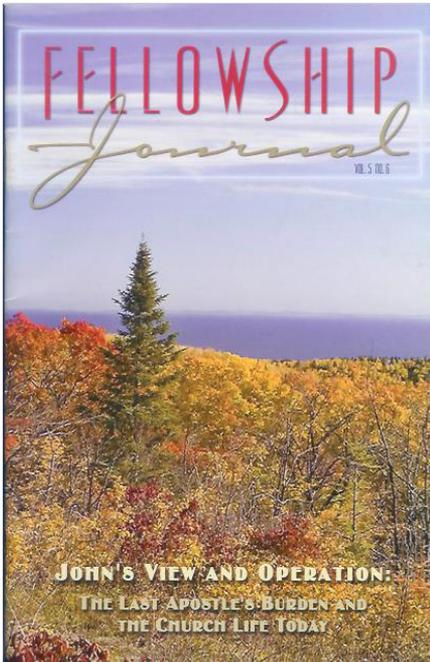


# FELLOWSHIP *Journal*

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For the Churches  
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*Announcing*  
*A Training to be Held*  
*on the Second Book of Psalms*

*(Psalms 42 - 72)*

*January 1 - 6, 2007*

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*in your locality for further information.*

*(Intended location: Ashland Woods.)*

## Apology

The use of certain photos in the previous issue may have struck some as being too whimsical and unfitting for the subject matter. This was not the intention, but if the photos detracted in any way from the message, I as the editor wish to apologize for my lack of judgment.

There were also two factual errors in the article on Moses that should be corrected. **These are not errors made by the speaker**, but by me as I condensed the material for the sake of the Journal. For these errors, I must apologize as well. They are as follows:

On page 10, the number of the Israelites the midwives are said to be serving is six hundred thousand. This is the number for the total number of men, not the total number of people. It is often reckoned that such a number would be closer to two million.

Also on page 10, Moses' mother is said to have constructed the basket for the baby Moses to lie in. According to the biblical text, she merely obtained the basket; it does not say she actually made the basket herself.

The corrected version of this article is available at [www.clevelandonline.org](http://www.clevelandonline.org). (In many cases, the messages found online have received more polishing and correction than those found in the initial printed edition.)

The majority of typographical errors found in the Fellowship Journal are often the result of the many last-minute adjustments and changes made just before I send the electronic file to be printed. The solution, therefore, is not more proofing of articles beforehand by others, but that another person would be responsible to send it to print after he or she has gone once more through the entire "finished" issue. The very capable person who suggested this has also volunteered his services, so hopefully fewer errors will be present in future issues than what has thus far characterized the Fellowship Journal since I have been involved as its editor.

John Berglund

# The Apostle John's Concluding Ministry for The Church Life Then and Now

## Message One

### JOHN'S WRITINGS APPLY TO US TODAY

Our situation today shares much in common with what was being experienced among the churches to which John wrote. The apostle John witnessed and participated in the first six or seven decades of the church life. The church life in our day has been practiced for about eighty years since its beginnings in China, and here in the United States the recovered church life has existed now for nearly fifty years. What John saw by the time he decided to write was similar to what we are seeing today. What is it that we see today that John also witnessed? It is that the saints have lost their happiness.

### OUR JOY NEEDS TO BE MADE FULL

When we first saw what the Lord was doing in His recovery, we were very excited about it. After thirty years now for many of us, we are still charged by it. After sixty years, however, how many in the church life will still truly be joyful about it? John wrote to a group of churches in just such a situation as we are in today, declaring, "These things

we write to you **that our joy may be made full**"! (1 Jn 1:4) His word to them included himself and the other servants of the Lord. When the saints became joyful, he was also joyful, and since he was already joyful, their partaking of the joy he was experiencing would also make his joy full!

After writing his first Epistle, it seems he was not fully satisfied, so he further wrote in Second John, "I am hoping to be with you and to speak face to face, that I may be able to fellowship with you, **that our joy may be made full**" (v. 12). His remedy and concern was that all the churches should experience a happy church life. This was not the situation at the time. Instead, the churches were frustrated by so many things that were going on. There was indoctrination from what had become the administrative center, where James had been, while at the same time there was something so high from the ministry of apostle Paul. Thus you have two extremes: one with high and divine revelation, such that Paul could even declare that he had completed the Word of God, and the other teaching the saints, "That is not good enough; you also have to keep the Sabbath and other matters". (Besides

simply believing in Jesus, the Judaizers insisted on additional things as being necessary beyond the common faith originally delivered to them by the apostles.) In attempting to accommodate both lines, the saints became disheartened and unhappy.

In such a situation John wrote, "I want to fellowship with you so that you might experience fullness of joy"! The churches at this point should have been somewhat mature in the Lord, but instead of happiness, what marked them was unhappiness. When I visit the churches, I often see saints who are in the same state. What has happened? Don't we tell people that when they receive Jesus, their life will become filled with reality and that they will be happy? Yet often we do not want to bring anyone to a church meeting, because there is no joy in the church life for people to see!

Therefore, as we come to John's writings, we should realize what we experience today was also the experience of the churches in his day two thousand years ago, namely, that the saints were not happy. Therefore John wrote, "I want to fellowship with you, so that our joy might be made full" and "I want to have face to face fellowship with you, so our joy might be made full". In his last Epistle, Third John, he once more stressed his desire to have face to face fellowship (v. 14), because he realized that, besides writing, this was necessary to bring in the joy.

Happiness is a crucial matter for a local church. If you visit a local church and all the saints are joyful, you know there is something very real being experienced there, regardless how prevail-

ing it seems or how small is their number. In the local church life, there should be happiness and joyfulness before the Lord!

In his third Epistle, John wrote that the brother had come and reported as to the saints' steadfastness in the truth. This caused the apostle to be joyful, for he had no greater joy than to hear that his children were walking in the truth (vv.3-4). Whenever we make issues, our happiness disappears, but whenever we are walking in the truth, we are happy, and our joy is made full! Therefore when he finished his third Epistle, John was satisfied.

#### JOHN'S QUALIFICATION: HIS EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH LIFE

In all of history, you cannot find another person who had more experiences with the Lord than John. First of all, John was Jesus' cousin (see Matt. 27:56; Mark 16:1; and John 19:25). Jesus might have even been present when John was learning to walk! When Jesus practiced carpentry, perhaps John assisted Him from time to time by helping Him in His shop. His relationship was more than merely a spiritual one. After Jesus began His ministry, John certainly realized something further about Jesus. He saw that his Cousin was not a human being of the usual sort! In fact, John came to the realization that Jesus was the anointed Messiah, the Promised One of God! Thus he became one of the Lord's twelve disciples, in spite of his comparative youth. In fact, John was seen as a particular apostle among the twelve. It was concerning him that Peter asked

Jesus the marked question, “What about this man?” (John 21:21). Jesus’ answer was, in effect, “None of your business. You just follow Me!” (How much we need to heed this word of the Lord today!)

John was also the only one of the twelve disciples who followed the Lord all the way to the place of the Lord’s crucifixion. He seems to have been the most affectionate apostle towards the Lord, having loved the Lord since he was a child. After one of their own had betrayed the Lord and the other ten had fled, it was given only to John to be witness to the Lord’s blood and water flowing down at the cross (John 19:33-35). (Not even the Lord’s brothers were present, but only a few women—including Mary His mother and Mary Magdalene—who were with this disciple “whom the Lord loved”—13:23; 19:25; 20:2; 21:7, 20.) Even in the midst of His sufferings on the cross, Jesus made it a point to entrust the care of His mother to John (not His capable brother James!) and instructed Mary to care for him as her son (John 19:26). Mary must have then been closely involved with John the rest of her life. (In this, Jesus apparently trusted John more than He trusted His brother James, whom He also never saw fit to appoint as one of His apostles.)

John was the first of the Lord’s disciples to arrive at Jesus’ empty tomb (John 20:4). Later that day, he, along with the other disciples, met the Lord and received from Him the Holy “Breath” (John 20:22). For the next forty days, he and the others experienced Christ in His new form (John 21) until they witnessed His ascension from the

Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9). Ten days after this, he participated in the great events of Pentecost (Acts 2). When the church in Jerusalem came into existence, he was one of its leaders. Thus, he was involved in the beginning of the formation of Christ’s Body on earth! He and Peter must have often looked at each other and wondered, “How is it that we simple fishermen from Galilee became involved in such things?”

Therefore John could say, “I knew Jesus before He began His ministry; I was with Him during His earthly ministry; and I still know Him today in His heavenly ministry in resurrection! My entire life has been a life of knowing Jesus in all three stages!”

In addition, after the first great gospel events in Acts, through which many thousands were saved and added to the church, John also became familiar with a very messy church life. Everyone was going around eating from house to house. Those who had food were giving it up, and those who didn’t have food were taking it rather than finding work to support themselves. Such a thing could not go on forever. More importantly, however, John saw the tragic degradation that took place as the Law wormed its way into the church life. The church in Jerusalem soon came under the control of James, Jesus’ half-brother, whose party insisted upon such things as circumcision and Jewish regulations. If you wanted to be considered a good brother, certain things had to be observed. Laws and rituals were promoted in the name of being a healthy and proper follower of the Lord. Thus, John certainly witnessed both the rise and fall

of the church life in Jerusalem, and what caused them both.

As James ascended to the church leadership, the original apostles seem to have been pushed aside. Peter had been the leading one of the twelve. His being pushed out of the lead had its impact on him. In the beginning, for example, he was not at all surprised to be released by an angel from prison, for he was the apostle of Christ (Acts 5:17-32)! The second time it happened, however, was after he had been replaced by James in the leadership. This time he couldn't quite believe an angel had really been sent for him—he thought it a vision—and instead of going boldly to preach the gospel as he did before, he quietly departed from Jerusalem after telling someone to inform James (Acts 12:7-9, 17). After being purged, he seems to have become another person. Were it not for his Epistles, we would have no idea whether he recovered or not.

In fact, as the first group of apostles faded, two other lines arose. In addition to James, the apostle Paul also had begun operating, releasing his profound and high revelation. How prevailing and rich was his ministry! Those associated with Jerusalem and James sought to follow Paul from city to city to destroy the work the Spirit was accomplishing through him. John was fully aware of these two lines, and how something had come in to shift the focus from Christ alone to something else. John surely was also aware of how Paul struggled to fulfill his ministry, and what had come in to frustrate what the Lord was doing through Paul.

## WRITING AS THE LAST APOSTLE

A few short decades after the church life had begun, James, Paul, and Peter were all martyred, along with the other original apostles. John was the last one left, and he seems to have outlived them by quite a long time. He did not even begin to write until he was around eighty years old. In experience, he was really an “ancient father” when compared to all the other believers alive at that time. How much he had witnessed! Knowing he was the last one who had been committed such from the Lord, he must have considered very carefully about what he should do for the sake of the churches so that a healthy church life could be maintained until the Lord's coming. Looking at the situation, he saw how unhappy the saints were, and how many voices were being raised by those affected by James, and others by Paul. All kinds of practices were being recommended. Everyone thought they were right in what they did, and that the others were wrong. Therefore John wrote to bring everyone into a common and completed joy (1 John 1:4). He did this both in writing to them and by means of his face-to-face fellowship with them (2 John 12) so they all might walk according to the truth (3 John 4), which is what brings in true joy!

### HIS FIRST EPISTLE

THAT WHICH WAS FROM THE  
BEGINNING

In his Epistle, John did not write, “As the venerable apostle, let me tell you that James was totally off and Paul was one hundred percent right. Don't study

James; study Paul!” John did not do so. (James should not be cast aside; he gave us the first Epistle written in the New Testament. He told people to practice the truth, rather than just listen to it. His letter was probably the first circulated among the churches. It was different from Paul’s Epistles in that it was written as a general letter, whereas Paul’s were nearly always written in response to some church because of a particular situation.) The saints were arguing and fighting over what was the right way to go on, and they were bothered. John’s prescription was to tell us that what matters is whether or not we have the reality of Christ. Christ is the medicine that heals everything. Therefore, our Christ must not be a doctrinal Christ or distant Christ, our Christ must be the One that we are able to enjoy at this very moment!

Thus John began by writing, “That which was from the beginning...” (1:1a) The Greek word for beginning is *arche*, which means the origin, the sphere of the source. From such a source there is a continuing effect, or ruling. The United States, for example, has its origin, and its origin still rules, or has its effect, upon this country. The origin produces a ruling. Although many Americans today are in a degraded situation, there is still something godly that remains in effect in this country. If a country’s origin were a bunch of outlaws, that country’s culture would differ from that of the United States because its source would be different.

I am Chinese. That is my origin. I have lived in the United States longer than I have lived anywhere, so I am very American. But regardless, I cannot escape the influence of my country of ori-

gin, no matter what. We should realize that God will forever be in control of the universe, because the universe has its source in God. Christ is the origin and sphere; He is the beginning. Since He is the beginning, everything in the universe is according to Him.

