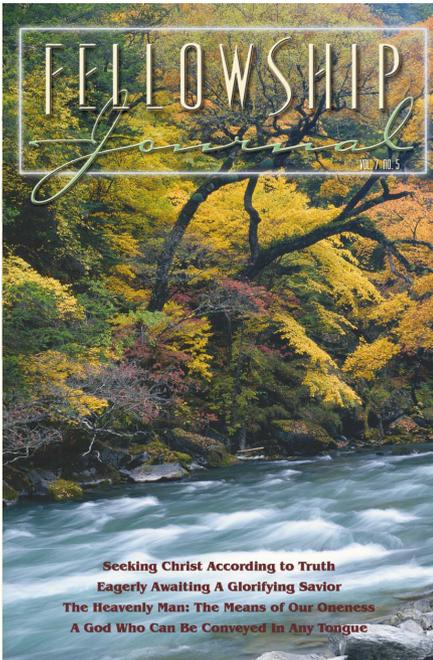


FELLOWSHIP *Journal*

VOLUME 7, NO. 5 • AUGUST 2008



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Life-Long
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Published by the Church in Cleveland Literature Service.
3150 Warren Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44111
Telephone: (216) 251 - 8832 • Fax: (216) 476 - 9699

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Report on a Time for Young Couples

On the weekend of April 18-20th there was a couple's weekend at the Ashland Woods Fellowship Center. We had formal and informal gatherings together to fellowship and exercise over the Word with a focus on balancing our family lives and our church lives, bringing up our children to be proper human beings who can eventually be a blessing to the Lord, and learning how we can be a blessing to one another and to our local churches. Chuck Debelak, Tom Neill, and Mike Samulak carried different portions of the weekend related to the ministry of the Word and practical service of the church. In addition to a rich and timely speaking of the Lord to us all concerning raising our children to be proper human beings who can be used by the Lord as He calls and wills, there was practical help concerning our time and commitment to the churches we are with as we begin to rise up and have more committed to us in the coming years. During the weekend there were also many opportunities for each of the spouses to pray and talk together concerning individual and family needs. We also considered together before the Lord how our homes can become a real blessing and strength to the churches we are in. Couples were encouraged to find sitters for as many of the children as possible for the weekend in order to really have a focused time together. Even so, as is the case with young families, there were plenty of beautiful babies to hold and enjoy throughout the weekend! Many of the couples were touched deeply by several sisters from different churches who came for the weekend and simply poured out in service to help take care of the food and children. Their care really allowed the Lord to use every moment of the time to minister to and shepherd those who came. In all, 19 couples from seven churches around the Great Lakes area participated. Many testified that this time was a real source of supply, refreshing, and reconnecting with their spouses while also bringing us all back to genuine care and desire to fight for the Lord and His interest.

Mike Samulak, Cleveland Ohio

Running a Life of Excellency

Message 1

On July 29 through 31, Titus spent time with college-aged brothers and sisters at Ashland Woods during what was called “Vision Month.” The topic of his sharing was Paul’s Second Epistle to Timothy. These are notes from his first time with them.

Very few young people typically are able to go on in the church life, primarily because very few have a heart for truth. Instead, they tend to be focused on sensation, yet it is truth and not sensation that establishes us. There is nothing wrong with seeking a rich sensation when following the Lord, but in addition to sensation, we must have truth.

The problem with seeking a sensation is that we end up trying to shape the Lord into something we want Him to be, while He Himself is seeking to shape us into the form He desires. But that is not in the mind of young people; before they support themselves, people tend not to appreciate everything that has taken place to support *them*. Even young people who love the Lord are prone to have expectations that are simply not grounded in the reality of the situation. Many of the songs that young people like to sing are often lacking in truth; instead, they promote a certain sensation. I counsel you to give yourselves to become acquainted with the Bible, and to seek the Lord according to the truth found there, for one day the sensation may fail you. When it comes time to choose between truth and sensation, those who value sensation above truth will no longer be able to go on. (And this practically defines young people today, whether or not they love the Lord.)

Watchman Nee was the servant the Lord used to raise up this spiritual “family” you have been placed in, and out of what was shown to him something precious has been produced. This has become our heritage from the Lord. The more you as young people can hold onto what has been passed on to you as your spiritual heritage, the more you will be blessed. This does not mean that you should become narrow; it simply means that you should learn to treasure what the Lord has brought forth among us and build upon it. But, as I have said, young people are not typically interested in truth, but instead are willing to sacrifice truth for sensation. Thus, very few young people end

up being able to pick up and carry forward what the Lord has entrusted to them. I do hope that you all love and seek the Lord for the rest of your lives.

You may ask me, “Titus, can you say that you are trustworthy?” For anyone to pursue Christ to the end is not an easy matter. In 2 Timothy, his last epistle, Paul was very careful in choosing every word for the sake of the continuation of his testimony. Eventually he was able to say that he had fought the good fight, that he had run the race, and that he expected the reward bestowed on those who finished as he did. I might be able to say something likewise if the Lord were to come back tonight, but if He delays, I can only say “perhaps,” because we cannot predict our ability to remain in this way, being as complicated as we are.

I say this in light of those we read of in the Bible. Peter, the leader among the twelve, gave the most prevailing gospel message in the Bible and helped establish the church in Jerusalem. After he spoke, 3000 were saved! After being imprisoned and in danger of his life, he was miraculously released, and boldly returned to publicly preach the gospel once more. After James the brother of the Lord eclipsed Peter as leader of the church in Jerusalem, however, Peter lost his boldness. This is clearly seen in his second imprisonment, after which, being again miraculously released, he simply went away and disappeared. His boldness had vanished. It must have seemed to him that he had failed by allowing James to replace what was originally revealed of grace through him and the twelve, with the Law. Peter was bold originally in the gospel, but he was not strong in the matter of truth, and therefore he could do little to stop James’ influence as someone who was directly related to Jesus and who could tell many stories about the Lord that would seem to support his view that the Lord’s followers should keep the Law. His arguments would seem convincing, for he could report how the Lord Himself perfectly kept to the Law His entire life. Should not His followers then do the same? Peter apparently did not possess enough truth to combat such an argument.

Paul, however, having a deep grounding in the Old Testament Scriptures, was able to apply the Word in a way that established the New Testament. Thus Peter was used to preach the gospel and raise up the church, while Paul was used to establish the churches in the truth. Without Paul, there would be no Christianity as we know it today. There would only be a Judaistic sect!

You must study the truth in the Word. For instance, why did the Lord say, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” instead of, “I am the Life, the Truth, and the Way”? Many of us, including myself, have understood that as we enjoy life, the truth will follow, and eventually we will thus walk in the way of the Lord. According to the Lord’s word here, however, it is as we give ourselves

to follow the Lord that we experience the riches of truth and life. The Lord says, "Choose to follow Me, and *then* you will enjoy so much." We say, "Let us enjoy, then we will find truth and have the way." The Lord said, however, "I am the Way. No one comes to the Father without Me." Once you have the way, then something sweet called truth will come to you, and all the things you know will be made alive to you.

Therefore, give yourself to be equipped in truth. Then you will find being in reality a possibility. (To some, what is learned indeed remains simply knowledge. But to some, it will become truth, and through them many more will be established.)

Truth is simply Christ becoming our reality through what God has unveiled to us. The most basic matters of the truth are Christ and the Church. Apart from Christ, Christians would have no faith and apart from the Church, Christians would have no living. Christ Himself is the center and focus of the truth, and with Christ Himself is the matter of the Church and the church life.

Peter and Paul were not the only servants of Christ in the New Testament used in such a significant way, however. The apostle John also has his part to play. Peter preached and raised up the church, and Paul established the churches in truth. People, though, might use truth simply as a means to argue with one another! John stressed life and love in the church life. Thus Peter was used by the Lord to initially raise up the church, Paul was used to establish the churches in the truth, and John emphasized the matter of life and love among the saints in the church life for its continued building up.

