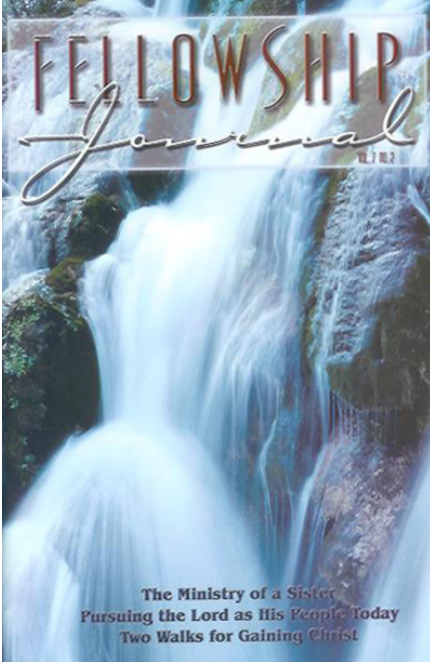


FELLOWSHIP *Journal*

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A Sister's Exercise

God in Marriage

Noah's Curse

Transition in Acts

Two Walks to
Gain Christ

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In this issue, we have a continuation from the 2006 College Training on the Life of Moses in the form of question and answer, the topic being the stand of a proper local church. An important time of fellowship is also represented in a message spoken in Goshen during a conference there on the exercise needed when confronting a time of transition. We continue on in Philippians towards the end of chapter 3 with an examination of two aspects of the walk we must exercise that we may continue to gain Christ, and we consider something regarding race (in light of the serious consequence of misapplying Noah's curse) and gender (in examining the need for a new beginning for the exercise of the sisters among us), with encouraging results! An overview of God's desire and its application to marriage as both a picture and a means to achieve what is portrayed is also presented.

May the Lord continue to bless all the saints as they pursue after Him and may we all experience that:

“The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from His word!”

Africa's Financial Need

The Lord's work in Africa has been growing steadily. Here is an excerpt from an Email sent by Keith Miller on February 24, 2008:

"We had 85 in attendance for the Matthew Bible study and 126 (our highest) in attendance for the Lord's Day morning. The most encouraging thing is seeing the trainees and full-time saints really beginning to operate (preach the gospel, shepherd, serve in many capacities, and labor in the Word). In addition, there were 29 (boys and girls) from Old Kampala SSS (high school) in attendance for the weekly Bible study conducted by Patrick and Ivan."

"Besides the campus, the Lord has raised up a testimony in the Naguru Go-down with a Lord's Day meeting attendance of 120. Two former pastors have also joined in to stand as the Lord's testimony in Kampala. Their two congregations add another 150."

In light of the Lord's move in Africa and through fellowship, there is the feeling that the needs in Africa should be presented to the saints.

A Summary of Current Needs:

1. Support of 6 fulltimers

Sixteen young people attended a full-time training in 2006-2007. Several of these young people graduated at the top of their class at Makerere University, the top university in Uganda. Six have committed themselves to serve fulltime. Some have turned down lucrative job offers.

2. Support of the current training: 10 fulltime and 3 part time attendants

The Lord has led us to conduct another training in 2007-2008. The quality of the young people is again the cream of Ugandan youth. When the training ends in June, we expect more to commit to serve fulltime.

3. Care for Keith and Tina Miller

4. Airfare for coworkers' travel to and from Uganda

5. Church needs not covered by local offerings.

Annual Need: \$120,000

Immediate Need: \$60,000

A brother has offered \$60,000 to cover half of the expenses. Therefore, there is an immediate need of \$60,000 to support the Lord's work in Uganda. There is an emergency work fund of \$30,000 that can be used temporarily to cover eminent expenses, but this fund needs to be replenished.

Please consider this matter before the Lord.

A Time of Gathering in Cleveland Heights

On February 10 about 150 saints gathered in the rented meeting facility of Cleveland Heights church for a wonderful conference with Brother Titus Chu. About 75 saints from Cleveland Heights, 25 from Mayfield Heights, and 50 from the Metro-Cleveland area enjoyed a time of fellowship, ministry, and meeting new people. The churches in Cleveland Heights and Mayfield Heights have both begun meeting within the last three years. Cleveland Heights began with the help of the 2005 Gospel Odyssey and Mayfield Heights began with the help of the 2006 Gospel Odyssey. Both churches have a great burden to reach out to their communities with the gospel. Through much labor and the blessing of the Lord, both churches have grown from meeting local people, a good number of whom have been saved and baptized among us. For many of these people this gathering was one of the first times they heard brother Titus share. There was a great warm response to the time of rich ministry and fellowship.

Brother Titus shared on the topic “loving the Lord and loving the church.” He encouraged saints to not merely hear and see the Lord Jesus, but also to focus on Him (behold) and even more to handle Him (1 John 1:1). He also shared about a simple and enjoyable church life where we have experienced saints bringing us into the fellowship of the Father and Son, and where our gathering together causes us to experience the blood of Jesus cleansing us from every sin. He also described the church life as being full of children who only know one thing: running back to the Father. Out of all these children some are fathers who know Him who is from the beginning, others are young men who have the word abiding in them, and others are young children who have their sins forgiven. We especially need to see young men raised up who know the word and who can thus overcome the evil one.

The whole gathering was a great blessing. It was a blessing to plan, prepare, and set up for the conference (we had to set up chairs and tables from 12 midnight till 3:30 am the morning of the conference). It was a blessing to hear rich, uplifting ministry. And it was a blessing to have fellowship with many other saints who love the Lord and who have given their lives to him. We hope the Lord continues to move through all the churches to reach out to the cities where He has placed us. *(submitted by Rex Beck)*

SISTERS CONFERENCE AT ASHLAND WOODS

Message Two

THE FOLLOWING IS DRAWN FROM A MESSAGE SPOKEN BY TITUS CHU WITH SISTERS AT ASHLAND WOODS ON DECEMBER 15, 2007.

During this brief time we would like to share about how, as a sister, you must treasure who you are, treasure the church life you are in, and treasure the resources you have. In addition to this, you should be aware of what, as a sister, you must avoid.

TREASURE WHO YOU ARE

First, treasure who you are. For a brother this is simple, but not for a sister. It is easy for a man to know where he is, yet it is very hard for a sister to know where she is. She either feels as though she is very high, or she feels she is very low. As a sister you should realize that when you feel so low, you are not that bad, and when you feel so prevailing, you are actually not that high.

SISTERS ARE TENDER AND GIVEN TO OBSERVATION

Sisters are like this because they are in possession of two things. First, they are very tender. When someone is tender, many things can grieve her, occupy her heart, and bother her. Secondly, sisters possess a finer perception than brothers do. A sister

possesses a certain ability of observation. They notice things. Therefore, it makes it more difficult for them, knowing such things, tender as they are. In comparison, nothing seems to bother a man, and yet many things will bother a sister. If a brother is driving a truck with his wife, he will drive blithely on, yet the sister will ask, "Won't dust rise up? What if a dog runs out? Watch your speed." The brother will simply respond: "Don't worry about it."

NOT ONLY A SISTER, BUT ALSO A FALLEN AND REGENERATED HUMAN BEING

As Christians, we are complicated enough already! Besides the human life and the fallen life, we also have the divine life. How simple is the life of a tree or an animal! Yet with us, three different lives are pushed into one vessel. Furthermore, while man was "fabricated" by God, woman was finely built. In Genesis we are told that God made man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into him, thus creating him. Then God took something out of man and built a woman. Man was manufactured one way, and woman another.

WOMAN IS SO DESIGNED
FOR A PURPOSE

Every woman, when compared to a male, is a much more finely-made work of art. You as a woman were made in this way to meet a need: that of your husband and of Christ, your spiritual husband. A fineness of perception and a fineness of feeling have been designed into the female by God. The sisters have been given a tender heart and a perceiving ability beyond what most brothers possess. Due to this, sisters often notice something before the brothers do. They also are more aware of certain needs than the brothers are, who tend to be more geared with the direction things need to go. How good it is that the church life has both brothers and sisters!

BEWARE OF HOW YOU AS
A SISTER MAY VIEW OTHERS

Because sisters are so keen in both feeling and awareness, many of those they are surrounded with become people that they develop strong feelings for, one way or another! Brothers' relationships tend to be more general. They can even be friendly to enemies, because they simply are not as affected by things as sisters are. For instance, I can testify that I bear no ill-will towards those who have recently attacked me. I would love to sit down and have fellowship with them, although I must take care in case that might cause *them* social difficulty.

I hope none of us would have any enemies. We should be able to lovingly receive all those who have caused trouble, even though we may be unable to take part in the stand they have taken. Brothers, however, find this much easier to do than sisters! I fear not if I may offend a brother, but should I offend a sister, I cannot sleep well at night, for I do not know whether she will ever forgive me. When someone offends a sister, what can be done to atone for it?

ABIDE IN LIFE AND
ALLOW LIFE TO PREVAIL

If you know how to abide in the divine life within and thus rise above all the issues, then the life element in you will become the element in the church life, rather than any issues that may develop due to the sisters' particular sensitivities. The moment you are able to forgive others, life flows! This eternal life becomes our salvation.

When a sister loves someone, she really loves that person, yet if she hates someone, she would even wish that in eternity she would never have to see that person. Only the eternal life can put us together in the church life, for out from this life develops a nature that looks after God's interest. If we allow this life to operate, it becomes the sustaining element in the church life. Due to its operation we find we spontaneously have the ability to love the Lord and all the things related to the Lord, including the Bible, the saints, and the church life.

Therefore, when you experience the divine life, everything becomes

very restful. Some people ask me whether I can be restful with all the things going on. (Even at this moment, I can almost guarantee that someone somewhere on this earth is saying something negative about me.) Yet I realize that as this divine life is operating within me, I am being brought into something extremely positive which goes far beyond all the negative things. In fact, these days I feel I know the joy that comes from abiding in this life more than ever before. This life within us always elevates us out of everything else to go after what is spiritual and of Christ.

Remember, God has measured to the sisters a certain tenderness that enables them to love and care for the Lord, those of the Lord, and their families. Due to this sensitivity, however, a female can view others harshly as well as being extremely loving. A man, when provoked, will not react as much. A woman, however, when offended, can be greatly affected and will respond more strongly. The tenderness and awareness a sister possesses should enable her to care for her family and God's family according to the depth of the need, however, rather than to cause her to become harsh. My wife is very conscious of my nutritional need, so she is very careful concerning what I should eat. In typical male fashion, I simply do not care much about how much oil or salt is involved, or how long something should have been cooked. It is given to the sisters, however, to care about many such

things on behalf of their family and on behalf of those in God's family.