#### CONCERNING THE WORD OF LIFE

John wrote that which is from the beginning is “concerning the word of life”! (1:1b) Christ is the Word of life, or the *logos* of *zoe*. *Logos* is used because the emphasis is on Christ as the means of accomplishing God’s economy. Christ as the Word is God’s economy, and His being the economy is according to His operation as the divine life. There was such an economy from the very beginning. This economy is not in the realm of defining who is right or wrong. It is something in the divine life of God Himself. When this life, who is Christ, operates, it operates not only as teaching, but even more as something that is according to His economy.

So in this first verse John was saying, “You are so unhappy because you have paid attention to so many other things, but you have not paid attention to Christ and His economy. This very anointed One is the *zoe*—the self-existing, ever-existing life! As such a one, He has a marvelous economy that has existed from eternity past. At one point it became manifest, and God said ‘I do what I do according to My economy. My economy must become something very real to those who love Me and follow Me. I must make very sure they have the Word, the economy, of the divine life.’ From the outset of his Epistle, John

writes that his remedy for our unhappiness is to see that we have a Savior, and that this Savior is the very *zoe*, the very eternal divine life, and this very divine life has its *logos*, its economy, and this very Christ, this very God of the life of economy, is very available for us to enjoy. Do you have the right focus, or are you focused on other things? If we have the right focus, it makes the apostle so happy, and causes us to be so happy together with him!

THAT WHICH WE HAVE HEARD, WHICH OUR  
EYES HAVE SEEN, WHICH WE BEHELD, AND OUR  
HANDS HAVE HANDLED

Instead of being able to say they had such a Christ, many might have only been able to say they had the writings of James, of Peter, of Paul, or of Jude. In addition, there were many other letters going around at that time, and a lot of debate about what writings were to be followed. John said, "I am also going to write you something, but remember, what I write is not meant to be another letter. I do not want to just write something to be added to the pile. You have enough letters already. My writing is very simple. I want you to realize you have a living person who is the divine and eternal life, and this divine and eternal person of life has an economy, and this person with His economy is not far from us! I have heard Him, seen Him with my eyes, beheld Him, and have even handled Him with my hands!" (cf. 1:1) John claims he has practically experienced this mysterious person of life in four particular ways. Isn't that marvelous?

To have "heard" Christ is to have

received Him in the gospel. To "behold" Him is to gaze with purpose upon Him with intimate attention. When a young man "hears" of a sister and is attracted to her as someone he wants to be his life-long companion, he does his utmost to spend time with her to "behold" her! The more he beholds her, the more wonderful she becomes to him, to the point he can say he knows her so well, and even will live in such oneness with her. John says, "Dear brothers and sisters, would you please come out from your laws and what ought to be done or not done. Please come out of that and focus on Christ. You have heard Christ already and you have seen Christ. Now, will you behold Christ? Can you look at Him and focus on Him with your full attention? Behold His beauty, His excellency, His might, His reigning, His resurrection, and His ascension. Behold Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords. You will then be able to say, 'Lord I want my whole life to be for You and You alone.'" How marvelous this is! Then one day you will be able to say, "I have a precious Lord. I heard of Him, I saw Him and I have been beholding Him. Now day by day I handle Him." If you are such a person, you will not care about who is right or who is wrong. You will simply be able to declare, "I have a precious Lord Jesus! I heard Him. I have seen Him. I am beholding Him! Now, in my life, I am even handling Him!"

Many years ago I heard one brother say of another, "This brother has grown to the point that God is in his hand." I was surprised, because I knew God has us in His hand, but this brother said God was in that brother's hand. It did not mean that this brother controlled God,

but rather that he knew so much what God was after, and therefore he knew how to live with God in complete cooperation with Him. This is what it means to handle Christ.

In so many local churches the brothers try so hard, but John from the beginning says, "Don't try that hard. Don't you know that you have the Word of life?" When he was younger, a certain brother was quite capable and earnest, but not that spiritual. Today, I have a sense that God is "in his hand". When you know how to handle God, no one can mislead you or cheat you, because you so clearly know God. John's answer to the saints' unhappiness was to tell them, "You have the very Christ who is the Logos of zoe, the Word of life, the economy of the divine, eternal life!" Outwardly, it is a divine operation, and inwardly, it is the divine life as the substance of this operation.

THE LIFE WAS MANIFESTED, AND WE HAVE SEEN  
AND TESTIFY AND REPORT TO YOU

John went on to write, "And this life was manifested and we have seen and testify and report to you" (1:2a). He doesn't use the word "handled" here, but instead the word "seen". I like this, because no one can pass on the experience of handling something to someone else, but I can describe what I have seen. If I were to tell a young brother about a sister, I might be able to say many things, but eventually he must behold her for himself. So John said, "I have had so much experience of Christ, but I can only report to you what I see so that YOU might behold Him and YOU might handle Him."

Can we all come out of all the issues, such as what material should be used in the church life, etc., and simply focus on Christ and consecrate ourselves to Him? What should occupy us in the church life should be the divine life and the economy of this zoe life.

John wrote that this life, this zoe, was manifested, made known. This implies shining and revealing. When you initially meet a person, you have no impression other than a general one, perhaps such as "this is a nice older Chinese man" or "this is a pleasant young lady," because there is no opportunity as of yet for that person to be fully manifested to you. The testimony becomes known as the person is revealed. Christ should be glorious to us, and appreciated in all His attainments and qualities. The more I as a person make myself known to you, the more I am manifested to you. John told us that the very zoe of God opened up to be seen and appreciated by us. What a marvelous Savior has been seen and testified and reported to us!

To testify is to witness out of your personal experience of something. John does not write of a teaching or a doctrine, but of a Christ he has experienced. In John's Epistles there are nothing but realities; there are no teachings. There are only testimonies of John's personal experiences. He knew God subjectively. He could say this life was with the Father and was manifested to them. Witness Lee wrote that the word "with" does not merely mean alongside, but also living and acting in union and communion with. It is normal for wives and husbands to fight, but it is more normal for them to come together again. This

“with” is a serious “with”. It is living and acting in union with! When we pursue the same thing, our heart is joined with one purpose, one motive, one desire and one action. Let that thing we pursue be this Christ that John testified!

THE ETERNAL LIFE WHICH WAS WITH THE  
FATHER AND WAS MANIFESTED TO US

John says that this life that was manifested was the eternal life which was with the Father. In other words, everything that Christ accomplished in this economy was in total oneness with God the Father. Everything God desired Christ accomplished, and nothing Christ sought to do was outside of God’s desire.

THAT WHICH WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD WE  
REPORT ALSO TO YOU THAT YOU ALSO MAY  
HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH US, AND INDEED  
OUR FELLOWSHIP IS WITH THE FATHER AND  
WITH HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST. AND THESE  
THINGS WE WRITE TO YOU THAT YOUR JOY  
MAY BE MADE FULL.

John wrote, “That which we have seen and heard we report also to you that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1:3). The saints were unhappy, as are many today. There were (and are) so many headaches! Seeing all this unhappiness, John said “If you can just fellowship with me, you would become so happy, because I am so happy! If you have fellowship with us, you will find our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son. As we abide in this fellowship, we are joyful. My desire is to bring my

fellowship with the Father and the Son to you, so we could all be in this fellowship with the Father and Son together!”

Fellowship means “close mutual relationship.” When I talk about a brother, it should be that I know him so well in his heart and labor, as he also knows me. This is fellowship. It involves a close mutual relationship. In other words, if we are in fellowship, you are in my labor and I am in yours. All the local churches are very nervous today, trying to protect their people. All the local churches have to learn to be so related and involved with one another, to the point that what others have becomes yours, and what is yours becomes theirs. When a certain brother becomes manifested, the others who are leading and laboring should learn from him. The brothers among the churches may be manifested in different ways, but when they fellowship together, whatever one has the others should receive, until what each has becomes the mutual possession for all the local churches to enjoy!

John said that eventually in this mutual fellowship we should find that we are all together, the churches and the workers, with the Father and the Son. What a mysterious Body of Christ is exhibited and manifested through **fellowship** for the Lord’s testimony.

May we all tell the Lord, “We desire our joy to be made full! Our desire is to simply focus on Christ and His economy! Lord, may we enter into such fellowship and may Your testimony be fully exhibited so that You might be totally satisfied!”

- Titus Chu

# The Apostle John's Concluding Ministry for The Church Life Then and Now

## Message Two

John must have been surprised when his Cousin Jesus one day dropped everything and began preaching the gospel! He was eventually called and became one of Jesus' closest disciples, and followed Him even to the cross. There at the cross Jesus even committed His mother to John's care, and according to tradition, she followed John to Ephesus, where she lived until her death. The fact that Jesus spoke such a thing from the cross about this matter is not a small thing, for Mary had very capable sons, particularly James. Jesus was surely also aware of how the churches were going to suffer due to His brother James' peculiar disposition. James was too legal, and had many stories he could tell about Jesus growing up. Jesus realized James would come in and have his effect upon the new church life. Jesus' word to John on the cross to care for His mother should have helped John realize something about James as well.

John also witnessed the Lord's resurrection, and afterwards he and the other disciples experienced Christ during that period of forty days until He ascended before them. Then John experienced the events of Pentecost, the

great beginning of the church life. The expression of the Body of Christ was realized in Jerusalem! By this time, John must have felt his life had been so rich. How many miracles and great matters he had witnessed and participated in! I believe he was simply happy to have followed Jesus, and when the church life began, he was just as happy to let Peter lead. He was a particular apostle among the twelve, but he was willing to merely stand up together with the others. He experienced many marvelous things in the church life's beginning, and just as suddenly he saw the church life change.

After its wonderful beginning, the freedom of the Spirit disappeared and the church fell into legalism through the influence of James, the Lord's brother. James could tell others how he grew up with Jesus, and how Jesus kept the Law, including the Sabbath, the feasts, and the dietary regulations. As James rose in authority, Peter and the other apostles certainly lost their place in the church life there. (Even if James were directly responsible for such things, we should still appreciate him as a godly servant of the Lord. According to tradition, his

knees were as callused as a camel's from all the time he spent in prayer!)

Eventually, however, Paul and Peter were martyred, as well as James. All the churches were doing their best to follow the Lord, and many writings were being copied and circulated among them. Even today in some places things are copied by hand and passed around in such a way, for in those particular writings the saints feel they are particularly blessed or have found "the flow"! Thus the situation among the churches was somewhat chaotic and messy. What results from such a state of affairs? The saints lose their initial joyfulness. In the early days, they were excited and expecting the Lord's return, because everything seemed so prevailing. Eventually, however, they were disagreeing over who would be the ones to bring the Lord back: those who followed Paul, who completed the Word of God, or those who followed Jerusalem, who were keeping the feasts and fulfilling the law. There must have been all kinds of disagreements. The older saints, who had been in the early church life, must have found it very discouraging. They could talk about the great events of years past, but when looking at their present situation, perhaps they could only weep. Therefore, what characterized the church life must have been an absence of the joy they had first experienced.

### JOY PROVES ABIDING

This was the situation in which the apostle John wrote his Revelation, his Epistles, and his Gospel. His burden wasn't to give the churches additional teachings or to add to the out-

lines and messages that were already circulating. His burden was to see the saints be made joyful! He was not concerned about developing a prevailing work...he only wanted to see the saints full of joy. (It is significant that the words for "joy" (*chara*) and "grace" (*charis*) are closely related.) John began to realize that the secret of a prevailing Christian life is joyfulness. He did not merely want to make the saints happy, for happiness can come and go, but his intention was to cause their joy to be made full. Joy is something intrinsic. Young people seek things that make them happy, but what they should seek is what brings joyfulness! It is the Lord's desire to make our joy full! I am able to labor as I do because I have the element of joy within me! If it were not so, I would have been finished a long time ago. Since I enjoy the grace of God, however, I am joyful. Our joyfulness proves we are abiding in the Lord's presence and that the Lord's grace to us is sufficient even in the midst of our weaknesses and trials.

### JOHN'S MINISTRY KEPT BY THE LORD FOR THIS PURPOSE

Thus, the Lord raised up John with his ministry as the solution to all the problems. The solution was not to take a certain stand or to teach or practice a certain thing; the solution was to realize that we must be people who are filled with the divine element so that we become joyful! This is an intrinsic matter. Are you bothered or frustrated? Perhaps. But if you are in the grace, you are in the joyfulness! John did not directly seek to address the issues they faced. To do so would have only made a complicated

situation more complicated. The apostle Peter and Paul's writings were outstanding. Jude had also written something, which we should also appreciate. (For instance, in v. 3 he wrote that the faith we have has been "once delivered"...meaning there is no more left to be delivered, which should keep us from the error of such groups as the Mormons.) I believe there were many of the Lord's servant who had written things by the time John felt to write. Some of these writings might have been outstanding as literature, and even profound. John said, "Dear brothers and sisters, let me write to you in this way: I will only write that of which I have the reality of. I have heard Him, I have seen Him, and I have beheld Him. I have even handled Him. He is the Word of life that was from the beginning. Such a One is more than real to all of us. To follow the Lord is a marvelous thing, because then you are able to abide in reality! You do not need to be taught or carried about by teachings. You are able to say, 'I can hear Christ; I can see Christ; I can behold Christ, and handle Christ'." Those who practice in this way, find that this Christ is the very God in His economy. Therefore they know Christ as the Word of life, just as John portrayed Him.