In our own history, we have seen something of this as well. When Watchman Nee was ministering in China, the number of saints in the church life probably numbered less than 60,000. Today, because of the truths recovered through Watchman Nee and added to by Witness Lee, that number is far greater. In fact, the truth conveyed in books such as *The Normal Christian Church Life*, *The Normal Christian Life, Changed Into His Likeness*, and *The Breaking of the Outer Man and the Release of the Spirit* have had worldwide impact. I hope you would read many of these books, for they contain what has been handed down to us as part of our heritage. It appears the thing we tend to lack is what John struggled to bring about in the church life, for we are often still short of love as we consider matters of the truth! We can preach the gospel and possess truth, but without love nothing is real.

What is so precious is that we have the same life and that we love one another, not that we preach the gospel or that we know certain truths (although the Lord has given us marvelous revelation). By the Lord's mercy, we can love one another in spite of all else. If we can enter into this, then we can come to 2 Timothy, the high peak of Paul's ministry, and to his last word to his intimate coworker on how one serves the Lord his entire life.

(continued on page 8)

Prior to his second message, Titus spoke with the young people on the matter of song. This is a sensitive issue, for it touches upon freedom of expression in our worship. Titus approaches it here from the angle of what God has committed to us.

When I was younger, brothers among us picked out new melodies (which would now seem dated to you) and gave them words according to truth. These songs you have sung are nice, but they are not according to our “family.” We would like to see young people come up who can carry the Lord’s work forward, but it cannot happen through such songs, even though there is nothing wrong with singing them. Sensationally, they are very good, but the words are lacking truth-wise. Many of you may possess more grounding in the truth than those who wrote these songs. Those who wrote these songs are talented, but I don’t know how much they know the Word or have touched the Lord, but sensationally they are good for helping us open to Christ. The depths of Christ revealed to us, however, cannot be touched through what I have typically seen of these.

Don’t say, “We used to be so old, but now we touch a new way.” It is foolish to think such a thing. The Spirit always has a way. As young people, we have given you as much leeway as possible, but we have not given you the right to not pursue the Lord! I have mixed feelings when we sing these songs, for the writers are to be respected; they at least at a certain moment had some feeling towards the Lord. Some songs come from such inspiration and some come from a living, and we should appreciate both. But in all these things do not forget the family, by the Lord’s sovereignty and mercy, in which you have developed.

The truth content in many of these songs, now often sung, can be challenged, although in terms of sensation they seem very good. A young boy looks around and may suddenly feel he loves a certain girl. He even finds he can no longer eat normally because of her. This is precious as something God created. It provides the base for you to develop in your love and for your marriage. When you are 16 it is mainly sensation, but when you are 22 it is something more real. Therefore don’t get caught in the initial stage. Let your love grow and mature, and then eventually you can become very sober on the matter of love and your marriage will be strong. When you are young, you may have tears as you call out a certain someone’s name. It seems foolish, yet it is real. We should not, however, be caught in such a thing our entire life. We need to enter into the real thing. We should desire to see a certain constitution produced, and to have a reality put in us.

Something was “ignited” during the first Ignite, but if there is not sufficient content it will cool off every time everyone goes home and will have to be re-started every event. If this is the case, it will be hard to continue. There should be a certain amount of substance imparted so that the young people may continue to develop in their spiritual lives even after they leave such times together. *see page 4

(from page 6)

**RUNNING A LIFE OF EXCELLENCY:
THE APOSTLE PAUL—HIS LIFE OF RUNNING**

Paul's life was a life of excellency, for there is nothing that can compare with the life of serving the Lord. Out of the 150 or so of those who graduated with me from Taiwan University, few achieved anything noteworthy. When I heard this, I felt once again that I had chosen the most glorious path by choosing to serve the Lord full-time. I was not considered outstanding in my class, and yet today, as I hear that the lives of some among my classmates are now over, I feel very sober before the Lord, realizing that serving the Lord has yielded something of real value, both to myself and to the Lord. Many around us may enjoy something they have obtained, but a life of excellency is a life that focuses on Christ and His desire, and upon being one with Christ for God's economy. Such is the most excellent life.

PAUL OFFERED HIS LIFE ACCORDING TO A FIRM ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Paul's life had two very distinct stages. First, he lived as a Jew and a strict Pharisee. Right or wrong, he never played around. When he lived within Judaism, he really gave himself to that, and when he became a Christian, he pursued Christ just as absolutely (or more absolutely) as when he had persecuted Christ and His members as a religious zealot.

Nothing is more precious than having the assurance from a young age of what your life is for. It is a tragedy if someone simply allows the trend of the age to carry them. That is a pitiful thing. Soon after I got saved, I felt clear to serve full-time, but the leading ones did not agree. So I went to school and preached the gospel there, and many got saved. Then a number of us decided to drop the church life. After a year, in 1954, a brother visited me and encouraged me to return to the church life. I didn't intend to, but I found I no longer had peace to stay away. Among those that left, I alone returned, and my life at that point became absolute for the Lord. I didn't care about my future; I only cared to follow and serve the Lord. It became something so real to me from that time until this day, even though I cannot say I have been continually victorious. Indeed, I fail many times every day! My realization of my stand before God, however, has never wavered.

We look at things from the angle of victory or defeat, but God looks at what it is we acknowledge. Do we recognize who He is and acknowledge that by offering ourselves to Him? There should be such a bond of mutual acknowledgement between us and Christ. That very bond becomes the most

crucial element in our Christian life. What is crucial is your firm acknowledgement and your consecration based on that acknowledgement. Realizing that Christ must be your center and your everything is what is precious. Paul, as a Jew, knew God as the God of creation. Once Paul met the Lord on the way to Damascus, however, his acknowledgement changed. Formerly he was for the Jewish religion, but ever after that encounter he was for Christ and the local churches. His whole being was bound by that acknowledgement. The value of your life will be determined by what you acknowledge. If you are able to truthfully acknowledge that nothing could ever replace Christ in your life, then your life has found its potential for real value. In these 54 years I have often failed, but the Lord has remained my everything. I haven't had the time to be overly regretful; we are just who we are. Whether I feel victorious or defeated, however, Christ has remained my Lord.

PAUL HAD A HIGH VISION, AND ALLOWED THIS VISION TO GOVERN HIS LIFE

Secondly, Paul had a high vision that governed his life. Jesus stopped him when he was on his way to arrest whoever called on the name of Jesus. Paul's response to Jesus' appearing, however, was, "What do you want me to do?"

When a person has a vision, he becomes very simple. If you have a vision, you become caught by what you see. When a boy catches a vision of a certain girl, he decides that he will do whatever it takes to marry that girl. At that point, everything else disappears. The world hasn't changed, but that person is no longer taken up by those things. In like manner, when we see the Lord, everything else disappears. If you don't have a vision, even reading the Bible will not profit you much. But once you have caught a vision of Christ, anything, all things can become a means for you to gain Christ! Whether or not your college experience will be of little or great consequence is based on whether or not you can say, "I know what my life is for!"

PAUL PURSUED WITH BOTH THE LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM IN VIEW

Whatever Paul did, he did as a pursuer. If someone only preaches the gospel during gospel events, isn't that peculiar? A pursuer has a plan to equip himself, and in every opportunity he seeks to gain Christ. One may say in a situation, "I failed," while another can say in the same situation, "I gained Christ!" In every circumstance the pursuer asks that, whatever may happen, he may gain Christ. Thus some in the church life pass through many activities and only experience the activities, while others passing through the same activities gain something of Christ.

PAUL PREACHED THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD, AS THE GOSPEL,
AND ALLOWED THIS GOSPEL TO BE THE CENTER OF HIS LIFE

It seems most Christians would rather talk about funny things than talk about Christ. When they try to convince others to join their organization, they are so zealous, but when it comes to actually seeing someone saved and grow in Christ, they show little desire. Christians are the funniest animals on the globe. Only Christ can be so grand as to embrace them, for every one among them seems to be such an oddball.

