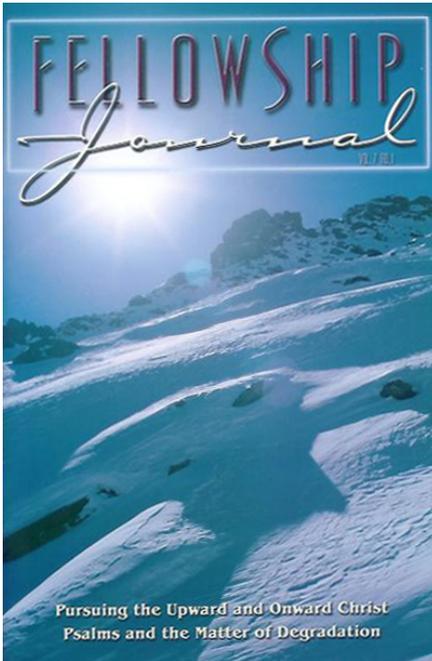


FELLOWSHIP *Journal*

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Message Thirty-One: Pursuing the
Upward and Onward Christ

Dear saints,

There are many profitable things taking place, both within localities, and through events such as times of fellowship at Ashland Woods. Recently I witnessed something of the time the young couples recently had together, and was really encouraged. Since I, however, do not fit in the category, I did not write anything as a report.

We simply at this time do not have anyone who goes around to all the churches or who sits in on the various times the saints are having together for the sake of letting the rest of the saints know what the Lord has been doing. It would be appreciated, therefore, if those who have something they would like to communicate would do so, for the sake of letting others know through this "fellowship journal." Because of the format, suitable pictures would also be welcomed.

Let all things be done for building up!

John Berglund
Editor

Sisters' Conference at Ashland Woods
Message One

THE DEGRADATION
FORETOLD
IN THE PSALMS

(It is public knowledge that Titus and a number of churches have been targeted for attack by a certain institution. Thousands of tapes and thousands more booklets have been distributed to undermine his ministry. Furthermore, untold thousands of dollars have been spent in attempts to confiscate properties used by certain local assemblies so as to disrupt their gathering. In this message, Titus refers to these matters directly, finding in Psalms a framework of reference.)

Even very lovely brothers can behave in quite an evil manner simply because we Christians are very peculiar beings. A dog only has one life. Therefore it can happily follow a master however that master leads, for that is the nature of the dog life. A human is more complicated, for a human being has both a natural and a fallen life. Once a human being becomes a Christian, however,

he becomes even more complicated, for he now has three lives: the natural, the fallen, and the divine! All three lives operate within one person. This is why it is difficult to find one who loves the Lord and yet behaves normally. Why are Christians so peculiar? It is simply because they are Christians! And if some believer is not as peculiar as you, the likely reason is that you are the one who really loves the Lord! How, on the other hand, is it possible for genuine Christians to operate in an evil manner? Often it is because that person has become *religious*.

The Root of Decline in Psalms

In this book, *Christ and the Church Revealed and Typified in the Psalms*, Witness Lee strongly states that the church's degradation is due to the fact Christ no longer holds the preeminence, the central place, in the church life.

The Progression in Psalms

Psalms is very interesting. Its first section (Book I, or Psalms 1 through 41) focuses upon our growth in life as individuals, while its second section (Book II, or Psalms 42 through 72) speaks of a healthy church life. By the conclusion of Book II, everything seems wonderful, yet from Psalms 73 to 89 (Book III) we find seventeen Psalms that reveal the church in desolation. According to our understanding, if we have grown in life and the church is wonderful, the Lord should come back! But in Psalms the order is first life, then the church, and then its desolation. This order revealed in the Word corresponds to the peculiarity of those who love the Lord. If you are a Jesus-lover, then you are an odd person, as I have said. The problem is that most Christians love all three lives within them. If you are a Christian who truly loves the Lord, you probably only love two of these lives: your self-life and the divine life. That any lover of the Lord does not become a mental case is simply due to the Lord's mercy! What kind of vessel could fully withstand the continuous operation of three lives struggling within it? In such a situation if you can be one with Christ for a few moments it is a victory, but most believers seem unable to abide for long, and end up going down once more.

Thus in Book III there are seventeen Psalms that talk about desolation. From 73 to 83, four stages of degradation are seen. (Psalm 84,

however, is one of the "gems" among all the Psalms.) When you come to Book IV (Psalms 90 to 106) we see that in its weakness, even as the church is not as exciting as you like it to be, it begins to work with Christ to spread over the entire earth. The last section (Book V, or Psalms 107 through 150) is composed of praises to the Lord. In the midst of all the praise, the older ones are able to look upon their life-long experience, so they provide us with the glorious Psalms of Ascent (Psalms 120 through 134). Psalms ends with Psalm 150, which simply says go ahead and make all kinds of noise to praise the Lord. So eventually our Lord loves a cacophony! It is not merely the enjoyment of guitar or cymbals, but using whatever there is to praise the Lord!

Decline Begins When Christ Loses Preeminence

What is the progress of the decline of the church life that is depicted? Brother Lee told us that Christ must have the preeminence; the moment any other thing comes in so that the focus shifts away from Christ, that moment the church declines. Is this not what we have seen in many so-called churches today? Something has come in which has replaced Christ as the pre-eminent one. He writes, "Book III indicates how the saints, in their experiences, realize that the house and the city of God with all the enjoyments thereof can only be preserved and maintained through

Christ properly appreciated and exalted by God's people. This means that if we would have a consistent experience of the house and the city of God with all their enjoyment, we must appreciate Christ and know Christ in a proper way. Only when we exalt Christ adequately and properly will the enjoyment of God's house and God's city be preserved and maintained. Otherwise, we will lose the enjoyment of the house, and the city of God will vanish. By keeping this in mind, we may realize how Book III is a further improvement in the progression of the Psalms." When Christ is not appreciated as first or exalted as top, the church will decline. If Christ is no longer the center among us, then we are going to lose Christ. I would like to sit across a table with those who support the "Ministry churches" and have each side of the table make its understanding public. My word would be simple: there is one ministry, one flow, and one publication: the Bible. I believe they would have to admit that many of the items they have insisted on are not according to the Bible nor are they focused on Christ. Institution has brought in degradation. How can so many become so distant for Christ, insisting upon certain material, practice, speaking, doctrine, and way of talking, and yet when asked "How about your Christ?" they can only respond "We are in the Body!" Those who say this imply that the saint they are speaking to is not! My question would be, "Then please tell me where I am!" They may say that in order to be in

the Body, you have to fellowship with Brother So-and-So. I must ask then, "Is he the Body?" "Oh no!" they may reply. If not, we should say, "Then please don't bother me." If someone charges that you are not in the Body, you should sweetly and firmly ask them where it is you are, if not in the Body. There is only one Body. Every believer is a member of this Body. So if every believer is a member of the Body, and you are a believer, are you not in the Body simply because someone says you are not? I don't like to get into such an argument, but I can assure you that those who insist on this have no joy, for even though they may seem to win such an argument, they have no enjoyment of Christ.

As we noted above, Brother Lee wrote "Book III is a further improvement in the progression of the Psalms." I like the word "improvement" because at the end of Book II you already see so many riches. What else do we need? Yet the Lord says, "Life and building only operate through trials. Otherwise you never are able to realize whether something is of your soul or whether it is of the Spirit, whether it is pure or of mixture." Even when we say, "We love you so much," The Lord says, "You love Me until another piece of candy comes along to draw you away." We are basically impure. How can the church life degrade? Degradation is simply with us. It is our religiousness that degrades us, and for this we cannot simply blame some institution.