#### **CHRIST'S OPERATION OF LIFE TO CARRY OUT GOD'S ECONOMY**

If I were to take a survey of Christians and ask for their description of Christ, many would say He is a Savior, a miracle worker, a marvelous gift-giver, and so on. John would not disagree with any of this, but he would stress that

Christ's operation is something in life! Therefore, His operation is something of strength, development, growth and manifestation. Furthermore, the life that is of Christ is divine and eternal, and possesses such traits as omniscience! It is not merely an earthly life. This very life is the life for an economy, and it is the source and base to carry out this divine economy.

Thus, from the outset John tells us very simply that this life is far superior to anything we might try to perform to please Him. This One is life and the Word of life. If you touch Him or even just hear Him, you will be saved! If you see Him, you will give your life to Him. And, if you behold or handle Him, you will say, "My goodness, what a human life this divine person has prepared for me! My life is so different from those who live earthly lives; my life is one with the very God who is carrying out His economy!"

John realized that the way for the saints to be happy was simple. It was not to be concerned about who was in the flow, or who would be qualified to be an overcomer, and so on. (Actually, wherever you go you will be surprised to see how many overcomers you will see. They may not use our terminology, but they love Jesus, and they have given themselves to Him and grow in Him. They even have their operation, so you have to realize how great God is in carrying out His economy.)

#### **CHRIST'S OPERATION IN HIS ECONOMY BEING THE SOURCE**

John writes of this economy in the first chapter of his Gospel. If you really

are a person who has experienced Christ to the point you have begun to really behold Him and handle Him, you will want to know more about this economy in detail! Both his Epistle and his Gospel speak of Christ being the Word from the beginning. The beginning here indicates that which is the origin and source that determines the outcome. This source is a ruling source. Often Christians want to obtain an outcome that is not of the source! They decided on the right source when they came to Christ, and confessed their need and admitted they were only qualified to go to hell. They received Christ as their Savior! Then they quickly left Christ as their source when they asked, "What can I do to make Christ happy?" Jesus would say to them, "You just told me you are good for nothing and only qualified to go to hell. How is it that you now think you are able to do something for Me? What can you do for Me? Nothing! Why have you departed from Me as your source in this way?" Your whole Christian life is according to the principle of the day of your salvation. If you were saved by grace, your entire life should be ruled by grace. If you were saved in mercy, your entire life should be by God's mercy. Tonight, as we sang the song, "Nothing's quite so precious as Jesus in my spirit," we were touched because we were brought back to the Source. What marks this song is not its high theology, but its ability to remind you of the day you were saved. On that day, you said, "Jesus, You are so precious!" You realized it was nothing you could do, but His mercy was just upon you. Our good performances can only mess

up His economy; He is the One who is from the beginning. Christ, as the Origin and Source, is the One who must govern and rule in our life. I have been saved for fifty-three years. What is it that I can claim? That I still confess my sins, and that I still pray that the Lord would have mercy upon me, and on the church, for He alone is the Source, the Beginning.

In the first chapter of his Gospel, John says "In the beginning was the Word," instead of "that which was from the beginning... concerning the Word of life" (1 John 1:1). He does this because in his Gospel he is going to explain how life was expressed in the operation of God's economy. In his Gospel, John begins by saying "In the beginning there was a God of economy, and the element of this economy of God is Christ." Without Christ, God has no economy. Therefore, when we see Christ, we should realize He is the Word, the operation of God's economy. Christ in us as the Spirit operates mightily, and carries us in God's economy! Christ within us operates in us that we might experience God accomplishing His economy through us. When we were regenerated, the Spirit entered, and the Spirit began to operate. It will operate in us until this very Word as the Spirit will constitute our entire being for the divine economy!

#### THE WORD BEING WITH GOD AND BEING GOD

In 1 John 1:1, he said the Word was the Word of life. In John 1:1, we are told this Word, this life, was with God and was God! "With" here does not mean merely adjacent to or alongside.

It means the two are inter-related. Since Christ and the Father are together and inter-related as one, Christ is God. He is God the Son.

Christ was in the beginning with God. There was never a time God has not been a God of economy, therefore there has never been a time Christ was not in the beginning with God. He was in the beginning with God, carrying out His economy.

#### **ALL THINGS CAME INTO BEING THROUGH CHRIST AS THE WORD**

It was through such a One that all things have come into being (John 1:3)! If we are someone who is for God's economy, we should realize how glorious that is, for then all things have come into being for us! How can we ever be unhappy? How can we ever consider our situation to be poor? How we need to see that the Christ who is with God and who is God for God's economy is the One who causes all things to come into being for this economy! Do not think that your university is something that simply exists. No! The reason it exists is you, if you are a person for God's economy! Apart from you, that university has no value. If you saw this, you would even tell the person you buy an ice cream cone from, "Do you know why there is an ice cream store here? Because of me! Otherwise your ice cream store would be of no value on this earth! Your store has value because it served a servant of the Lord!" All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him, not one thing came into being that has come into being. Without Christ, there would

be nothing but a void. Apart from Christ, nothing has come into being, and if anything has been allowed to come into being, it is only because of His economy!

We should be able to see that the Boeing 747 that carries a person operating for God's economy, and even Boeing itself, exists for those of us who are in God's economy. How high we have become! We were once merely common sinners, but now we are those who are part of God's operation on the earth, for we have the Word operating for God's economy in us! In our life, we are standing with this God who is operating for His economy. John tells us that **all things** have come into being through this Christ who does all for the carrying out of God's economy. How can we be less than joyful?

#### **IN CHRIST AS THE WORD WAS LIFE, AND IT WAS THE LIGHT OF MEN**

Furthermore, in this Word who produces all that exists, was life, and the life was the light of men (John 1:4). We need to realize that when Christ as the operative, vital, growing life is manifested, it becomes light. In Him was life, but when this life is touched by us, it becomes light. The experience of this light is not one primarily of exposure, but of guiding. This light operates as a beacon. It grants you focus. It brings you to your life's meaning. This *zoe* life is the light of man. Anything that comes through Christ, who is God, and the Word, which is life, produces light; and this light enables you to have further experiences of life. Isn't this marvelous?

## CHRIST AS THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND TABERNACLED AMONG US

Still, there is more! All of this has to do with Christ as the Word who was in eternity. Mankind, however, fell away from God. Therefore, the Word had to take another step: it had to become flesh. In verse 14, we are told the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. The Word became flesh in both essence and likeness. He did not merely appear to become flesh...He truly became flesh. And, in appearance, He was just as any other man. He had no special appearance. The only difference between His being flesh and our being flesh was that He had no sin.

One day this marvelous One who was in eternity as the means and operation of God's economy became flesh and tabernacled among us! Outwardly He appeared just as a man, but inwardly He contained all the divine reality. This is the picture of the tabernacle. In the tabernacle in the Old Testament, which the Israelites constructed in the wilderness, there was an Outer Court, and a sanctuary with a Holy Place and the innermost Holy of Holies, where God Himself dwelt among His people at that time. The Outer Court could be said to represent Christ's body, the Holy Place, His soul, and the Holy of Holies, His divine Being. On the exterior, men saw another man. They had no idea of what was actually there on the interior!

I hope the young people among us would treasure Christ as the tabernacle, that is, those who have Christ. Do you appreciate a shallow popular figure, such as some singer, just as the other worldly young people do? Or do you

appreciate Jesus and those who have Jesus within them? If all the young people could say, "I don't care about what appears attractive outwardly; I only care about Jesus," that would be wonderful! I have been accused of allowing the young people to use rock music. I was with a group of young people recently, and there I really did help them sing. Somehow the song changed tune by the fourth verse, because we were just enjoying it, and didn't have any instruments at all. The more we sang, the more they became joyful. Every meeting the number increased, because we were really enjoying the Lord. People, however, like to hear the evil report rather than the good.

The Lord came to dwell among men as such a marvelous tabernacle. Within Him was all the reality that was prefigured in the tabernacle with all of its furnishings. With Him was the ark of testimony. With Him was the showbread table and the lampstand and the two altars. With Him was the laver. With Him were even all the offerings. He was a person living among the Israelites in total oneness with the God of Israel. If you were to touch Christ as He dwelt among men in the flesh, you would be touching God Himself!

### JOHN'S TESTIMONY: HE BEHELD GOD MANIFESTED FROM CHRIST AS GLORY

John could say, "We beheld His glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father..." (John 1:14). Glory is God manifested. Sometimes, when you touch God as you are gathered with the saints, God just comes out, and you cannot help but shout, "GLORY!"

From this tabernacling One, glory could be seen, for God was manifested in His only Begotten, full of grace and reality. Within Him were contained all the riches of the very Triune God. Since that was what He experienced, that was what came out of Him, and since that was His experience, this is what can come out of us! Why? Because such a One is now in us! When we touched Him, we did not die; we began to enjoy the presence of God! In the presence of this One there is justification, sanctification, transformation, conformation, and glorification! You are brought step by step all the way from the Outer Court, with its initial offerings for sin and its cleansing, all the way into the Holy of Holies, with its Ark of Testimony. How could we not be happy if we are in such a process? But we are not happy because we are touching so many other things. Saints, touch Him, for when we do, our joy is made full!

**JOHN'S TESTIMONY: CHRIST WAS FULL OF  
GRACE AND TRUTH**

The Lord being full of grace and reality (or truth) indicates that in Him, what was on the inside and what was exhibited in His living through His humanity completely matched. There was no hypocrisy. There was nothing that was not genuine. He did not have to try to be something He was not. He was the real deal. "Truth" here simply means correspondence. Yet how often we say to one another, "Praise the Lord!" and yet we have no joy of the Lord within. At such a

time, our living is not full of truth or reality. When we are enjoying the Lord and loving Him, however, and say, "Praise the Lord!" then what we say and what we experience match. They are in complete correspondence. Then what others see is reality!

**EVEN IN INCARNATION, JESUS REMAINED  
IN THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER**

It seems the Bible makes a mistake when it says "No one has ever seen God, but the only begotten, who IS in the bosom of the Father..." (John 1:18). To our understanding, shouldn't it say Jesus WAS in the bosom of the Father? Yet after His incarnation, He was STILL in the bosom of the Father. Hallelujah! Jesus, even though He was in the flesh and on the earth, was still living in the presence of God. He never departed. Therefore, if we who live on the earth as God's children desire to be happy, what should WE do? Dwell in the Father's bosom! Jesus did it, and so can we. God was a mystery until Jesus declared Him. Jesus Christ is the explanation of God. We should be so joyful, for just as the Lord never departed from the Father, we should never depart from Him (cf. John 6:57). How good such an existence is!

**JESUS, THE LAMB OF GOD, TAKING AWAY  
THE SIN OF THE WORLD**

In verse 29 of John 1, Jesus is called by John the Baptist (another cousin of Jesus!) the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". Some may

raise a couple of questions here. First of all, why would John the Baptist refer to Jesus merely as a small lamb? Wasn't a lamb a poor man's offering? Shouldn't He have been called something more fitting? The secret to happiness, however, is not to be something big, but something real. Jesus was happy to receive the title Lamb of God, and as the Lamb He would take away the sin of the world. The second matter is more bothersome: If my sin has been taken away by Jesus, why do I still experience sin in my life? How is it that we can experience having our sin taken away? How? It is by being joined to Christ. Do not think that you will simply grow less sinful as you age or mature. The secret is to realize that the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is here for you to abide and hide yourself in. You must become fully one with Him! If you are trying to be a good Christian while living a life independent of Him, surely you will discover sin is still present. But when you are with Him, your sin is taken away! When you are learning to abide in Him, there will be times His arms around you will seem unbearable, and you will sneak off and sin again. Afterwards, however, you realize your situation and ask the Lord's forgiveness. Then, just return to abide in Him again. He is the Lamb of God who takes away sin.

**THE HEAVENS OPENED AND ANGELS  
ASCENDING AND DESCENDING ON CHRIST  
AS THE SON OF MAN**

Besides this, the Lord is also the Savior by means of His life, as the

Word. Remember, all of this has to do with Christ being the Word! It has to do with His operation in His economy, which is an operation in life. Eventually at the end of the first chapter, we are told by Jesus that we shall see the heavens opened, and angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. This is a reference to Jacob's dream in Genesis 28. In the beginning of this chapter, John revealed that Christ was the Word in the beginning with God and as God. Now we see the earth and the heavens joined in Christ. Humanity and divinity are joined in Him. All the operations of God in His economy are carried out through Him. Eventually, there is no more separation between heaven and earth or God and man, because through Christ, God accomplishes His purpose. The moment we received Jesus as our Savior, we ascended to the heavens and began to have a heavenly existence. We are no longer merely experiencing an earthly existence; we are now one with God in the heavenlies. The more we experience this, the more we also descend, to bring others into this process. So John, in the first chapter of His Gospel, portrays Christ in eternity past being God's economy, and Christ in time being made flesh so He might die for us and resurrect, thus becoming the heavenly ladder that we might be brought to the heavenlies where we experience both being joined to Christ and engaging with those on the earth to declare this operating economy of God!