SISTERS HAVE GREATER CAPACITY TO
LOVE, CARE FOR, AND
SHOW MERCY TO OTHERS

Sisters have a greater capacity to love and care for others, even to the point of being able to show mercy to others. In the church life, besides the need for love and caring, there is also the need for showing mercy to those who seem beyond the reach of anyone's love and care. Sisters have the ability to exercise love, care, and even mercy in the church life. If a sister does not exercise her capacity to love, care for, and show mercy to others, however, after awhile in her eyes few will appear worthy of her service due to her perception. At first certain ones may have seemed to meet her criteria, but after a few months, they may no longer appear so deserving. The longer she observes a certain person with her female perceptiveness, the more she will notice things that disagree with her female sensibilities. Will she still be able to care for them even when they seem undeserving? This is why a sister must exercise her ability to show mercy, for eventually everyone will be in need of it. Has not every saint, whether brother or sister, not received much mercy from the Lord? Therefore the sisters must allow their capacity for showing mercy to overcome what they may be unable to avoid observing.

SISTERS CAN OFTEN SEE THE NEED BROTHERS CANNOT

Sisters have the ability to see practical and spiritual needs, environmentally and practically, in the church life and in their family life. This is not a small thing! Even though a sister does not operate as the head of her household, nor as the head of the church, she should be willing to render the Lord her full cooperation to take care of her family and the need of the church. If a sister can do this, she becomes very useful in the church life.

HOW ABOUT A SISTER'S FUNCTION IN THE MEETINGS?

As the sisters seek to operate in the church life, it seems one portion in the Bible rises up to suppress them all, and that is "Let your women keep silent in the churches...for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (1 Cor 14:34-35 [see also 1 Tim 2:12 - editor]). It may be true that a woman is not the head of the home or the head of the church, but the purpose of being under headship is to develop to the full. All those under a proper headship should develop. Aren't our children under our headship so that they might fully develop? Yet it seems that due to our understanding of this one passage, all the sisters are thwarted from such a full development. For instance, the elders are not sisters, so there are many things they are unable to address among the sisters. Can they not trust such a thing to the sisters to take care of among themselves?

SISTERS CAN DO MUCH MORE

Many times I realize my tiredness is due to my own foolishness. The Lord seems to be telling me, "There are hundreds of good sisters, and yet the only things they are often entrusted with are matters such as cooking for the saints or cleaning the hall. Are they not able to shepherd others and preach the gospel? Can they not also minister and give conferences? They can become a blessing to many local churches!" After this weekend, our mentality has to be changed. The sisters should be bold to tell the local elders that the churches would have more hope if they were given more respect!

CARING FOR MATERIAL NEEDS

As those who possess a more acute perception, sisters are often more likely to discern the financial needs of the church and the work. The Lord's financial need during His earthly ministry was, in fact, met by a group of sisters (Luke 8:2-3). While brothers may at times write out a generous lump-sum check, sisters will offer in such a way as to meet the need. There is a difference. The need is indeed great. For instance, just to take care of the need of the work in Africa requires a very substantial amount. Therefore, a single generous check by a brother, even though it may be helpful, is not what is needed. What is needed are those who can offer according to the need itself, and to offer according to need

requires those who can perceive it. If many sisters begin to share in the care for the Lord's interest, rather than simply talking about it, then many would be freed from feeling the pressure of need. My personal, spiritual hope is that every Lord's Day some envelopes may be offered, not because of the money, but because it means the coworkers would sense that the saints were standing with them.

The Lord has provided. Sometimes I have even felt to return an amount offered by a locality for my sake, knowing that their need was greater than mine. We serve the Lord for the saints not because they pay our way, but because the Lord instructs us to serve them!

The sisters should learn to offer based on however the Lord tells them. Whatever a sister offers may become a fellowship with the local church they are in, the Lord's work and the workers, or with needy saints. (Never care for the needy in the way of salary, but rather as a week by week offering. Then the one in need will learn to pray, and realize that everything comes from the Lord.)

The sisters do need to be covered in financial matters because of their tenderness and observation, however. Due to what they see and how they feel, it is possible they may write a check, and then later realize it wasn't so wise. Therefore if a sister feels to give a substantial amount or become involved in a certain way, she should fellowship with her husband, or, if she is not married, with the elders in her locality.

The reason that sisters have been

given such tenderness and perceptiveness is so they might take care of their families and fulfill a particular function in the church life. In order to fulfill this function, however, a sister must seek the Lord so that she might fully realize her potential to be a blessing to the church life.

THE HEALTHY FUNCTION OF THE SISTERS IN THE CHURCH LIFE

In a healthy church, the number of sisters should be higher than that of the brothers. However, if the number exceeds two-thirds, that may not be so healthy, for it could indicate that the sisters are bossy and have scared their husbands away! Typically, though, the sisters desire that their husbands would take the lead. The problem is that when the husband does, it may not be the way the sister wanted him to go! When the sisters are so "prevailing," it hinders the brothers from following the Lord as they should. When the sisters become a frustration to the brothers, something is wrong. This may be evident when the husband says he doesn't want to go to the meeting, when in fact it is just that he has no opportunity to pursue the Lord because he is frustrated by his wife, who may act like one kind of angel in the meeting, and then another kind of "angel" when at home!

For the church life to be healthy, there should be more sisters than brothers, for the sisters have a greater ability to care for others. They have much more sustaining ability than brothers. Therefore, in the Lord's

way, it can be a profit when more sisters than brothers are involved.

IN THE CHURCH LIFE LEARN TO BE A
BLESSING AND TO BE BLESSED

In a healthy church life, each sister is a blessing, and all the saints in that locality should be a blessing to each sister. For a sister to discover how much the saints can become her blessing, however, she first has to become a blessing to them! For instance, as I travel I realize it is the saints that are my blessing much more than I am theirs. To others, it may seem I have so much to share, but my realization is that this is because the saints are all so good. When I see them, they become my blessing, so what else can I do but have more to share? Therefore, sisters, go to those in your locality and say, "Give me some of the life that you have, and I will give you of what I have. I will bless you, and in turn I will enjoy your blessing to me!" This realization should elevate every sister so that they might not live a self-centered, self-elevating life. You may wish to become a source of riches to the saints in the church life, but to do so you have to learn to first be a blessing to others and to allow others to be a blessing to you. To truly become a blessing in the church life, you must learn this secret of mutuality.

If a sister does not know how to be a blessing and receive the blessing in the church life, she may become preoccupied with thoughts such as, "What did I get? Did I grow? Have I

gotten something? Is the Lord good to me?"

It is also easy for sisters to become self-elevated. Brothers do not tend to have much mental time for such thoughts. The way to come out of this is to give yourself to the church life, especially to those things that are practically necessary for the Lord's move.

**A GREAT NEED:
HEALTHY HOUSEHOLDS**

A healthy church life is built upon healthy households which convey love and mercy and provide hospitality to others. Due to such households, every member in the church life should be able to find a place they feel they are at home. Such a matter depends much more on the sisters than the brothers.

This is our greatest need today. Don't think LSM is destroying us. If there is a problem among us, it is because of our own lack. If anything destroys us, it will be our inability to practice the genuine church life, live the spiritual life, and follow the Lord! If there are open homes in the church life, everyone should feel there is a particular place they are able to go to enjoy the presence of the Lord and of saints along with some food or refreshment. In such a church life, no one feels lonely. If your church life possesses such a "culture," I can guarantee that it will be prevailing! If a certain church is not prevailing, it is probably because the sisters and brothers are all struggling to do something for God or defend

the truth or preach the gospel, yet apart from having such homes.

If even ten percent of the homes in the church life were open in such a way, that church life would be fruitful. Our problem is not a lack of pursuing in truth or preaching the gospel and so on. Our problem is that so many saints are lonely! Rather than fighting for this or that, all in the local churches should know and be so restful that they have a home! How wonderful it is when everybody's at home! The church life becomes so "homey" when a number of the saints' homes are opened up to all the saints.

This is something we have been away from for too long. We had such a culture in the church life, but starting about twenty years ago much of it was lost. If we want to see a recovery among us, how about a recovery of such a "homey" church life? If we could, we would see increase, joyfulness, and a real appreciation of the church life we are in.

Since this will be another new beginning for us, it will not be easy. Therefore a locality should begin with just a couple of homes. When one couple goes to the other couple's home, they should bring another couple with them, and when the other couple comes to their house, they should bring another couple with them. Through such homes, any distance that exists between the saints can be erased. The saints should realize there are homes they are invited to. Such homes are easy to bring new ones to. In just a few months, a few homes like this would

become a real source of blessing to the church life.

BECOME A PATRONESS

A healthy and mature sister should desire to be a patroness of many. She should care for many. When a sister is healthy, she will desire to care for others. Paul said he received help from one such sister named Phoebe, whom he called a "patroness of the saints" (Romans 16:1). In Romans 16 there are two apostles mentioned in verse 7, Andronicus and Junia. Some have interpreted them to be females due to their names. According to our study thus far, Paul seems to be referring to men. (For a sister to be an apostle would be quite a burden, but for a sister to be a patroness would be much less of a burden!) [*Some interpret this to be a couple, like Aquilla and Priscilla -ed.*]

Priscilla and Aquilla had already raised up a church in their home in Rome, and then were forced to leave, so they went to Corinth, where they met Paul (Acts 18:2-3). From there they moved to Ephesus, where Paul left them (Acts 18:18-19). Because that sister was so functional, she was of great use to the Lord. She was even involved in teaching Apollos (Acts 18:26)! Every sister should be able to teach in this way.

PROPHECY IN THE MEETINGS

As far as sisters speaking in the meeting goes, Paul did say, as we mentioned, that a woman should

be silent and not speak (1 Cor 14:34-35). This passage seems to “kill” all the sisters in the church life. The Greek word for “speak” in verse 35, however, has the meaning of chattering. It seems Paul was actually saying that sisters shouldn’t be talking around during the meeting, making comments, and so on. Sisters like to talk, so Paul made this statement. He didn’t employ the Greek word that means to speak with a burden. Therefore, it appears he was not restricting the sisters from speaking for the Lord. Paul also wrote, “every woman praying or *prophesying*...” in 1 Corinthians 11:5. Doesn’t this indicate that women were speaking in the meetings, and that he was not taking a stand against this? Sisters can speak in the meetings.

Here is what I feel frustrated by: fifty percent or more of our “assets” in the church life have found themselves held back due to a seemingly mistaken understanding of the Word. This fifty percent that is being held back is in many ways the “better” half of the church life! (Sisters tend to be less preoccupied than brothers and are more perceptive and sensitive to matters than brothers, as we have noted.) Yet this precious portion of the saints seems to be annulled as far as speaking for the Lord is concerned. Something had to be wrong, I felt, for both Brother Nee and Brother Lee were saved through sisters, and Brother Nee was raised up by a sister. The Lord raised us up thus through sisters... would He then tell

us that no sister should do a thing? Because of three sisters the Lord’s recovery is here today. How is it we suppress the sisters among us by forbidding them to speak?

BE AWARE OF THIS PATTERN SO THAT
YOU DO NOT CONTRIBUTE TO IT

It is true that most of the serious problems in the church life today indeed owe themselves to sisters. Brother Lee told me that the revival of Chefoo was destroyed by some sisters who brought in tongue-speaking. In a time of revival, saints are often open to nearly anything. The elders were overrun by these sisters until a child died and the leading sister told everyone the child would be resurrected on a certain date. That of course caused a sensation. They prayed over the body and did this and that to try to bring about this miracle. When the time passed, however, the elders finally said, “This is over. Everyone go home. We must prepare for the child’s burial.” That saved the church. Perhaps due to this history, Brother Lee became careful concerning both tongue-speaking and sisters exercising too prominently in the church life.

