching itself, that is religion, and if the listeners have as their aim the receiving of a teaching, that is also religion. If, however, the ministering one reveals something of Christ through his teaching, that is something very healthy! Furthermore, if those who listen receive Christ through the sharing instead of just some points, you know also that is not religion. Our teaching must bring the saints beyond the teaching itself; our teaching must bring the saints into further revelations of Christ.

Therefore, no one should say that we have too much teaching, for if a teaching is able to bring us to Christ, how valuable that is!

## **2. People in religion have ideology, but are devoid of Christ as God's testimony.**

We should fear ideology the most, yet we cannot seem to avoid it. Ideology is something you are for or against, like being for a team in competitive sports. People said, "How could the Messiah be from Nazareth?" That caused them to totally miss God's economy.

If you find someone who loves

Witness Lee's teaching, do you love that brother because of shared ideology, or because you are both equally members of the Body?

The center of the universe is the earth, the center of the earth is man, and man is meant for Christ. Christ is supposed to be the center of all, but ideology draws people off from Christ as the center to something else. Some are drawn off to become a Baptist after finding Christ, and others are drawn off to become a Presbyterian, etc. The form of belief they hold to (whatever is extraneous to the common faith) becomes their ideology. For some reason, we feel a need to lay hold on to ideology. It is just like rooting for whatever nearby team there is...something in people just needs to do it. Does that team's success or failure do anything for them personally? No, but many even become violent over sports. Christians are reborn to faith in Christ, yet they end up fighting over so many other things.

Ideology is characterized by exclusiveness. If one wins, another loses, but those in ideology have no feeling for the "losers". Religion even produces levels of acceptability--a Plymouth Brethren is better than a Baptist who is better than a Lutheran who is better than a Catholic, and so on. Yet might there not be a Catholic brother who experiences more of Christ than you do? Even among us, some feel if someone is from a certain locality, he is from a place of blessing (or lack of it). Don't receive any thought that causes you to be selective or exclusive. Learn to say, "Lord, I love to see the work of Your Spirit!"

### **3. People in religion persist in and**

### **preserve past blessings, but are devoid of growth and advancement.**

Every servant of the Lord needs the Lord's blessing, but every servant of the Lord also needs to be aware that any blessing the Lord gives can become something for you to dwell upon and seek to preserve. Once you see something from the Lord, it is easy to say, "That's it! I have seen it! I have it!" and then seek to preserve and persist in *that* rather than persevering in the Lord Himself. At that moment you lose the living person of Christ and fall into religion.

Many older brothers suffer today because years ago they tasted something so sweet, and now what they see is different. One brother even told me, "If I had known the recovery was going to become like this, I would not have gotten into it in the first place"! I wondered, "Then what do you want the recovery to be?" There is nothing wrong with remembering back to things of the past, but even though we have changed, and others have changed, the Lord has not changed. Perhaps forty years ago I could minister for four hours, but now I only have strength to minister forty minutes. I cannot insist on being able to return to my past ability! Perhaps things were more powerful and sweeter in the past, but we cannot reproduce what was in the past. The age is different, the saints are different, and how the Lord is working is also different. The Lord never changes, but His manner of operation does. We should not seek to reproduce what is now history. We should only seek that what the Lord is currently doing might grow and advance.

#### **4. People in religion have a form of godliness, but are devoid of its power.**

Godliness is something that is taken as evidence of God. We can live a godly life, for we have Christ within us as life! Godliness is the expression of this divine life in our human living. Yet if I ignore Christ within me, I may still possess something of its outward form. If my godliness is something apart from the power and operation of Christ, it is but something of religion.

#### **5. People in religion pursue, but are devoid of union with Christ.**

As those who love the Lord, we love to study the Bible. We may even be asked to present something on a topic, and find that this is quite engaging and enjoyable. However, we should remember that any study of the Bible apart from Christ is also something of religion. When coming to His word, we must join ourselves to Christ. We are one spirit with the Lord! In my pursuing after truth, the Lord must be the backing, the process, and the goal. Through my pursuing, I must gain Christ, and even be found in Him.