- *Titus Chu*

# The Apostle John's Concluding Ministry for The Church Life Then and Now

## Message Three

Many of the saints among us, when they first came into the church life, felt assured of a glorious future. It was the same at John's time. What these saints found was that after so many years, instead of being glorious, things had become complicated, because there were many writings and many declaring who they should follow. I believe that, overall, the churches had lost their morale. John was there as a discerning physician to diagnose the situation and prescribe the remedy. He was the final apostle whom the Lord left among the churches. His realization was that he did not need to prescribe more teachings, for everyone already had plenty of those. Neither did he feel regulation would be of any help, because that would only be a repeat of what James had done. What John did was simply point the saints to Christ and His economy, because when we live for Christ and His economy, our joy is made full!

How wonderful it is that there

is a book that has as its goal making our joy full! Paul instructed the Philippians to rejoice, but the prefix "re-" indicates some effort on our part is involved, because the first "-joyce" has stopped. Rejoicing and having joy are two different matters. Rejoicing is a matter of something stirring me up, but being joyful is a matter of my person. Rather than telling the saints to be happy, John says, "You already have the reality of joy, because you do have Christ, you do have the Word of life which was from the beginning, and this very Word with its life element within you is God Himself!" This Word, this Christ, accomplishes everything that is in God's heart, and He does so within us. He not only tabernacled among us, He even became the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world and now He is operating within us! Should we not be happy? What is it that we have to do? Oh, saints! Simply join yourselves to this Christ! Abide in Him! Lean on Him! Give yourself to Him! Take Him as your

life supply and your blessing! Allow Christ Himself to be your source of joy!

**THE MEANS OF GOD'S OPERATION:  
THE SPIRIT WITH OUR SPIRIT**

GOD IS SPIRIT,  
GOD IS LOVE,  
GOD IS LIGHT

John explains in John 4:24 how it is possible that we can know this God who is life. How? It is as Spirit. We have a spirit (Zech. 12:1, 1 Thes. 5:23, etc.) and God is Spirit. (In the Greek, there is no predicate...it is merely God—Spirit.) The reality, operation, and essence of the Spirit is one hundred percent God's reality, operation and essence. There is only one reality of Spirit, and that is God Himself. Then, with this very God who is Spirit, there is love, and there is light. Other portions tell us that God has many attributes and that Jesus has many virtues, etc. But the Bible explains God with just three appositional phrases, all given by John: God is Spirit (John 4:24); God is light (1 John 1:5); and God is love (1 John 4:8).

Thus, when we have God as Spirit, we have love and we have light. Therefore, how we need to be in spirit! When you have the reality of the Spirit, you will realize that God is light and God is love, and you will have the reality of light and love. In John 4:24,

John goes on to say that those who worship God must do so in spirit and reality, or truthfulness. To worship means to be healthy and properly related to God. Therefore, to worship you must be in Spirit and truthfulness.

**A PROBLEM: WE DO NOT CONTINUE  
IN THE WAY WE BEGAN**

Although each one of us begins our Christian life with the Spirit, most Christians tend not to continue on their Christian life with the Spirit. This is strange, but when we consider the matter of eating, we see the same pattern. We begin our human life very focused on nourishment. How important is a mother's milk to a baby! After we grow for awhile, however, our focus is drawn to other things, and eating becomes no longer of such primary importance. In fact, many people develop very unhealthy eating habits, either eating too much of the wrong thing, or not eating enough of anything. God gives the infant the instinct to eat! We are born with that. But as we develop, we become obsessed with how to serve and how to develop, and on strange things that promise growth (like fad dietary supplements). In this way we lose the source of our joyfulness, which is totally of the Spirit. You don't need to analyze so much; just be in your spirit! Because of this, John gives us an entire line that explains about God being Spirit.

## ...BORN OF SPIRIT IS SPIRIT

In John 3:6, John wrote further, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit..." Our birth by the flesh made us a part of the old creation, and our birth by the Spirit made us a part of the new creation! Now there is a new creation within the old creation. We do not live in the old creation any longer, we live in the new creation. He who is born of Spirit is spirit! You were born of the Spirit. Every genuine Christian is. Therefore you are in the new creation, and the basic essence of the new creation is Spirit! If you desire to live in the new creation and have the new creation as your reality, then be in your spirit! This is the way to glorify the Lord and this is the way to be joyful.

### THE SPIRIT THAT IS GIVEN WITHOUT MEASURE

John continued in verse 34 by saying that this Spirit whom God has sent speaks the word (rhema) of God, for He gives the Spirit not by measure. Wherever you go on the globe, there is one thing that you enjoy freely without measure, and that is air. Sometimes there is a problem with pollutants in the air, but the air itself is, for all practical purposes, unlimited. The "pollution" to our enjoyment of the Spirit comes from religion, and so on. Therefore, we should stay away from religion and all of the

hindering teachings. What you should hear should be of the Spirit, without any polluting element. Can we be so simple to enjoy the "pneuma" that the Lord provides us without measure? (In Greek, the word for both 'spirit' and 'air' is *pneuma*.) It is given to us freely, which is a good thing, because if we had to pay even just a fraction of a penny each time we needed air, we would all soon be bankrupt! Praise the Lord, it doesn't matter what condition you are in or how much you desire it, every time you come to the Lord and breathe His name, the Spirit becomes your supply and enjoyment. I am so thankful there is a verse that tells us that the Lord gives us the Spirit without measure!

Have you done something that offends God? What will you do? Hold your breath for two days because you are afraid to come to Him? You cannot do that! Even if you go to the movie theater, or are doing something so improper, you still breathe in air, don't you? With the Spirit it must be the same. The Spirit is given without measure to you just as the air is. Therefore, keep breathing, no matter what! "O Lord! Lord Jesus!" Eventually, the movie will be gone, and you will have Jesus! He gives us the Spirit free of charge. The Spirit is ALWAYS available for you to take in and enjoy, even at this moment. How good this is!

When I see some of the local churches, I can tell they have become

somewhat old. The saints come late to the meetings, which means you may be embarrassed to come on time if you are bringing a new one. Just come in anyway, and enjoy the Spirit! Just begin to praise the Lord and pray, telling the Lord that you love Him. The Spirit is freely available to us, regardless of the situation.

#### THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE

In John 6:63, John tells us that it is the Spirit that gives life. Whenever you touch the Spirit, the reality of life comes in. Every time you touch your spirit, it is not happiness or feelings that you are touching, but the divine element of God, which is becoming your constitution. It is the Spirit that is giving us life! The flesh is of no profit, and receives none. Most Christians, however, still try to do things to make God happy by means other than the Spirit. In the Christian life, we must do everything in Spirit!

#### THE SPIRIT CONTAINS RESURRECTION POWER

In John 7:38-39, John spoke yet further of the Spirit, telling us, "As the Scripture said, Out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water...but this He spoke of the Spirit, for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified." The Holy Spirit was present at that time, but Jesus had not yet passed through the process of His

death and resurrection, which was His glorification. This indicates that the Spirit today includes the element of death and resurrection. O saints! We have a Spirit that gives us both life and resurrection! This is so needful, because it seems that we as Christians are professionals at getting ourselves killed. We find all kinds of things to kill ourselves with, spiritually speaking. I have the habit of reading in bed in order to help me get to sleep. The key for this is to find a book that is neither too boring nor too interesting. One night, however, I had the wrong kind of book—it was too interesting. Therefore I wanted to continue reading even when I sensed it was time to stop. "But Lord," I protested, "It is only another twenty or thirty pages before I find out what happens!" I thus purchased death for myself. But I am so happy that even though we too easily find ourselves in death, we just as easily can be brought into resurrection! How is this possible? Because whenever you touch the Spirit, you touch life and you touch resurrection. All is given without measure, for the Spirit is given so. At any time and in any place, we can touch this Spirit!

- Titus Chu

# The Apostle John's Concluding Ministry for The Church Life Then and Now

## Message Four

John had become a very aged apostle, full of experience, and profound in truth. He saw the situation among the churches and realized that the problem required a particular solution. What was the solution? Simply to make the saints' joy full! What he shared with the saints was profound, yet it was simple. It all was related to Christ. In essence, Christ is life, and in operation, He is God's economy. Hence, He is the Word of life. God's economy is totally focused on Christ. Therefore, our Christian life should be just that simple.

### SO SIMPLE A CHURCH LIFE:

FATHERS

YOUNG MEN

LITTLE CHILDREN

Tonight we sang a very simple song: "Jesus Lord, Jesus Lord, how we long to touch You." That simple song brought us into the enjoyment of the Lord. In the churches, we need to learn to be so simple. Are we able to simplify our church life in such a way? John's word to recover the joy in the church life pointed the saints to some-

thing so simple: in the church life all are children, and among these children there are fathers, young men, and little children. The fathers in the church life should know how to hold on to the One who was from the beginning; the young men should know how to fight; and the children should know how to eat and drink. If you have that...good enough! That is the church life! When John spoke of the church life, he made it so simple. First, however, he began by telling the saints that Christ, their Savior, was life and the Word of life. For this, brothers, I am so thankful. Our Lord is not a high teaching or an advanced theology; our Savior is simply life for us to enjoy. Whenever we enjoy Christ as life, we participate in God's economy, because this life is an operating, purposeful, mighty life that has energy, strength, and God's purpose in view.

### BE SIMPLE: BE IN SPIRIT

In his Gospel, John explains what this Word of life is that he speaks of in his Epistle. He tells us the Word was in the beginning. This life is God

Himself and this life constitutes the inter-relationship of God. The life itself is light, the light itself is the creation, and in this life is the life of incarnation, testifying of God and salvation, the Lamb of God, and the Spirit. In the third chapter, John also says, "Dear ones, don't you realize that the Christian life is overall a matter of Spirit? When you have the Spirit, you have life, for the Spirit gives life. You must realize you have had two births. In your first birth you are born of the flesh, therefore you are flesh. Through your second birth you are born of the Spirit, therefore you are spirit" (3:6). He who is born of the flesh is flesh and he that is born of the Spirit is spirit and this Spirit is given to us without measure, just like the air is given to us to breathe. Regardless of where you are or what your condition is, the Spirit is always available to you for you to partake, enjoy and drink. This is marvelous!

#### OVERCOME BY SEEING HIM

O dear saints, please live a simple life. Don't try too hard. John doesn't even really seem too concerned about the matter of trying to be an overcomer, for he just says that when the Lord comes, we all shall be like Him (1 John 3:2...he does not say only *some* shall be like Him!). John would not deny there is such a thing as overcoming, but he realized that even to get into that would be too complicated. People would begin to say, "I am in this material and therefore I am an overcomer," or "I am in this locality, therefore I am more likely to be

an overcomer," which would just produce more competition among the saints. So he says, as to the Lord's coming, "We don't know exactly what is going to happen but we do know this: when we see Him, we shall be like Him. When we look at Him, we will say, O JESUS IT IS YOU... yet as we look at one another, we shall see we are exactly the same!" Isn't that simple? Isn't it enjoyable to teach concerning the Lord's coming in this way? Could we remain unhappy, having such a hope? Therefore, make your Christian life so simple.

#### ENJOYING RESURRECTION IN THE SPIRIT

In his Gospel, John also indicates that in resurrection Christ became the Spirit to be received by His believers (20:22). Therefore in this Spirit which we receive without measure, we also enjoy resurrection!

Resurrection implies the ability to overcome, to conquer all the limitations, including the greatest limitation of all, which is death. I have heard saints say, "I feel so dead." That is not something we should say. Instead, learn to say, "I was so dead, but there is resurrection in me! Whenever I call on the Lord or say 'O Lord, I love You!' resurrection comes! Resurrection is in my spirit!"

#### THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

In John 14, John continued to tell us about this marvelous Spirit we have received. John 14:17 and 26 speak of the Spirit of reality, or truth. Reality

is what is within you and what you live out, therefore what is within and without correspond. That is reality. We should not have to perform. We often say certain things and perform a certain way so we might be accepted by a certain society. A local church life can be such a society. (This is why I like to see it when a hippie comes to a meeting, because such people usually don't care what others think; they walk into the meeting hall dressed according to who they feel they are! Most among us are conformists.)

What is it to live according to reality? It is to live out the Christ you have within, exactly according to who He is to you. If you enjoy Christ within, then live a happy Christian life! What you have within and how you live should match. That is what the Spirit of reality is producing. The world does not know Christ or behold Him or receive Him, therefore the world does not receive such a reality, but WE know Him. This "know" is *ginosko* (instead of *oida*). In other words, when you apprehend this Christ, you realize there is God, there is incarnation, there is crucifixion, there is resurrection, there is ascension and there is the life-giving Spirit and this is God's economy. It is not just that you hear of Christ, but you really know Him, partake of Him and enjoy Him, for He abides with you and shall be in you!