THE FOUR PARTIES INVOLVED

1. The Saints Who've Become Religiously Indignant

The church's damage eventually comes from four parties. First of all, when the saints themselves are religious, they can become saturated with religious thought. In other words, they feel "Since I am with the Lord, I will be blessed in a certain way. If I come to the church meeting, it should be so enjoyable. When I read the Bible, the Lord should give me so much speaking..." Eventually such religiosity is the root of the problem.

Others' Blessing Becomes a Test

How is it that the church declines? The Lord says, "You know Me already and you love Me, and you have grown well and you are very much in the church, yet everything needs to be tested."

For instance, when a young man loves a young lady, he may call her to ask her out for some coffee. The girl may decide to test the boy, as to the depth of his feeling for her, so she refuses to see what happens. If the boy takes another girl out for coffee instead, and if the girl he loves asks him what he did, his reply will reveal his sincerity. There could be different results. He might say, "I went out with another girl and found out she is better than you." Or he might say, "I went out with another, but found through that experience it is you I really love; I could only think of you the whole

time" (which is somewhat forgivable). Or he might say, "I am sorry. I was foolish to do what I did. What I did was wrong." Such trials are often extremely useful in our Christian life, or else we would not know our real situation. That boy might have thought he was really in love with the first girl, for example, until she wasn't available and then he found it easy to call another girl.

Christians, unaware of the status of the three lives within them, often tell the Lord how much they love Him. The Lord may respond to such zeal by rendering blessings to those who do not love Him instead of those who do, to see the real situation. Many times you may notice that the Lord has blessed relatives who are unconcerned about the Lord more than you, and you, instead of receiving blessing, become much more confined, even though you are the one who loves the Lord. So you wonder what has happened. Or you meet with a number of other saints on the local ground, very purely for the Lord, and yet the Lord may appear to send people to the Living Stream church! You would wonder how it could be. They come out from those meetings and tell you they are so excited. They don't tell you the emptiness they feel, but they boast in the numbers that are coming together. This may cause you to feel that perhaps you have made a mistake, and that you should join them, for that would make life much simpler. As long as you declare your loyalty to the headquarters, wouldn't everything

be better? So when we examine the matter of the decline in Psalms, we must realize that we must be extremely pure. We need to be pure to the point that we might declare as the Psalmist does in Psalm 73: “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.”

2. Ambitious Ones Who Introduce Names Other Than Christ

The second party involved with the degradation of the church are those who seek to make a name for themselves in the church life. These are capable, ambitious people. They realize the churches are established, and there is already a large pool of people. They wonder how they might get themselves a place of leadership. In order to do this, they realize they must build up a name among the people. People follow names. Only in the USA, with its Constitution, there are limits as to how far a name can take you. A president with the name “Bush” or “Clinton” can only lead for eight years, no matter how great his name becomes. In the church life also, people try to develop their names so they can have control over the congregation. That is another reason for degradation. The church becomes degraded firstly because saints become very religiously bothered, and secondly because there are ambitious persons who come into the church and try to build up a name, so that their name eventually replaces the name of Christ.

Cutting Off the “Thick Trees”: Removing the Mature Life-Lines

If someone wants to build up such a name, he has to do a few things. First, he has to cut the saints off from the particular life-lines in the church (“thick trees” in 74:5) through which the saints have been receiving the rich supply (see Eph. 4:16). As long as such saints are allowed to operate, the ambitious ones don’t stand a chance. So they must insist that those in the church can only be proper if they use a certain material or exalt some particular name.

Smashing Every “Carved Work”: Denying Any Work of the Spirit

Secondly, they try to destroy all the work of the Spirit. No saint can have the freedom to follow the Lord anymore. The Spirit cannot work with them, for they are told that only if they do this or that, they are in the flow or one with “the ministry.” All the work of the Spirit, the carving work (74:6), is destroyed. If any brother has any work of the Spirit, that brother will not be able to survive, because such a one becomes a life-line to the church. In order for those who are ambitious to reach their goal, they would have to try to cut off such brothers or to smash any work of the Spirit among the saints.

Psalms 73 through 83 gives us a clear portrait of the reason the church becomes degraded, as well as giving some encouraging words. Then in Psalm 84, we are told of a

third party that contributes to the degradation of the church life. In Psalm 77:10 the leading brothers are seen to be infirm, or cowardly. The Hebrew word implies you have been pierced and wounded. Due to that, you lose your ability to act strongly. The church becomes thus degraded by three categories of people. First, all the Christians become degraded by their religiosity. They wonder why, as those who love the Lord so much, they are not so blessed. Secondly, as the church develops, in the midst of that prosperity there will be some who rise up to attempt to take over the work by lifting up their names. As those who raise up their name, they must cut off the trunk so the life-line is destroyed. They also have to destroy the work of the Spirit, to the point the saints do not even think in that manner any more. Their thinking becomes very programmed. The saints are told everything is in a certain earthly source and that all the work of the Spirit is with them (the ambitious ones).

3. The Leading Ones, Who Are Infirm

Thirdly, the leaders of the churches become very weak and unable to function as they should (77:10). As leaders, they have suffered many things. Therefore they become extremely careful, even to the point of being cowards. Instead of rising up to speak out about the situation, they look at the situation through the eyes of their infirmity and decide they cannot stand

against the situation. I have heard over and over brothers telling me "Even though we go seven times a year, we are doing fine." I finally lost my patience at hearing this, so I asked, "Is the Lord doing fine?" They could say their hall was doing fine and that their local church was fine, but was the Lord doing fine with them? They bribe their conscience to the point they cannot stand up to say "We must follow the teaching in the Bible." This a third reason for decline: leaders are unable or unwilling to function as they know they should.

So the picture you get of the church life is that of a bunch of very religious saints, with some very ambitious brothers running around cutting off the life-lines and denying the work of the Spirit so that they might take control, while the leading brothers are too fearful to react and function as they should. In one place they asked me to send a co-worker to help them. I said "You are doing 'seven-times-a-year,' so continue that. You are always welcome to fellowship." They denied that they were seven-times-a-year, so I agreed to send a worker. Before he went I told him not to give any advice, but just to minister life according to the Bible. So he went there and read the Bible with them for a whole week. Afterwards they told me, "Thank you, brother. You have brought the Word back to us. Since 1996 we have not come to the Bible in such a way, for we dared not lest we be considered as not being in the flow."

Another place saw the work of

the Spirit denied in a similar fashion. None of them had anything to talk about because of the atmosphere of denying the Spirit's work, so they talked about me every week for a couple of years, until one brother said, "I have a comment. Titus has never been here, and we don't know who he is. We have been talking about him for a few years already. Shouldn't we talk about something else?" This is the situation in more than one place. One day we contacted about a hundred young people in a certain province. They read something on the internet, and began to correspond with us. Eventually one of those brothers said, "We hear we should only be in certain materials, but I feel we should read the Bible! This is what we should do." The others responded that he was following Titus Chu in this matter, and excommunicated him. Afterwards, he began to try to figure out who "Titus Chu" was. Then he found the Cleveland website, and he was helped. It is evident we are living through some situation in which the ambitious ones are trying to brainwash people, and the leading ones are inadequate in their function, so they just do their best to maintain their position by using whatever materials are provided, regardless how they may feel about it.