#### **6. People in religion possess virtue, but are devoid of mingling with Christ.**

I know a person who some consider to be a holy man. He is a believer, has a clear mind, is willing to help others, and honors the principles of the Bible in his decision-making. I would still ask, however: Are these vir-

tues something of Christ? Such virtues may be of Christ, or they may be religious.

Many do their best to be on time for the meetings, to function, and to do what they are told by the elders. They are "good saints." Yet much of this is religion, for it is not something that comes out of having been mingled with Christ. Do not say, however, "Then I will drop such virtues." Just realize that such virtues are not necessarily something of Christ, and should not deceive us so that we miss Christ.

#### **7. People in religion can testify of a blessed past, but are devoid of the present Christ.**

What matters is not how prevailing you were yesterday, but how you are now. How do you know you are not religious? When you are fresh with the Lord.

Brother Lee once told us, "If I were to pray for just five minutes, I do not know how I would handle myself." I was young, and surprised by this. I thought surely Brother Lee prayed for more than five minutes at a time! I asked an older brother about this, and he answered, "I rarely have seen Brother Lee pray for more than five minutes, but I have also rarely seen Brother Lee go for more than five minutes without prayer!" That is to practice to have the present Christ. No matter how marvelous the Lord was to you a minute ago...at *this* moment you must have Christ!

#### **8. People in religion labor diligently, but are devoid of the operation of Christ.**

Sometimes I hear a brother wonder why he preaches the gospel so much, yet no one gets saved, or why he visits the saints to no effect. I am sure many have wondered why, after giving their testimony, there is little in the way of an “amen”! On the one hand, you are still in the process of learning, but on the other hand, you should know that unless the Lord is operating, our operation doesn’t mean much.

Some saints labor, and even though there is no effect, they are still joyful, for they realize the result is not up to them, but up to the Lord. Two brothers may return after laboring in the gospel: one depressed, and the other joyful. One claims that nothing has happened, and is disappointed. The other says, “All I know is that the Lord’s presence was real, and He is operating. Everything else is up to Him!” You are not always the one to see the fruit of your labor in the Lord.

A brother once came to me after I had drifted from the Lord while in high school. He was an old soldier, and we certainly had little in common! Most young people at that time looked down on such people. Yet I could not forget his visit. He simply came to seek out a boy named Titus Chu. When I told him that I was the one he was looking for, he at first didn’t know quite what to do. Eventually he just asked if I would come to a meeting. For some reason, I said, “Maybe.” Then he left. But I could not forget him. There was something of the Lord in his visit, and because of that brother’s operation, I returned to the church life.

Often when we visit others, we are looking for results. We want to see

some effect from our labor. But we should not go to others in this way. Instead, we should simply go to others in the operation of God.

### **9. People in religion have religious practices, but are devoid of the living Christ.**

One person may practice what he calls “morning revival.” Another may call what he practices “morning watch.” However, the one who called it revival may not be revived at all, while the one who called it a watch may be quite revived. It should be evident that terms don’t mean that much. What counts is whether the living Christ is involved. If the living Christ is there, that thing is healthy. If the living Christ is absent, however, that thing is religious. Therefore, the entire church may be practicing morning revival, and yet be quite dead. Here is another example. One brother may give a three-minute prophecy with the living Christ, and another may give a three-minute prophecy with a lot of preparation but no Christ. Which prophecy builds up the church?

Without Christ, everything you do as a Christian becomes religion. Do not say, however, “If this is the case, it is better to do nothing”! If you do nothing, you are dead, having neither Christ nor religion. Simply learn to have a healthy exercise with Christ!

### **10. People in religion have spiritual operations, but are devoid of the Lord’s leading.**

Today what many young brothers are most short of in the church life is the leading of Christ. They are opera-

tive, but either in total obedience to the elders, or with their own program. Whichever the case may be, you must constantly have the Lord's leading in all matters.

For instance, I have encouraged those serving the young people in Cleveland to invite the young people from the neighboring churches to come together with them on Saturday nights for singing and so on. Eventually, I told the brothers that if we did this, many older saints might be revived as well, and perhaps many of the churches around Cleveland would become energized. I did not, however, command the brothers to do it. I know some brothers sometimes feel frustrated and wish I would just make a clear decision for them. But if I were to do this, I would be getting in the way of their seeking of the Lord's leading. The brothers should come together to pray to see how the Lord would lead them.