Two sisters who were considered to be very spiritual also caused Brother Nee to be brought into his greatest difficulties. It was due to one that he was put out of the church life in Shanghai and was unable to minister for six years. Many churches suffered due to that, and some were even dissolved. Brother

Lee tried to help her to apologize to Watchman Nee, and she eventually did. On another occasion, when Brother Nee had come to Hong Kong, Brother Lee spoke to him of the global situation and urged Watchman Nee not to return to the mainland. A sister was there also who simply said, "Jehovah is ruling above the waters." [*This seems to be referring to Psalm 29:3 or 89:9 - ed.*] In other words, Watchman Nee should just trust the Lord and return, for God was in control. From one angle, Brother Lee was right, from another angle this sister was right. At any rate, Watchman Nee returned to China and was imprisoned for the last twenty years of his life. Due to these things, I believe Witness Lee became very careful with the matter of sisters holding authority.

In recent years, among us, I must say that there seems not one case where division came in that did not begin with a sister. (Brothers make mistakes too, but they tend not to be fatal.) Due to this, I also wonder whether the sisters should be allowed to speak in the church life! You sisters do mess things up. Yet the Lord used three sisters to start this work, and fifty percent of the church's "assets" are sisters.

SISTERS NEED TO DEVELOP THEIR MINISTRIES

Truth has more than one side. According to the apostle Paul, he made it clear that man is head of the woman, and Christ is the head of the man (1 Cor 11:3). As we mentioned,

he also said women shouldn't talk loosely in the meetings. At the same time, did he not honor Phoebe and Priscilla? And aren't we here because of three sisters who did so much to raise up Brother Nee and Brother Lee? So can we who lead take the risk to trust the sisters? I am so bothered that so many sisters cannot find their usefulness. I hope that everyone would develop their ministry and become useful in their localities. Yet, at the same time, remember that sisters seem to have a greater potential to be troublemakers. When a sister wants something, who can stop her? But this does not mean the sisters should be useless in the church life. I would like to see sisters give help to other sisters, and to be patronesses of many. It does not make sense that fifty percent of those in the church life should be held back. The sisters should desire to be useful, yet at the same time they should be aware of how much damage they are capable of doing. All the sisters should desire to be a blessing, and yet also be aware that they can be a problem as well.

A NEW BEGINNING NEEDED

Therefore, may we have a new beginning. Our culture needs to be changed. Many of the sisters among us have more spiritual experience than the brothers, yet their function is buried simply because they are sisters. We don't want to see the sisters start a revolution and kick out the brothers, but we surely desire to see the sisters come up with a proper functioning. - *Titus Chu*

The Twenty-five Hour Conference in Goshen

About a year ago the small church here in Goshen, Indiana, began to feel a desire to host a gathering of churches in the Great Lakes area. Our attendance had fallen due to problems without and within and we began to ache for the strength of others in our area who have followed the same vision we have had all these years. We wished to have a time of warmth and fellowship with lots of joyous singing unto the Lord. And we wanted to examine a question that has troubled us in recent years: Who are we?

There was a time when many of us could have given an instant and clear answer: we are the testimony of the Lord in the city in which we reside, the local church. But time has a way of testing all things and time has done a good job testing us on this very question.

So we invited three brothers each with unique ministries to come and speak: Nigel Tomes of Toronto, Ontario, Vern Yoder from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and John Myer from Columbus, Ohio. We were not looking for definitive answers. We were looking for the Lord's multifarious speaking.

To make things as convenient as possible for those travelling, we decided to begin with an 11:00 A.M. Saturday meeting which would allow saints as far away as Cleveland, Cincinnati and Columbus to leave Saturday morning and still make the first meeting.

Vern Yoder threw out a novel suggestion: why not have a "coffeehouse" on Saturday evening? We Goshenites jumped at that because that's exactly what we had considered doing. For those who don't know what a coffeehouse is exactly, it's just a time where people gather together for food, fellowship, and music ... and yes, coffee. Good coffee. It's a great opportunity to invite neighbors and a great time for the gospel. But would this work for a conference? We didn't know and figured nothing ventured, nothing gained.

So it was settled: we would have three meetings over the weekend, each with two thirty-minute sharings, and one Saturday evening coffeehouse. The entire conference would last twenty-five hours: from Saturday eleven a.m. to Sunday noon.

Did it work? Well, it's been exactly one week since it happened and we are still floating on a wave of the Spirit. The singing throughout the conference was remarkable. We moved from hymns to contemporary to songs we wrote in the 70's to songs we wrote just for the weekend. We sang with as many kinds of instruments as our talents allowed. We sang a *capella*. We sang in unison, we sang in harmony, we sang in Spirit. We sang before the sharing, between sharings, and afterward. We sang away our troubles, sang away our fears.

The messages by the three brothers were equally released. In the first

message, Nigel Tomes told us we really don't need a conference to ask ourselves who we are, we just need to Go! He said the disciples around Jesus didn't sit around analyzing themselves: they went! They went without a road map and any single person directing them. C. A. Coates, a Brethren teacher in the early 20th century, told a young brother to "Follow the man with the pitcher." Here Coates misapplied the Lord's word in Luke 22 to mean we today should follow a man, in Coates' case meaning follow James Taylor, the then-leader of the Exclusive Brethren. Instead of following a man or a prescribed plan, we need to read the Bible, to pray, and to have a heart for the Lord.

Vern Yoder followed with a strong word about how the Apostle Paul saw an elevated view of what the church was, a view that was not portrayed by the disciples in the book of Acts. They used the word "church" for its simple meaning, a collection of called out ones, but Paul saw it as the masterpiece of God. Vern encouraged us to admit we had botched some things over the years, and there are a lot of things we should throw out. But we should never throw out what we saw and experienced of the church.

By the third message we realized the brothers were hanging their messages on three hooks: Peter, Paul, and John. John Myer showed us the church in Ephesus from the Apostle John's point of view. We all know about the letter Paul wrote to the Ephesians but we often forget the one John delivered. We see in Revelation 2 all the good of this church nullified by a single point: they had lost their first love. If they didn't repent, their lampstand would be removed. What does that mean? John shared that to remove the lampstand is to remove our impact in the world. How about us? Is our lampstand still in place?

Six short, living messages were delivered over this twenty-five hour conference. They brought laughter, soul-searching, and tears. By the end, if we couldn't say any more clearly who we are, we could say this: We are seeking the move of the Spirit.

For those so inclined, these messages and some of the music of the weekend can be listened to at www.keepitintune.net.

As we in Goshen muse on this conference, we feel one thing very strongly: the Spirit is moving again among us. We are ready to "drop the past" as we used to sing, and follow the Lord joyfully. We are already planning another time like this together. It is our prayer that the winds of the Spirit that blew here on February 16 and 17, 2008 will gain strength and fill the sails of our churches. The boats have been in the harbor too long. Let's untie the ropes and let the Spirit send us to sea! *(submitted by Mark Jordan)*

First Message from the Goshen Conference

Acts is not a textbook or a manual. When we do take Acts as a manual we find it doesn't work. Rather, what we should pick up from Acts is how the Lord moves and how His people cooperate with Him. Acts is a narrative, a story. There are principles and lessons we can learn as to how to cooperate with the Lord and what the Lord wants among us today. Today it is much more applicable to us than it ever was, for our situation matches more than before what was happening in Acts. They didn't know how things would turn out, and we don't either!

In the first chapter we see how Jesus presented Himself to His disciples for forty days. He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They asked whether He would be restoring the kingdom to Israel. He responded that such was not up to them, but they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they would become His witnesses to the uttermost part of the earth. Eventually He ascended to the heavens. They

were told they would see Jesus return as He had left. They remained in Jerusalem and were praying together. Peter stood up and told them that they should replace Judas. Therefore they chose two from among them and cast lots between them, and Matthias was chosen to be among the twelve.

In Acts the disciples entered into a new phase, a new situation they'd never been in before. They knew how to follow Jesus when He was with them. When He said, "Let's go to Galilee," they went to Galilee. When He said, "Let's get in the boat to cross over to the other side," they did so. They were learners, His students. Now after His ascension He wasn't with them physically any longer. After His death and resurrection there was a whole new situation. This is why this is applicable to us. They didn't know exactly what to do anymore. They had their concepts. Their question was, "Lord, are You at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" We may think, "Where did that come from?" But they had their background. They didn't get it, but don't blame them! During His

earthly ministry, Jesus spent all His time in Israel. He had little to do with the Gentiles, so why would they think beyond Israel? The Lord wanted to lead them farther. What He had in mind was much more. He was expanding their horizons, so He told them they would receive power and become His witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). They were in a time of transition, transition from the earthly kingdom to the Spirit, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. They needed to make a transition; we also need to make a transition. It may not be as radical, but it certainly is a transition. I've been in the church life since 1972. The longer we are in the church life, the more baggage we pick up. When we started out, we didn't know much of anything! When I came in the saying was, "We don't care for doctrines!" Thirty-five years later, I would say virtually no Christian group has more doctrines. Like barnacles that collect on the hull of a ship as the ship voyages, doctrines and practices accumulate. The disciples picked up a lot of things too. Some were helpful, some were not. As the Lord brought them into a new sphere and era, they needed His help, just as we do.

The theme of this time is "Who Are We?" In Acts they did not ask, "Who are we?" It wasn't a matter of self-identification. The Lord just said, "Go! Don't sit down and analyze 'Who are we?'" That is a clue. They didn't sit down to define themselves. They were following the

Lord. They didn't say, "We are in Jerusalem. Let's be the church! Let's take the ground, register the name 'the church in Jerusalem' and establish the Lord's table!" They were trying to follow the Lord. In the beginning they described themselves as disciples or saints. When Peter got released from prison, he went to "his own" (Acts 4:23, Gk.). His own what? It is not that clear. His own kind? His own folk? Saul told the king that he was seeking to arrest those who were in "this way" (Acts 22:4). Often in Acts they are called those of "the Way" (9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4). Eventually they did get clear that they were the church. My point is that the way things unfolded was not by analyzing, "Who are we?" As we follow the Lord and touch Him, we will become who we are supposed to be. Claiming to be something doesn't necessarily make you what you claim to be. What are you? If you really are something it will cause you to be named that. There will be no argument.

What should we do? A good principle is to say, "Lord we want to follow You today in whatever You are doing right now." It has never been this day before! We are learning to follow the Lord in what He is doing today. How should we be believers at this time and in this place? We are not in the first century. We can learn principles, but we cannot simply choose a few things from Acts and put them together to define who we are. It is not going work like that; we tried

that. We need to ask what is the Lord doing today?