***Besides Being Wounded,
There is Another Reason Leading
Ones May Become Infirm***

Another reason for the reticence of many is understandable: You

grow up with a certain group of people. Your wife and children are also with them. If you take a clear stand for the Lord, that jeopardizes everything. Your wife and kids will have no one to talk with! It is not that such a brother doesn't know something is wrong; he just feels he cannot afford to challenge it. When we began to serve the Lord, we were ready to live a suffering life, and were prepared for hardships. At that time we didn't care what price we might pay. Now, however, for many, their kids and their wives are a consideration that wasn't present before, and their situation has become involved. In some places the leading brothers would really suffer if they were to stand up to the situation.

An elder in one place told one such brother that he could still be a part of them even though he didn't participate in the "seven-times-a-year" and so on. But this brother asked that elder, "but part of what?" The elder agreed with this brother that they were there for the local church, the Body of Christ, and that the Spirit must have the authority in the church. He also agreed that everything must be according to the Bible and that Christ must be the content of the church life and that their stand must be on the ground of oneness. Everything was very sweet. This brother then said, "I didn't realize that everything we see is the same! Why don't we write this down and send it to all the saints in the church here to tell them that this is the church's stand?" To this the elder could not

agree, because once something such as that would be put in print, he would be finished. In this you can see cowardice and weakness has become a factor among leading ones in many places.

4. Gentiles Who Become Involved in “the Lord’s Inheritance”

In the church life there are three crucial factors: the local saints, those who can function with ministry, and the leading ones. There is a fourth factor that figures into the decline that should have nothing to do with the church life, and that is the Gentiles, or nations. In Psalm 73 the decline begins with the saints falling into religion by means of their taking their eyes off of Christ, and this eventually leads to Gentiles being brought in, after the ambitious ones do their work and the elders are insufficient to respond to it. Once the Gentiles enter into the church life, the testimony seems truly lost.

One matter that has come up in recent years is the use of the Gentile courts. If you want to defend yourself in court, don’t you have to get advice from Gentiles? This is a serious matter. It does not mean we should not use lawyers when necessary, but we must be very careful. In the Middle Ages, the church became degraded as those who were not believers gained power in the Church. A nobleman’s first son inherited the estate, while the second son was sent to take some position in the so-called Church. It didn’t matter whether or not he was a Christian. The Gen-

tiles entered right into the Church and took positions of power within it. Even today, prominent non-believers sit on the boards of many denominations. This is the fourth party that comes into play in the church’s decline: Gentiles end up in the Lord’s inheritance (79:1).

In the decline, as the workers come in to raise up their own name to replace Christ (74:4), and the elders lose their courage to take a stand, this is what must happen. I received a “letter of quarantine” that told me I was pretty terrible, so I had to hand over all “my” coworkers, and all the churches that I served. I felt none of the churches were mine, so I was in no position to hand any church over anyway. As far as the coworkers were concerned, it was up to them whether or not they wanted to serve under Living Stream. So I called the coworkers together and showed them the letter, which they read. I told them LSM asked me to hand them all over, although I have no right to do this, but that they could do whatever they felt to do before the Lord. I was very peaceful. If you want to fight for something as they do, you have no choice but to cut off the big trees, the trunks. You would never charge the saints to go to Christ alone. Secondly, there can be no “carved work” (74:6). If someone claims they saw something in the Word, it is rejected if it is not something said by a “blending brother” or the “acting God.” You are not even allowed to enjoy how the Spirit may be at work! These

brothers are not my enemies. Due to my protest, at least in some places they have relented and have told the saints they may read the Bible. This was partially due to the fact they found I just wasn't "slaughterable," even though thousands of copies of misrepresentative taped conversations and tens of thousands of booklets have been circulated to smear me. We are not fighting to win something; we are fighting for Christ to have a way. As long as the saints are allowed to read the Bible, there is always hope.

Thus Book III of Psalms gives us four steps or parties in the church's decline. Firstly, the saints become religious, then the ambitious ones try to take over by cutting off the saints from Christ, the leading ones are unable and unwilling to do anything about it, and in such a degraded situation the Gentiles come in and get involved in the church life. After the Gentiles come in, of course everything of the church life is gone.

Let us go over these matters as they are stated in Psalms. In Psalm 73, it begins to talk about us. "Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart, but as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped, because I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked (godless)." How come those who do not even have Christ become so prosperous? I see many dear saints go through hard times, hearing "You are not one with the ministry." They

should have replied back, "We have Christ, and we have the Bible!" Yet the others can testify, "When we come together there are so many thousands; when we sing hymns how joyful we are! How many come to your conferences?" When you see all those without God become so prosperous and those who follow Christ become so hopeless, isn't this discouraging?

In China some ask, "Are you following the water (LSM) or are you following the pig (Chinese: chu)?" or "Are you following the stream, or are you following the red (Chinese: chu)?" My reply when I heard this saying was "Only a pig follows a pig. Therefore it is stupid to follow me! You have a Christ. Isn't that good enough?" Just follow Christ! They say, "But many churches are with you now, right?" Actually there are hundreds of churches I am still in fellowship with, and every local church in the Midwest still stands, even though millions of dollars have been expended to tear things down.

Psalm 73

To be wicked basically means to be without God. "There are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm" (73:4). I have been "excommunicated." Their strength was firm! I can tell you, however, that I have never known Christ could be so marvelous as in these days. I could look at the churches and say, "Lord, if this is not of You, now is the time. If it is of You, You are the one to keep it." If you build a building, be sure that the rain and

wind will come. If it is on solid foundation, it will stay. If it is not built on solid foundation, it will fall. One of my close friends told others that I was finished. Saints, I was finished the moment I gave myself to Christ! Every day there has been a termination operating. The resurrection, however, has never stopped! There can be no other way for us to go on, for the strength of those who seek to destroy appears very firm.

When a person becomes messed up by being envious at the godless ones, knowing that the Lord should bless the pure, he needs to get himself into the sanctuary of God (v. 17a)! The Psalmist says all this was going on, until he came to the sanctuary. It is easy for us to get worked up about what we see taking place, until we come again to the church life! I am always impressed by Mansfield. I heard how those with LSM came and claimed they were going to use the hall there to extend LSM's work—it was evident that their strength was "firm." Three senior lawyers from a prestigious law firm showed up in court on their behalf. They used money offered by the saints to sue us. They were very firm to say, "Brothers, we come to take over!" In this time we say, "O Lord, until we came into the church meetings, the sanctuary of God, we did not understand their ends." Our lawyer asked, "Is it worth it?" I replied that it was not just about one locality. In other places people think we have lost our case, even though it is not true. We know that if we negotiate on one, they will come to other places

to do the same thing. We do not want to sue them, but we do have to let them know we will defend the offering of the saints. The elders must do their best to protect the saints' offerings. It is because of what Mansfield is bearing right now that the rest of the churches are at peace.

It may seem they have nothing else to do but to try to study what can be done to destroy us! They do not seem to be willing to acknowledge what part we had in restoring the situation among the churches in 1989, when Brother Lee's ministry was in trouble. The saints in this area were those who enabled Brother Lee to continue operating at that time, restoring his name and ministry. Those who attack us do not speak of these things, and we have not made an issue of this either.