How many brothers who are manifest among us know how to follow the Lord's leading in the matters of their life? When a young saint graduates from college, is there any possibility that the Lord is able to lead them in what they should do? Most just seem to send out their applications and move to where they will receive the best pay and benefits. It is the same with buying a house, and so on. Apart from the Lord's leading, our operation becomes something of religion.

### **11. People in religion have spiritual activities, but are devoid of the dispensing of Christ.**

What is the difference between practice, operation, and activity? Prac-

tice is related to our daily life, operation has to do with what our exercise towards the other saints, and activity in the way it is used here has more to do with practical service.

In the church life, there is the need of many practical arrangements. Chairs have to be arranged, meeting halls have to be cleaned and maintained, and so on. Yet if we do even these things without experiencing the dispensing of Christ, these things also become something of religion.

As we carry out these matters, we should be receiving the dispensing of Christ! As we labor in such things, we should enjoy the Lord. Sing hymns as you clean the restroom. Call on the Lord as you arrange chairs! These things should not be taken as mere activities. If they are done with the Lord, even the most mundane task becomes something of great value.

### **12. People in religion are involved in movements, devoid of the work of Christ.**

At times some are able to work together with the Spirit, and something very prevailing is produced out of the Lord's move. The Lord's blessing is upon it. For some reason, however, even after the Lord is no longer present, a movement can continue on under its own power. When a movement continues on apart from the Lord, it becomes something of religion.

When the Lord does a major work, those who work with the Lord should struggle to enhance that move of the Lord. What often happens, however, is that instead of watching to see how the Lord is moving onward, those laboring focus on the pattern that the

Lord's move has already produced.

If you were to go to Wales today, you would find little evidence that one of the greatest revivals took place there eighty years ago. Why is this? The laboring ones apparently did not have the ability to focus on how Christ was working. Instead, they became focused on the movement itself.

In the 1970's, the "Jesus movement" was taking place in America. At that time, many young people came to Christ. It wasn't unusual to visit a high school and discover that a majority of the students had received the Lord. We would go to Cleveland State University to preach the gospel, and most of the time we ended up fellowshipping with other Christians there, because three out of four people you met had already been saved! Eventually, however, the majority of those who were saved at that time fell into dormancy, for few knew how to labor with the Lord as He was moving.

When so many are coming to the Lord, the real labor is to bring them on further, to love the Lord, to grow in life, to become equipped in truth, and to function as members in the Lord's Body. Because so few knew how to labor with the Lord and to stand with Him in what He was doing, the Jesus movement did not bear the effect it should have.

Our problem is that we often seek to be where the action is, rather than abiding in the Lord and **His** move. Since arriving in the United States, I have witnessed many movements even among the local churches. There has been the movement to consolidate, the movement to migrate, the movement to the suburbs, the move-

ment to the campuses...and every good brother wants to be in the center of the action. I don't believe any other Christian group has experienced as many movements as we have, simply because the churches are full of activists! What is a movement? A movement is "Let's do this! Let's do that!" And if you are not careful, you will compete to see who will be at the center of the movement. If that is the case, you become divisive.

### **13. People in religion have a godly behavior, but are devoid of the empowering of Christ.**

When I was a young boy, we tried to copy the way the elders walked and held their Bibles, and so on. It was hard as a young boy to walk that slow and look that serious! We all need to live godly lives, but the source must be God Himself. We shouldn't merely emulate some kind of behavior; we need so much the Lord's presence as our inward supply.

### **14. People in religion possess piety, yet are devoid of the person of Christ.**

When I first came to the US, I visited an Amish community. There is something to be said for having no TV, no radio, no worldly effects, and to live a simple life trying to honor God in all things. However, I would still ask, even with such a life-style, where is Christ? Without Christ, all is vanity.

Brother Lee possessed what might be called true piety, but he never impressed you with his piety; he impressed you with the person of Christ.