The Lord ascended and the disciples went back to the city and to an upper room. Many feel that this may have been the same upper room that they had the so-called Last Supper in before Jesus was crucified. The book of Acts was written by Luke, along with his gospel. In Luke 22:8-13, the Lord instructed them to go into the city and to look for a man with a pitcher of water and to follow him. This was how they were to find the room. A man carrying water may not have been a common sight. In Africa, for example, the women or children carry the water. According to Jesus' direction, the disciples went to the upper room and prepared it. Christians like to allegorize the Bible, as have we. C.A.Coates wrote a letter to a new believer in response to the question of how to find those he should meet with. His response was to "follow the man with the pitcher of water," using this instance from Luke as an allegory. C.A.Coates met with the exclusive Brethren in the 1930's. In the 1920's and 1930's this group developed the teaching that God speaks through one man in every age, and that man is today's Paul, the oracle of God, as the person to follow. That man at the time among the exclusive Brethren was James Taylor. What Coates meant was to follow James Taylor. That may sound familiar, for history seems to repeat itself. The teaching that God only speaks

through one man wasn't invented in the 1980's. This teaching of the minister of the age has been introduced a number of times. Even if we accept this teaching, however, the man with the pitcher of water was mentioned before the Lord's resurrection. He came on the scene once and never appeared again! He disappeared, so this is not a lesson you can apply to your Christian life. God surely has used different people to bring us to Christ and grow as Christians, but we don't become their disciples. We don't follow a person with a "pitcher of water." We are disciples of Jesus Christ. We are in Acts after the Lord's resurrection. We are not back in the Gospels, so that doesn't apply.

According to Acts, how *do* we follow the Lord? One way is to be together in prayer (1:14). That is a good way to follow the Lord. Then we have the Bible. Why does Acts give so much space to Peter's proposal to make the eleven disciples twelve again? How important was that? Was it crucial? Did Peter find in the Bible that the New Jerusalem would be unstable if there were only eleven foundations? I don't know why Peter felt there was a need that there be twelve, but the main thing is that Peter found something in the Bible that he felt applied to them. He said, "I found some verses in Psalms, and they apply to us!" (See 1:16.) That is the point. It wasn't that if they did not do that, Pentecost would have been

delayed.

So, how do we follow the Lord? First of all, we should pray, “Lord, we don’t know how to be Your church. We don’t know how to follow You today where we live.” We used to think we did. Somehow we are not as clear now. Maybe the Lord is rejoicing because we were too “clear.” Therefore we must come to Him and pray. Then, secondly, we need to come to the Bible in a fresh way, in a new way. We should not come to the Word thinking we have all the answers. Peter’s point was that the Scripture had to be fulfilled. Everything has not been explained, for the Bible is infinitely rich. It is God’s Word. We haven’t gotten to the bottom yet. It hasn’t been fully applied yet, and the Spirit is living, and the Spirit is applying the Word to us today.

If you are in the Word, the Lord can use the Word to speak to you in your individual life. As you are before the Lord, He may give you a verse and apply it to you. That is a real encouragement. It was in the Bible, and now it is in you! It may be a word you read six weeks ago or six years ago. I have had that happen to me. As I was considering what to do the Lord gave me a definite verse. I didn’t remember where it was, or its context, but I knew that word was for me.

How do we follow the Lord today? Not by following methods. We want to follow the Lord who today

is the Spirit. That takes prayer and that takes the Word. Nothing replaces the Bible, for it is the Lord’s living Word. The disciples chose two and then cast lots between them. Was this the right way? Isn’t that like rolling dice? “Should I go to Goshen or not? If I roll a six, I go.” Or do you flip a coin? This seems a little strange. It is not a matter of how it was done. What is more crucial was their desire to follow the Lord. The point is they wanted to follow the Lord and they read the Bible and they applied it to themselves. If the Bible says it, and the Lord applies it to you, then you should do it! How they worked it out may not have been the best way. Matthias qualified, he was chosen, and the Lord honored that! Some say the Lord actually chose Paul to be the twelfth disciple. If you read carefully, you will see that this is not the case. They were looking for someone who had been with Jesus all the way up until His resurrection. We may not choose the right method, but don’t be that worried. It is not a matter of method; the crucial thing is that we want to follow the Lord, and if He applies some word to us, we say “Amen.”

(spoken by Nigel Tomes in Goshen, Indiana on February 16. Other speakers for the six messages given were Vern Yoder and John Myer. Audio messages available at www.keepitintune.net.)

The Stand of a Proper, Healthy Local Church

In response to a question asked during the 2006 College Training, Titus responded concerning what was required for a group to stand properly as a local church. (This speaking immediately followed Message 9 on Moses found in volume 6 issue 6.)

If some raise issues and separate themselves from those meeting as the church in their locality, they are still a part of the church, for the church is constituted with all the Christians. Yet are they practically in the local church? No, for they circle themselves with issues. If I as a Christian stress on tongue-speaking to the point I can only meet with others who speak in tongues, my stand is not that of the local church, for I can only gather with those who are excited by and practice the same things. Those who do not share in such a focus become "second-class Christians" in such an assembly. If you try to be with them and yet do not speak in tongues, they will be unable to receive you as they receive those who speak in tongues like they do. Therefore, they cannot be considered the local church, for they are unable to receive others other than their "kind," except as "secondary" saints if they do not speak in tongues. That causes them to lose the oneness of the Body of Christ, because the issue cuts them off from many other Christians. Therefore they are not a local church. If

you stress a ministry, a teaching, a practice, a certain doctrine...when you stress anything other than Christ Himself, that very stress will easily cause you to lose the ground of locality.

What is a local church? This is a good question.

Brother Nee simply taught that a local church had two requirements. First, a local church knows how to be under the authority of the Spirit. This group must be led by the Spirit. The Spirit has the lordship. Secondly, those meeting as the local church must take the ground of locality.

I followed this and practiced it for many years. After all this time, I can try to redefine it.

1. HAVING THE AUTHORITY OF THE SPIRIT

What is a local church? First, a local church is a place that acknowledges and accepts the authority of the Holy Spirit. It is a most fearful thing when you say we are the

local church if you do not know how to go to the Lord and pray and to seek after Christ and follow Him. If you want to be a healthy local church, you must know how to be with the Lord. You also must know how to let the Lord lead you.

I am happy when a locality does something because they feel the Lord has led them to do so. How do you know when a group of saints is standing as the church in their locality? First of all, they desire to follow the leading of the Spirit. As long as we are on this earth, we may not always rightly discern the Lord's leading, but if we feel the Lord has led us in something, there is nothing to regret about it.

2. HAVING CHRIST AS THE CONTENT

Of course, there must also be a sign to show that you are the local church. The sign is Christ becomes the content of the church life. What brings us together? Christ! When we come together, what is the focus of our gathering? Christ! We care for Christ more than anything or anyone else. Our subject, our fellowship, our ministering, our preaching is Christ. We come here to enjoy Christ and exalt Christ. Christ becomes the content of the church.

I even worry when some say they love me. It is too easy to make a man's teaching the content of the

church. The teaching should bring you to Christ, and Christ must be the content of the church. I hope when you leave this time we have had together, you are able to say, "I have gained so much Christ!"

I dislike that churches would depend on any materials, because that robs the saints of the opportunity of seeking the Lord. It is too easy to have a church life apart from Christ. Too many "play" the church as something for their enjoyment. Some enjoy the church life for fun! When you are young in the church life to have Christ and fun is all right. Just don't end up one day with fun and Christ, because too easily you may have fun and no Christ!

In your local church life, what occupies you? In your local church life, what is the topic? What is the reason for your gathering? If it is not Christ, then you know there is something wrong. A genuine local church is very simple, for it only loves Christ. It doesn't matter how young or mature the saints are, as long as they all love Christ. Who is exalted and emphasized? Christ!

3. RECOGNIZING THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

Thirdly, how do you know a gathering is a local church? They only rely upon the Bible and they are able to say "The Bible is our unique standard." You may read

many other books, but every book must go according to the Bible and bring you into a deeper understanding and appreciation and application of the Bible itself. One group a brother visited recently had not read the Bible for nine years! Everything they read was “cooked.” That is very serious. In the church life don’t let other things possess you. Everything you read must bring you back to the Bible. The Bible is so rich! I am so happy I am able to share here from the Bible. The Bible is my reference for my expounding of the Bible.

You should read many books, especially those of spiritual men. But you shouldn’t abide in any spiritual man’s teaching and use that ministry to replace the Bible. Once you do, you become a denomination of that ministry. If someone were to declare he was going to follow me because he appreciated my ministry, I would strongly tell him we don’t need any such denomination! In the local church life, the Bible is our unique standard.

There is an endless supply of expositions on the Bible. Darby’s translation may say one thing, and the King James may interpret the same word differently. You can receive all the teaching. You should have a good habit of studying the Word and reading good spiritual books. When I first got saved, the total number of books available was quite small. The first books I read

were by Watchman Nee, such as *The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* and *The Glorious Church*. Those few books settled my life! I am so thankful to Watchman Nee and Witness Lee for under their administration so many booklets were published by those who really had spiritual riches. When I was young I read writings by Madame Guyon, Charles Finney, Andrew Murray, John Nelson Darby, Jessie Penn-Lewis, and others. Brother Nee was so wise to only provide a small representative portion of their ministry, so that it only took about twenty minutes to read, but in that twenty minutes, you came to know that spiritual person! This is why when I came to the United States, people thought I knew so much. Actually, I only knew twenty minutes per person! I had a good source supplying me all these riches so that I was not narrow or small, and they all brought me to the Bible and to Christ.

So, do you rely upon the Bible or on some particular man’s teaching? Lutherans rely on Martin Luther’s teachings, Calvinists on John Calvin’s teachings, and Methodists on John Wesley’s teachings, and so on. The Lord desires us, in the practice of the church life, to not depart from the Bible itself. We may not know so much, but what we do have must be according to the Bible. Your interpretation may seem kind of funny sometimes, but it must be according to the Bible. It

is also possible that you may be very right in your interpretation, but should it replace the Bible itself, there is a problem.

4. STANDING ON THE GROUND OF ONENESS WITHIN THEIR LOCALITY

The fourth test of a local church is the most difficult of all. You must stand on the ground of oneness in your locality. Brother Lee honored the local church with the best utterance, saying, "Don't look down on the local churches. The local churches prevent the development of a great association like the Catholic Church as well as smaller divisions within the locality."

Suppose you are an able young sister, and you have a dream that you should go forth as an apostle to young people. Therefore eventually your stand is "young people." Then suppose there are other saints in your city who are standing on the ground of locality. They may be scattered all over the city, but their stand is on the ground of that city. Their stand includes all the Christians in that locality. You may say, "But they only have a few meeting together. There are many denominations in that city that can boast much larger numbers in their gatherings." What is the difference between the church in that city, and, say, the Baptists in that city? The Baptists in that city only include those who come to the Baptist denomination, while the church in

that city includes even all the believers who meet as Baptists. If the Baptists were to say, "How about you join us, since we are bigger in number?" You have to say, "But once we join you, we become Baptists, but if you drop being Baptists and join with us, we are still the church in this city." If everyone dropped their "circle" that separated them from other believers in your city, then all would simply stand on the ground of oneness in that locality.

So how many are in the church in your city? It is a tricky question. On the one hand, you must say that in reality the church in your locality includes all the Christians in your city. On the other hand, you can say that those practically meeting together number those that come together apart from all the other circles.