Our salvation is interesting. When the church becomes so degraded and beat up to the point everyone looks around, wondering "Where is the hope?" and yet the saints go into the sanctuary, they discover the Lord is still so marvelous. When you are so depressed, then go to the church meeting and begin to pray... you will find the Lord has never changed. He is still precious to you! So in verse 23 the Psalmist can declare: "Nevertheless, I am continually with You." You may be discouraged by things outwardly, but you discover you are still with the Lord. "You have held me by Your right hand. You shall guide me by Your counsel, and afterward receive me unto glory."

That is good enough! With this, therefore, we may cry, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon the earth that I desire besides You." Now he can say "I have no one in heaven or on earth but You." How marvelous is our Lord's work, even to those such as us. Our heart may fail, but God is the strength of our heart and our portion forever. It is good for us to draw near to God. Go to the Lord. Do not abide in the problems, which are endless, but draw near to Christ. "I put my trust in the Lord God that I may declare all Your work" (v. 28). This is for us who are in the church life.

Psalm 74

The next Psalm, Psalm 74, addresses the ambitious ones. The Psalmist cries out, "Remember Your congregation, which You have purchased of old... which you have redeemed, this Mount Zion [this testimony] of Yours. Lift up Your feet upon the perpetual desolations." Enemies are doing things apart from God in the church life. Roaring in the midst of the congregations, they set up their ensigns for signs (v. 4). Who is our "sign"? God! Jesus Christ! Now God's enemies have come in and set up another sign. Isn't that our situation? Without these two years I could never understand these verses with such experience. Now you look at all the LSM churches. What do you see? No sign of Christ, but instead the signs that they are proudly of Living Stream. They still talk of the lo-

cal church, but it is secondary. When they say "local church," what they are actually exalting are "blending brothers," "one flow," the "seven times," or the "acting God". This, in other words, has become their type of "store." When a sign changes, it indicates the ownership has changed. The sign used to be very clear that the churches belonged to Christ alone. Now ambitious ones have come in and set up other signs. When you take other names, you have no idea to where that will lead. When we first began to love the Lord, we were very simple. Everything was related to Christ. Now you see many congregations have deviated from this. They are no longer local churches, for they have put up other signs. Even the Psalmist knew what would happen!

When Count Zinzendorf was nearing death, he made it clear that he wished no special gravestone. He felt he was just a brother among all the saints. After he died, however, they gave him a grave higher than the others. This becomes an "ensign for a sign". Today, the presence of such signs as "one publication," "acting God," "in the Body fellowship" and so on has become very definite.

When a man seeks to gain a name, doing so to gain power among the churches, he eventually must attempt to lift up his axe against the "thick trees" that are present (74:5). The thick trees are growing to produce life, so they come to cut off these life-lines. If you are such a one and yet do not

do as they say in these places, you are out! They cut off those who give life to the saints. Their desire is that such ones would be useless. If you can assist their operation, they will keep you. Otherwise, if you want to grow something for the saints, they will cut you off. Why? Because to them there is only one group working as the acting God. Brother, if you are such a one and they succeed in chopping you down, how about your locality? It will suffer the loss of your ability to supply them with life.

Now they break down the carved work thereof, and advance with axes and hammers (74:6). Carved work in the Bible refers to the work of the Spirit. They come in to cut off the work of the Spirit wholesale with an axe or smash it piece by piece with a hammer. They do not allow anything of the Spirit's work to be found among their followers. Isn't this more Roman Catholic than the Roman Catholics? "Catholic" means everyone is included, but in the Roman Catholic Church, everything is ritualized and the Spirit is excluded. In such a place a sister such as Madame Guyon was persecuted for no reason other than the fact she knew Christ. In such a setting, those who dare to follow the Lord are targeted for destruction. A number have been excommunicated simply because they questioned something that did not seem to be of the Spirit, or were seeking after the Spirit

"They have cast fire into Thy sanctuary, they have defiled by casting down the dwelling place of Thy

name to the ground" (v. 7). When everyone wonders where their future will be, they raise up a name as an ensign, cut off those who can produce something real for the church life (the thick trees), and do their best to destroy the work of the Spirit (the carved work). Eventually, they cast fire into the sanctuary and cast the dwelling place of the Lord's name to the ground, totally changing the Lord's recovery and the local churches into something else. What were once local churches became Living Stream churches. If the saints only cared for Christ, such things would have no way to operate among us, but because the saints become so religious, such ambitious ones find an open door to operate.

I was so shocked when I read these verses. It seems too clear as to how so many churches are being destroyed. But, the Psalmist says, God is his King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth (v. 12). Look over the whole globe. Vern and I recently went to Ghana. The brothers there reminded me that I first visited in 1978. They still remembered some of the things I shared then. We had met in one classroom. People walked a long way to the meeting. We felt unqualified, but we did our best to serve. About eighty met with us. This time the number represented by these brothers we met with had grown to three thousand saints from sixty churches spread across four countries. How much the Lord has blessed them! I saw their hall, which was very beautiful, and I was in-

formed I had a lot of input as to its design, something which I had no recollection of. Then we went to Uganda. The first day there was a training with about fifty saints. The second day, one thousand came to hear us. As I looked at them, I was reminded again how the Lord was at work over the entire earth. Don't just look at the situation in your local church! Our God is a God who is working in the midst of the whole earth!

When I was in Africa I also met a man from Kenya who drove all the way to see us. He knew of me from our Cleveland website. He told me there were six-hundred meetings in twenty churches! Yesterday I got a letter from Cuba. It was an invitation to visit, but I do not think we as Americans are allowed to go. But look at the earth! If you look at Mansfield or Cleveland or at your locality, you may feel things are so poor. In some places the godless ones seem to be very firm, driving tanks over everything, but we should lift up our eyes to see that the Lord is still moving over the entire earth! You have to learn to look at the situation with such eyes. In China, every time I go I meet new groups of Christians who desire to have fellowship, but we simply cannot work with all of them. We have no strength to care for them all. It is beyond what we are able to do, yet the Lord is opening doors from province to province. In one county in China, we know of over thirty full-timers serving the Lord for His testimony! Their only desire is to preach the gospel and raise up lo-

cal churches. How marvelous this is! Look at the whole earth and see how much the Lord is doing. He is God, working salvation in the midst of the earth! For ourselves, our conclusion is "Whom have I in heaven but You, and there is none upon the earth I desire but You." But for the church's testimony, look at how the Lord is working in the midst of the entire earth!

Psalm 77

In Psalm 77, the Psalmist says "I cried unto the Lord with my voice....my soul refused to be comforted (vv. 1-2). Now he really suffers. First, he became envious. Secondly, some came in and trampled over the church life. In this third matter, things become much harder, because it involves the leaders. They are with you, and you cannot simply ignore them as you might those who try to come into the church life and do damage. Regarding the leaders who are unable to function properly, you can only cry out, "O Lord. I complained, my spirit was overwhelmed" (v. 3). "Will the Lord cast off forever?" (v. 7) When the leading ones do not take a proper stand, the saints really suffer. This is the cry of the saints under such a leadership. They realize the brothers do not know how to properly confront the invasion of things other than Christ. Eventually he says, This is my cowardice ("infirmity" v. 10). This person recognizes he does have a problem. He does not know how to respond. He remembers the

years of the right hand of the most High. But at the same time, he is insufficient to confront an enemy invasion such as this.