Human beings want anything that advances their importance or place in the world. So many seem willing to do anything to become somebody. If you give a message illustrating how influential you are, don't you become more important in others' eyes? Paul preached Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as the gospel. Paul preached Christ and allowed that gospel, which is Christ, to be His center. He did not seek to establish his own importance.

When I was a young brother in Taiwan there was a flow to be with the "present ministry," which meant T. Austin-Sparks' ministry. Some would say they were with him, or had received a letter from him or so on. I went to meet with some who were reading a booklet by T. Austin-Sparks entitled, "Christ, Who is All in All" (!) I was bothered by what the brothers were using this booklet for, which was supposed to center us on Christ. Then one day I came to the United States and visited some Christian meetings, including some Pentecostals. While with them, they began to speak in tongues. Since I didn't join in, they wanted to lay hands on me. I agreed, if they would hear something I would share with them first. I shared with something I had enjoyed of Christ, and afterwards, they said they no longer wanted to lay their hands on me, for they realized from my sharing there was something higher.

Paul preached Christ as his gospel, and this became the center of his life. We should not care for anything other than Christ Himself.

- Titus Chu

THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST IN PHILIPPIANS

MESSAGE THIRTY-FIVE:

EAGERLY AWAITING A SAVIOR WHO WILL CONFORM OUR BODIES TO HIS BODY IN GLORY

For our commonwealth exists in the heavens, from which also we even await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfigure the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of His glory according to His operation by which He is able even to subject all things to Himself. —
Philippians 3:20-21

Philippians chapter 3 is a very crucial chapter in the Bible. It almost seems Paul was preparing to conclude at the end of chapter 2, for he greets the saints and makes mention of some practical matters. But then he begins to tell the saints about how he pursued Christ! In this third chapter, Paul shows us his struggle to enter a heavenly incorporation with Christ. This is most clearly seen when he says, “...but I pursue, if even I may lay hold of that for which I have also been laid hold of by Christ Jesus” (v. 12 Rcv). Therefore, in chapter 3 we see a man pursuing the greatest and highest experience of Christ. There is nothing higher than fully possessing Christ and being fully possessed by Him!

In past messages I presented the seven steps or stages in this chapter that led up to this high peak. Paul experienced something higher and higher until he arrived at this great peak where Christ became so much to him. Every step contained some element that enabled him to take the next step onward to this goal. These steps should also become our experience. We should go on to know Christ as Paul did until we also arrive at the peak where Christ becomes such a great and high realm to us. As we experience becoming incorporated with Christ, we shall come to know Him as an inexhaustibly rich realm for our experience.

THERE IS NO GRADUATION FROM PURSUING CHRIST

You may think that if you really knew Christ in such a way that your pursuing would finally be over, but Paul writes, “Not that I account myself to have laid hold, but one thing I do, I forget the things which are behind, and stretch forward to the goal for the prize for which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward” (vv. 13–14). Paul also tells us that those who have arrived at a level of maturity in Christ, which he calls full grown (v. 15), must have a mind to continually pursue towards Christ, who is the goal of our upward calling.

THIS UPWARD CALLING IS TO LIVE A CHRIST-CENTERED LIFE,
NOT A SELF-CENTERED LIFE

This upward calling is also our commonwealth which exists in the heavens (v. 20). God has put us in the Body, and this very Body is a heavenly commonwealth! Each of us has attained to a certain rule or measure that should mark our walk as being with Christ. Even if we are otherwise minded, God is able to get through to us (v. 15). However, if we insist on walking merely according to our stomach (v. 19), as many seem to do, that means that we exalt ourselves, for our stomach represents our person. To live for your stomach is to live for yourself. Such a life is a self-centered life instead of a Christ-centered life. If such is our case, our glory becomes our shame, for we become someone who sets the mind on earthly things instead of on Christ, who is the reality of our commonwealth in the heavens. It seems too easy for many to go down, instead of up!

Even if we could reach the level of maturity that Paul reached, we would still need to keep pursuing Christ. We can never rest upon what we have already gained or attained. This is why Paul followed verse 12 with a charge to walk according to the measure of Christ we have received (v. 16). Otherwise, we may end up as those who exalt themselves rather than Christ, whose god is their stomach (that is, themselves). Such people Paul calls enemies of the cross of Christ. They may feel what they are doing is glorious, but in actuality what they do deviates from Christ and is shameful and disfigured. All our running should be towards Christ as our goal. Whenever we lose Christ as our central focus, our labor becomes something distorted, and the result is loss instead of gain.

Even in the church life we can fall into this trap if we are not careful. These two verses are unpleasant to consider, and we may wish they were not even in the Bible, but we must be reminded of what can happen when we take something other than Christ as the unique goal in our lives. Christ must be the

center, Christ must be the content, Christ must be the reality, Christ must be the inner substance, and Christ must even be the circumference. Christ must be everything!

OUR COMMONWEALTH, CHRIST, IS IN THE HEAVENS

Whenever a person misses the heavenly Christ, all that remains are earthly things. Paul, however, does not end this chapter on such a depressing note. He encourages us by telling us our commonwealth exists in the heavens! Therefore, we are not an earthly people. Paul tells us that even though many walk in a manner that leads to degradation, our commonwealth exists in the heavens. What is this commonwealth? It is just a big Christ! In this Christ is the totality of all that God is and the reality of the heavens. Therefore, in this commonwealth we have nothing but Christ Himself.

This commonwealth also includes Christ's organic Body. In this Body, we all share in a sweet life-relationship. I am related to you in the divine life, and you are related to me in the divine life. Nothing can break this life-relationship. Nothing can separate us, for our relationship is something heavenly, divine, and according to the eternal life of God. This organic Body encompasses all the life-relationships between the members and Christ.

There is a divine administration in this heavenly commonwealth. Here, God in Christ is the government. He is its ruler. Christ is the sole owner and leader. He is the one taking care of this commonwealth.

Furthermore, Christ is the essence and element of this heavenly commonwealth. To illustrate, the fiber of an orange is its substance, and yet the fiber itself is made up of the essence of the orange. Essence produces the element which becomes the substance which becomes our enjoyment. An orange is sweet and juicy to us because of its essence, element, and substance. In the same way, the commonwealth of the heavens is wonderful because Christ is its essence, element, and substance.

Since the church possesses such a marvelous commonwealth, it is a shame in the church life to exult anything other than Christ. Praise Him!

IN THIS COMMONWEALTH, WE FOLLOW CHRIST

The content of this commonwealth is Christ. When you fellowship with others who share this life relationship with you, there should be no other content but Christ Himself. We must be brought to Christ as we fellowship together. Christ must be the One we enjoy.

In this commonwealth, we follow Christ. When I first wanted to serve the Lord full-time, the brothers told me no. This was very discouraging, but I told the Lord I would serve Him by holding a job, which I did for quite some time. Eventually, after I moved to the United States, the Lord told me I should begin to serve Him full-time. He confirmed this word to me often as I was in His presence, so I wrote to Brother Lee of my feeling before the Lord. Brother Lee wrote back, “If the Lord has called you to serve Him full-time, you have no choice but to follow Him.” This is the operation of the Lord in this commonwealth—we follow Christ, enjoy Christ, and never depart from Him.

ENEMIES IN THE SPIRITUAL REALM

Brother Lee recommended the writings of T. Austin-Sparks. Brother Sparks taught that once we reach the land of Canaan, meaning we are somewhat mature, we find this spiritual realm contains seven enemies waiting to frustrate us. The Israelites were never able to terminate these enemies. This word caused me to realize that there is no graduation with spiritual things. Up until then I anticipated that one day I would be free of sin and self. I imagined that in my mature stage I would walk about as a shining light to others. After following the Lord for over fifty years now, I realize that the combat only increases. The more mature we become, the fiercer the fight.

