

SECRETS OF SURVIVAL IN THE SERVING LIFE

By Titus Chu

MESSAGE ELEVEN: BEING FAITHFUL TO GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

In the church life it is a great art to know how to survive. When we say “survive” we do not mean that after fifty years we are still in the church life. We mean that whatever the Lord has given us has been developed to the fullest. We have all been allotted a certain measure and a certain gift according to that measure. Now we must grow and function unto that measure. Eventually, in our experience in the church life it seems that this is the most difficult thing. I have observed many who initially were full of talent and zeal, yet for some reason they either eventually dropped the church life or became common. With them there is neither anything extra nor anything too short, yet before the Lord they have lost their commitment. Because of this we can say that keys to surviving are crucial lessons for us to learn and experience.

We have already covered the four pillars needed for our survival in the church life as revealed in the first two verses in First Timothy: the apostle, God our Savior, Jesus Christ our Hope, and the genuine life relationship. You cannot find the realization of these pillars in Christianity. They can only be experienced fully in the Body life. It is in the Body that we can be related to the apostle, know the God who is saving us into His economy, accumulate the riches of Christ to be our hope at His return, and experience the life relationship with the members of His Body.

**BEING COUNTED FAITHFUL BY GOD
AND DIVINELY EMPOWERED FOR
THE GROWTH INTO OUR MINISTRY IN THE BODY**

In chapter two of Timothy is another crucial matter concerning our survival, the matter of honoring God's divine administration and His administrative arrangement. You may not sense that you have any problem with the apostle or with God, and you may really love the Lord and the saints, yet still you may feel that you are not that much a part of the Body. What is the reason? It may be that you do not know how to properly honor God's divine administration or His divine administrative arrangement. In verse 12 of the first chapter Paul said that he thanked God because God had empowered him and counted him faithful, appointing him to the ministry. Paul was frank. He was saying, "Do you know who I am? I have been empowered. I am faithful. God has counted me faithful. Furthermore, He has appointed me to the ministry." He did not say, "Praise the Lord, even though I am a failure, through God's miraculous working He has generated in me a ministry!" That is how I possibly would have written it. I wouldn't have been so bold to say that God counted me faithful. If I were Paul, I would recall my offering sacrifices in Jerusalem which Luke recorded in Acts 21. Yet Paul still had the boldness to say, "God has counted me faithful." He said this fully realizing that many had noted his faults. But Paul realized that God didn't see his situation in that way.

OUR NEED FOR GOD'S EMPOWERING

Paul said God empowered him. Who is the one who needs empowering? The one who is weak. Doesn't this indicate that Paul considered himself quite weak? Wouldn't that indicate that he himself detected shortcomings in his daily life? This verse should mean, "Brothers, you esteem me as someone quite great, but I am not that great. In fact, I am a weak person, but God has counted me faithful because He is the One who empowers me!"

We are fallen, by our very nature we are corruptible and weak. From the time I get up in the morning, even from the moment I become conscious, I realize that the moment I am not being empowered, I am in trouble. Even in the matter of drinking coffee I have to thank God for His empowering. What does He empower me out of? He empowers me out of drinking anything over two cups of coffee a day! We all realize our need for a time with the Lord at the beginning of each day. But how many know that it is only by the Lord's empowering that we even know what such an experience in the morning is? You need His empowering just to get to bed fifteen minutes earlier. You don't need to talk of the high things. Just mention coffee, a time with the Lord in the morning, or dessert, and then you begin to realize your need for the Lord's empowering. Without the Lord's mercy and empowering we would have no way to follow Him.

Why does Paul speak of his weakness in such a positive way? It is because he is encouraging his young co-worker, as well as all of us, to follow the Lord and to honor God's divine administrative arrangement. Even though you may be weak, or limited, or have problems, remember: Christ Jesus the Lord is the One who empowers you and who is able to cause you to be counted faithful so that you may carry out your ministry.

**GOD'S COUNTING US FAITHFUL
IS BASED UPON HIS DIVINE OPERATION**

The frustrating word in the phrase "because He has counted me faithful" is "because." If I am faithful, I do not need empowering. If, after being saved, I am able to read thirty chapters a day in the Bible, pray three hours, and fast once a week, why would I need to be empowered? If I am able to preach the gospel to everyone I meet and am always testifying in the meetings, I would have no need of the Lord's empowering. Since none of us fall into this category, however, we can all pray, "Lord, empower me."