On mainland China I met a brother who was very clear concerning the situation. I told him he simply had to follow the Lord. He said, "I am instead waiting for them to chase me out." In such a situation, it may be wise to wait, but while such a person waits, he suffers, and even more, the church and the saints suffer. If those in power are wise enough not to chase him out, he would be finished. He was chased out eventually, and praised the Lord. Quickly he began to minister, and a group of saints became established through his labor. I asked him, however, if he had not been such a coward, what might have been if he had taken a stand to follow the Lord when he became clear about it six years earlier? Why does the church decline? Number one, the saints become religiously troubled. Number two, the ambitious ones see an opportunity and act on it. Number three, those who should stand up and speak out don't. Because of this the saints suffer, and those who are infirm in the lead also suffer.

So many among the leading ones are clear and know what is right and disagree with what is happening. If you were to ask them why they do not rise up, their reply will be that they simply cannot. For a saint to say "I can't" is understandable, but for a leader to say "I can't" is shameful. Such a person puts the Lord's people on trial for the sake

of his own position and comfort, and sacrifices the interest of Christ in the local churches for his own profit. How shameful this is! You can declare your infirmity and cowardice, but it doesn't change the fact you have betrayed the Lord's interest for your own.

The speaker says, "I am a coward, but Lord, be with us. Your way is in the sanctuary" (see v. 13). In the midst of declaring his infirmity, he still says, "The Lord has mercy". But, in the process, the church suffers.

We will consider these matters further. We should be impressed that, beginning with us, we must do our best not to succumb to religious reactions. Let us be able to say that we only desire and seek after Christ. All that we seek to gain is Christ. When others come to destroy, we still realize that the Lord has His work in the whole earth. Thirdly, when it is time to take a stand, even though we don't know how we can do it, we still would say, "Lord, you are the Name of all names. You are the One who has raised us up for Your testimony. Strengthen us to function for You as You desire."

*Shared by Titus Chu,
December 14, 2007,
at Ashland Woods Fellowship
Center near Sullivan, Ohio
The first of three messages.*

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Powerful Testimony— About 1,000 saints cram into the Law Development Centre in Kampala for the corporate church gathering. More than 40 communities attended.



Refreshing Visit

On September 21 brothers Titus Chu and Vern Yoder visited Uganda. The brothers were welcomed at the airport by more than 30 saints from the church, who received them with joyful shouts and singing. This was brother Titus' first time visiting Uganda since 2004. Almost none of the saints currently meeting in the church had ever met him before.

During his brief stay brother Titus held a conference at Makerere University and conducted a training for the saints in the ten-month training and full-time serving ones. While the atmosphere of this training was informal, the messages were powerful—filled with personal experiences and practical application. The saints gained valuable principles related to their love for the Lord and service in the church. They also received an inculcating word against pitfalls that could hinder their growth in life.

Brother Titus also ministered to nearly 1,000 saints from over 40 communities in and around Kampala at the corporate church meeting.

Vern Yoder was able to stay some additional days and was able to render much help to the full-time serving saints, the trainees, the pastors in various communities, and the church as a whole. Tina and I were personally benefited by the brother's visit. Thank-you brothers for your care and ministry.

Bright future— Brother Titus Chu conducted an informal training with saints from the current and past ten-month training and those who are serving the church full-time. The commitment among these brothers and sisters to Christ and the church may very well shape the future of the country!



Child Care, a precious service—David Ssempijja and Richard Kamyia care for children during the corporate church meeting in Kampala



Service training— Vern Yoder ministers to Community leaders and pastors from communities throughout Kampala who gather for a weekly training.

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Multiplying- Kizito, Solomon, and Lauryn stand with some of the saints who are now meeting in Mukono



Participants- for the 2007-2008 ten-month Training pose outside the meeting place for the church in the Makerere community

New Training Underway

In August of this year a new ten-month training began. Currently there are twelve full-time participants and another six who attend part time. Most of the participants are recent graduates from Makerere University. Some have even taken a "dead year" from their university education just so that they could attend. It is our hope that the Lord will use this training to raise up saints who genuinely love the Lord and can become solid pillars in the church. It is my prayer that the ministry of the Lord's word into people through trainings such as these would result in the building up and spread of churches. It is also my personal belief that the practical or local church, is the hope of this city, country, and all of Africa. May the Lord continue to use the trainings to obtain a bright and shining testimony throughout Africa.

Serving sisters- Lauryn and Rachael (3rd and 5th from left) with some of the sisters from the Mukono community.

Developing fields

There are now six local brothers serving the church in Kampala on a full-time basis. Two of the brothers - Kizito Ongole and Solomon Pius travel twice weekly to Mukono- a developing city about 10km outside Kampala. There they labor at UCU (Ugandan Christian University) bringing the good news of the gospel to the students one by one. They are currently meeting with about 15 students and others from Mukono on a regular basis at a facility just outside the campus. Through their labor, people are being shepherded to have a deep love for the Lord and His church.

Two serving sisters, Rachael Navuga and Lauryn Kamusiime, join the brothers for their weekly gathering to help meet the need among the sisters. In addition, they regularly labor at Makerere University Business School, a branch campus on Kampala's west side. Some from their labor are now beginning to meet with the church here in Kampala.



Ministry of Life- saints from the ten-month training organized and carried out a gospel event at Makerere University designed to reach the in-coming students.



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Outdoor Classroom—Randolph Mann teaching trainees during the ten-month training

A Welcomed supply

We would like to offer a special thanks to brother Randolph Mann who willingly offered to come to Uganda to support the burden here. Randolph and his wife Debbie first visited Uganda with the group who came in June, earlier this year. They were so touched with all that the Lord was doing here that this led them to pray and have a further consideration. Through prayer and fellowship, Randolph then offered to come to Uganda for three months and to labor in any way he could be of assistance. He arrived in September and was immediately brought into service. During his stay he has helped to shepherd the new full-time serving saints and join with them in their fields of labor. He has also done much in the field of evangelism, labored with the saints in the Naguru community, as well as taught some classes in the ten-month training. It has also been refreshing for Tina and me to have a dear brother and companion from our early days in the church to labor alongside us.

Other Happenings

Just Married!—Congratulations are in order for our brother Alex Mwangi and his newly wedded wife Francie. The couple decided to forgo all the cultural traditional obstacles that make getting married difficult. Instead, they had a brief, simple ceremony after the Lord's table meeting that was enjoyed by many of the saints. The couple hoped their marriage would serve a positive example for others considering marriage



New Bridge - People in the Naguru community have better access to the main road thanks to a newly renovated bridge. Randolph Mann and brother George Peter worked with George Kiiza to remodel the dilapidated old bridge.



Our sincere Appreciation...

2007 has been a trying year for the churches. We understand that many of the saints have personally suffered all kinds of persecutions and trials. Yet in the midst of this, you have continued your care for us. We would like to thank you all for the love, prayers, and support that are enabling the move of the Lord to continue here in Uganda. Your emails and letters are a real encouragement to us. Take comfort in 1Peter 1:6-7.

Keith and Tina Miller

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THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST IN PHILIPPIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-ONE: PURSUING THE UPWARD, ONWARD CHRIST AS OUR UNIQUE PRIZE

Philippians 3:

13 Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before,

14 I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward.

15 Let us therefore, as many as are full-grown, have this mind: and if in anything you are otherwise minded, this also God will reveal to you.