Even spiritual things can be used by fleshly men. One day while I was still in Taiwan a brother approached me about reading a book by T. Austin-Sparks with me. I agreed because I desired to pursue something further in the truth. As we read together, however, he made comments that were troubling to me. He used the opportunity to criticize things we were practicing at that time in the church life, such as pray-reading. After that first time together, I decided I wouldn't continue. This brother challenged me saying, “So you have no desire to pursue? You are content to stay where you are?” I still remember the voice he used. I lost my peace, so I went to an older sister who was serving us. Her word was simple. She told me not to criticize anything, but to simply tell him that I was not up to it. That word really helped me. I learned not to get involved with who is right or who is wrong. As we pass through messy things like this, how we have to thank the Lord that our commonwealth exists in the heavens!

IN THE CHURCH LIFE, CHRIST RULES IN RESURRECTION

The “governor” of this heavenly commonwealth is the resurrected Christ, who declared, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25)! His rule is full of resurrection power and divine energy. While many may yearn for some-

thing in the past, Paul tells us we need to forget the things that are behind (Phil. 3:13). We may experience discouragement and frustration in the church life. Remember, however, that our commonwealth exists in the heavens, and its power is continuously experienced in the church life. Therefore, there is nothing to be afraid of.

THE LAST MATTER: TO EAGERLY AWAIT A SAVIOR

Paul wrote, “Our commonwealth exists in the heavens from which also we eagerly await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 20). The highest point of Philippians is when we are brought to the point we are able to lay hold of Christ even as Christ lays hold of us (v. 12). Christ shall eventually become such a vast realm to us. In chapter three, Paul brings us to this point through seven “peaks” or stages. Once we begin to touch this realm where Christ becomes so much to us, there are another seven steps—beginning with our knowledge, we go on to our acknowledgment, our stand, our living, our reality, becoming the testimony, and discovering there are those we can imitate. The last matter is to eagerly await a Savior.

Even after a person becomes so mature as to live in that divine, mystical realm of incorporation with Christ, he still needs a Savior! It seems such a mature brother should have written, “Since we have such a commonwealth in the heavens, we now restfully await the Lord’s coming.” Why is it such mature saints actually would eagerly await Christ as their Savior? It is because they realize they need Christ to be such a Savior to them. They are desperate and eager for the Lord to rescue them, for they really know who they are. Our eagerness for the Lord’s coming has much to do with who we are.

We must realize that while we are on this earth, we have no home. We are just wanderers here. Once we become comfortable here on this earth, we forget the Lord. The degree of expectation we have regarding the Lord’s coming back has so much to do with the degree of our enjoyment of Christ, our pursuing of Christ, and our realization of ourselves. The more mature we are, the more we realize how degraded we are, and how vulnerable we are to Satan’s attack. The more mature we are, the more we say, “Lord, save me!” We therefore eagerly await Christ the Savior.

According to the stages in Philippians 3, such individuals have experienced the divine, mystical realm. They can say, “Lord, I am so mature now and I have grown so much. I know You and have become someone You have been able to use. In spite of all this, however, I realize that my real salvation is Your return. Before You come and I am transfigured, I can only suffer in my limitation.”

This chapter concludes with eagerly awaiting a Savior. Maturity is not what we may think it is. Some may think, “I will grow, I will be so useful. Eventually when I give a message, thousands will be saved. When I declare something, Satan will tremble! Wherever I go, blessing will follow in my wake.” Perhaps the Lord may use such a person in this way, or perhaps the Lord will use him or her in some other way. At least I have seen the Lord use Brother Lee in such a way. Due to his level of spiritual maturity, wherever he went, blessing came. But however mature you are, you will realize that according to what you ought to know, you still do not know (1 Cor. 8:2). We need a Savior. Before that moment of the Lord's appearing, we will not be able to fully apprehend the unsearchable riches of Christ. We will need eternity to enjoy His unsearchable riches. Eternity exists so we may know Christ and all His unsearchable riches!

No matter how much we have grown, no matter how many stages we have passed through, no matter how rich our enjoyment of Christ has been in the divine and mystical realm, no matter how much we are able to live a life in heavenly incorporation with Christ, no matter to what degree Christ and we have laid hold of each other, we always must realize that we need Jesus as our Savior. I have loved the Lord for more than fifty years, and yet today, more than ever, my realization is how much I need Jesus to be my Savior. When you are young, you focus on whatever you think should be coming next in your life. You may anticipate becoming involved in some type of service. Perhaps you also expect that you will begin to study the Bible in a more excellent way, preach the gospel in a more prevailing manner, and go on to fulfill your ministry however you envision it. There are so many things you think you are going to do! The more mature you become, however, the more you realize all such things do not mean as much as you once thought. Instead, you will increasingly realize that the thing of real importance is the Lord's return. Until He returns, whatever we can do is relatively limited. The older you get, the more you should sense this frustration, and the more you should realize how you need the salvation of His return.

It is only after we become aware of who we are that we truly treasure our salvation. At first, we really have little idea of what it means to be a sinner, only recalling some bad things we did in our life. As we mature, however, we really become aware of the power of sin and the limitation that being in the flesh presents.

Even if we enter such a high level of maturity as Paul possessed and pass through all the stages of spiritual growth he passed through, we will still say, “Lord, I need You to come back.” We may think of someone as being a very

spiritual person, but regardless, there are many elements that remain that cause even the most spiritual among us to cry out for the Lord's return. In fact, the more truly spiritual you become, the more you will find yourself yearning for the Lord's coming, because you will be more aware of the limitation you confront while in this flesh. You will long to be saved through the transfiguration of your body. Thus Paul concluded this chapter by writing of the Lord as the one "who will transfigure the body of our humiliation to be conformed to the body of His glory" (v. 21).

OUR BODY A BODY OF HUMILIATION

The word "humiliation" in this verse has a different sense from its use in 2:8. There it referred to the virtue of humility, whereas here in verse 21 it refers to the fact of humiliation. Our body is a body of humiliation. Years ago, I could speak very vigorously, and easily run up and down a flight of stairs. Today, I need help ascending the stairs, and as I do, I firmly hold to the handrail. Furthermore, I experience so many aches and pains now. I often cannot sleep through the night. And my voice is no longer as vibrant as it once was, but instead raspy. Oh, how our body increasingly becomes a body of humiliation day by day!

Even a young man must know that his body is a body of humiliation, for every human body is a body of flesh, and the flesh is something that can never be fully subject to God. This is why, when referring to the human body, the Bible also mentions the cross (Gal. 2:20; 5:24; Rom. 6:6). Our body is a matter of the flesh, and this flesh which is related to our human body can never be fully dealt with. Whenever we are in Christ and are enjoying Him, sin is not something within our consideration. Apart from Christ, however, when we have nothing to do, we may easily become involved with sinful things. We want to be pleasing to God, but the body of humiliation will always frustrate us.

When we see a very aged person walking slowly along, we should realize that such is our lot. That, however, is just the outward aspect. The inward aspect which has to do with this body being a body of sin is even more humiliating! None of us can afford to expose all that goes on within us due to the fact that our body is a body of sinful flesh, for that would simply be too humiliating.

CHRIST WILL TRANSFORM THE BODY OF OUR HUMILIATION TO BE CONFORMED TO THE BODY OF HIS GLORY

We praise the Lord, however, for the transfiguration! This is the final point of the third chapter of Philippians. Christ will transform the body of our humili-

ation to be conformed to the body of His glory. Hallelujah! How marvelous is Paul's means of expressing this fact. He does not merely say that we will be freed from our body of humiliation in this transfiguration. He says that with this transfiguration will come a conformation, and this conformation is a conformation to the glory of Christ. By this transfiguration and conformation, we will match the glory of Christ!