**Except for #2, we need the above items! May we be impressed that Christ Himself must be our goal and our way.**

# Obedient to the Revelation

*“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.”*  
(Act 26:19)

The Apostle Paul told King Agrippa that he *“was not disobedient to the heavenly vision”* (Acts 26:19) while on trial due to the false accusations of his believing Jewish brothers. These were the ones who had followed Paul wherever he went so that they could discredit him, and bring those whom he had raised up under their own influence (Gal 2:4). They twisted his gospel, accusing him of encouraging people to sin that grace might abound

(Rom 3:8; 6:1, 15). They accused him of speaking *“against the [Jewish] people and the law and this place [the temple in Jerusalem]”* (Acts 21:28).

In his defense, Paul recounted to the king the details of his conversion on the road to Damascus. On that day and the days that followed, Paul received a heavenly vision that demanded his obedience, even at the risk of his life. Even though the Jews followed him and seemingly stirred up whole cities against him, Paul was compelled to withstand their opposition and remain faithful to his original vi-



sion.

Consider what pressure was upon Paul to compromise his message. He was seemingly the only one who had received the vision that caused him to declare, “circumcision is nothing” (1 Cor 7:19). Against him were men in the church of great reputation, who “were reputed to be pillars” (Gal 2:9). When “some came from James” (Gal 2:12), even the great Apostle Peter surrendered.

### James’ Vision

We have no record that James ever received a vision from God. But he was the Lord’s younger brother, and knew

had many interesting stories to tell about the Lord from these early years, and could quote many things He had said. His vision was an “earthly vision” of a law-keeping Jewish Jesus whom he knew according to the flesh.

James was notably absent during his brother’s ministry. He never heard the Lord’s teaching or saw His works. When rumors of Jesus’ “bizarre behavior” reached him and the rest of the family, “they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, He is beside Himself” (Mark 3:21). He must have been mystified indeed when Jesus publicly disowned him as his brother in favor of “whoever does the will of God” (Mark 3:31-35).



### Paul’s Vision

Paul, on the other hand, never knew the Lord according to the flesh. The Lord he met on the way to Damascus was already in resurrection. He was the heavenly Christ, and so the vision He gave Paul was heavenly. Perhaps it was because Paul saw how James

Him very well in his youth. He no doubt watched as his older brother Jesus kept the law perfectly as a young man. The divine record tells us almost nothing of the Lord’s youth other than that he “grew and became strong, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him. And His parents went year by year to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover” (Luke 2:40-41). Until the day of his introduction by John the Baptist, the Lord kept the law perfectly. James surely

had risen to prominence in the church through his earthly vision that he wrote, “So then we, from now on, know no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him so no longer” (2 Cor 5:16).

Thus the book of Acts is a history of a clash between two visions, one earthly and one heavenly. The majority of believers (thousands according to Acts 21:20) were on the side of



James with his earthly vision. James had seemingly subdued Peter and John, two prominent early apostles in the church in Jerusalem. The many law-keeping zealots who followed Paul wherever he went forced him into many hardships. His reputation was maligned and his message was twisted.

Paul's own words show the additional environmental frustration to his labor: *"Ministers of Christ are they? I speak as being beside myself, I more so! In labors more abundantly, in imprisonments more abundantly, in stripes excessively, in deaths often. Under the hands of the Jews five times I received forty stripes less one; Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep; In journeys often, in dangers of rivers, in dangers of robbers, in dangers from my race, in dangers from the Gentiles, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers in the sea, in dangers among false brothers; In labor and hardship; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often; in cold and nakedness—Apart from the things which have not been mentioned, there is this:*

*the crowd of cares pressing upon me daily, the anxious concern for all the churches."* (2 Cor 11:23-28)

How tempting it must have been to give up. Let James have the day. Everything would have been simpler then. But Paul's vision demanded obedience. He had no choice but to continue. Against all odds, Paul could testify even while in chains that he was "not disobedient to the heavenly vision."

### **Our Vision**

Our own vision must be the same. If it can be given up easily, it is not a heavenly vision. Brother Lee once said that even if everyone forsook the way of the local church, he would continue, because he had no choice. We must feel the same. When we meet the Lord, we will not be able to defend ourselves by saying that the majority went another direction. We will not be able to point to some "James" and blame him. The Lord will ask us how faithful we have been to the vision He has shown us. Vision demands obedience.

- Dave Shields