After attaining to the high point of verse 12 in Philippians 3, it is surprising that Paul would then write, “Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold, but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before, I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward” (3:13). Such a strong statement has a surprising logic. He has just said, “if even I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.” He has already arrived at the peak, and now he discovers a plane at the very height, instead of a point from which he must return. Once we arrive at the top-

most experience of Christ, we find unsearchable riches for us to abide in. It is not that we arrive at a peak from which we can only come down. No, it is an immense plane! Therefore Paul says, “I do not account of myself to have laid hold...”

The type of logic we live by generates our ideology. For instance, if our credo is “I live for the Lord,” that determines how we make choices and live our life, regardless how spiritual we may be. We will live according to that logic. Paul here is saying, “No matter how spiritual I may be or how much I have gained of Christ or how mature I have become as a be-

liever, I refuse to consider that my quest is over or that I have arrived.”

In creation, things are finite. Even a scholar of Shakespeare will find there comes a point when everything has been mastered; there is little of real interest that needs to be studied. A brother who was wealthy once said to me, “Titus, I have made so much money, but now I ask myself, ‘What have I made all this money for? There’s not much value in it.’” In the Christian life, however, you just continue to go higher and higher. At every point, you think you have so much, even though you haven’t arrived at the utmost peak yet. Then, when you arrive at the experience Paul speaks of in verse 12, where you really have gained Christ, you discover Christ is truly unsearchable!

Verse 13 becomes a crucial verse for anyone who desires to pursue Christ life-long. Some spiritual men arrive at a place where they feel they have mastered the Bible. Since they have read the Bible so many times, they feel as though they really know what every verse is talking about. This determination is the reason so many denominations have developed. They come out of someone’s riches, but the living Christ disappears. Why? Just because they feel like they have basically arrived. They believe they have received and

grasped the totality. Yet Paul, after ascending these seven stages we have highlighted in this chapter, and after arriving at the peak, discovers Christ is an unlimited expanse for us to explore. We are laying hold of Christ, and He is laying hold of us! What an open door! What I have experienced thus far is not sufficient, no matter how rich it seems to have been.

Only those who have a limited experience of Christ declare that they have a lot. Those who have passed through all the stages of pursuing and gaining Christ until they can say “that I may lay hold of that which I have also been laid hold of by Christ” can only say “not that I have already obtained.” Once you arrive at the seeming peak

Throughout eternity, we will still be discovering further riches of Christ for our enjoyment and everlasting reality.

of enjoying Christ, your declaration is: “There is no way I can exhaust such an unsearchably rich Christ!” Throughout eternity, we will still be discovering further riches of Christ to be the substance of our enjoyment, and our everlasting reality. Because of this Paul says, “After I have paid such a price and have passed through all the levels of experience to arrive where I now am, I can only say ‘I do not account of myself to have laid hold.’” The Lord’s riches are beyond telling! Therefore Paul can only say, “Yet one thing I do...”

In this portion of three verses (vv. 13-16), we have further stages of realization. First is to acknowledge that something is in view. It is because of this Paul writes “I do not account of myself to have laid hold.” Instead, he says, “One thing I now do... I forget the things that are behind and stretch forward to what is before.”

Forgetting the things behind is something that is apparently impossible. First of all, the things behind us are the things that have become a part of our constitution, and secondly, many of the things that are behind us are cherished matters, or else we wouldn't keep them in mind. While we may want to forget the negative and troublesome things, we find it hard to leave behind the things that we treasure.

Things that have become our constitution are a part of us. An overweight person may love to lose what has become a part of his constitution, but it is not going to go away no matter how much he determines to leave it behind. I came to this country weighing just 95 pounds! I have considerably “broadened” since then. I may wish to drop what I have added, but my wishing can't change my present constitution. Spiritually it is the same. All the things you have enjoyed spiritually have become a part of you. Recall all the wonderful times you have experienced the Spirit, all the where's and when's. After you become a Jesus-lover, your spirit is made alive, and your constitution has changed. Because of this, you begin to see other be-

lievers as your dear brothers and sisters. Isn't this good? You also remember times of ministry and enjoyment. What wonderful times! Brothers and sisters, do you realize that all such things have to be let go?

I recall when I first truly repented before the Lord, and the sweetness I experienced. I remember the many times the Lord has touched me since then, often bringing me to tears. The problem is that when I hold on to these occasions and events and happenings, I am prevented from going on to new experiences as I might. Yes, all these wonderful things have contributed to the spiritual constitution I now possess. This constitution I carry forward with me, but I must learn not to carry with me all the things that brought me to this point if I wish to go on further.

FIVE CATEGORIES OF THINGS TO BE LEFT BEHIND

What are the things I must learn to leave behind me? They are of four categories: religious experience, revelations, experiences of growth, teachings, and our work.

1. RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Paul could say, “I was a Pharisee, a Hebrew, a Benjaminite, successful at keeping the law, instructed of Gamaliel, and in so many ways zealous in pursuing the things of my religion” (see 3:4-7 and Gal. 1:13-14, for instance).

2. REVELATIONS

Paul could also say, "I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body I do not know, or outside the body I do not know; God knows) such a one was caught away to the third heaven. And I know such a man...that he was caught away into Paradise and heard unspeakable words..." (2 Cor. 12:2-4). Paul himself never boasted in his revelations. Luke recorded his word to Agrippa and his experience on the road to Damascus, but Paul himself never goes into detail about what the revelations were in which he heard "unspeakable words." The reality the revelations imparted to him that became his constitution never departed from him, but the happenings themselves he did not hold onto. He preferred to boast in his weaknesses. He didn't want praise from men, because to entertain such a thing is to forfeit further growth.

Many might consider such revelations as qualification to be somebody. Wouldn't it be reasonable to open up a "Third Heavens Training Center"? Paul was taken to the third heavens and was shown things. As far as we can tell, the Lord never told him he couldn't do such a thing. He was never told he

couldn't pass along such things for the benefit of others. To Paul, however, to do such a thing would jeopardize his further pursuing of Christ. Even the very event of a revelation can become a frustration to us when it comes to pursuing Christ. That revelation may have brought about some growth of life, but the event itself we must not lay hold on to. We have to learn not to hold onto the event, or it will hinder us in our further pursuing. This is a law.

3. SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Thirdly, we must learn to forget about how much we may have grown spiritually. We should not abide in our growth. If you are someone who feels that so many others are spiritual infants when compared to you, you are finished. Instead of celebrating, you should sing a dirge for yourself. Yes, you may have grown. Thank the Lord. But abiding in such a realization can frustrate you from growing further.

While we may want to forget the negative and troublesome things, we find it hard to leave behind the things that we treasure.

4. TEACHINGS

Fourthly, the truths we have received also have the ability to prevent us from going on with the Lord. Those who give a message on some matter know how that matter can become formed in you as

you minister on it. That portion of truth then becomes “hard” in you. For instance, I gave a message in which I actually was mistaken on a certain matter, and yet because I was sharing on it, even that mistake then became a truth, as far as I was concerned! I can even point to a saint who was very helped by my interpretation! How easy it is for us to give a message on a certain verse, and then afterwards feel, “That’s it!” We forget that the Bible is a divine speaking, and whatever is of divine speaking is always fresh. If we simply are able to

look at our notes on a verse and then share only according to those notes, thinking that we “have it,” then we are not someone who is “forgetting what is behind.” Many times, the truth can be something we lay hold on instead of the present Christ.

When I was giving that message in which I “misapplied” a certain type, some were checking their footnotes and glaring at me for my “mistake.” It is good to know what is in the footnotes, but it is even better to have the present Christ!

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...

When we dwell
in these things,
we are unable
to find
Christ.