The problem is that it is even easier to open up a new "church" than it is to open up a new restaurant. To open up a restaurant you need some initial investment. To open up a "church" you only need three or so believers! What is a local church? We must be very strong to stand on the ground of oneness in our city. All the believers are one with us in our locality. You may say, "But there are so many who are Catholics!" We can't help that. If so many want to put themselves in other circles, what can we do about it? Just leave it alone.

Some may tell you they would like to meet with you as those meeting as the church. They may ask, "What is required of us that we may join in?" You should be able to tell them, "Number one, we follow the Spirit. Number two, we only care for Christ. Number three, we take the Bible as the unique standard. We only teach the Bible." All believers should be able to receive these things.

Brother Lee often used to say to me when I first came to the United States, "Brother Titus, when you practice the church life, the more general, the better."

Shaker Heights was named after the Shakers, who practiced shaking chairs as a way to try to experience the Spirit. If we practiced this, we might actually find it profitable, but the fact of the matter is that people wouldn't be able to join in with us because they would find it too peculiar!

I have been to many Christian groups in order to find any who might want to go the local church way. I once visited a Pentecostal group. They treated me nicely, and eventually they said, "Let's start." I expected we were to pray so I bowed my head. But what happened next shocked me, because everyone began acting so strangely. They watched me, wondering why I hadn't joined in, so they stopped

and asked if they could lay hands on me. I said, "Sure, since we are brothers, I cannot refuse you. Do you mind, however, that I share something first?" I believe I shared on God's economy from Ephesians. Then I said to them, "Brothers, I have done my part. Do you still desire to lay hands on me?" They said no. I don't say they did not have the Spirit, but if they practiced such a thing it would be difficult for them to be the church, for their practice was far from general.

Once you insist on anything, you lose your generality. Our speciality, is the common faith of all believers. On other things we should be very general, so anyone may join us without any frustration.

Thus, a local church has four prerequisites. First, do you, as a group of believers, have the authority of the Spirit among you? Second, is Christ your unique content? Third, is the Bible your unique standard? Fourth, do you take the stand of oneness in your locality? With you there can be no exclusiveness. If a brother came and spoke in tongues I would receive him even as he practiced it in the meeting, even though I may not agree. If someone insisted on speaking tongues in the church life, the elders would have to stand up and say no, but if they wanted to practice speaking in tongues themselves, they should be allowed to do so.

That is the preciousness of the local church! (The Bible says, “Not all speak in tongues,” indicating both that not all and yet some do!) Our stand cannot be any practice, doctrine, person, or history. Our stand must be the ground of oneness, which is expressed in localities.

How do you know that something is a local church? First, do those meeting have the authority of the Spirit? (I know many Christian leaders do not even know they have a spirit!) Secondly, is Christ the content? (I know that if it is said Christ alone must be the content, some will say that such a thing is too hard to take. One brother felt the church life had too many things like politics and so on. I asked whether there was anything real in the church life, and he said yes. “Then,” I asked, “Why don’t you focus on these things?” I eventually found he was concerned that his children might not grow up properly if they remained in the local church life. As brothers together in the church, we should stand with one another and do our best to help one another according to our genuine concerns before the Lord. That does not mean, however, that you make the entire church a “second-generation-raising-up-church.”) Then, the genuine local church honors the word of the Bible as authoritative. Finally, those meeting as the church stand on the ground of oneness in their locality.

A local church is so inclusive.

Brother Lee made it very clear in the *Young People’s Training* messages that the local church doesn’t just mean those who are meeting together as its testimony; it includes all the Christians in the locality. I strongly advise you to read those messages.

All the believers in a city together make up the local church, but the testimony of that local church refers to those practically gathering upon the ground of oneness in that locality. Why? They are those burdened to bear the testimony of the church in that city. If their practice is general, then quickly when people come, they will be able to join in with them to enjoy the Lord together.

May the Lord have mercy, that He might keep us to be healthy local churches in our locality. We love the authority of the Spirit. We love Christ. And we hope in the church life nothing occupies us but Christ Himself. And we love the Bible as our unique standard. Everything is as the Bible says. Then, finally, we love to stand on the ground of oneness in our locality. When we say we stand on the ground of locality, we mean we are one with all the believers, not that we are special, and they are outside. When you practice this you are a healthy local church. -*Titus Chu*

THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST IN PHILIPPIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-TWO: A TWO-FOLD WALK TO GAIN CHRIST

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.

16 Nevertheless whereunto we have attained, by the same *rule* let us walk.

WE MUST HAVE A MIND TO PURSUE CHRIST

We ended the previous message by referring to Philippians 3:15: “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.” No matter how mature you are, comparatively speaking, you must have the mind to pursue Christ. If you have another mind, however, God must take away the veil, for you need to see that pursuing Christ is the only thing worth doing! Pursuing Christ is the unique definition of a healthy human life.

A WALK ACCORDING TO OUR SPIRITUAL ATTAINMENT

In verse 16 Paul continues: “Nevertheless whereunto we have attained, by the same rule let us walk.”

These verses bring us to the matter of testimony, for they mention our walk. As we pursue Christ and gain Him, we become a part of Christ’s testimony on the earth. This is why Paul says, “whereunto we have attained, by the same rule let us walk.”

The Greek word for “attain” in verse 16 refers to reaching a position by means of a worthy striving and a progressing advancement. In other words, once you have attained, you have really accomplished something and gained something. What such a person must do then is to walk according to the “rule.”

A WALK WITHIN A RULE THAT LIMITS AND FREES

A number of the ancient manuscripts do not have the word for “rule” (*kanon*) in verse 17. If we accept it, however, we can note that *kanon* refers to that which measures. Kittel notes that the word can also be translated “boundary, and is not used only for measuring area, but also for measuring function. In this sense it has to do with a sphere, as in “sphere of operation.” As we will see, what is implied eventually can apply to the two Greek words for walk, *stoicheo* and *peripateo*.

At this point, the apostle Paul has spiritually attained unto something comparatively full and high. Paul is a spiritually mature person. In fact, looking back through the centuries, it is difficult to imagine anyone has even approached Paul’s level of spiritual attainment. His experience of 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 is enough to convince me of this. Who else can say they had been caught away to both the third heavens and to hades? That was something especially measured to Paul. He surely had attained to a level that was spiritually very high and rich, even when compared to anyone else! His attainment became unto him not only an outward rule of measure that restricted him in his walk, but also a sphere in which he was able to walk about extensively and freely.

OUR LEVEL OF MATURITY BECOMES A RULING ELEMENT

In other words, the level of maturity in Christ we have attained to becomes the ruling element of our walk on one hand, and on the other it determines the sphere in which we are able to walk about freely.

THIS RULING ELEMENT IS CHRIST

First of all, the Christ we have gained becomes the ruling element in our daily life. The more Christ you gain, the more Christ rules over your daily life. This *kanon*, this rule, is a living person, and the more you possess Him, the more He will set Himself as a rule over you. The more of Christ you gain, the more He is able to rule over you.

Secondly, the Christ we have gained also becomes the operating element for us to walk with freedom in Him. In other words, the “rule” is but the boundary of a sphere in which we freely operate.

In my life, it is likely that I never met a man more spiritual than Witness Lee. He was a person who walked according to this “rule” at a level beyond any other person I ever met. On the one hand, he was totally under the rule of Christ, and on the other, he was totally free. Sometimes he did things that shocked me, for I never would have had the same freedom to do as he

did. According to our concept if we are under some rule we cannot act so freely, for in our minds the two are mutually exclusive. In Brother Lee, however, I saw how it was so. Brother Lee was very much governed by the Lord in what he said and did. He was not someone that you would catch doing something ungodly, and yet he did things many times that I simply would not have had the freedom to do. My conscience would have bothered me greatly, but because of who he was with Christ, he had the freedom to do those things.

For instance, at one point in Taipei a couple joined us in our prayer meeting. I noticed them, but I did not know where they came from or who they were. Eventually I noticed that when we had a training, they were also placed in the front row. I wondered who they were, because I had never before seen a sister placed in the front row like that, but I never said anything about it. One day a brother mentioned that a certain brother had requested that I join him for lunch. I asked who this person was, and he told me his name and the country he was from, and I felt I should go. When I arrived, I was surprised to see that there was no one else in the restaurant but us, meaning that this brother had reserved the entire restaurant for the few of us brothers to eat together! I was asked to pray, which was an honor because the others present were all

older brothers. I eventually found out this brother was the head of one of the world's wealthiest families.

That time of fellowship was very sweet, but I had the consideration: I cannot treat him differently than any other brother because he is such a wealthy person. I did not feel I had the freedom in my conscience to do such a thing as Brother Lee did, which was to seat him with his wife on the front row. If it were me, I would have perhaps said, "Praise the Lord, you are a billionaire, but praise the Lord even more you are just a brother, so don't sit there!" That was how my conscience would have operated. Yet Brother Lee had another way of operating based on his attainment in Christ. Actually, if that couple had been gained, it was not wealth that mattered, but instead the possibility for the gospel and the advancement of the Lord's work. By the Lord's mercy that brother had a desire to come to Brother Lee's training, so Brother Lee showed him that they welcomed him and honored him, not only privately, but also publicly, before thousands of saints.

THE FREEDOM CHRIST MEASURES TO OTHERS MAY NOT BE OURS

If at that time I said, "Brother Lee has done this, so I may do it also," I would have gotten myself into trouble, for it was not something the Lord had measured to me.

Brother Lee could do such a thing because it was something within the boundary measured to him. For me to do it would have been something beyond the boundary measured to me. Therefore we must be careful when we examine the behavior of others, for what the Lord allows them is not necessarily something that we ourselves may enter into.

The attainment in our walk produces a restriction as well as a liberty. The very rule that measures everything also determines the sphere of your freedom in Christ. On the one hand, in Christ we are totally under discipline, while on the other hand in Christ we are totally free. Not only does the rule establish a limitation, or boundary, but with its boundary it also establishes the sphere in which you find you may operate freely. If you operate beyond the rule or boundary measured to you, however, you find yourself walking in a manner that is “out of order.”

IMITATORS AS THOSE INSPIRED BY THE
CONSTITUTION OF OTHERS RATHER THAN
THEIR BEHAVIOR

In this walk we need the Lord’s mercy. On the one hand, we are one hundred percent disciplined by this rule, and on the other hand, we are totally free because what the Lord has measured to us is so grand! Young people are often stumbled by this, however. They

say, “If the elder can do it, why can’t I also do it?” Many times a person becomes an imitator of an older brother not in the way of gaining Christ, but in the way of some outward behavior. Because the leading brothers speak so as to inspire others, they gain the attention of those they speak to. Those who see them, however, may not realize it is their constitution that enables them to inspire, so rather than seeking to gain Christ so as to be similarly constituted, they instead merely copy such things as how they deliver their message, and so on. This kind of imitation is actually ugly. To truly become an imitator as Paul speaks in verse 17 is to be inspired by their person, their life, their vision, their constitution, their operation, and their riches. These are the things in a person that should inspire us to become imitators.