CHRIST ABIDES IN US TO  
TRANSFORM US

What is the difference between "abide" and "dwell"? "Dwell" gives

you the feeling that something is in and out, while abide gives feeling of staying, and with a purpose. When I abide somewhere I stay, but not in an inert or passive manner, but with a purpose in view. So Christ abides in us, refusing to move away, working towards His goal.

I told the Lord many times when I was young, "Please get out of here, I cannot tolerate anymore!" The good thing is that when I say, "I am through," He says, "I am still here," and He waits until you confess your sin. He abides in you as the Spirit with a view. To dwell means: "This place is for me," while abiding means: "I am with this place." It is not merely to have a mutual abode; it is the source of transformation and sanctification. It becomes the source of your spiritual growth. It refers not only to the union between God and the saved person, but also the means to produce the transformation for our glorification. It's marvelous that the Spirit has come now to abide in us!

I am happy. Do you know who was the naughtiest boy before the Lord? I was. The good thing is that in January 1953, I said, "Lord I receive You!" He came in to abide, and more than to abide, to make me into an abode more and more fitting to Him. Now He is patiently watching over how I grow. He says, "Abide here, this is My residence!" Actually, He cannot move out because I already have an organic union with Him, for that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, so He has no choice! He is imprisoned by this naughty man. However, He is so hopeful! If you asked Him, He

would say, "I have worked with him 53 years already, and still have more time to work." The Lord says, "I will abide with you, I will abide in you and I will watch you grow, develop and mature. I will be so one with you, even though you are so naughty. When you were young you were naughty, and now you are old, you are still naughty. I may not appreciate you the way you are, but I abide in you because I am transforming you!"

Isn't that marvelous? His abiding with you is in the way of an organic union with you, not something dead but something in which He is full of expectation. If I said, "What about that person?" He would say, "I have a lot planned for him and I have a way to develop in him—I abide in him with a purpose."

#### THE SPIRIT REMINDS US

Jesus went on to say in verse 26, "The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and remind you of all the things which I have said to you." The Spirit was sent not only to teach, but also to remind. We tend to be "forgetful professors". Often we forget what the Lord has taught us, yet, praise the Lord, everything He teaches He also reminds us of. He often says, "Haven't I told you already many times?" to which we respond, "Yes, I remember now!" Christians are thus not taught with teaching alone, but also with this very Christ! As long as you are saved, you love to hear the name of Jesus Christ. This is why whenever Christ is men-

tioned, even if it is by someone you dislike, inwardly you just feel joyful. Why? Because the teaching gives you the reality of this very Christ.

#### THE SPIRIT TESTIFIES CONCERNING CHRIST

Now we come to 15:26: "When the Comforter comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of reality, who proceeds from[-with] the Father, He will testify concerning Me." First, the Spirit abides in you; second, He teaches you and thirdly, He testifies concerning the Lord. Do you realize that within you there is a living Spirit who is continuously bearing the testimony of Jesus Christ? Thus anytime you come across a Christian or anytime you come to the Bible or touch something spiritual, there is a witness, a testimony. You are more than willing to pour out the things of Christ to anyone who asks. We should praise the Lord and proclaim, "What a Spirit we have! First, we are begotten of the Spirit, so we are spirit. Then the Spirit gives life, and we are able to take in the Spirit without limit or measure. The Spirit is with resurrection, and this Spirit abides in us, and it even teaches us to testify of Him!"

Often as you are in fellowship with others, there come times when you feel dead and lose interest because the focus has deviated to something that may even be related to Christ, but it is not Christ Himself. I have a marvelous granddaughter. If you tell me my granddaughter's dress is beautiful I would be offended, because my emphasis is on *her!* In the same manner,

our fellowship should be concerning Christ Himself! When we meet someone and find he or she is a Christian, we may spontaneously share what we have been enjoying of the Lord with one another. It seems, however, we often ask, "Which denomination do you go to?" At such a point the testimony is gone. Or, if we are both in the church life, one asks, "What material are you using?" and the Lord's presence disappears. That is shallow calling unto shallow, not deep unto deep. You become colleagues instead of co-heirs of Christ. But when we share something so real of the Lord together, everything is so sweet. Once issues are brought forth, however, the testimony disappears. The Lord desires to see us all simply in our spirit because our spirit testifies concerning Him. "Do you love the Lord? He is so precious!" Out of this life fellowship, there may indeed be testimonies of the Lord's doing. The day I got saved, I was so moved because the burden of sin was removed. These are testimonies concerning Christ. Don't make issues. The Spirit gives life to you along with the element of resurrection for you to partake of and enjoy, and this Spirit testifies concerning Him!

#### CONVICTING THE WORLD CONCERNING SIN, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND JUDGMENT

According to 16:8, when the Comforter comes, He will convict the world concerning sin, concerning righteousness and concerning judgment. This is precious. The Spirit does not care for minor things. The Spirit asks, "Where is your existence?" If you

dwell in yourself, then what you know is sin. If you dwell in Christ, then you experience righteousness. If you live a life according to Satan, you are under God's judgment. So in the whole universe there are only these three crucial parties: The fallen man, Christ and the believers, and Satan and his followers. The Spirit comes and makes your life clear. There is nothing I can say, for I am just a sinner. With Christ I have righteousness, for He is the righteous one and committed the righteous act. I have nothing to do with Satan, for he will be judged. The Spirit leads you to have a proper understanding of your existence, and to live according to the desire of God.

#### GUIDING US INTO ALL REALITY

John 16:13 also tells us that when the Spirit of reality comes, He will guide us into all reality. This is the conclusion. The Spirit is the Begetter, the Savior, the Supplier, the Provider and eventually the One responsible to guide you into all reality. This word for "guide" means to lead the way. As the Lord leads, He will guide. How does the Spirit guide? He walks in front and we follow. Sometimes we cannot follow if He gets too far ahead, so He walks right in front so you might follow in His steps. He is with you in every step you take, and directs and makes certain you reach the goal. Suppose I am a naughty born-again Christian who loves the Lord, and He is leading. As He leads, I am distracted by many things. "Look! That is a university!" "That is a good salary!" "That

is a good job!" But how marvelous is the Spirit's leading! Not only does He say "I am with you," but He is also responsible for our going on. He guides you into all the reality, causing you to come out from all kinds of distractions, forms, rituals, and practices until your life is filled with Christ as your reality.

So eventually in 1 John 4:13 John says, "In this we know that we abide in Him and He in us; that He has given to us of his Spirit". "Of His Spirit" means the Spirit comes to you in such a rich way, as an unlimited source. Therefore, now we have nothing to fear.

#### GOD IS LIGHT

More than this, John also says that, besides being Spirit, God is light. "This is the message which we have heard from him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). God is really a marvelous person; there is nothing opaque with Him. He is not a God who would trick us. He may be humorous, but He will not deceive. In Him there is no darkness at all. In Him there is nothing opaque, nothing unrighteous, nothing defiled, nothing that is not to His heavenly standard, because in Him there is no darkness at all!

When He comes as light, He not only enlightens the situation, but also manifests Himself in a very clear way. As He manifests himself, He becomes so lovely, He becomes so attractive, so intimate, so close to you, and, more than that, He becomes so holy and

righteous. You have to appreciate this. God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. How good it is that we can trust ourselves to Him, for He will never lie to us. Everyone else lies. Everything else on this globe is in darkness. Lies come from the White House, and those who report on it lie also, for they are selective in their reporting. God is light. Once He appears He is a shining person. When He is present, you can see the righteousness, the holiness, the purity, and all the righteous attributes. With Him there is no darkness at all. Are you able to give yourself to Him and tell Him, "Thank you, with You there is no darkness. If You have led me one step, You are responsible for one step. If You led me a second step, it may have been difficult, but You gave me that step as well. I would rather trust You than a job or a company. Everything else has darkness." I am happy that at age seventeen I gave myself to the Lord, and to me He could say "I am light and in Me is no darkness at all. Everything I obtained, attained and accomplished WILL be your reality."

#### FELLOWSHIP: A JOINT VENTURE

If we say we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and are not practicing the truth (1 John 1:6). Fellowship is a matter of inter-relatedness, like a joint venture. You both share the profit. God will gain something because you are faithful, and you will gain so much of God because God is faithful. In this joint venture You and God are so together in

everything.

If we say we have fellowship (are joined to Him) and walk in darkness (i.e., look for a job when He is leading you not to) that is no good. Yet if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another. If I was the writer of the Bible, I would have written, “we have fellowship with Him, and then realize we are so poor, weak, disqualified, terrible, and cry out for mercy, for only mercy can save us!” Sometimes in hotels they have a mirror that magnifies your face so all your pores and blemishes are magnified. Is this how we know we are in fellowship with the Lord? No! How then do you know when it is you are in the light? If whenever you see a brother you are happy, you know you are in the light. Doesn't this make the Christian life so simple? What John stresses is this: When God is here, fellowship is here; not only with God, but also with one another.

#### IN THE LIGHT, WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP AND THE BLOOD OF JESUS CLEANSSES

The saints are all very different from one another. According to their dispositions, they would rarely choose to be companions with those God has placed them with. But the funny thing is that regardless of your age, your disposition, your race, etc. ...when we are in the light all the saints become lovely. Sometimes brothers have really attacked me. For the truth's sake I have to stand, but I really love them. Do you know what is light? When you are in light, everyone becomes so lovely. How do you know the Spirit

and life is here? Because you love one another. Because life is here, you have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from every sin (1 John 1:7).

This isn't a testimony about sin, but in principle it is the same. This afternoon I was so tired, so I asked the brothers to place a chair on the platform. As I went to the meeting, my shoes felt like they were ten pounds each. But as we sang together, “Jesus Lord, Jesus Lord...” all of a sudden my burden of tiredness was lifted, and I felt fine. My mind was clear. I became energized. Thus the Bible says, the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin. Frequently when we return from work, after having listened to so much defiling talk, we feel grungy and exhausted. After we go to gather with a few saints and begin to pray, we just find we are cleansed. We didn't even tell the brothers, “I confess I need cleansing”. We just find there is a circulation of life. To be cleansed means something has been erased, removed away. As we meet with the saints, so many frustrating things are removed and cleansed away.

#### TWO REMEDIES FOR SIN'S DEFILEMENT

John goes on to say that if we say we do not have sin (meaning the sin-nature) we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, the Lord is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (vv. 8-9). So there are two remedies for sin's defilement, and the first is just

to be with some saints! Are you depressed? Be with brothers! You feel sin is a burden, then get with some brothers. But if you are in a city all by yourself, just confess your sins! The Spirit is unlimited, just like air is unlimited. So if you are watching a movie, pray and ask the Lord to cleanse you from all your sin. You should even confess in the midst of doing something unclean. Right there tell the Lord, "I am unhealthy, have mercy on me." If you confess, He will be faithful and righteous to forgive. "Faithful" means He will do it, and "righteous" means He has no choice but to do it. He is legally bound to do it.

#### THE TEST OF LOVE

How do you know you are truly in the light? According to 1 John 2:10, he who loves his brother abides in light. In other words, when light comes, love is produced. What you see is light, and what comes out of you is love. Here it doesn't mention repentance. This tells us that if we feel we are defeated, we just need to go to spend time with some brothers! Go to a meeting! Go to fellowship! But if you don't have anybody, then go to the Lord. Ask Him to forgive, for He has no choice but to forgive. And when you really have the light, you will love your brother. Therefore he who loves his brother abides in light and there is no cause of stumbling in him.

Suppose a son came home smoking. Would his father disown him? If so, the father is not healthy. There is

no reason to stumble. If that boy came smoking to me, I might react with indignation and thus be stumbled by that. But if it is your own son or daughter, there is no cause for stumbling. If you really love someone, there is no reason to be stumbled. One brother doesn't move his feet as he conducts the singing. If I criticize him and appreciate another brother who does a more lively job, then stumbling comes in. There is nothing wrong with that brother not moving his feet. When love is absent, however, there is always something wrong. That one becomes too picky, that one is too independent, that one is not clear minded, that one is too clear minded, and so on. How practical John's word is! The way to practice the church life is to love others. When you love them, there is no reason for anyone to be your problem. If they are your problem, it is because you do not have enough love for them. (The only situation where you must exercise judgment would be when both the individual and the others need to be cared for. For instance, the father has the right to tell one son, you must change or else all the others will be damaged by you. That is also because of love.) He who loves the brothers abides in the light and there is no cause of stumbling in him!

#### CHRIST'S COMMITMENT TO US IN LOVE

Now let us read First John 4:16-18: "We know and have believed the love which God has in us. God is love

and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. In this has love been perfected with us, that we may have boldness in the day of the judgment, because even as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear because fear has punishment, and he who fears has not been perfected in love." When Christ abides in us, because of His love, He really takes us. When we abide in Him, John stresses we abide in love. You should be happy about it.

When I was young, I was chased out of the house by my father. I waited by the outer gate, because I knew I was abiding in love. My brothers came out at supper and informed me it was time to come in for supper. The secret is to abide in love with no provoking. If I had gone back in and said to my father, "I have come back; what are you going to do about it?" I would have gotten myself into trouble. I just went in and sat on my seat and ate and after awhile went to my room, because I knew I was abiding in love. The one who loves you has the ability to pay a bigger price for you than you are able to pay for him. Whatever the situation, he loves you. Therefore, abide in love and thank Him that He loves you so much and provides all this for you.