What I learned from that “mistake” is that in many matters the Bible is very free. It is true that you have to abide by certain principles, but too many feel like they know exactly what a verse means or how a certain matter is to be defined, and thus cannot forget something that is behind for the sake of stretching to what may lie ahead.

5. OUR WORK

Finally, something that can also easily stumble us in our pursuit of Christ is our work. For instance, we had a glorious meeting upon the comple-

tion of this hall. Many of you who are present were not even born yet! Can we forget such things? Our constitution is what we take forward with us, but these other things, such as the “good old days,” we must learn to let go. A certain brother recently reminded me of a certain conference I spoke at. He said, “I just felt as though I was flowing with divine water. Every saint was just overflowing!” How we love to hear these stories! Since I gave this conference, I enjoyed hearing this testimony even more than the person

enjoyed giving it. The problem is that such times are so difficult to forget. When we dwell in these things, however, we are unable to find Christ today.

SELF CLINGS TO AND IS SECURE IN WHAT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

The frustration due to these five things—what we religiously practice, what we have been given to see, our “maturity,” our knowledge of truth, and any accomplishment in our work for the Lord— simply exists because our self loves them. Our self is comforted by religious practice. It boasts in the fact we have received revelation. It basks in any stature we have arrived at spiritually. It takes pride in the truth we know. It draws a sense of accomplishment from our work. I have been following the Lord for fifty years. During these fifty years I have learned and experienced much. I could write books relating to all five of these topics, yet I am saved by Paul’s word here. “Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold, but one thing I do...”

THE FIVE CATEGORIES ARE LIKE FIVE “WIVES” OF SELF

Our self is always seeking for something to boast in. It needs some capital, however, before it can do this. (If it has no capital, things can even get worse, for people in the religious realm will often spy on others and report to those who do seem to have stature as if by pulling someone else down,

they may be brought up.) We all must realize we have such a self, and that this self is married to five “wives”—religious practice, the desire for revelation, the appearance of spiritual growth, knowledge of truth, and accomplishment in our labor.

We must know that if we dwell in these things, we are in trouble. If we feel, “Ha! Look what I am able to do! Look at what I have seen! Look at how far I have come! Look at what I now know! Look at what I have accomplished!”... then the Lord will say, “Ha! You are finished.”

The secret is simply this: “I do not account of myself to have laid hold.” It doesn’t matter how rich you are. Would you dare compare yourself with the apostle Paul? Yet it was he who said this. According to the Greek scholar Frieberger, “on account” here refers to thinking according to a logical rule.

FORGETTING AND STRETCHING

“Forgetting” is a word that indicates intensity, and accumulation even to the point of fullness. It simply means, “I have become completely unaware.” For instance, a brother recently had a good time with some trainees in another country. If I were to ask that brother about it, his response will reveal whether or not he is still within that, or whether he is beyond it. In order to go beyond these things, we must be someone who knows how to intensely leave them behind. Otherwise, our abiding in these

things declares we no longer hunger to go on further with the Lord.

The word translated “stretching forward” combines the word for “stretch” with a prefix that intensifies it. It is only found here in the New Testament. The phrase “toward the goal” is also only found here. The picture is that of a runner straining himself towards the finish line. His whole being is geared towards running the race. He does not look around at who may be watching. He does not wave to anyone in the stands. Even if people were to try to distract him, he would give no heed to them. He is totally focused on the goal that is set before him. And what is this goal? It is Christ! He only sees that he must obtain Christ. He sees that his whole life is only for gaining Christ, and the only danger is that he might miss Christ. What Paul portrays here is the means and intensity of someone who is truly pursuing Christ. Nothing else means anything to such a person other than gaining Christ.

This is why we feel so energized after attending a certain time of ministry or after touching the Lord in prayer or reading. We see Jesus! We feel our life is new, and that our direction is as it should be: towards the Lord. After such a time, we do not feel like we have reached the peak and that everything afterwards must be an anticlimax. No, we see that Christ is a broad place for us to abide in. In such a pursuit there is no such thing as retirement. There is simply continual enjoyment, intense forgetting, and

stretching forward to what still lies ahead of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Pursuing is Persecuting

Paul says the goal for the prize God has called him to is in Christ Jesus. The riches he sees are the riches that are in Christ Jesus. Therefore, he pursues. As we have seen, the word “pursue” also means to persecute. To pursue Christ is also to persecute ourselves, but to truly be able to accomplish this, we have to see who we are.

Who are you? First of all, you are a big “I”. You have a soul, so you have a soul-life. With the soul-life is what the Bible calls the old man. The person of this old man is the self. If you see this, you will gladly persecute yourself so that you might pursue and gain Christ!

THREE ASPECTS OF THE WORLD FITTING WITH THREE ASPECTS OF OUR MAKE-UP

The three aspects of the world are simply related to who we are. The material world is related to our flesh, whether sinful or natural. The psychological world is related to our soul. The religious world is related to our spirit.

Don’t you have a big “I”? Don’t you have a strong soul-life? Are you not a very hard old man? Don’t you live your self-life according to your natural ability? Do you not also have a troublesome flesh? This is you, and this you is related to these three worlds. The flesh of your old

man is related to the sinful world. The soul-life and your natural man are related to the psychological world. Once someone becomes a Christian, the I and the self are typically most strongly controlled by the religious world. Therefore, in order to pursue Christ, we must know how to take care of these three aspects of the world.

Of the three, the sinful world is normally the easiest to handle, because it is the most obvious. The psychological world is more difficult, however. Most believers have a hard time with the psychological world. The psychological world, however, involves thinking about things in ways that have nothing at all to do with Christ. Just consider all the ideologies that exist today. But the most troublesome aspect of the world, when it comes to pursuing Christ, is the religious aspect. It is the religious world that becomes the closest comrade to our self-life, for it is always supportive of the idea of being for Christ. The problem is that it doesn't reveal that it is actually taking you away from Christ even as it speaks of Christ. The sinful world, on the other hand, makes no such claims. Since it leads to sin, the conscience reacts, and this usually leads to repentance. In the religious world, however, few see it as something to repent of, for their conscience seems to remain peaceful.

The psychological world lies somewhere between. It best fits our natural man. For instance, I was driven here by a brother in a late model Camry. It is a comfortable

What does it mean
to persecute
yourself?
It means to take the
route nobody else
would take.

enough car, but it is not a Lexus! This brother, however, is a doctor, and when he meets others, they often drive new, luxurious cars. In that realm it is difficult not to sometimes feel you should also get a better car. That is how the psychological world operates. Another example has to do with how people in the world take vacations. Does this not make some among us envious? If you serve the Lord, you will get to see plenty of places, as the Lord arranges. Yet it is easy to see what others have. We, however, have set ourselves to gain Christ, and Christ alone! Therefore, we must know ourselves and the world, and what must be "persecuted" in ourselves in order that we may pursue Christ.

What does it mean to persecute yourself? It means to take the route nobody else would take. Others dance, buy things, go places, seek after entertainment, and yet we have nothing to do with those things because we persecute ourselves that we may gain Christ. Then oth-

ers say they have success, money, and a name, and yet we don't, because we are persecuting ourselves that we may gain Christ. Nobody knows us! Paul said they were even considered the scum and off-scouring of all things. Jesus said, "Woe to you when others..." (name). We pursue Christ by taking care of our being. Even though we may have the "legal" right to enjoy certain things, we persecute ourselves.