A RULE THAT MEASURES
SOMETHING TO YOU

As we noted, Kittel and others reveal that the meaning of *kanon*, or rule, in verse 16 can be applied to a geographical measurement, as of land. Upon the piece of land measured to you, you have freedom. We live according to the Christ we see. The higher and greater the Christ we have, the more our life comes under the ruling of such a Christ. At the same time, in such a greater and richer Christ, we enjoy an enlarged sphere

in which we exercise freedom in our operation.

When we were first saved, we had a comparatively smaller Christ measured to us. All we knew was that we should be a good brother, which may have meant standing up in the meeting and speaking a couple of minutes. If I did not know what to say, I could write something down and read it. There was a limited amount of rule and also a limited amount of freedom. The first time someone stands up to read in this way, everyone may give an enthusiastic "amen" because that person has stood up for the first time. The second time, however, the response would be less enthusiastic, and the third time it may be little interest. The person may wonder, "What happened? I did the same thing as before." The problem is not with the saints; the problem is you didn't grow. We all need to grow, and as we grow, the freer we should become in our operation. How we all need to tell the Lord, "I want to have the proper growth and a proper maturity!"

FREEDOM ACCORDING TO CONSTITUTION MEANS FREEDOM FROM AS WELL AS FREEDOM TO

As you grow unto maturity, you will find that you cannot do things that others are able to do or say because of this rule. On the

other hand, you will find you are so free within these boundaries the Lord measures to you. There is so much Christ for you to apply, so many principles you can experience, and so many things you can do because of the freedom you have within that portion that has been measured to you.

Let me return to that example of Brother Lee placing this famous couple in the first two seats of his training. Do you think he would have glanced over to see whether what he was speaking was pleasing to them, or that they agreed with him? Do you think he was concerned about losing them? No. He surely had the feeling, "Lord, I have done my part and have given You the chance." But would you dare give the Lord such an opportunity? Or would you have been able to handle it if you had? Perhaps you would not have known what to do if that brother's face had fallen at something you said. Why? Because you are not someone as free as Brother Lee was. You might berate yourself if they did not come into the church life (which they did not). After all, if they were in the church life, how many doors would have been opened for an improved situation for the spread of the church life! Brother Lee was able to do what he did, but he remained in the measuring rule.

I am concerned, on the other hand, that some may say,

“Brother Lee did it, so we can too!” You should realize that Brother Lee did it, but you cannot. A certain thing you may not feel you can do, yet you should realize that you can be very free within the measure the Lord has granted to YOU. You have your measurement of Christ for your walk.

THOSE WHO WALK AS ENEMIES OF
CHRIST’S CROSS WALK IN RELIGION

Paul then mentions in verse 18 that some walk in such a way as to become enemies of the cross of Christ. The same Greek word for walk is used as in verse 16. Here two kinds of people are portrayed to us. One kind of person has a walk in which Christ becomes so much. These are the ones that are the healthy patterns for the younger ones. Another kind of person walks in a way so as to become an enemy of the cross of Christ. Why is it one has the realm of genuine attainment, while the other has not? The answer is this: if a person walks according to his spiritual level of maturity everything is fine, but if a person walks according to his religion he becomes the enemy of God.

TWO WORDS FOR TWO NECESSARY
KINDS OF WALK TO GAIN CHRIST

In Greek two words for “walk” are *stoicheo* and *peripateo*.

Stoicheo refers to a walk that is orderly, governed according to certain basic principles. Brother Lee taught that this Greek word for walk applied to the basic things (see *Life-study of Galatians*, Message 46). Many seem to think that *stoicheo*, with its apparent application for the march of an army in one accord, is the more advanced walk, but this is not the case. *Stoicheo* provides the base for *peripateo*, which refers to the walk that is free or “all around,” and is equated to living by the Spirit in Galatians 5:25.

There are principles from which we, as believers, can never deviate. This has to do with our *stoicheo* walk. The word for the disorderly walk in Philippians 3:17 is *peripateo*, that is, “walking at large” or “walking all around.” According to this section, remember, our walking about freely is determined by the rule or measure of Christ to which we have attained. *Stoicheo*, as Brother Lee taught, has to do with a walk by the same rule, the same line, the same path, and the same footstep. This is the church life.

WALK SO AS TO
WIN THE PRIZE

Do you brothers realize that in this training on one hand I keep on encouraging you to go to the Lord, seek after Christ to see how He leads you. On the other hand, I

keep on imposing something. What I impose is *stoicheo*. What I encourage is *peripateo*. There is a rule, a walk with a clear goal which is achieved through certain principles. That is crucial. If you have some maturity, walk so as to achieve the goal. Walk so as to gain Christ! Thus, in this context, *stoicheo* is to walk with the goal of pursuing and gaining Christ to the fullest extent so that you might win the prize of God's upward calling (Phil. 3:14).

ISSUES FRUSTRATE OUR WALK IN ONENESS TO GAIN CHRIST

As long as we do not make issues, we are one, pursuing the same goal. It is the unique focus of gaining Christ that is our oneness. It is not that we all rise at the same time in the morning to pray, and so on. Whether you get up at five or eight, whether or not you are focused on prayer or on reading the Bible or preaching the gospel, you are all gaining Christ, so there should be no problem with our walking "in the same steps." The moment someone asks, however, "What material are you using?"...the *stoicheo* is gone, and the testimony disappears. (If some declare, "You should not be using such materials," it is the same thing. To do so is also to make issues. We all should simply be pursuing Christ, however we feel led. Anything else, whether "pro" or "con" on the same issue, can be religion.)

If we read something, let us read it unto the Lord. If we have a training, let us do so unto the Lord. Everyone has a right to follow the Lord. I was asked recently whether those churches that participate in the "seven times a year" had become (to use Watchman Nee's term) "ministry churches." If the elders felt they had no choice but to go, then that could mean those with them were a "ministry church"; but if the elders felt led of the Lord to go, that would be something that was, in their case, unto the Lord. (And again I would say, if some among us began insisting on something, we would be no less a "ministry church" than any church we might refer to as such.) The secret of marching together (*stoicheo*) is not to raise issues. Just stay focused on Christ. Everyone has the right to follow Christ, even though you may not agree. Whenever we raise issues, we violate the principle of this common walk according to the principle of gaining Christ together to the fullest extent.

If someone should attempt to raise issues with you, your response should be, "I respect you and honor you as one whom I believe is seeking to follow the Lord, and I hope you would also honor the fact that I too am seeking to follow the Lord, just as you are." Thus we also have the freedom to live before the Lord according to His personal leading and operation with each one of us. Does He have this right in your life?

Even though you may have things laid upon you, you all must feel free to follow Christ.

BECOMING IMITATORS TOGETHER OF
PAUL AND ALL OTHERS WHO WALKED
IN SUCH A WAY

For these two walks, we all should become imitators together of the apostle Paul, and all others who walk ahead of us.

OUR WALK TOGETHER TO GAIN CHRIST
IS NOT A MATTER OF OUTWARDLY
PRACTICING THE SAME THING

Many seem confused today, and ask the churches to carry out the same outward things together. We should not think to do so is to walk as Paul told us to walk. The basic walk is that which has the sole aim of gaining Christ. At the same time, our Christian living in the various local churches should be a walk in the realm of resurrection (*peripateo*, Rom 6:4), that we may reign in life until we are conformed to the image of Christ.

The *stoicheo* walk is not to do something outwardly that matches what everyone else does. It is to march together towards the same goal: to gain and obtain Christ; to become mature in Christ. When we all have such a heart, we spontaneously have the *stoicheo* walk among us. Our attitude towards others elsewhere is then, "I don't care where you are or what you

do...as long as we are able to go on together, gaining Christ!" In the different local churches, all the saints should be living in resurrection, walking the *peripateo* walk. We all should be able to follow the Lord of life as He desires.

WE SHOULD WALK IN SUCH A WAY
THAT WE MIGHT GAIN CHRIST TO THE
UTTERMOST

We all have attained to some measure of Christ according to our level of spiritual maturity, and this measure becomes the rule that produces two aspects in our walk: one aspect which restricts us to a line as it points us toward the goal, and one which allows us so much freedom to walk about in the sphere we have within that boundary. Both aspects exist in our walk that we may go on to further pursue and gain Christ. -

Titus Chu on May 5, 2004, with those in the one-year labor.

On God's Desire and The Picture and Reality of Marriage

On February 24, a number of young couples from the Cleveland area churches came to meet with the saints in Lorain. During the time, Mike Samulak shared the following with those present.

In Genesis 2:18, God says, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helper as his counterpart." The phrase, "It is not good for man to be alone," gives us a little window into the purpose of the creation of woman as man's counterpart. Man is already on the scene. Adam has been created. Something, however, in the heart of God, did not want to see man alone. So He felt it was good for man to have a helpmeet, a counterpart. The word "counterpart" indicates something that would match man. This was an echo of His own desire towards mankind.

God had formed from the ground not only man, but also every animal of the field and every bird of heaven. The Lord brought all these things He had made to man to see what the man would call them, and whatever Adam called something, that became its name. It wasn't just to see what man would call them, but to demonstrate that man needed a counterpart, and that God likewise was searching for a counterpart.

A dog may be man's best friend, but a dog cannot be man's counterpart! I had a dog growing up that I loved to the uttermost, but the appreciation I had for my dog pales when compared to the appreciation and love I have for my wife! There is no comparison. He was a good help, but he was not my match as my wife is. How many animals God must have brought before Adam! After a period of time, however, Adam must have

realized that there was no hope that any of them might become his counterpart (2:20). After this, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam. He then took a rib from Adam's side and built it into a woman. Then He brought her to the man. Remember, all the animals and even man had been created from the ground. Woman, however, was made out of what was taken from the man. In this way, woman was truly a match for man, for she was built from something taken out of Adam himself! God had to take something out of man in order to produce something that would match man. When Adam saw Eve, he had no doubt this was the one who was his match. He exclaimed, "This is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh!" (Gen 2:23)

The presence of the woman changed everything for Adam. The Bible even tells us, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Now that he had his counterpart, everything for man became different.

This is the picture in Genesis. From what continues in the Bible, we believe that the statement "It is not good for man to be alone" expresses something in God's heart for His own existence. Our God does not want to be alone! Many on earth ask why they were made. They were made for God! They were made because God does not want to be alone. We were created in the image and likeness of God for this purpose (Gen 1:26). We can love because God is love. We seek righteousness because God is righteous. There is a match. Just like a glove is made in the image of a hand to contain a hand, man was made in the image of God to contain God. People may try to fill themselves up with other things, but only one thing can satisfy man according to what he was made for, and that is God. Other things may seem to fit, but they don't really match. Thus, man keeps looking for something more than what he already has. What he is really looking for is God. When God comes into man, man finds he matches God.

God gave us this little picture of a couple so that we might see how much He desires man as His complement. In the whole universe there was no complement to God. Although He was perfect in Himself, He desired someone with whom to share everything. As a husband I can say that if my wife were not with me, nothing else I experienced would be so satisfying. God gives us this picture to show us what is on His heart.

Zechariah 12:1 says that God stretched forth the heavens, laid the foundations of the earth, and formed a spirit in man. I was intrigued as a child with how immense the universe is. To my mind, God gave us the universe to give us some hint of what eternity is. But nothing in this vast universe matched God until He got this little man on this little speck called earth in the vastness of the universe.