#### IN LOVE THERE IS NO FEAR

John tells us that he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. In this, John says, has love been perfected. If you know how to abide in love like this, something is

perfected, or matured, both in quality and quantity. You know both the various riches of the love and the depth and soberness of the love. There is no fear. As you abide in this love and let love mature in you both in quantity (you enjoy so much) and quality (you know this love is eternal, divine and unchanging) you know even in the day of judgment there is no fear. Thus John's conception of overcoming is so simple. We make overcoming a difficult matter. John just says, abide in love and you will be an overcomer. Then he says, there is no fear in love. If you love God, don't be afraid of Him. Do you know He loves you? Therefore cast yourself on His bosom, for He is love and there is no fear in love, for perfect love casts out fear. Fear has punishment in view. You feel, "O Lord, how are You going to deal with me, seeing as I am so sinful?" But God does not want to punish you. God has no intention to punish you. Why are you so afraid? Because you do not know how much God loves you, and how you should love God in return. If you did, you would have no fear of God's punishment.

John then says, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7). Finally, let us read 1 John 5:1, "Everyone who believes Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God and everyone who loves Him who has begotten loves him also who has been begotten of Him. Therefore, if you have been begotten of God and love God, you will love every child of God. - *Titus Chu*

# The Apostle John's Concluding Ministry for The Church Life Then and Now

## Message Five

John was very valuable to the Lord as the apostle He used towards the end of the first century. What he witnessed up until the time of his writing included everything that was going to happen in the church life in the years to come. In other words, what has taken place in the nearly twenty centuries since then has been no different from what was experienced and manifested during the time John was an apostle. I believe this is something of God's arrangement. The Lord realized what was going to happen, and He allowed everything to happen so that every situation might be properly treated and the prescription made available to all. The Lord used the apostle John as one who witnessed both the church's profound growth and its eventual frustration. The wonderful and heady days did not last long! We should not expect that they would for us either, no matter how prevailing a revival may be. In John's time, James quickly came in and replaced everything the Spirit had started in Jerusalem by bringing in the law. Once things in the church life

are regulated by law (such as being told you must do things a certain way to be proper or to be an overcomer) the vitality of the church life will be lost. Yet the number in the church life seems to have increased under James. With such capital, James had many who could travel among all the churches. Their effect was to damage the church life in the churches raised up by the apostles outside of Jerusalem.

Paul wrote his first letter, whether to the Thessalonians or the Galatians, in or around AD 54, only twenty years or so after the Lord's death and resurrection. Paul's salvation took place soon after the church began. After about ten years of being prepared he was ready to go forth and minister. During those nine or so years of ministry before he wrote his first Epistle, he was in trouble, just because he loved the Lord and fought for everyone's focus to be only on Christ. The Christianity of that age, Jerusalem, rose up to accuse him of not being in the flow. Therefore Paul wrote such a strong letter to the Galatians, saying, "I marvel you have

so quickly departed from the revelation you have received. Why do you forsake what God has given to us, which is Christ and Christ alone? Why do you so quickly forsake the reality of the local churches by systematizing the Lord's work?" Paul was very strong to rebuke and warn them. But Paul eventually lost the battle, or so it seemed. It is doubtful the Galatian churches were recovered. Even Ephesus, where Paul had poured himself out for years, took the lead among the churches to forsake Paul. But the good news is that although the churches forsook Paul, the Lord did not forsake the churches!

According to Revelation 1, John was given to see that the Lord still was walking among the churches in Asia, even though they had forsaken Paul. John himself was in this region and saw the matter. I think he met some old brothers who tearfully told him, "Dear brother John, don't you realize how bad things are? When we were raised up by Paul, we were so blessed, but eventually we were swayed by those from Jerusalem. They compelled us to take a stand: it was either them or Paul. You must understand; they were nearby with a big headquarters and with all the power and resources. We felt we had no choice but to forsake Paul. We didn't realize Jerusalem would be destroyed right afterwards, leaving us with nothing to rely on anymore!"

God allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed. Every stone of the temple was torn down to get at the gold that ran between the joints as it melted in the fires. The entire city was leveled. I

believe many in the churches saw this for what it was. The churches in Asia forsook Paul around AD 68 and soon afterwards Jerusalem was destroyed. The Lord allowed them to follow Jerusalem for only a couple of years before the whole thing disappeared. I believe many of the churches had a real repentance, even though the apostle Paul wasn't alive to see it. Is not God marvelous in His sovereignty? God even seemed to say to Paul, "I don't even want you to enjoy your fruit; I want you to only enjoy Me." We have to realize that regardless what man or Satan can do to mess things up, God is still in control.

About ten years later, the apostle John rose up and entered into that situation. He saw how many letters were circulating, some from the old headquarters, some from Paul, and probably even some from people we do not know about anymore. John's way was not to make things more complicated, nor even to validate which writings were of the Spirit and which were not. Perhaps our response would have been to set up a center that evaluated all the writings, determining which were of the Spirit, which were somewhat of the Spirit, which were absolutely not of the Spirit, and so on. If he had done that, wouldn't that have produced one recognized body of teaching? By doing this, it seems he could have unified the church. But he didn't do this. He must have realized that even if he made all the teachings very clear, the result still would not have been what God was after. Why wouldn't such a thing have worked? Why couldn't John merely

have requested all the writings be submitted to him for review and verification? Why? Because everything related to God's work is organic.

#### THE SPIRIT IS GOD, GOD IS SPIRIT

John wrote the book of Revelation while he was exiled to the island of Patmos. Afterwards, he was able to return to Ephesus, where he wrote his Gospel. To him this was still not sufficient, so he also wrote his three Epistles. In his Epistles he stressed the Word of life that was from the beginning. Then he described life. Life is God; life is the operation of God; life is being with God; life is light; life is the positive side of all that has come into being. Then what is God's economy? Incarnation is God's economy; the exhibition and testimony of God is God's economy; His salvation is His economy; the Lamb of God is God's economy. Eventually Christ as the heavenly ladder is God's economy, bringing all the regenerated ones on earth into a heavenly place, then bringing them back down to minister this life. This becomes our life experience, ascending to partake the riches of Christ, and descending to declare God's economy, thus our life becomes so very meaningful. John also wrote that God is Spirit, but even that did not seem to satisfy him, so he continued to write that God is the Spirit and the Spirit is God. When we speak about God, we must remember the Spirit, and when you are in spirit, you must remember God. Enjoying the Spirit is to enjoy God, and the Spirit is the reality of our experience of God.

#### THE CHURCH COMPOSED OF CHILDREN

John tells us that God is light and God is life. When he says God is light, he says not only that He is light, but that in this light we find the church life, and that in such a church life there is love. In between God being light and love, John inserts the church life. John made the church life much more simple than we usually take it. We think we need a hall, elders, serving saints, "pew-warming saints," trainings, and many other things to have the church life. In a way that is right. In the church life there are elders and if you don't respect them, you are just stupid! And there are those who serve and many others who together love Jesus and bear His testimony. But we still think because of this, we need elders' trainings and deacons' trainings and gospel trainings... John's word was this: Let's make the church very practical. First of all, realize that everyone in the church life is just a child (1 John 2:12).

#### IN THE CHURCH ALL THE SAINTS SHARE A LIFE-RELATIONSHIP

When John emphasizes the purpose by the phrase "I write to you" it indicates he really means what he says. In this emphasis he calls them little children, which is a little awkward. The Greek word means "born child," signifying that there is a life relationship. Because of this life relationship, in the sight of your parent, you never grow up; you are always considered a child! Even when I was sixty years old, my father still regarded

me as his boy. You may consider yourself an adult, but did you realize that your parents rarely consider you as an adult, no matter how old you are? They remain concerned for your welfare all your life, for there is this life relationship. You may resent it or find it irritating at times, but you cannot deny it or escape it. When John talked about the church life, the first thing he said was, "Don't you know we all have a life relationship? No one can therefore say 'I am sufficiently mature'". Once you have this view, it becomes very difficult for you to practice the church life in a religious way.

Many practice the church life in the realm of what is right or wrong, or who is qualified to minister, and so on. John says we all are children! In the church life, we should realize we are related to one another organically! We have a life relationship with God and with one another. This is John's first point about the church life.

### **EVERYONE A CHILD MEANS EVERYONE STILL MUST GROW**

John's second point is that we all need more growth. You can never sit down and say one day, "I made it. I have the high revelation." There are high revelations. When Brother Lee unveiled these riches to us, they really were high. Still, you have to realize we are children. We have to grow into such revelation as well as according to it. The Lord's servants gave us such revelation. Now let's grow INTO it. And once we are INTO the reality of the riches, let us grow ACCORDING TO them.

What is the church? It is a constitution of all the children--those who are related to God organically. Since we are organically related to God and the apostle, we all have so much more to learn.

In a few months I will be 71. I have been in good meetings, given prevailing messages, and to a fair degree I have come to know what is in the Bible. If I were not here to fight for the advance of the revelation, my life would be meaningless. I travel so much. About the only place I don't know is Tibet. I have experienced so much, so I should be satisfied, am I right? But if you were to ask me what I still feel I need to live for, I would say, "For more Christ, more divine revelation, more speaking of God's revelation." I live because I want to see more growth for myself and for the Lord's testimony.

### **OVERCOMING AND FORGIVENESS**

What is the church? The church is a group of children. These children are related to God and one another organically, so their attitude is: "We have so much from those ahead of us, yet at the same time we fight so hard for our advancing because God has more to speak to us, more to give to us, and more to bless us with!" This is why when beginning to speak of the church life John says "I write to you my children because your sins have been forgiven because of His name" (1 John 2:12). I would rather he had written, "I write to you my children because you are His testimony; you are His light-bearers. You

shine out to the whole globe because you are the unique entity with divinity mingled with humanity..." Instead, he says, "Hey brothers, don't be so proud. You are forgiven sinners." Isn't that marvelous? Many think, "I have been in the church life for twenty years now; I should be an overcomer!" Yes, you should be an overcomer, but make being an overcomer simple! Those who are overcomers are those who know how to take the blood of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps a manifested brother might have felt John's word here was insulting. If you wrote that to me, I might have replied, "I am a servant of the Lord!" Yet John wrote, "I write to you number one because you have an organic union with Christ and you are organically related to one another. What marks you? Your sins are forgiven for His names' sake." To be forgiven for the sake of the Lord's name means the Lord must take responsibility for our forgiveness. He wants to make sure your sins are forgiven. Oh, what a marvelous church life! Here is a real gentleman. What matters? That his sins are forgiven. Here is a real naughty one. What matters? That his sins are forgiven. How we need to view the church in this way! Every time some people look at the church, they are looking for overcomers. The Lord says, "Do you want to see an overcomer? Here is one. His sins are forgiven." This is a sweet church life. Every time we see one another, we shouldn't have such high expectations. Don't say, "Finally we have ourselves a future apostle." Even if there is such a brother, you are not the one

who produced him. We have to say "I worship you Lord for the church life, for the church life is a group of brothers who are organically one with Christ, are born of Christ, have a life relationship with Christ, and yet at the same time they are common people. Every one is the same as the others, for all can only testify "I am only a sinner saved by grace." The Lord Jesus is responsible to forgive us of all our sins.

### FATHERS, YOUNG MEN, YOUNG CHILDREN

At the same time, the Lord says, "Among you there are three general sorts. Number one, I write to you fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning. Then, I write to you young men because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you young children, little children, because you know the Father" (1 John 2:13). What is the church life? This is the church life. Could you believe it? We make things so complicated, but the church life is simply composed of such persons. The Church life is not unified, but rather composed of those growing in their different stages.

### THE FATHERS: KEEPING THE CHURCH LIFE IN HIM WHO IS FROM THE BEGINNING

Here stands a typical father in the church life. Can he give a message? Is the Lord able to use him greatly? Perhaps not, but he is able to stand against whatever is conflicting with what was from the beginning. He is able to guard the church life against

whatever is in conflict with Christ and His economy. When we think about elders we think everyone has to be filled with leadership qualities. When we are tired, we may think of them as the ones who are behind us pushing. We know, when John talks of elders here, what marks them is that they really know Christ and the economy of Christ. They know Him who is from the beginning. To them, Christ and only Christ is the source, the realm, and the ruler. His economy must dominate the church life. Are they so great? No, the young men are great, but we elders are not that great. But do you think we are so sleepy that someone can bring something in other than Christ? No! We rise up, for we only care for Christ and the economy of Christ! To be an elder means you encourage the saints to grow and develop, but if anyone tries to sell anything besides Christ and His economy, you make sure it doesn't happen! The problem in many churches is that the elders are not laying hold on the economy of Christ, but are instead pursuing something else.