How many of us have been entirely faithful to the vision the Lord has revealed to us in His recovery? But, praise the Lord, the Word does not say that God realized Paul was faithful, it says that He counted Paul faithful. This “counting” is based upon God’s empowering.

Let me illustrate in this way. Suppose you feel there are too many church meetings and that you haven’t had enough time with your family or to watch television. You decide to stay home from the prayer meeting, thinking the saints won’t miss your amen that much anyway. The strange thing is, as you are watching the television, your response is not as one who in the world. You just cannot derive real pleasure from it. It doesn’t absorb you in the same way it does your neighbor. Faithfulness in this verse doesn’t refer to a kind of behavior as we usually conceive of it. Faithfulness here is the operation of the divine life which God has given to us. Because of this operation God can count us faithful.

THE WARFARE WITHIN US

When we were saved, God’s divine life entered into us. But after we experienced the entrance of this life, sin rose up against it. Our spirit now tells us to love the Lord. Sin leads us to watch television. Now is when you need the empowering. Whenever you are not in your spirit, sin has its way with you. But the Lord is very good in counterattacking. You feel you are a complete failure, but something rises up within you to cause you to continue to pursue the Lord. This guerilla warfare is going on in us all the time. Sin works at your reasoning and tries to bring you into rebellion. It tries to convince you something is unreasonable. Perhaps there is an older person driving slow in front of you. Sin seeks to involve your emotions and your will. You get angry and determine to tailgate that person. Suddenly you realize, “Thank You, Lord. Thank you for this principled gentleman who drives so carefully.” As your spirit rises up, you experience a kind of empowering.

What is this empowering? It is a divine faithfulness. God realizes you are losing the battle, so He rises up to rescue you and to bring you out of your unfaithfulness. Now is when you need to learn something. This is where our cooperation is needed. We need to learn to be faithful in our will to cooperate with God's faithfulness. In other words, don't give up. It is not that you declare that from now on you will be in your spirit all the time. What we need is to learn to exercise a faithfulness towards God's operation in us.

THE DANGER OF DISHONORING GOD'S OPERATION IN US FOR HIS DIVINE ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENT

Sometimes as we fight this war we feel we cannot win the victory. Therefore we sign a treaty with the Satanic regime and drop the church life, or at least part of it. A kind of reasoning develops which runs something like this: "Until the Lord returns it is just going to be this way, so I might as well salvage what's left of my life." Now you have really lost your faithfulness, not because of your weakness, but because you refuse to receive God's faithfulness.

Once you reason that you cannot accept the situation with your weakness any longer, you are then open to consider how to lose your faithfulness. Satan's strategy is to magnify our problems in order to cause us to dishonor God's administrative arrangement and to make us feel like we are worse than a nobody. This is when we can lose the ministry which the Lord has given us. We may dishonor and nullify the faithfulness of God in His divine administrative arrangement.

HONORING WHAT GOD HAS ARRANGED IN HIS DIVINE ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENT

In His divine administration, God has given some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers. He has also given elders, deacons, and deaconesses. Furthermore, in His divine administrative arrangement, He has given us apostles-to-be, prophets-to-be, elders-to-be, deacons-to-be, and so on. In other words, every saint is crucial to God in His administrative arrangement. You may not be manifested today. You may not see who you are in His administrative arrangement, but God sees who you are. God sees us clearly. He points to one and says, "Here is an apostle." To another He says, "This one is a shepherd and a teacher." We are still in 1985, but God is not so limited.

We must all learn to honor God in what He has arranged for us in His divine administration. The way to honor God in this matter is to be faithful to His faithfulness, which is just His divine operation within us. You must honor the fact that God is faithful and is empowering within to substantiate His ministry in you. What must you do? You must learn to be faithful to God's faithfulness.

We should be able now to distinguish between the faithfulness which is ours and the faithfulness which is God's. Can I love the saints? No, all my love is exhausted on me. But there is an empowering which continually generates a love towards the saints. Concerning being victorious, loving the saints, preaching the gospel, or reading the Bible, my faithfulness is exposed as nothing. However, my God is a God who empowers me. If a person were able to become an apostle in a short time, it would mean that there was no need of the Lord's faithfulness. To develop into what the Lord has prepared for us may require twenty, thirty, or even forty years. Whoever continues to exercise faithfulness to God's faithful operation knows how to honor God's divine administration and His divine administrative arrangement.

The test comes whenever our weakness rises up and God's empowering seemingly disappears. Can we continue on faithful to the Lord's faithfulness without giving up, even after thirty or forty years? The danger is that one day we might think, "Well, I have been stirred up so many times and nothing ever comes of it. I am not going to allow myself to be set on fire again, so goodbye Jesus." This is when someone loses their faithfulness and becomes unable to operate any longer in the church life.