In our lives, we all pass through stages. Even as believers, this is true. When we first believe, we are regenerated. Then we experience the stage of sanctification, and the stage of renewing. Further, we enter the stage of transformation, and the stage of conformation. These are the stages the seekers of Christ experience as they pursue Him throughout their lives. You may not consider the amount of Christ you have gained as something so grand, but that Christ you have gained is a Christ of eternal glory. The more your mind is renewed, the more you will experience conformation to the body of Christ's glory. Every genuine believer will possess something of Christ which will be expressed on that day, but "star differs from star" in the degree of glory that is manifested (1 Cor. 15:41). In everyone's experience, however, the humiliation of their body will be done away with, regardless to what degree of glory they have attained.

THE LORD'S RESURRECTED BODY IN GLORY IS OUR FUTURE

The Lord's resurrected body in glory is our future. We will be conformed to the body of glory the Lord presently possesses. His body today is a physical body, but it is a physical body of glory! Christ's body of glory is now our future. Today, the Lord gives us time that we may become more conformed to His image. Therefore, what a blessing it is to live a long life! Every day is given to us with the intention that we might use it to be further sanctified, renewed, transformed, and conformed. The degree that we are conformed in time will determine the degree we are glorified in eternity. Therefore, seek to live as long a life as possible that you may participate as much as possible in this process.

This is what our lives should be for. When we consider what we have accomplished or have experienced, the real issue should be how much the Lord has gained in us. We should not think that the Lord will magically glorify all believers equally. Too many people consider Jesus to be such a magician, pulling a rabbit out of a hat where no rabbit was before. This is not the case. It is true that in a twinkling of an eye, millions of Christians will be glorified due to Christ's operation, but it will be something that is according to His operation

within them (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 2 Thes. 1:10). That power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the heavenlies will be experienced by us (Eph. 1:18-20; 2:7). The difference is this: what Christ experienced was total, whereas what we experience will be proportional to our degree of conformation.

What you gain of Christ today will be your glory in eternity. In order to accomplish such a glorious future for us, Christ is subjecting all things to Himself. In His wisdom, the Lord has arranged everything today for that day. He is subjecting all things by means of His power, and He is doing this for our glory.

THE SHAPING OF CONFORMATION FOR OUR GLORIFICATION

In this verse, however, Paul does not call it glorification but conformation. This is because it involves Christ's using our environment to shape us. You are where you are because it is something the Lord has arranged for your glorification. Christ is using the environment to do a subjecting work, causing even the minor things to be ordered for our conformation, which in turn determines our glorification. In that day, the intent of all the Lord's subjecting work will be expressed. In that day we will all be clear (1 Cor. 13:12).

Today, the Lord in resurrection is putting everything in just the right place. All things, especially the unreasonable things, are subject to Him so that we might grow to the greatest degree of glory. The Lord is subjecting all things to Himself that we may be conformed today for our glorification in that day. This is the sweet conclusion to Philippians 3, and to the entire book as well. We can restfully take all things from His hand, knowing that what is taking place is for our conformation and glorification.

ALL THINGS ARE USED BY CHRIST TO WORK OUT OUR SALVATION IN GLORY

No matter how spiritual we may become, our body will always be a body of humiliation, but the Lord is subjecting all things for our salvation in glory. Should we therefore be anxious? Everything is subject to Him and all things in our lives take place that we may increasingly be conformed to the image of Christ for our glory. - *from a message given by Titus Chu in May 2005 to those in a ten-month training in Ohio*

Rex Beck has written a book based on T. Austin-Sparks' "The Stewardship of the Mystery, Volume 1, All Things in Christ" entitled "More of Christ: Seeing the Heavenly Man." Sparks' book is a compilation of messages given in 1937 in England. Rex reworks this important volume, expanding as well as rephrasing it. Quotes referencing *Stewardship* are from Sparks' original as published by Seedsowers.

From the Preface

"This volume seeks to show that the central focus of the entire Bible is a heavenly Man. The heavenly Man is Christ, but not simply the individual Christ, who was born about 2000 years ago. God is seeking Christ with His Body, the Body of Christ, which includes all of God's believers. This is a great heavenly Man, who will one day fill the universe. In the very beginning, God had this Man in His foreknowledge. Since then, God has been seeking in stages to display this heavenly Man more fully. Creation came about because of this Man. Every man who had relationship with God in Old Testament times conveys a certain facet of this heavenly Man's character. Incarnation was part of the quest for this Man. Crucifixion and resurrection were central in winning this heavenly Man. Redemption brings God's chosen people back to become part of this heavenly Man. The gift of eternal life brings God's people fully into the heavenly Man. God's answer to every problem in this universe is this heavenly Man. God does not put forth mere methods, doctrines, or philosophies to solve problems. His answer in every case is a Man. This heavenly Man is God's chosen way of expressing Himself. One day this heavenly Man will fill the entire universe with a wonderful, growing, and increasing knowledge of God. This was God's thought from the beginning, and He will see it all the way through to its end."

More of Christ: Seeing the Heavenly Man

Chapter 13: The Heavenly Man as the Source and Sphere of Corporate Unity

The heavenly Man, Christ along with His Body, is the source and the sphere of Christian unity. When believers have Christ as their center and dwell together in unity because of that center, then God can command His blessing of life. In this sense, the church is the place where believers can practically realize the great blessing of life from God. Psalms 132 and 133 provide a wonderful picture of this blessing, which finds its full fulfillment in the New Testament church.

Psalm 133:3 says, “There, the Lord commanded the blessing—life forevermore.” This psalm shows us a picture of God’s blessing to His people. God’s blessing is life, eternal life. It is refreshing, reviving, and uplifting. It is likened to the dew of Hermon (Psa. 133:3), which brings life and revival to the barren, dry, wasted land surrounding the mountain. It is likened to precious oil upon the head (Psa. 133:2), coming down to cover the beard and even reaching to the edge of the garments. God’s blessing is upon Christ, the Head, and then flows to all that are holding Him as their center. God’s wonderful blessing is life; it revives and refreshes as the dew; it flows freely to all people around Christ as oil flows to the edge of the garments.

This series of Psalms, the Psalms of Ascent, not only describe God’s blessing, but also show us the factors upon which God’s blessing is based. We will see that the blessing is based on two factors: God having His rest or satisfaction, and the unity of God’s people. Psalm 132, which immediately precedes the description of the blessing, describes a man, David, who does not care for his personal interests: “I will not go into the chamber of my house” (Psa. 132:3), but rather desires that God would have His rest. David says, “Arise, O Lord, to Your resting place” (Psa. 132:8). The seeking of God’s resting place is one factor that brings in the blessing of Psalm 133.

The second factor is the unity of God’s people. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psa. 133:1). It was there,

where brothers dwelt in unity, that God commanded His blessing. When personal interests are dropped and a whole group of believers picks up Christ's interests, they find themselves united in Christ. This is like Zion, the upward destination to which all the Israelites were traveling as they recited these Psalms of Ascent. When brothers are together in unity, the blessing of God is there.

The Psalms of Ascent portray an Old Testament, Old Covenant, picture. Thus, they describe a partial, imperfect fulfillment of the enjoyment of God's blessing. The Israelites fulfilled the factors presented in the Psalms and tasted something of God's blessing, although at that time it was imperfect and only partial. However, these Psalms are also types and prophecies of the real fulfillment of God's blessing in New Testament times. They point to the full blessing, which is to come when New Testament believers fulfill these very same two factors in New Testament times. Thus, the New Testament blessing is realized fully in reality.

God's Satisfaction and Rest

Psalm 132 reads, "Surely I will not go into the chamber of my house, or go up to the comfort of my bed; I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.... Arise, O Lord, to Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength.... This My resting place forever; Here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread."

This psalm shows us the Lord coming into His resting place, a place where He has perfect satisfaction. David, the writer of the psalm, set aside what was his own and cared for the Lord and the Lord's resting place. The Lord's resting place refers not to a physical place but to a place where the Lord has things according to His mind and heart, a place where He finds what He's been seeking. That is His satisfaction. As the Israelites were ascending Zion, they were singing this psalm and realizing that Zion was the place where the Lord could have rest.