Don't you know the church life is based on these "unspectacular" people? We think an elder should walk in as Peter, so that wherever he goes people get healed by his shadow, or thousands would get saved when he preaches. No, these brothers are not ambitious. Their love is to Christ and to the saints they serve. They may not have much, but if anything tries to take their "children" away from Christ and His economy, they would stand up strongly and say NO! They

can preach well, but for some reason their maturity covers their ability. In a young man, his ability covers his maturity. (Every young man should be bold to operate, even though they don't have much inwardly to back it up. This is healthy, as long as they are under the protection of their elders, who only know the One who is from the beginning: Christ and His economy. Therefore they are able to encourage the young men to be free and to fight for the Lord's kingdom. If anyone wants to creep in and destroy the nature of the Lord's testimony, they will swing into action. I am so thankful that, while we don't have many spiritual giants who can give messages, we do have so many faithful elders who jealously guard the Lord's testimony.

The responsibility of the fathers is to make sure nothing other than Christ, or the economy of Christ, creeps into the local church life. This was the biggest threat in the apostle John's time. One letter came, and another teaching presented itself. A certain person came and testified promoting James or Peter or Apollos or someone we don't even know. All these kinds of things were going on. Eventually, John wrote a letter to these brothers, saying, "Brothers, you may not have much, but make sure of one thing: that you lay hold of Christ, and the economy of Christ! Don't let any person or teaching or practice creep in to replace the preciousness of Christ Himself. Do we have much? No. But with what little we have, we are strong and clear for Christ and His economy.

YOUNG MEN:  
OVERCOMING THE EVIL ONE

John then continued to the second category: "I write to you young men because you have overcome the evil one." The young men, not the elders, are said to be overcomers. Don't expect so much of the fathers. Their job is to make sure that only Christ and the economy of Christ are allowed in the church life. The vitality of the church life is with the young men. As a young man, overcome the evil one!

LITTLE CHILDREN:  
RUNNING TO THE FATHER

Finally, John addresses the third category: "I write to you little children because you know the Father." What marks the little children? They know the Father. Every time they fall, they know where to go. Are you a young brother? Know the father! Do you get defeated? Run to the Father. Have you given a good testimony? Tell Him, "Lord, I come." When you are hungry, when you sin, when you are down, say, "Lord, I come!" Little children, your trademark is that you know the Father. You always know who you should run to, and enjoy His comforting and reassurance.

Some, when they sin, stay away from the Lord, thinking He is angry with them. But if I am just a young child, and I get into trouble, nothing accuses me or condemns me or would cause me to give up this lovely Christ and this lovely church life...instead I would just run to the

Father to receive His comfort and supply. This is the church life! John talks about the church life in just so simple a way. In other words: Fathers, let the brothers be free, as much as possible. As long as something is not against Christ or His economy, it should not be a problem. If the young ones want to dance or sing songs in their way, let them be happy! We are fifty years older! If you say to me, "Grandpa, let us sing a song I enjoy"...I may find I cannot, and if I want to sing with them a song I enjoy, they may not find they can. Yet is there anything in either song that is against Christ's economy? We older ones can bear all this for the sake of the younger ones.

But the "young men" are those who are strong to overcome the evil one. And all the little children are those who remember they have a Father. They can be defeated, have problems and mess things up... but they know to come to the Father, for their Father not only loves them and is their source of life, but also their source of protection.

WRITING ONCE MORE TO THE FATHERS,  
YOUNG MEN AND LITTLE CHILDREN

Interestingly, John felt he hadn't finished, so he wrote once more, "I have written to you" (1 John 2:14). Here he is simply referring to the previous verse! "I have written to you fathers because you know Him who is from the beginning"—he doesn't take account of them as someone who can hold trainings or conferences, or raise up pillars, or spread

the gospel throughout the globe. No, John doesn't even care about that. John seems to be saying, "Do you know why there are so many problems? Because everyone is trying to write a book or do something. Eventually everything becomes so messed up. So I write to you fathers, because you know Him who is from the beginning." Then he says to the young men (for they are the future): "I have written to you young men because you are strong and the word (logos) abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one." The young men know the Word—God's economy—for it abides in them in its operation.

### LOVE NOT THE WORLD

When John tells the young men not to love (agape) the world, he means, "don't give the world much value". Agape refers to a love that is in response to something that is held in value. It is the word used for God's love in John 3:16 (although in that verse the world refers to humanity). The world has so many things that people love and value, but we should not love or value highly the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Young people are those who are going to face some very critical choices. What is most valuable to you? That is what you will give your life to. What is your selection for your human life? It is based on what you see is of value. If you see fame or career as valuable, then you give your life to achieving fame or career. If you see money as having value, you give

your life to money. If you see family life as being what is valuable, you give your life to your family. If you see Christ is the center of all things, then you value Christ as the highest, and you properly love the Lord. You must give Christ the proper love He desires, which indicates that nothing is higher to you, nothing is more valuable, more lovely. Such a love reveals that, to you, nothing can compare with Christ. Your mind is made up; your life is set. You can say, "I know Christ is the most precious, the most valuable One." Do not appreciate or value the world. Could you be president? So what! What is it you value?

When I was first full time, I wished I could buy a loaf of bread at a proper price, for I always bought one-day-old bread. I wondered how those who picked up bread off the shelf could do it. But I am thankful that throughout my life, I never felt deprived. One day I had one dollar left, and I went to buy a loaf of bread for me and my wife and a carton of milk for my kids. I was singing, and an older lady asked me, "How can you sing, seeing how expensive things have become?" I wish I had replied, "It is only because every moment I see God's hand." At that time I felt my life was so high. I didn't have things for people to appreciate, but I had Christ, I had God's economy. My life was so different from all the others on the globe; only those who were purely following Christ could boast as I did. Thank the Lord! "Young men," John says, "Don't love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, you cannot love the Fa-

ther that much anymore. If you give your heart to something in the world, then your love for Christ has to go. You only have one heart. If you give your love to Christ, some other things have to go. When we value Christ so highly, we can say, "Everything can go; I just want to gain Christ!"

BEWARE THE SINFUL,  
PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND RELIGIOUS WORLD

Then in verse 2:16 John explains, "Because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life are not of the Father, but of the world." John speaks so much to the young men because the children and fathers are simple; the children just run to the father, and the fathers just make sure nothing creeps in to replace Christ and His economy in the church life. But to the young men he speaks so much. Do you realize the world is walking beside you all the time, showing its beauty? The world is all the time surrounding us. Sometimes it is a credit card. Sometimes it is a lot of money. All kinds of things are surrounding you. Sometimes it is of the lusts of the flesh. The lust of the flesh is with everyone all the time. That is the sinful world. Then there is the lust of the eyes, which is the soulish world. Then thirdly, there is the vanity of this life, which refers to the religious world. When you value Christ, the world will present itself so attractively. Number one, there is the sinful world. Number two, there is the psychological world (the lust of eyes). In the Orient, it is common to exchange business

cards. The more impressive the name of the firm and your position in it, the more prestigious is your card. If you do not have a business card, it means you are a nobody. People are after the lust of the flesh or the lust of the eyes. Young people, many of you are seeking something that will either satisfy you in the sinful realm or the psychological realm. But even more than that, what is waiting for you is the religious world (the vainglory of life). Man's life should be for God. But for some reason in this life, people look for what John calls vainglory.

ESPECIALLY BE WARY OF THE  
RELIGIOUS WORLD

With the physical body there is a lust of the flesh. With man's psychology there is the lust of the eyes. With the religious world there is the vainglory of life. The most dangerous of these is the religious world. Even if you are able to overcome the sinful world and the psychological world, you will find it is hard to overcome the religious world. We have been defiled in our environment not so much by the sinful or psychological world, although we are surrounded by sinful things in the world, and psychologically, we may have our hobbies. It is nearly impossible, however, for a Jesus lover to overcome the religious world. In the religious world there is the attraction to be known, to be manifested, to be someone everyone would appreciate and exalt. The religious world is what eventually becomes the greatest world to those who love the Lord. Very

few, even though they can overcome the sinful and psychological world, can overcome the religious world.

We suffer so much today not because of the sinful and psychological world, but because of the religious world. Few can overcome the religious world. Among us, it is much more prestigious to be recognized as writing something that has impact among the believers than it is to have a business card that says you are a professor in a university. There are so many professors, but how many people can say they have given their lives to Christ, and have a career of serving the Lord? It is so easy for us to anticipate or expect others admiration or good comments. That is what John called vain-glory of life. The young men should overcome the sinful world, the psychological world, but most of all, they should overcome the religious world. You are for Christ and Christ alone. You are for God's economy. Besides this, nothing should matter to you. How precious this is!

Besides this, he says, "Young men, now you are strong and the word of God is in you and you do not love the world and the things of the world, for what is of the world...is not of the Father but of the world. And the world is passing away..." (Even the religious world is.) "But he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17). Drop the world! "Little children, it is the last hour, and many antichrists have come..." (v. 18). John considered that whoever came in to mess around in the church life was an

antichrist. Do you realize the church life is a society? In every society people come in and out and try to do something. So here he says that some will come in, but they don't really have the Lord, or they have the Lord but at the same time they believe other teachings.

Do you love the church life? From now on I hope you know how to appreciate the fathers. Don't say to them, "Where is your shadow so I can be healed?" No. Look at the elders and be thankful for them, for they have loved the Lord for so many years, and only care for Christ and His testimony.

In the church life there are also the little children. They know how to run to the Father to receive life and comfort. They say "Just as I am, I come to You to get the life supply and to receive comfort and strength."

Most of all, in the church life there are the young men. They have the word of God. They overcome not only the sinful and psychological world, but even the religious world. They only love God and God's economy. They value God as the only worthy one, and they value God's economy as the meaning of their lives.

This is the church life! It is that simple. Can we practice such a church life, and love every saint as we are learning to be in spirit? Can we practice in the church life to be so free in our spirit, yet so strong for the Lord's testimony? Praise the Lord for this opportunity He has granted us! - *Titus Chu*

## IS THE RECOVERY ON THE ROAD TO ROME?

The Lord's recovery began with Martin Luther's stand against the Roman Catholic Church. After 500 years of recovery, the question arises: **Are we returning<sup>1</sup> to the city from which we departed? Is the recovery on the road which leads to Rome?** Are there incipient tendencies reproducing traits of the Roman Catholic Church within the Lord's recovery? This suggestion might seem far-fetched at first. However, there have been subtle alterations in teaching and practice which may be harbingers of this trend. Here we highlight these changes by contrasting the "blended co-workers'" current teaching with Watchman Nee's ministry which initiated the recent recovery.

### ONE GLOBAL COMPANY OF CO-WORKERS?

Watchman Nee's teaching was clear<sup>2</sup> – *"the churches are local, and the work is regional."* In his exposition of Acts, Brother Nee viewed Jerusalem and Antioch as work centers. Peter and his company labored out of the former, Paul and his companions out of the latter. The fact that,<sup>3</sup> *"It was the Holy Spirit who initiated another beginning at Antioch, established another group of apostles, and sent two out to work,"* set an important precedent. Based on this, Brother Nee concluded,<sup>4</sup> *"You have to know that before God there was... **not only one region, but two regions.** Therefore, when it pleases the Holy Spirit, He can establish a 3<sup>d</sup> region, a 10<sup>th</sup> region, a 1,000<sup>th</sup> region, or a 10,000<sup>th</sup> region on the earth."* Thus, in Brother Nee's view, multiple companies of workers could labor in diverse regions, yet all engaged in the Lord's one work. He was assured that<sup>5</sup> *"Even though there is no central control, provided all the workers follow the leading of the Spirit, everything will run smoothly...and there will be coordination of a body."*

### "THE MORTAL WOUND FOR ROMAN CATHOLICISM"

Watchman Nee called Acts chapter 13 *"the mortal wound for Roman Catholicism."* Why? He answers,<sup>6</sup> *"If the Holy Spirit had not initiated a beginning at Antioch, we would have to say that ... God's work on the earth had Jerusalem as its one center. This center might be moved somewhere else, [e.g., Rome] but still there would only be one center... **then the principle of Rome would be correct.**"* The fact that Acts records a second work-center (in Antioch,) with a second company of workers, establishes a crucial principle. Brother Nee says,<sup>7</sup> *"Without Acts 13, the concept of the pope would be entirely correct. The concept of Rome,...that there is a capital of Christianity, would be completely correct."*

Watchman Nee rejected one global company of co-workers as unscriptural and “Romish.” He says,<sup>8</sup> “**Scripture... does not imply that all the apostles formed themselves into one company and placed everything under one central control. . . [O]ne company is not shown in the Word of God.**” He points out that<sup>9</sup> “in the Scriptures. . . [t]here is a company of apostles, but it is **not great enough to include all the apostles. That is Romish, not scriptural.**” Witness Lee also warned against producing hierarchy, saying<sup>10</sup>, “Regions of the work exist today. . . . If we organize these regions into one unit, it will lead to hierarchy with an official leadership. This would insult Christ’s headship. The scriptural pattern shows various companies of workers, laboring in diverse regions, extending to each other the “right hand of fellowship,” (Gal. 2:9) yet all working for the one Body.