**TRUSTING IN GOD'S FAITHFUL OPERATION
EVEN AS YOU BECOME MORE AWARE OF YOUR
WEAKNESSES**

In the messy church life you have to realize that, in the midst of it all, God is faithful. He is empowering us according to His faithfulness. We only need to continue to be faithful to God's faithfulness, for God is operating. You may wonder why many mature brothers feel so unworthy. It is because the more mature you become, the more sensitive you become. Things which Brother Lee may confess are things which to you may seem quite high. As you go on in the church life, you will discourage yourself, even as you grow. Things that you never realized when you were younger will become evident to you. This in itself is proof of God's operation. Yet you must learn to remain faithful to God's faithfulness.

WHAT IT MEANS TO WAR THE GOOD WARFARE

In his epistle Paul charges Timothy (1:18) "according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that in them you might war the good warfare." Timothy was a young apostle somewhat still in a learning stage. Paul is saying, "Timothy, I left you in Ephesus that you should function according to God's divine administrative arrangement concerning you." They had laid hands upon Timothy and prophecies had been made concerning him. Those prophecies revealed how Timothy would function, what his operation would be. Paul could say to Timothy, "You know who you are. Based upon this prophecy, war the good warfare."

How about you? You may think, “No one has laid hands on me or prophesied concerning me.” Perhaps not, but you are all regenerated members of the Lord’s Body. As members you each have a particular function. To war the good warfare is to develop to the uttermost what the Lord has arranged for you in His administrative arrangement for the building up of His Body.

We think we should fight to defeat Satan. This is true, but eventually our experience of this warfare is simply one of Satan creeping in to tell you to forget about what God is after, incident after incident, year after year. Attack after attack, our warring is just to continue on faithful to God’s faithful operation which is operating in us to produce our ministry for the building up of His Body.

In this warfare we are constantly under siege, for Satan is continually coming in. Sometimes he uses sin, sometimes he uses the world, and sometimes he uses you yourself. Some become discouraged after being saved because of sinfulness. Even more, Satan uses the world. There are at least three aspects of the world which Satan can use. There is the evil world, like Las Vegas; the religious world, which occupies you with things concerning Christ or ethics which are not Christ Himself; and the typical world, which may involve how to be a responsible husband or a good mother, and so on. Satan uses these as issues in your life to discourage you. As you are trying to be a good father, you find yourself bringing your children to watch television with you. The Lord may convict you concerning this, but Satan will condemn you about it much more. You must learn to tell Satan, “Shut up! I am worse than that, but that is none of your business!” However, we usually end up beating ourselves. You tell yourself how terrible you are. You may feel that no matter how much grace the Lord has given you, you are a hopeless case. This is when you must war the good warfare.

DEVELOP WHAT THE LORD HAS ALLOTTED TO YOU

Here is the problem. According to God's arrangement, there is a brother who should perhaps be an apostle. He, however, considers his condition. He still experiences defeat, still gets caught by the world, and still has a strong self. Satan comes continually to condemn him and tell him that he is hopeless. What would you do? You need to continue to develop all that the Lord has given you. He has given you certain talents. You need to take them and develop them more. As you already love the Lord, love the Lord more. As you already love the saints, love the saints more. As you have a talent, exercise it more. This is the warfare. Satan distracts me, but I concentrate on loving the Lord more! The world distracts me, but I concentrate on loving the saints more! The self exposes me, yet I concentrate on exercising my talent more! It is very different from our concept.

**BE PREPARED TO EXPERIENCE
FAILURE UNTIL THE LORD COMES BACK**

When the sinful nature operates, when the world distracts, when the self frustrates, refuse to be discouraged. This is to war the good warfare. Be assured that all these things are going to be present until the Lord returns. They will be present with us until our bodies are transfigured. Until then you must learn to live with corruption and weakness. Don't develop them, but learn to handle their presence. Learn to say, "Sin, you have caught me, but I have woken up! O Lord Jesus, Amen!" This is to war the good warfare. You are still going to lose your temper, you are still going to experience lust, you are still going to do what is contrary to your own good judgment, and the world will continue to be attractive. After you realize these things you may feel that you have no chance. However, the Lord is continually empowering you to retake your stand for His recovery and to love Him more.

To war the good warfare is to continually rise up from discouragement and develop what you have. This is to honor what God has arranged for you. Such an exercise will lead you into the full realization of what God has for you in His divine administrative arrangement.