Remember that God built the woman out of something He took from man's side as he slept. In John 19 we see, after Jesus suffered on the cross and died, His side was opened when a soldier pierced His side, and blood and water poured forth. It was the very element God took out of Adam that He used to build a woman for him. What God is after is not just one individual, but many who together are His church. In Ephesians and elsewhere, we are told that the church is God's Bride. How did God get the church? It was when He was pierced on the cross, and out flowed blood and water. Man had a big problem. Before we could match God, sin had to first be taken care of. That was what the blood was for: that we could be redeemed and be brought back to God, so that anything that did not match God could be taken care of. In addition, water also came out. Water signifies the Spirit. Today, God is building His dwelling place in Spirit. It is by His Spirit that He is working His very self into us. It is by His Spirit that He is building us into His counterpart, by adding all His elements into us! Now we can see how God and His church are able to match each other so perfectly. Can you believe what is in store for us as human beings? He gains His Bride by means of what He accomplished on the cross, and what He is accomplishing today within us as the Spirit.

God is doing a building work today among His people by His Spirit. This is how He is gaining His Bride today. Perhaps some of the verses that we can most readily see this in are found in Revelation. For instance, Revelation 19:7 tells us, "Let us rejoice and exult and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and the wife has made herself ready." There is the matter of us getting ready as His Bride. There was a lot of preparation involved before my wife and I arrived at our wedding day! In Revelation 21:2 we read, "I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her Husband." Then in 22:17 it states, "The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come!' And let him who hears say 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come and take the water of life freely." Here we can really see the Husband and His Bride speaking together as one. They have the same cry. Come to the water of life and drink freely! How marvelous it is that we will eventually share in all God is as His counterpart.

In Genesis 1:26 God said, "Let us make man in our image and according to our likeness, and let him have dominion..." The heart of our God has not changed. From the very beginning, this is what He has been after. He has been after a counterpart, a match, a bride, with whom He could share all that He is and all that He has. But it is not that we would be a queen in His palace, living in the lap of luxury. We are there so that we might share His authority! The universe is out of order. It is in disarray, in chaos. Unbelievers even recognize this. We are those who agree with God and come back under His Headship, bringing the universe back into order. As His Bride, we share in His authority and exercise His dominion to bring the earth and universe into order.

This can be seen between a husband and wife and their own household. When there is disorder between a husband and wife, there is disarray. The kids feel it; anyone who comes over feels it; even the dog feels it. But as the two become one flesh by joining the Lord on the cross, something wonderful is produced. This is the work of the Spirit. When we are filled in spirit and come under His headship, we are headed up and we take part in heading up the chaotic situation in this universe. The universe suddenly looks a bit brighter! The universe needs this. All creation is longing for us to be headed up and to express God's authority. Romans 8 tells us all creation is longing for the revelation of the sons of God. Creation is standing forth on tiptoe, wondering, "Where are you? Come on! Let's go!" We need you to be in order so we can be released from the curse that has been brought upon us by this fall." The fall of man did not just affect man; it affected the whole universe. When we come back under the authority of God, we will be able to exercise the authority of God. We will see the dominion of God begin to have its place on the earth so that God is no longer only the God of the heavens but also the God of the earth. Why? Because there is a man on the earth saying, "Yes, Lord. I take You as my Head, and I take the order You have established." Then everything is under our feet, and when Christ has such a Bride, everything is brought under His feet, and this dominion stretches even to every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. In this way, all things will be brought under God's authority.

The simplest unit, the beachhead, that the Lord begins with is the household, or the couple. We may think it is ourselves as individuals, but each one of us is actually only a half. You need your counterpart, your complement. This picture of the two halves being brought together and becoming one flesh should remind us daily of God's purpose. We are brought back

into His heart. Then we can say, "Yes Lord. It does matter how I spoke to my wife, and how she took it." Communication is a big thing. It is too easy to let it go. But how often I receive the supply of God just by saying, "I'm sorry." As my wife and I are together, we experience Christ in a particular way. I couldn't experience Christ in such a way by myself. Alone, don't we all seem fine? A guitar by itself may seem well-tuned, even though it may not be in tune around other instruments at all. The Lord thus gives us one another to help us along the way, to come back in order and to be under Him that together there might be a testimony, something that shines out among men. Man is longing for peace. The real peace is when we are back in order according to God's purpose. When someone comes and sees the testimony of two becoming one flesh in such a way, something in their heart says, "Yes. That is what I know is right. That is what I also want." They may not fully understand that such a marriage is the fruit of God's work, and you yourself may not even recognize that is such a testimony. In John 17 the Lord prayed that "they may be one, that the world may believe that You have sent Me." There is a testimony to the world when man is back in order, and oneness is displayed. It is not just that we all buy one another a Coke so that we all might get along and sing in perfect harmony, putting aside our differences until such a time when it is convenient to bring them back! This is a real oneness that only the work of the Spirit can produce.

I think we all can agree that Satan has "done a number" on this thing called marriage. Why? It is because when people see something of God's work between a husband and wife, they are amazed by such a relationship and are drawn to the very thing that established it. My wife's friends, when she was young, always preferred to come to her house rather than to have everyone over to theirs. Why? Because there was something they sensed that was found in that home. God was working in their home, and that little taste drew them in. They may not have been able to say it was God, but that became my wife's realization. What they witnessed in that home was something they were longing and looking for. - *Mike Samulak*

BLACK SLAVERY AS “THE CURSE OF HAM”

BIBLE TRUTH OR RACIST APOLOGETIC?

“And Noah said ‘Cursed be Canaan! A slave of slaves, a slave to his brothers! Blessed be God, the God of Shem, but Canaan shall be his slave. God prosper Japheth...But Canaan shall be his slave.’” (Genesis 9:25-27¹)

Who Did Noah Curse—Ham, Canaan or Cush?

Turning to Genesis 9, there’s an arresting asymmetry between Noah’s blessing and his curse; he blessed Shem and Japheth; he did not curse Ham. Rather, Noah pronounced a curse on Ham’s son, Canaan, saying, *“Cursed be Canaan: A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers...Blessed be... Shem and let Canaan be his servant.”* Hence, strictly speaking, it is inaccurate to talk of “the curse of Ham.” The “curse of Canaan” is the correct term. This is important because Ham had four sons: Cush is listed first and Canaan, last (Gen. 10:6.) Witness Lee points out that “Ham’s son was Cush, the forefather of Ethiopia.” Scholars agree that “Cush” means “black.” Hence many expositors concur with Witness Lee that “Ham...was the forefather of the black people,” through his son, Cush.² Yet, Ham was the forefather of other peoples also—through his other sons. So why focus attention exclusively upon only one lineage—Ham’s black descendants? Moreover, regardless of the ethnic origins or skin colors of the Cushites, the fact remains that no curse is pronounced on either Ham or Cush. The curse of servitude was pronounced on Canaan, another of Ham’s sons. The Bible states clearly that Noah cursed Ham’s

fourth son, Canaan, not Ham's first son, Cush (the black, "Ethiopian.") There is no Biblical justification for transposing Noah's curse from one of Ham's sons to the other.

The Old Testament indicates that Ham had four sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan (Gen. 10:6). According to scholars,³ Cush, Ham's oldest son represents the African tribes known as Ethiopians; Mizraim corresponds to Egypt; Put (or Phut) is linked by some to Somalia, by others to Libya. Lastly, Canaan⁴ "normally represents the land of Palestine and Phoenicia...the Old Testament... use[s] the term for inhabitants of the area in a general sense...These many tribes are in some way related to Canaan, and thus are called Canaanites." So "Ham is the ancestor of all these people from Phoenicia [through Palestine and Egypt] to Africa." It is an unjustified leap of logic to reassign Noah's curse away from Canaan to Ham (his father) or Cush, his black "Ethiopian" brother. The notion that Ham himself was black, originated in later rabbinical folklore. It is without Scriptural foundation. Hence expositors conclude⁵ "The reputed curse of Ham is not on Ham, but on Canaan, one of Ham's sons. This is not a racial but geographic referent. The Canaanites, typically associated with the region of the Levant (Palestine, Lebanon, etc) were later subjugated by the Hebrews when they left bondage in Egypt according to the Biblical narrative." Thus, these scholars conclude the object of Noah's curse was not black people, but Canaan, the forefather of the Canaanites. Noah's curse was fulfilled by the Hebrews' subjugation of the Canaanites. Canaan became "a slaves of slaves," when the Canaanites [e.g. the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:21, 27)] served the ex-slaves from Egypt, the Children of Israel. Genesis provides no biblical support for the assertion that black people are under Noah's curse.

Black Slavery as the 'Curse of Ham': Bible Truth, Jewish Myth or Racist Apologetic?

Cush, the forefather of the black peoples, was not cursed by Noah; rather it was Canaan. Therefore, simple logic dictates that Noah's curse to be "*a slave of slaves, a slave to his brothers,*" does not apply to black people. The NIV Study Bible notes,⁶ "Noah's curse cannot be used to justify the enslavement of blacks, since most of Ham's descendants are known to be Caucasian, as the Canaanites certainly were (as shown by ancient paintings of the Canaanites discovered in Egypt)." We conclude that Genesis provides no biblical basis, either ethically or prophetically, to justify black slavery.

If black slavery is not a logical deduction from Genesis, where did this concept arise? Nowhere in Genesis do we find evidence that Ham

was black. The tradition that Ham was a black man developed much later. It is a Rabbinical elaboration,⁷ not explicitly formulated until the Babylonian Talmud of 500 AD. Hence this concept belongs in the category of Jewish “myths and unending genealogies” (1 Tim.1:4). In the middle ages, European scholars of the Bible picked up on the Jewish Talmud idea that the “sons of Ham” were “blackened” by their sins.⁸ These arguments became increasingly common during the slave trade of the 18th and 19th Centuries. A historian, Edith Sanders, concludes that the identification of Ham’s descendents as Black Africans,⁹ “gained currency in the sixteenth century.” Thereafter, it “persisted throughout the eighteenth century, [and] served as a rationale for slavery, using Biblical interpretations in support of its tenets. The image of the Negro deteriorated in direct proportion to the growth of the importance of slavery.” Benjamin Braude, Professor of history at Boston College, writes¹⁰ “in 18th and 19th century Euro-America, Genesis 9:18-27 became the curse of Ham, a foundation myth for collective degradation, conventionally trotted out as God’s reason for condemning generations of dark-skinned peoples from Africa to slavery.” Sadly this notion has been perpetuated through its uncritical repetition by Bible teachers and writers. However, today evangelical scholars reject this view as an out-dated remnant of folklore, masquerading as Scriptural truth. - *Nigel Tomes*

(This portion is taken from Nigel’s article of the same title to be found on www.concernedbrothers.com.)