In the New Testament, God does not dwell in an earthly tabernacle. However there is One who gives God rest and satisfaction. This is Christ. We see a picture of the rest that Christ gave to God when Jesus rose from the baptism waters. The Spirit, typified by a dove, the symbol of peace and rest, rested on Him who was the satisfaction of God. God said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). Christ was where God found His rest, where He was perfectly satisfied, and where He found all His desire. "The Lord Jesus answers to all the desire of God's heart, and in Him God enters into His rest" (*Stewardship*, p. 76).

Christian Life Application: Focusing on the Lord Jesus

This picture is full of application for us. When we set aside our own interests and focus all our concern upon the Lord Jesus, we give God rest in our lives. Christ has the first place with us. This gives God rest and paves the way for us to enjoy the blessing.

The picture portrayed in Psalm 133 shows us that the blessing of the Lord—the anointing, the precious ointment—is poured upon the Head. It is first upon the Head and then comes down to us. Only when we hold Christ as such does the blessing come. In the New Testament, this blessing is the anointing. It is important to see that the anointing doesn't come upon us; it comes upon the Head. This is why we must learn to hold the Head. “The Lord does not bless you and me as our natural selves. The Lord will not bless my flesh, nor your flesh. The blessing of the Lord comes to rest upon His Son as within us: ‘...the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you’ (1 John 2:27)” (*Stewardship*, p. 76).

The anointing described in 1 John abides. This is a precious point, because in ourselves we do not abide in the Lord for even five minutes. We can be as changeable as the weather. We change from morning to night. Throughout the seven days of the week, we may be seven different people. Sometimes we feel that we are spiritually on top of the world, and the next moment we may feel that we are very low. If we live in that sea of changing feelings, then we are full of distress. Thank the Lord that the anointing abides. The anointing abides because it abides on Christ, the Head, and not on us. Christ is “the same, yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). There is no variation or shadow of turning (James 1:17). He is unchangeable. Our moods constantly vary. One moment we may feel God loves us, and next we feel that He doesn't. However, Christ says “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3). He is immovable and the anointing is on Him. “It does not come and go. It does not rise and fall. It is not in and out, up and down, one day this and the next day that; it abides” (*Stewardship*, p. 77).

“The enjoyment of that is only possible when Christ is the focal point of our lives. God comes to rest in His Son, and finds His satisfaction there. You must come there in order to find God's rest, and then the blessing is there” (*Stewardship*, p. 77). We must therefore know God's rest in Jesus Christ His Son to partake of this blessing. Even the Lord Jesus Himself calls us to find this rest in Him: “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29). When we were younger we might have thought that these verses were for working men toiling in life's endeavors. However, now we find that this toiling mainly deals with our changing moods. We work against the tide of our own instability, uncertainty, doubt, and questioning. Living in this realm is real work. The Lord beckons us to come, for He will give us rest. If we are wondering whether God is pleased with us or whether He will be satisfied with us, then I'm sorry to say that this will not happen until we are fully glorified. The Lord will never be satisfied with us in ourselves. However, He is already perfectly satisfied with His Son who dwells in our hearts right now. Christ is the seat of God's satisfaction, and we are accepted by God in Him. In this way, the blessing comes.

The Unity of God's People

The Psalms of Ascent were sung by God's people as they traveled up to Zion. Imagine the scene: A whole caravan forms and grows with people arriving from many distant parts of the nation. All of them join a great procession upwards. They all have eyes and hearts set upward for Zion. Expectation and hope fill their breasts. Zion is the city of their solemnities. Zion is the joy of the whole earth. In their hearts "are the highways to Zion" (Psa. 84:5). Zion, in a very real sense, is the unifying factor among these Israelites. Israelites from vastly different parts of the kingdom find the same goal in Zion. Those who never met before, find commonality in Zion. Their paths in ordinary life may stray far from each other, but they have this one common road. Their sphere of life and service may be separate, but Zion is their unifying center. Separation and division have no place here. They are free from everything sectional, personal, and divisive. They have become as one man with Zion in their hearts. Zion has unified them.

"When the Lord Jesus is our central, supreme object, and it is toward Him that our hearts go out, then we come into a unity" (*Stewardship*, p. 78). When we are free from our personal interests, then we are able to take up the interests of the Lord. David makes this clear in Psalm 132. If he was interested in his own tabernacle, slumber for his own eyelids, or his own rest, then he would not be able to care for the Lord's rest. However, he put his personal things aside and centered on the Lord and His interests and rest. When everyone else does that same thing, then we find our perfect uniting center in Christ. This is dwelling together in unity.

In the New Testament, this is described in Ephesians 4:3–6: "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.... one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who above all, and through all, and in you all." This perfect unity is reached "by all that is individual and personal being left, by the Lord being the focal center, and by our giving diligence to maintain the unity in that way" (*Stewardship*, p. 79). We would continue to forsake our personal interests and keep Christ's interests in full view, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man" (Eph. 4:13).

Christian Life Application: Working Together with God's People

This is not idealistic and impractical. It is very practical because when we work together there are always various elements of divisiveness creeping in to break us apart. The enemy is always trying to put barriers between God's people. These could be strain, distance, discord, or unrelatedness. They could be misunderstandings, misinterpretations that are always exaggerated by the enemy. The way to maintain the unity amidst this kind of storm is to make Christ's glory our highest priority. In the midst of this attack, we must say, "This is of no value to

the Lord's interests. This is not for the Lord's glory. This can only mean injury to the Lord." This attitude should overrule our hurt feelings and any situations in which we feel we were wronged or hurt. My nature would say that I should go away because I've been hurt. However, if our attitude is to consider, "How can the Lord gain by this? How will the Lord's name suffer? How will the Lord's interests be set back?" then we will realize that we must overcome this for the Lord's sake. We must not let this affect our attitude toward this brother. We would put aside our feelings and sometimes even our rights for the Lord's interests here. We might not do it for the sake of the person who offended us, but we would do it for the Lord's sake. This is diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit. And this is the key to victory over divisiveness and for unity. Here is the Lord's blessing and the way of eternal life. "Life is by unity, and unity can only adequately be found in Christ being in His place as the One for whom we let go everything that is personal" (*Stewardship*, p. 80).

The Blessing Realized

The greatest example of the commanded blessing of the Lord is found in the second chapter of Acts. Here, "Peter, standing up with the eleven" (Acts 2:14), displayed brethren dwelling together in unity. Christ's work of redemption on the cross has been accomplished. The apostles have departed with everything personal and are now filled only with Christ and His interests. Thus, God enters into His rest in the perfect redemption of Christ. Christ then comes into full view as the apostles stand together, united in Him. There the Lord commanded the blessing, life forevermore. The Father commands the blessing upon the Head, Christ, and the blessing flows to the edge of the garments, which are the members centered on the Head and held together in Him. The blessing came like the precious ointment that was poured upon the Head and ran down to the edge of the garment. This blessing is life, freshness, hope, revival, and fruitfulness.

These Psalms have shown us the way to blessing and fruitfulness. It is with these two basic things: Giving the Lord Jesus, as God's rest, the first place, and keeping the unity through our mutual love for the Lord. This is not a mere message that is intended to uplift us. It is a call from the Lord. It is a question, "Do you want the blessing?" When we drop what is personal, center ourselves upon the Lord, and dwell together in unity, there the Lord commands His blessing. This is life for evermore.

(Taken from *More of Christ: Seeing the Heavenly Man* by Rex G. Beck, Good Land Publishers, 2008. Used with permission.)

THE GOD OF TRANSLATION

The God of the Bible is the “God of translation.” The term “translation” is usually associated with converting Scripture from the original languages (Hebrew and Greek) into English, Chinese, Urdu, Punjabi and other tongues. Certainly that is included, but our title, “God of Translation,” implies much more. It encompasses God’s desire to reach all mankind, Christ’s incarnation, and communicating the gospel to people with diverse cultures, philosophies, and mindsets. To highlight this point, let’s first contrast the God of the Bible with Islam’s view of the Koran.