And even more so, we realize the danger of the religious world. We may not have the things of the sinful or material or psychological world, but we have the church life! Therefore, many think "Can't I at least become someone in the church life?" We have no right to become anything. The Lord never gained anything. The apostle Paul never sought anything other than to gain Christ. We only have the right to persecute ourselves so that we might gain Christ. Watchman Nee wrote "I only want to be lonely and hidden; in this sinful world, may Christ alone be honored." He only desired to follow the Lord faithfully to the end. There is nothing for us in the sinful world, the material world, the psychological world, or even the religious world. We are not aiming at being considered a good brother or sister in the church life. We are not aiming at gaining others' recognition or appreciation. Our goal is Christ and Christ alone. Why? We have seen upon the mountaintop the open field of Christ for us to enjoy. Therefore we

forget whatever is behind us, and stretch forward to what is before us. What we see is too precious. Therefore we persecute ourselves to pursue Christ, saying goodbye to the world. All that is of my flesh, my talent, my reasoning, and even my religious gain is gone. Only Christ is left for me to enjoy, and only Christ becomes the substance of my life. I don't care about what price I pay, or what will be the appearance of my life to others. What I do care about is Christ. Therefore I pursue. If in anything I may satisfy these three worlds, I say no! I am here to pursue and gain Christ, and Christ alone.

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(continued)

[Another message begins here]

We realize we must remain upon this wonderful expanse we find at the “peak” in verse 12. Therefore we determine to do one thing—to pursue towards the goal for the prize for which God in Christ Jesus has called us upward (v. 14). This is now our living. How do we pursue in this way? It is by a stand and by a practice. Our stand is now to forget the things that are behind and our practice is to stretch forward to the things that are before. Our living is now a life of pursuing.

CHRIST THE GOAL IS NEVER BEYOND OUR REACH

The goal of our pursuit is Christ Himself, and the one who is overseeing our pursuing is also Christ! A. T. Robertson, a renowned Greek scholar, stated the meaning here is that as we continually press forward, the goal also presses forward. Christ is not a “fixed” goal. Instead, He keeps Himself just ahead of us, based upon our pursuing. If He allowed Himself to be laid hold of according to our concept, we would stop our pursuing! Because we need to be continually growing and maturing, Christ as our goal always remains just ahead of us, calling us onward to a deeper, richer union with Himself. He continues to reveal Himself as the goal to draw us after Him, and therefore we continue to run! This is why even Paul could not say, after all his hard “running,” that he had arrived.

CHRIST OUR DIRECTOR AND OUR GOAL

The word “upward” in the Greek original can refer either to a place (the heavenlies) or a direction. We have a place we are going to, and we have a direction in which we are going, and the goal before us is always moving onward, always keeping itself in sight.

When you first become a Christian, perhaps your goal is to make the meetings. Then you grow a bit more, and your goal then is to enjoy the Lord in your daily life. As you pursue this, you see something further. Saints, there is no such thing as retirement for a Christian, for there is always something further for us to pursue in our experience of Christ. The interesting thing is, the

Christ runs ahead according to how we ourselves are running. He never runs too fast for us or gets too far ahead of us. He is always urging us on according to where we are at.

goal for each one of us, regardless how different our levels of growth, seems to remain just ahead. In a sense, the distance to the goal is the same for each of us.

ALWAYS PURSUING,
NEVER ARRIVING

This is not at all like it is in the world. In the world, after you get your Bachelor's degree, you are finished with college, unless you get an advanced degree, in which case you are considered an expert or specialist. Why is it that, after some have run for many years, and others but for a short while, each seems to be pursuing the same goal? This is a mystery, but in following Christ you can never declare, "I have attained!" There is no graduation from the Christian life. No one can say to anyone else, "I have achieved the top-level 'black belt' in following Christ. How about you?" No matter how much we have pursued, Christ remains ahead of us, and runs ahead according to how we ourselves are running. He never runs too fast for us or gets too far ahead of us. He is always urging us on according to where we are at.

This goal we run towards is Christ, and it is overseen by Christ.

**BEING MATURE MEANS HAVING THE
MIND TO PURSUE CHRIST
ABOVE ALL ELSE**

In verse 15 we read, "Let us therefore as many as are full-grown have this mind, and if in anything you are

otherwise minded (meaning you think too wildly) this also God will reveal to you." There is such a thing as coming to a certain stand based on your growth. A number will arrive at a stature that Paul calls "full-grown." This doesn't mean they have laid hold; it just means they have arrived at this kind of mind—the mind that seeks to lay hold of Christ by forgetting what is behind and stretching forward to what is before.

PERFECTION A MATTER OF QUALITY,
NOT QUANTITY

The Greek word for full-grown means "being perfect." Perfection in this case is not related to quantity, but to quality. Maturity is not a matter of quantity. For instance, maturity is not a matter of how many verses you know. It is not based upon how many conferences or messages you have attended. Being full-grown or mature has to do with something divine that has, by the Lord's mercy, developed within.

Paul's word is to "as many as are full-grown." There should be a number of brothers among us like this.

**MATURITY MEANS HAVING THE DESIRE
TO MATCH GOD'S HIGH CALL**

Those who are mature have the desire to match God's high calling. They desire to win the prize. Therefore, they use their mind to consider things with this goal in view. They aim at the best and the highest. They are with the Lord to obtain whatever is best. They are able to tell the Lord in

a bold way, "My living on this earth is for one thing: to gain Christ!" Paul, as one comparatively full-grown, was able to say "I only have this mind in me."

THE MIND IN PHILIPPIANS

In chapter one of Philippians the terms "mind" and "soul" were used instead of mind. The strongest part of your soul is your mind. It is your mind that determines your soul. The heart is another word that also approximates the soul, with the mind. In chapter one of Philippians, Paul told the saints that they had him in their *heart*. He also said they should strive together in one *soul* for the gospel of Christ. The gospel has to do with the mind.

In chapter two, the mind advances. It is not merely a matter of having someone in mind or preaching the gospel with a certain mind. In chapter two we have the mind of Christ Jesus, a mind which we can also have, to humble ourselves for the sake of the Body of Christ. This mind came from the heavens to be a man. A person with this mind humbled Himself, even to the point of suffering a shameful death. A person with this mind eventually was exalted by the Father. It was not a mind that said, "What do I get for all that I have sacrificed?" Yet the Father exalted Him and gave Him a name that is above every other name.

In chapter 3, the mind is again stressed. As we have the brothers

in our heart, as you are endeavoring to live unto the gospel, as you are blending yourself with all the brothers in the principle of death, we need to remember one thing. We are for gaining Christ. Christ is our unique goal and prize. Christ is God's high calling. After advancing through Philippians, the mind becomes saturated with one thought: I want to gain Christ! The goal of my life is Christ alone!

Don't think this is as easy as simply saying it. Is a brother who raises up a congregation willing to drop it if the Lord is leading him to do so? Or does he reason with something else in view, such as his obligation or the seeming need of his congregation? Only those who are spiritually mature are able to say, "I only care for Christ and nothing else." Our labor must simply become whatever it takes for us to gain Christ, to accumulate more Christ. If we are full-grown, we should have this mind.

Then Paul says, "But if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal this to you" In other words, if we remain veiled to how surpassingly excellent Christ is, God will eventually be able to reveal Christ to us to such an extent that we become mature enough to desire Christ and Christ alone.

From Messages shared by Titus Chu in Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, in April and May of 2004.