NOTES:

1. The Recovery Version reads: “*And Noah said ‘Cursed be Canaan: A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers...Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Shem and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth...and let Canaan be his servant’.*” (*Gen., 9:25-27 Rcv.*)

2. The word “Cush” means “black” and direct references are made to Cushite and/or Ethiopian individuals in the Biblical narrative, such as the wife of Moses, Zerah the Ethiopian army commander (2 Chronicles 14:9-15) and Tirhakah, Cushite Pharaoh of Egypt (2 Kings 19:9; Isaiah 37:9). [Allen P. Ross, “The Table of Nations in Genesis 10—Its Content,” Bibliotheca Sacra vol. 138 (1980) pp. 22-34.]

3. See for example: Allen P. Ross, “The Table of Nations in Genesis 10—Its Content,” Bibliotheca Sacra vol. 138 (1980) pp. 22-34.

4. Allen P. Ross, “The Table of Nations in Genesis 10—Its Content,” Bibliotheca Sacra vol. 138 (1980) pp. 22-34

5. Goldenberg, David M. The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Princeton University Press, 2003 (New edition 2005).

6. It's worth quoting more of the NIV Study Bible's notes on Genesis 9:25 in their entirety: "***Cursed be Canaan!*** ...This account of Noah's cursing and blessing of his sons is addressed to Israel. Most likely it is for this reason that Canaan is here singled out from Ham's descendants as the object of Noah's curse. Israel would experience firsthand the depth of Canaanite sin (see Lev 18:2-3, 6-30) and the harshness of God's judgment on it. In that judgment Noah's curse came to be fulfilled in the experience of this segment of Ham's descendants. But Ham's offspring, as listed in 10:6-13, included many of Israel's other long-term enemies (Egypt, Philistia, Assyria, Babylonia) who also experienced severe divine judgment because of their hostility to Israel and Israel's God. ***Lowest of slaves.*** Joshua's subjection of the Gibeonites (Jos. 9:21, 27) is one of the fulfillments (see also Jos 16:10; Jug 1:28, 30, 33, 35; 1 Ki 9:20-21). Noah's curse cannot be used to justify the enslavement of blacks, since most of Ham's descendants are known to be Caucasian, as the Canaanites certainly were (as shown by ancient paintings of the Canaanites discovered in Egypt)." [NIV Study Bible, Zondervan]

7. Ole Bjorn Rekdal, "When hypothesis becomes myth: the Iraqi origin of the Iraqw," Ethnology vol. 37 (1998): 17-32, p. 19. **Jewish scholars, working around the 6th century AD, introduced the idea that Ham was marked by dark skin.** From the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 108b: "Our Rabbis taught...[that] **Ham was smitten in his skin.**" {Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 108b} James Fenton says from the "medieval versions [of these events] we learn more about the nature of Ham's misdeeds. He mocked Noah's nakedness, and invited his brothers to do the same (which they refused). What is more, **this is not the first of Ham's transgressions.** When they had all been on the Ark together, Noah had insisted that everyone be sexually continent, but Ham, by the aid of a magic demon, slept with his wife. Next day Noah saw his footprints, and there grew up an enmity between Noah and his son. **Ham was punished by being given a black skin.** When the world came to be divided up, Japheth received Europe, Shem got Asia, and Ham was awarded Africa." [James Fenton, Fenton, "A Short History of Anti-Hamitism," New York Review of Books (Feb. 17, 1996), p.7] There is no scriptural basis for the notion that Noah enacted an ordinance of sexual abstinence on the Ark. This fiction is the invention of a religious legalistic mind! Professor Braude notes that there is **no black depiction of Ham appears in western art until the nineteenth or twentieth century.** This was much later than the tradition of depicting one of the "three wise men" as black. (ref. note 21 below)

8. The following are three examples of Medieval writers who make

this extrapolation:[1] “Mar Ephrem the Syrian said: When Noah awoke and was told what Canaan did. . .Noah said, ‘Cursed be Canaan and may God make **his face black**,’ and immediately **the face of Canaan changed; so did of his father Ham**, and their white faces became black and dark and their color changed.” Paul de Lagarde, *Materialien zur Kritik und Geschichte des Pentateuchs* (Leipzig, 1867), part II [2] The Eastern Christian work, the Cave of Treasures (4th century), explicitly connects slavery with dark-skinned people: “When Noah awoke. . .he cursed him and said: ‘Cursed be Ham and may he be slave to his brothers’. . .and **he became a slave**, he and his lineage, namely the Egyptians, the Abyssinians, and the Indians. Indeed, Ham lost all sense of shame and **he became black** and was called shameless all the days of his life, forever.” *La caverne des trésors: version Géorgienne*, ed. Ciala Kourcikidzé, trans. Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Corpus scriptorium Christianorum orientalium* 526-27, *Scriptores Iberici* 23-24 (Louvain, 1992-93), ch. 21, 38-39 (translation). [3] Ishodad of Merv (Syrian Christian bishop of Hedhatha, 9th century): When Noah cursed Canaan, “instantly, by the force of the curse. . .**his face and entire body became black** [ukmotha]. This is the black color which has persisted in his descendents.” C. Van Den Eynde, *Corpus scriptorium Christianorum orientalium* 156, *Scriptores Syri* 75 (Louvain, 1955), p. 139.

9. Edith R. Sanders, “The Hamitic Hypothesis; Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective,” *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1969), pp. 521-532

10. Benjamin Braude, “The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. LIV (January 1997): 103–142 Professor Braude points out that the linkage between Noah’s curse and black slavery first appears in Western literature with Portuguese voyages to W. Africa of discovery & commerce (including slavery.) He says, “**It appears, arguably for the first time in the exploration literature of Africa, in the mid-fifteenth-century *Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* of Gomes Eannes de Azurara,**” which talks of ‘ancient custom, which I believe to have been because of **the curse which after the Deluge, Noah laid upon his son Cain** [Portuguese original-“Cairn”], **cursing him in this way:- that his race should be subject to all the other races of the world. And from his race these Blacks are descended...’.**” (pp. 127-8.) This 15th century writing confuses Canaan (Gen. 9) with Cain (in Gen. 4) both of whom were cursed. This is probably the first historical instance of “Noah’s curse” being used to justify Black slavery.

On Things Once Delivered to Us...

According to my perception, apparently there are currently three “working models” among those churches which have up to this point shared a common heritage.

The FIRST is the “standard” model, which simply recognizes that all the individual believers within a city comprise the church in that city, and those that recognize this, along with the matter of the universal oneness of the Body, stand upon the “ground” of such oneness. Those that take such a stand as representatives of the church in that city see other groupings as a frustration to the practical oneness and the result of Satan’s confounding work. (This stand can produce misunderstanding among those who identify themselves with other groupings, and is prone to be cast as exclusionary! “What? Are you the only church and not us?” The difficulty lies in having to find a descriptive name that allows the depiction of something that is both made up of all the believers locally and an expression of the oneness of the Body universally.)

The SECOND recognizes all the groupings of Christians within a city as comprising the church in that city. Rather than refusing to acknowledge other groupings within a city as valid, they recognize such groupings as loci of God’s working within that city, and are open to learn, or even actively seek to know, what God may have been doing in the varied groups, of which they are only one. (It is worth noting that this is identical to the “standard” model, except instead of a region made up of localities, it is a city made up of intra-city groups.)

The THIRD model seems a kind of hybrid. It recognizes groups within a city, but with the purpose of introducing any such groups to the “standard” model. Therefore, those taking this model approach other groups as another group, while at the same time standing upon the ground of oneness (or else they would have nothing to bring others into!)

[I could include a FOURTH model here: the “ministry church” which ascribes to the “one practical worldwide work” view: that there is a unique ministry “of the age” embodied in a particular organization of ministers. In order to be protected from “different teaching” and division, these assemblies simply practice close and exclusive adherence to the “authorized” ministry.]

There are implications to some of these developments. For instance, if one “church” of the second model holds a youth event in conjunction with a group in that city that takes some ground other than that of the “standard” model, those who send their young people from a “standard” model gathering will have a problem with that, for the activity validates for their young people the stand of a group the parents and elders in principle refuse to recognize. That problem would be alleviated if it was known that the intention was, as per the third model, to introduce some to the ground of meeting as seen in the “standard” model.

In the Goshen conference it was argued that the principle in Acts is that we become who we should be as we contact the Lord and get into His Word. Amen.

In this issue Titus Chu also notes that there are two Greek words for walk: one which has to do with the basic principles, and the other with the freedom in whatever the Spirit measures to us. We do have more than those disciples had in Acts 1: the completed Scriptures, for one. We have Paul's writings, who wrote that the mystery of the ages had been revealed to him, which he made known to us. That was something the disciples did not have during that time before the church even became something beyond Jewish!

It seems the main thing many are re-evaluating is our heritage: the things we have received "from faithful men." Watchman Nee, for instance, laid great emphasis to the matter of the cross. In the church life we know the cross operates because we must receive all believers whom God has placed us with, rather than going to (or remaining in) a "church of our choice." Thus the church life on the "ground of oneness" is a tough row to hoe in one sense, and surely others' grass may often present itself as greener. In principle, can it really be? I, for one, praise the Lord for the blessings the "restriction" of the church life has brought me in my own Christian experience, and can testify to the life-supply to be found there.

No doubt there are two kinds of yearning for freedom within each one of us. One is the yearning of the flesh for release from the cross the Lord has prepared for us, with its outward limitation. The flesh wants something new, something to deliver it from whatever seems tedious to it, and so on. On the other hand, the Spirit also yearns for freedom within us, from religious practice and the limitation of natural understanding and human tradition. There may seem to be a fine line sometimes, but the line is real. Probably we often don't know until we try it, but let it be unto the Lord! What one "liberal" calls "old time religion" might actually be holding the needed supply, just as may what a "conservative" calls "worldly practice."

In the end it all comes down to this: **What does God want from us?**

We who have been together share a common heritage and thus we find it easy to enjoy fellowship together. We are somewhat together because we have been raised up by the same ministry; a ministry which instructs us to all follow the Lord. There will be diversity. There must be, since each group is unique both in its environmental situation and its internal chemistry and makeup. What bond between groups determines their fellowship? Their common heritage? How close must they be in their understanding of various matters to recognize each other as fellow-participants in a common pursuit?

It has been suggested that the four criteria should be: recognition that the Spirit must have the right to lead, Christ must be held up as the unique focus, the Bible must be accepted as authoritative, and the ground of oneness in localities must be the ground of gathering. To many, this last point is a matter of revealed truth, while to others it is a teaching subject to reconsideration. As it has been demonstrated, however, we must take care of one another in this matter. Much is being studied these days about what is the "baby" and what is "bathwater." May the Lord have mercy on us that what He desires among us may be accomplished. - *John Berglund*

Repentance

Lord, You have so much to do in us
That we would not face You ashamed;
Repentant of our haughty pride
That distanced us from those who love Your name.

Your Word was opened, revealed to us,
For this we praise You as we ought;
But to our shame, we had no room
To receive what other believers taught.

Lord, we never knew how closed we were
"Open to all" we would proclaim,
Yet attitudes within our hearts
Did not match our talk, obscured all we claimed.

Humbled, we repent, both to You, and
To believers we never knew.
We see that our rejecting them
Was really our rejection of You.

We worship and thank You, Lord of Light,
For opening our blinded eyes,
We'd pay the price of gold refined,
For eye salve that You'd still anoint our eyes.

submitted by J.G.