The God of the Bible versus the Koran

The religion of Islam teaches that their holy book, the Koran (Qur’an), is not translatable; it is only divinely inspired in Arabic. They believe the Koran was written in heaven in Arabic and transmitted without error, addition, or omission to the Prophet Mohammed in Arabic. Professor Andrew Walls says Islam considers the Koran¹ “the direct speech of God, delivered in Arabic...unaltered and unalterably fixed in heaven forever.” Of course technically it can be translated into other languages. However, Moslems believe the Koran’s “revelation ceases to be the Word of God...if the [Koran] Qur’an is translated from Arabic into any (other) language,” Professor A. L. Tibawi of Harvard University explains.² Adherents to Islam learn Arabic in order to recite prayers and read the Koran. For them Arabic is the language of God; God speaks only in Arabic and only hears prayers in Arabic. Their Scripture is not translatable; their God is not a God of translation.

Contrast Islam's view with God as revealed in the Bible. Scripture reveals God as the God of translation. God does not have His own divine dialect—the "language of God"—in which He communicates with humanity. God does not require us to learn His language; He speaks our dialect. Charles Kraft declares,³ "God...uses the language and thought patterns of those to whom he speaks. He could have constructed a heavenly language and required that we all learn that language in order to hear what he has to say to us...He has, apparently, no holy language, no...linguistic patterns that he endorses to the exclusion of all other patterns." God spoke to the Pharisee Saul in Hebrew, his mother tongue (Acts 26:14). And God is not limited to Hebrew as if that were the only sacred tongue. On the day of Pentecost, by the Spirit's operation, Jews from every nation under heaven heard God's magnificent works *proclaimed in their own dialects* (Acts 2:6, 11). Andrew F. Walls points out⁴ "the Pentecostal crowd of Dispersion Jews hears the wonderful works of God, not in the sacred language of the temple liturgy...but in the languages of the various nations that were their real mother tongues (Acts 2:11)." In principle at Pentecost God could have given the gift of audition, enabling everyone to understand one divine dialect. He didn't do that; He gave diverse tongues to the 120 disciples. God respected the linguistic diversity and authenticated the many dialects of the Jerusalem pilgrims. D. A. Carson comments,⁵ "At Pentecost God did not give the gift of one language...he gave the gift of many languages, so that the one message could be heard in all the relevant languages, thus preserving the diversity." The hearers at Pentecost would be justified in declaring, "God speaks my language!" When God speaks to us in our dialect, our secular tongue becomes a sacred language!

This principle—that there is no unique sacred language, either Old Testament Hebrew, or New Testament Greek, or Medieval Latin—is the foundation of Bible translation. Religious scholar, Lamin Sanneh says,⁶ "Muslims believe that Christians have no revealed language for revelation and so are divided by the languages of the world." They misunderstand; it is not that "Christians have no revealed language." Rather, God can be revealed in all dialects! All languages become sacred, "the language of God," when Scripture is translated into them. Today the entire Bible has been translated into 400 languages, the New Testament into another 1,000 tongues and John's gospel into 900 more dialects. Hence, at least part of Scripture has been rendered in 2,300 languages. This monumental accomplishment resulted from the realization that⁷ "the Christian Scriptures are not, like the Qur'an [Koran], the Word of God only when delivered in the original languages...The Word of God can be spoken in any language under heaven." God is the God of translation.

Incarnation—the Supreme Act of Translation

Islam's axiom that the Koran is not translatable reflects their view of God. Our tenet that the Bible can and should be translated stems from our realization of who God is. Islam teaches that God is God; He never became a man. In contrast, we declare history's greatest event—incarnation, that God became a man. Incarnation is the supreme act of translation: hence the Bible says, "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14). God doesn't ask us to ascend to where He is; that's impossible. Rather, He came down to where we are. Thus the divine Logos was "translated" into humanity to bring God to the human race. Again Professor Walls says, "Christ is the Eternal Word of God; but Christ is the Word Translated. That fact is the sign that the contingent Scriptures...unlike the Qur'an [Koran] may and should constantly be translated." Our God is the God of translation.

Announcing the Gospel in Antioch

Acts records a pivotal event—the arrival of the gospel in Antioch, a truly cosmopolitan city (Acts 11:19-21). This was "one of the most crucial events in Christian history," because it was "the first real encounter of the Christian faith with the pagan world," says Professor Walls.⁹ Prior to Antioch the gospel was proclaimed to people familiar with the Old Covenant. This included Jews (both Hebrew and Hellenist), "half-Jews" (Samaritans) and Gentile proselytes and God-fearers.¹⁰ However, it had not yet reached the pagan Greeks, the typical heathen Gentiles. "Antioch is famous," says F. B. Meyer, "because a number of...unnamed disciples dared to preach the gospel to Greeks ...in entire disregard of...Judaism." This epoch-changing event was not the work of the apostles, Peter or Paul, but of "small potatoes," some anonymous believers. "Antioch... the most important event in [Church] history, was brought about by unknown Christians," notes Johannes Munck. They were refugees from the persecution triggered by Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 11:19). Yet, after arriving in Antioch, they flaunted religious convention by evangelizing their pagan neighbors. Their success marked the beginning of the conversion of the Greek world, a step which changed the face of Christianity. But this required "translating" the gospel, not into another language, but from one set of cultural concepts into another.

Translating the Gospel

Prior to Antioch, Acts describes the apostles' proclamation as "announcing the gospel of Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42). After

he was saved, Paul “confounded the Jews in Damascus by proving that this One [Jesus] is the Christ” (Acts 9:22). In summary form the gospel to people under the Old Covenant was—“Jesus is the Christ,” the Messiah, the Anointed One promised to Israel. This message works for Jews familiar with the Old Testament; it’s also effective for Gentile proselytes and God-fearers attached to the Jewish community. However, it doesn’t work well for heathen Greeks.

To pagan Gentiles, “Christ” is just a name; the Greek name, “*Christos*,” sounds like “*Chrestus*,” a common slave name. To them, “Jesus Christ” sounds like any other name; they would understand there is a person with the first name “Jesus” and the second (surname) “Christ.” Of course the evangelists could explain that “Christ” is not just a name, but a title. Yet the title “Christ,” translated literally, means “Smearred One,” which only adds more complexity. Of course it signifies the Anointed (i.e., Messiah), the promised One. Yet Christ, the Messiah, was promised *to Israel*; He is the national Savior of the Jews. This message has little appeal to the Gentile nations. It was necessary to “translate the gospel” in order to reach pagan Gentiles. Andrew Walls explains¹¹ “they found it was of little use to talk of Jesus as Messiah. The word meant nothing to Greeks, and needed endless explanation. They had to translate, to find a term that told something about Jesus and yet meant something to a Greek pagan. According to Acts (11:19-21), they chose the word *Kyrios*, ‘Lord,’ the title that Greek pagans used for their cult divinities.” Significantly Acts records that the Jerusalem refugees arriving in Antioch “spoke even to the Greeks, announcing the Lord Jesus as the gospel” (Acts 11:20). Breaking the previous pattern, they didn’t announce Jesus as the Christ; they proclaimed “Jesus is Lord!” They risked being misunderstood; some Gentiles might consider adding Jesus as one more “lord” or “god” in their personal pantheon. The New Testament acknowledges this pagan concept. Paul writes, “Even if there are so-called gods...and many lords, yet to us [Christians] there is one God...and one Lord, Jesus Christ...” (1 Cor. 8:5-6). Yet, they took the risk, “translating the gospel” into Greek cultural concepts and it was rewarded; Scripture records that the “Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). The church in Antioch, the first local church in the Gentile world, began as a result of the cross-cultural communication of the gospel. This pattern of “translating the gospel” has been repeated many times since then.