**THE DANGER OF TEACHING DIFFERENTLY
AND FOCUSING ON SOMETHING
OTHER THAN GOD'S ECONOMY**

As we are developing according to God's administrative arrangement, there is a trap that we must be aware of. This trap is revealed in 1:3-5, "Even as I urged you when I was going into Macedonia to remain in Ephesus that you might charge certain ones not to teach differently." This trap is to focus or to aim at something other than God's economy and to teach differently. The central thought of the entire Bible is that God has a purpose and that He is operating to accomplish this purpose. God is operating to build up His habitation locally and universally, to produce a Bride to be His counterpart for eternity. It is very easy, however, to be distracted from this. You perhaps would not even be aware that something else besides God's economy has become important to you.

Christianity is glutted with teachings which have nothing to do with God's economy. Even in the church life, however, we can misaim and become distracted from the central view. Brother Lee may mention something of a need to know the truth, and we may respond by rushing to buy reference books and learning Greek. Brother Lee, however, has no desire that we should take things in this way. We are not for learning Greek, nor for knowing the different schools of teaching on various doctrines. We are for God's economy.

MYTHS AND UNENDING GENEALOGIES

Paul also charged Timothy to warn others not to occupy themselves with myths and unending genealogies. Myths are things of superstition. We must beware of becoming superstitious or occupied with things related to superstition. This includes being occupied with miracles. These things are off the mark of God's New Testament economy. Unending genealogies in our experience have to do with our personal history in the recovery. We establish our seniority by means of our "genealogy" in the recovery. If you have been in the church life awhile, don't you enjoy telling new ones of your church life history? If you have to talk about your history, let it be for the testimony of Jesus rather than to impress others with yourself.

TWO POSSIBLE PRODUCTS OF TEACHING

Paul indicates that there are two things which can result from someone's ministering or teaching. One possible result is questioning and the other is the dispensing of God's life. Sometimes after a message you may have a lot of questions. You may begin to question the ministry, the elders, or the recovery in general. Once someone gave a message called "Reconsidering Our Concepts." That message led many people to reconsider and question everything. However, there is only one thing to consider, and that is God's eternal purpose! We are for nothing but God's divine dispensing! Besides this there can be nothing else. If you have other concepts you had better reconsider so as to be for nothing but God's economy!

It seems Paul was asking Timothy to exercise some sort of control over the church in Ephesus. Actually, don't you believe that there is a need of some discipline when things are shared which produce questionings? This is not to control the church life, it is to exercise discipline over the things which divert the saints from God's dispensation. Timothy was there to charge the brothers not to teach nonsense and to help the saints pay attention to God's dispensing.

**THE WAY TO BE KEPT IN
THE DIVINE DISPENSING AND
THREE MATTERS REQUIRING OUR EXERCISE**

In 1:5 Paul says that the goal of the charge is love. How can one be in the divine dispensing? How can one be protected? By being a person of love. Paul reveals that a person of love is one who exercises to have a pure heart, a good conscience, and unfeigned faith. These are the three elements which produce the real love.

Firstly, this love is out of a pure heart. A pure heart is towards God. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:3).

Secondly, the love that builds up the body requires a good conscience, which is related to the Body. This may surprise you. Paul viewed the matter of conscience as something related to the saints. He says in First Corinthians, for example, “conscience, I say, not your own, but the other’s” (10:29). Let me illustrate in this way. Perhaps after thirty years in the church life I may reason that it would not be bad if I took up golf. My doctor recommends that I get some exercise. The problem is that if I play golf, the whole church will end up playing golf.

Let me give you a real example. There is a brother who can fly a few of us in a plane between churches, which could save us considerable time and money. When the brothers suggested I take this means, I hesitated. Why? I had to consider the conscience of the saints. Perhaps some may feel, “Those servants of the Lord are really something, flying around in their airplanes.” There is nothing wrong with being flown around, but the saints may feel that there is something more to it. We should be careful to give no occasion for any offense. I would rather drive and spend a little more time and money rather than cause any saint to stumble. Love out of a good conscience means that you are careful that no ground for offense between you and the saints is allowed to develop.

Finally, this love comes out of unfeigned faith, which has to do with you yourself. Only you know what you are really after. You have to learn to exercise a faith that is without hypocrisy.

CONCLUSION

These are the exercises for us to be in God's divine dispensing. May the Lord have mercy that we may be led by Him with a view to His dispensing. We should be thankful that we are not discouraged and that we are still developing here in God's divine administrative arrangement.

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