“NO ONE IS SAYING . . . FORM ALL THE CO-WORKERS . . . INTO ONE COMPANY” —  
“BLENDED CO-WORKER”

As recently as Spring 2005, the “blended co-workers” appeared to espouse Brother Nee’s view. One said,<sup>11</sup> “**no one is saying that we should form all the co-workers on the earth into one company under a central control. That would not be one work.** Moreover, he echoed Brother Nee’s view,<sup>12</sup> “Let there be **groups of co-workers in all the continents in so many languages following the Spirit in the harmony of the Body, doing one work. That is what we need to see.**” Where then is the “turn towards Rome”?

“MORE THAN ONE COMPANY OF APOSTLES — NOT SATISFACTORY”

An LSM-brother’s recent article, suggests the *Acts*-pattern is seriously flawed. Specifically, the precedent of multiple worker-companies is called into question. The brother writes,<sup>13</sup> “**In the first century, . . . there was more than one company of apostles . . . We may think that it was satisfactory according to God’s ordination.**” Certainly based upon Brother Nee’s writing, one would think so! However, the LSM-brother declares, “**the situation in the first century was not satisfactory.**” It was “unsatisfactory,” not because of minor incidents involving Barnabas or Apollos. According to the LSM-brothers, multiple worker-companies were a serious problem. The Acts record is flawed because, “**Peter and James should have joined themselves to Paul’s company and worked together with Paul under the vision the Lord had given him. . . . All the workers, . . . should have served together with Paul in God’s move at that time.**”<sup>14</sup> What is this? One global company of workers, under one leader – Paul!

ONE “WISE MASTER-BUILDER,” ONE GLOBAL COMPANY OF WORKERS

What’s behind this drastic change? Why are multiple worker-companies “not

satisfactory"? It follows from the teaching of "one wise Master Builder." An LSM-brother writes,<sup>15</sup> "God does **not** give His vision, ... **to two men; He gives it to only one man.** ...the **wise master builder; he is the minister of the age.** In God's unique work of building ...only the word of the master builder counts." Hence, "the situation in the first century was **not satisfactory**" because "God's way is to have **all His people serving Him ...under the supervision of one master builder.**"—Paul.<sup>16</sup> According to this view God wants "one wise master builder" supervising God's work on the entire globe and leading one company of co-workers. Due to this, the LSM-brothers depreciate the biblical record of **two ministries** (Paul & Co. to the Gentiles and Peter & Co. to the Jews), **two regions**<sup>17</sup> of the work and **two companies** of workers. Multiple ministries, regions and companies are "flies in the ointment," flaws in the **Acts** record.

The LSM-brothers also apply the "one wise Master Builder" paradigm today. They claim, "**This is a strong principle that holds in every age, including today.**"<sup>18</sup> Hence they exhort, "**we must serve in one company...**" Based on this view, the "blended co-workers" have written a senior co-worker directing,<sup>19</sup> "...you would join yourself and those co-workers loyal to you to the blending co-workers, with the continuation of your previous work left to their coordinated oversight."

#### PAUL'S FOUNDATION & "OTHERS' FOUNDATION"— WAS PAUL THE ONLY MASTER-BUILDER?

Yet what does the Scripture say? The New Testament acknowledges an apostolic division of labor. Paul was entrusted with the gospel **to the Gentiles** and Peter **to the Jews** (Gal. 2:7). Peter's apostleship was **to the circumcision (Jews)** and Paul's **for the Gentiles** (Gal. 2:8). Neither Paul nor Peter was given a global mandate for their practical apostolic labor. The written legacy of Paul's completing ministry benefits the whole Church. Yet his practical apostleship was to announce **to the Gentiles** Christ's unsearchable riches (Eph. 3:8). Scripture does **not** present the division of labor into Jewish and Gentile "fields" in a negative light (Gal. 2:9). Nor does the New Testament depict distinct worker-companies as negative *per se*. Isn't that "negative light" due to *eisegesis*—imposing the "one wise Master Builder" perspective upon the biblical record? But is that view-point biblical? Would Brother Nee agree?

Watchman Nee points out that the apostle Paul was not the only one who laid a foundation. Yes, to the Corinthians, Paul proclaimed he laid a foundation for others to build upon (1 Cor. 3:10). Yet elsewhere, Paul declared he wouldn't build upon "others' foundation" (Rom. 15:20). Brother Nee relates this "others' foundation" to Jerusalem. He says,<sup>20</sup> "*In the Bible there are not that many people who have been raised up by God to lay a foundation. **No doubt, there were some brothers in Jerusalem who were raised up by God. Paul was also raised up by God. ...[H]e was a master builder set up by God.***" Further, Watchman Nee writes,<sup>20</sup> "*When Paul said that he did not want to build upon **others' foundation, he was specifically referring to the work of the brothers in the region of Jerusalem. Paul did not want to build upon **their foundation.*****"... Moreover, he adds<sup>21</sup>

***“whoever lays a foundation is a wise master builder.”*** Notice Watchman Nee doesn’t assert that Paul was **the** unique wise master builder. He acknowledges that both Paul and *“some brothers in Jerusalem”* were *“raised up by God to lay a foundation.”* Moreover, Brother Nee does **not** disparage the foundation laid by *“the work of the brothers in . . . Jerusalem.”* Paul laid a foundation, and so did they. Paul was a “wise master builder” and so were they, since (in Brother Nee’s words) ***“whoever lays a foundation is a wise master builder.”*** This is consistent with his inclusive view of multiple ministries, regions and worker-companies.

#### AFTER PAUL, EVERYONE BUILDS ON PAUL’S FOUNDATION

Watchman Nee acknowledged both Paul and the brothers in Jerusalem as master builders. However, Brother Nee continues,<sup>21</sup> *“The **brothers after Paul** should build upon the foundation laid by Paul.”* Again,<sup>21</sup> *“**All of the brothers and sisters after Paul** need to learn to **build upon this foundation.**”* In Brother Nee’s view, the early apostles (especially Paul) laid the foundation. Thereafter every worker builds on this foundation. This is consistent with the New Testament’s completion by Paul and the other apostles. Thereafter, every Bible teacher and expositor builds upon their writings. No one lays “another foundation” by writing a “third testament.” Subsequently, there are no more “master builders,” contributing to the New Testament. The New Testament canon is closed. In Brother Nee’s statement, *“**All of the brothers . . . after Paul . . . build upon this foundation,**”* “**All**” includes Luther, Calvin, Zinzendorf, Wesley, Darby, Brother Nee himself, and Brother Lee. Doesn’t this imply Watchman Nee would reject the designation of “wise master builder”? It also suggests he wouldn’t embrace the “one wise Master Builder” teaching.

#### THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE UNIQUE EXECUTOR VS. ONE HUMAN, “WISE MASTER BUILDER”

Brother Nee never taught there was a unique “wise master builder” in each era. Rather, he affirmed that the Holy Spirit was the “unique Executor” of God’s work. The Holy Spirit renders redundant any “director,” “manager,” or “supervisor.” Brother Nee wrote,<sup>22</sup> *“Some . . . are tempted to attain the **position of director over all of God’s servants.** How good this seems from a human point of view. . . We would say, however, that. . . **the Holy Spirit is always the unique Executor. He never needs man to be His manager. . . [W]e are never His assistants.**”* Watchman Nee rejected the concept of a human manager (director or executor) of God’s work<sup>23</sup>. Instead of a human “global supervisor of God’s work,” or “universal coordinator of the One New Man,” Brother Nee emphasized the role of the Spirit. Doesn’t this imply Brother Nee would reject the teaching of “one wise master builder” overseeing God’s global work as mere human organization, reminiscent of the Catholic Church?

**NOW WHO’S SAYING – “FORM ALL THE CO-WORKERS. . . INTO ONE COMPANY”? –  
THE LSM-BROTHERS!**

One year ago a “blended co-worker” proclaimed,<sup>11</sup> **“no one is saying that we should form all the co-workers on the earth into one company under a central control.”** What about today? Now the question, “who is saying this?” must be answered: **“Who? — the LSM-brothers!”** They have explicitly said,<sup>24</sup> **“we must serve in one company, even in one Body, under the proper leadership in the Lord’s move....”** How much things have changed in one year! Watchman Nee’s teaching about “one company of workers” has been turned on its head. He warned of the peril of one global co-worker company, calling this unscriptural and “Romish.” Now the LSM-brothers write of<sup>25</sup> **“The Peril of Having Different Companies of Workers.”** According to Brother Nee, one global group of co-workers under “one wise master builder” (or his successors) replicates the Roman Catholic model. In view of Brother Nee’s warning, are we remiss in asking – **Is the Recovery on the Road to Rome?**

### NO “APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION” BUT “CONTINUATION” OF THE “WISE MASTER BUILDER”

The one “wise Master Builder” teaching undermines the recovery’s critique of Catholicism’s “apostolic succession.” Brother Lee used the fact that James is listed before Peter and John (Gal. 2:9) to establish that<sup>26</sup> **“James came to the forefront to take the lead among the apostles.”** He then asserted that (based upon James’ leadership) this<sup>26</sup> **“strongly refutes the assertion of Catholicism that Peter was the only successor of Christ in the administration of the Church.”**

However, under the “wise Master Builder” teaching, both Peter and James’ leadership was illegitimate. In that case, isn’t the switch from Peter to James meaningless? It is now asserted that **Paul should have been the global leader!** Not only should James and Peter have learned<sup>27</sup> from Paul, they should also have submitted to him! So, where does this leave us? It looks to me like we’re virtually rehabilitating apostolic succession. Aren’t the LSM-brothers essentially saying, **“Peter was the only successor of Christ”** as the one wise Master Builder and Paul was Peter’s successor? Except the term employed is “continuation,” rather than “succession.” But isn’t that difference mere semantics? A “blended co-worker” recently said,<sup>28</sup> **“There is no successor to Brother Lee, but there is an open group of the ‘being-blended brothers’ who are continuing Brother Lee’s ministry.”** Can we say this **“strongly refutes the assertion of Catholicism”** concerning apostolic succession? Doesn’t this rehabilitate it under the guise of “one wise master builder”? **Are we returning to Rome?**

### THE RECOVERY OF THE *IMPRIMATUR*?

Last year the “blended co-workers” issued the “One Publication” document decreeing that<sup>29</sup> **“All the saints and all the churches everywhere should ...be restricted to one publication in the Lord’s recovery.”** Some responded, **Isn’t this the Roman Catholic practice concerning publications – the *Imprimatur*<sup>30</sup>—the official stamp of approval?**

A recent contributor<sup>31</sup> to an LSM-sponsored web-site disagrees, claiming any

resemblance to the Roman Catholic practice is superficial. He contends that ‘one publication’ differs from the *Imprimatur*, because<sup>32</sup> **“the Roman Catholic practice of Imprimatur is a doctrinal test, [while] the one publication surpasses mere orthodoxy.”** He says, **“whereas an Imprimatur settles for the lowest common denominator of acceptable teaching, the one publication practice”** enforces a standard according to the “high peak truths.” To qualify for LSM’s one publication, writings **“must match the all-inheriting vision of God’s economy unveiled in the Lord’s recovery.”** Evidently the method is the same, but the qualifying standard differs. Far from demonstrating the difference, the writer has shown the similitude of LSM’s “one publication” practice to the Catholic *Imprimatur*. In the area of publications **isn’t the recovery on the “Road to Rome”?**

*“WE DO NOT KEEP A FOLLOWING, THEY DO NOT BELIEVE US.”*

Few fundamental Christian groups restrict their members to approved literature. Those who do are perceived to be fencing their congregations from outside influences in order to retain a following. Brother Nee called this *“working along popish [Roman Catholic] lines.”* He said,<sup>33</sup> **“We should never cherish the hope that *only “our” teaching will be accepted by any church.*...There is no need to build a wall of protection around “our” particular “flock” to secure them against the teachings of others. *If we do so, we are working along popish lines.*”** W. Lee talked about retaining a following. He said,<sup>34</sup> **“If all of today’s Christian preachers and leaders would say, ‘Lord, let my following be Yours that You may increase and that I may decrease [John 3:30],’ there would be no problem. ... This is the problem today: every preacher has his own following. *Many think that we are the same as they are.... When we say that we do not keep a following, they do not believe us.*”** This word was spoken 30 years ago, before the promulgation of “one publication” in the recovery. May we ask, in the light of that policy, is Brother Lee’s declaration — **“we do not keep a following”** — more credible today or less plausible? Hasn’t LSM’s “one publication” policy dramatically increased the skepticism reflected in the phrase — **“they do not believe us”?**

#### CONCLUSION — REPLICATING ROMAN CATHOLICISM?

We posed the question, **“Is the recovery on the Road to Rome?”** We are not suggesting the recovery is in danger of returning to the Roman Catholic “fold,” led by the Pope and headquartered in Rome. Rather, the issue is whether the recovery has begun to adopt teachings and practices which **resemble** those of Catholicism. Examples include recent teachings about “one global company of workers,” “one wise Master Builder,” and “one publication.” Other examples could be cited, but perhaps these are sufficient to justify the query: **“Is the recovery replicating Roman Catholicism?”** -Nigel Tomes

(references may be found at [www.concernedbrothers.com](http://www.concernedbrothers.com))