Paul’s New Testament epistles suggest the slogan “Jesus is Lord” summarizes “the gospel to the uncircumcision” (Gal. 2:7). He says, “If you confess with your mouth that ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9 NLT). The “litmus test” of the Holy Spirit’s inspiration is that “...no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). Moreover, the

gospel's ultimate triumph occurs when "every knee shall bow...and every tongue shall openly confess that 'Jesus Christ is Lord' to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-10).

Translating the Gospel Today

There is only one gospel; its core is the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Any other gospel is a "different gospel," which ought to be rejected (Gal. 1:6-9). Yet this unique message can be presented in various ways, depending on the audience. The apostles, Peter and Paul, acknowledged there is the "gospel to the uncircumcision" as well as to "the circumcision" (Gal. 2:7). Hence Acts records a variety of Paul's gospel messages—his presentation to Jews and devout Gentiles in the synagogues of the Dispersion (Acts 13:16-41), to Greek intellectuals at Athens' Areopagus (Acts 17:22-32) and to idolatrous "barbarians" in Lystra (Acts 14:15-18). The former differs from the latter; in the synagogue Paul quoted from Scripture and reviewed Jewish history. On Mars Hill he quoted Greek poets and Athens' altars (Acts 17:23, 28). Paul was translating the gospel for different cultures. Contrary to what some commentators have claimed,¹² Paul's "Athens Apologetic" was not a failure; two prominent people were gained, including "Dionysios the Areopagite," one of twelve Athenian judges of religious affairs (Acts 17:34).

The New Testament pattern for gospel proclamation is not "one size fits all." There is no single message suitable for all people, regardless of their background. No single "silver bullet" exists which can reach everyone. Any gospel booklet—e.g. "*The Romans Road*," "*The Four Spiritual Laws*," or "*The Mystery of Human Life*"—will resonate with some people and not with others. The challenge for Christians today, when the cities of North America are becoming increasingly multicultural and multiethnic, is to translate the gospel into forms which can reach different people. The level of complexity is magnified by the "generation gaps" between "baby boomers," "Gen X-ers," and the "Google generation," between "modern" and "post-modern" worldviews. A recent survey of religious beliefs in the US concluded that¹³ "Americans believe in everything. It's a spiritual salad bar...[It] is a 'salad bar' where people heap on upbeat beliefs they like and often leave the veggies—like strict doctrines—behind." The diversity of spiritual concepts in North America today may be no less than in Paul's day (*circa*. AD 50) when he beheld a multitude of deities in Athens. The challenge to make known the "Unknown God" portrayed in the Bible remains. To effectively reach our neighbors, friends, colleagues, and relatives with the good news of Jesus Christ requires translating the gospel into contemporary terms they can understand while preserving its life-changing power.

Nigel Tomes

NOTES:

1. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, Orbis Books, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, UK, 1996, p. 27. A. F. Walls is a former missionary to W. Africa and Professor at the University of Edinburgh, UK. Along the same lines Prof. Walls talks about “the ultimate untranslatability of [Islam’s] charter document, the Qur’an [Koran]. The Christian Scriptures, by contrast, are open to translation” (p. 23).
2. “*Is The Qur’an Translatable? Early Muslim Opinion*” by A.L. Tibawi. Paper read at the XXVth International Congress of Orientalists on Friday 12th August, 1960, in the University of Moscow, and later published in *The Muslim World*, Volume 52, 1962, pages 1–16.
3. Charles H. Kraft, “*Culture, Communication & Christianity*,” William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA, 2001, p. 209. Charles H. Kraft is a former missionary on the faculty of the School of World Mission, Fuller Seminary, S. Pasadena, CA, USA.
4. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, p. 32.
5. D. A. Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008, p. 74. Carson is professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL, USA.
6. Lamin Sanneh is Professor of Missions & World Christianity and Professor of History at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, CT, USA. His writings include, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 1989.
7. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, p. 47.
8. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, p. 27. In this context, Prof. Walls makes the important point that “the true analogy with the Qur’an [Koran] is not the Bible, but Christ. Christ for Christians, the Qur’an for Muslims, is the Eternal Word of God; but Christ is Word Translated. That fact is the sign that the contingent Scriptures (also described as Word of God) unlike the Qur’an [Koran] may and should constantly be translated.” The highlighted text is quoted above.
9. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, p. 52. These phrases appear in reverse order in the original.
10. Luke’s record in Acts makes a clear distinction between Jews and Gentile proselytes & God-fearers. Proselytes accepted circumcision, the Jewish diet, and regulations; “God-fearers” remained uncircumcised and were more accommodating on the Jewish diet, etc. The apostle Paul addressed the “men of Israel [Jews] and those who fear God [i.e., Gentile God-fearers]” (Acts 13:16); also, “sons of the race of Abraham [i.e., Jews] and those among you who fear God [i.e., Gentile God-fearers]” (Acts 13:26). The “Jews and devout proselytes” are referred to in Acts 13:43. Cornelius was “devout and one who feared God” (Acts 10:2). Nicolas (one of “the seven” deacons) was a [Gentile] “proselyte of Antioch” (Acts 6:5).
11. Andrew F. Walls, “*The Mission of the Church Today in the Light of Global History*” in *Word & World*, Volume XX, Number 1, Winter 2000, pp. 17–21. Along the same lines, Prof. Walls writes, “Many believers were forced out of Jerusalem...Most of them...proclaimed Jesus as Messiah in the Jewish communities (Acts 11:19). But some people...arriving in the cosmopolitan city of Antioch, began to talk about Jesus to ‘Greeks’—that is, to pagans (Acts

11:20). This meant talking about Jesus in a new way. There was little to be gained by stressing the ethnic term 'Messiah.' It could be translated into Greek easily enough, but the translation ('the Smeared One') would still seem odd to anyone not well acquainted with Jewish institutions. Explaining it would require a lengthy introduction to the Scriptures; and supposing there were Greek pagans with the interest and stamina to pay attention, they might still be puzzled to see any relevance to their own situation. Why should they rejoice that the national savior of Israel had arrived? What sort of good news to them was the restoration of Israel? The believers from Cyprus and Cyrene...took a different route. Linguistic translation was not enough; conceptual translation was necessary in order to convey the fact that Jesus had ultimate significance for Greek pagans, just as he had for devout Jews. They presented Jesus as Lord, *Kyrios*" [F. Walls, "Converts or Proselytes? The Crisis over Conversion in the Early Church "in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, V. 28, No. 1, (January 2004),p. 4].

12. The "mixed response has led to the conclusion that Paul's attempt at a 'philosophizing sermon' was a failure," says Ron Vince in "*At the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31): Pauline Apologetics and Lucan Rhetoric.*" He cites Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) p. 601, as one example. Dr. Ralph Winter counters this view, after explaining its basis as follows: "Luke's succinct summary of Paul's Areopagus address has sometimes been...judged [as 'highly pleasing to Almighty God, but never to be done again.'] As such, it is seen as a one-off, valiant attempt at philosophical discussion...in the sophisticated field of apologetics in the late Roman Republican and early Empire....The Areopagus address is regarded in some Christian circles as a well-meaning, innovative experiment, 'highly pleasing to Almighty God'—after all it resulted in the conversion of the two distinguished Athenians and their entourage—but it was 'never to be done again'. Therefore, it has to be concluded that today Acts 17 provides no paradigm for Christian apologetics which are an essential prerequisite to evangelism. Those who believe that this address was, in effect, a failure, support their contention by arguing that Paul himself subsequently resolved never again to attempt this approach in his ministry. They argue that, of his evangelistic endeavours at his next port of call, Paul 'determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified' (1 Cor. 2:2) in that culturally sophisticated city of Corinth" [Dr. Ralph Winter, "*Introducing the Athenians to God: Paul's failed apologetic in Acts 17?*" (emphasis added) on line at:

<http://www.euroleadershipresources.org/resource.php?ID=120>].

13. The Survey was the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life's U.S. Religious Landscape Survey of 35,000 Americans. Pew released demographic data in February, 2008 from the survey, conducted May through August 2007. The quote is from *USA Today*, Jun 29, 2008.