

《The Christian(1934~1940)》

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THE CHRISTIAN (1934-1940)

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THE CHRISTIAN (1934-1940)

PREFACE

The Christian was first published in November 1925 and discontinued in 1928 after twenty-four issues. The first twenty-four issues were published in The Collected Works of Watchman Nee in Volumes 3 through 7. The magazine resumed publication in July 1934. This volume is a collection of all the articles by Watchman Nee that were published in The Christian when it was resumed. The following announcement appeared in the first issue of the resumed magazine:

After its resumption, the nature and content of The Christian will be largely the same as before. The differences are that the former "Gospel Messages" column is now changed to "Notes on Scriptural Messages" and the former "Notes from My Bible" to "Bible Studies." These changes are only in style; the function will be the same as

before. The reason "Notes from My Bible" is being changed to "Bible Studies" is because we intend to publish, in succession, notes of Bible studies which Brother Nee conducted with the brothers and sisters in Shanghai during the last few years. By this means the truth-seeking brothers and sisters in every locality will receive help. "Gospel Messages" is being changed to "Notes on Scriptural Messages" in order to keep Notes on Scriptural Messages continuing so that the help God's children have been receiving will not be interrupted. Hence, although the Notes on Scriptural Messages ceased to be an independent publication, its essential existence has not been abolished. We simply incorporated it as a column in The Christian. Thus, on one hand, The Christian resumes publication, and on the other hand, Notes on Scriptural Messages is also preserved. On the one hand, we want to restore the former testimony of The Christian, and on the other hand, we want to carry on the present help of Notes on Scriptural Messages...

THEME: To speak forth God's will and to cultivate a Christian's spiritual life.

CONTENT: Notes on Scriptural Messages, Twelve Baskets Full, Stories, Testimonies, Question and Answer Box, and Bible Studies.

The editors of this magazine were Witness Lee and Tang Shou-ling. The magazine published seventeen issues and continued until 1940. Volume 21 of The Collected Works of Watchman Nee contains eleven messages by Brother Nee from the "Notes on Scriptural Messages" column and two stories by him from the "Stories" column. A table of contents of the original seventeen issues of The Christian (1934-1940) has also been included at the end of this volume.

WASTE AND PRAGMATISM

Issue No. 1

Scripture Reading: Matt. 26:6-13

We have spoken twice on this passage. There are many significances to this portion of the Scripture, and I will not repeat what I have said. Last Monday evening during the Bible study meeting, I said that, the Lord willing, we would specifically speak on this passage on the Lord's Day. Hence, we will spend some time on this passage.

This portion of the Word is on the story of Mary. But in this Gospel, her name is not mentioned. In the other Gospels, her name is mentioned; therefore, we know that this woman is Mary. Why does Matthew mention her only as a woman? It shows us that what she did can be done by any ordinary woman; it was not something that could be done only by someone called Mary. The use of the word woman means that it does not refer to any person in particular. Moreover, the fact that she is only mentioned anonymously as a woman shows that the person does not mean much; it is the Lord who is worthy of our attention.

We know that Mary did not have a servant at home. There was no one else in her house except her sister, Martha, and her brother, Lazarus. She served the Lord personally. We also know that she did not have a rich family. But it is an amazing thing that she bought a pound of ointment of pure nard (we are told of this in the other Gospels), and the pure nard was "very valuable" (John 12:3). Hence, this ointment must have been very expensive. Perhaps one cannot even find such expensive ointment today. When she poured the ointment on Jesus' head, she was criticized by many. They murmured that it was a waste of three hundred denarii to anoint the head of the Lord, and that the money could have been given to the poor and taken care of many people. But the Lord said, "Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her" (Matt. 26:13). Therefore, I believe that wherever the gospel is preached, the story of Mary is to be preached also. It would not be proper to preach the gospel without speaking about the story of Mary. As long as there is the gospel, there should be the story of Mary. In other words, after a man understands the gospel, he should also know the story of Mary. Unfortunately, the gospel is preached in many places, but the story of Mary is not preached.

Some wonder why three hundred denarii are so important. Since the Lord was sold for three hundred denarii, Mary's three hundred denarii had a tremendous significance. (Do not misunderstand when I say that the gospel was worth three hundred denarii and the enemy's valuation of the Lord Jesus was also three hundred denarii. The Lord was worth three hundred denarii only in the eyes of the enemy.) Since a flask of ointment was worth three hundred denarii, Mary sold herself for three hundred denarii worth of ointment. Putting it in another way, Mary was that flask of ointment; she put herself into that flask and sold herself to the Lord.

The story of Mary must be spoken of wherever the gospel is preached because every time the gospel is preached, there is the need of the story of Mary to maintain the balance of the truth. If there is a place which only preaches the gospel without mentioning the story of Mary, the truth is unbalanced. It is easy for men to preach the gospel without mentioning the story of Mary. It is possible for the gospel to be preached too much without having the proper balance. Preaching the gospel is easy today. The gospel preached among us and everywhere in the world is a gospel that satisfies men. A man believes in the gospel because he wants to profit, rejoice, live well, and gain something. If we profit, rejoice, live well, and gain something, we feel satisfied. Many people believe in Christ only to be saved from death and hell and to receive eternal life and go to heaven. Many people have not believed in Christ to the extent that they give themselves to the Lord. Many preach the gospel by telling others that they can pass from death to life, and from judgment to eternal life and salvation. Men like to hear this kind of gospel. But if you tell them that after they have believed, they should offer themselves to God, obey God, and be His prisoners and slaves, they would refuse to accept. Many people see salvation only as deliverance from judgment; they have not seen that salvation is also deliverance from self. The salvation of many people is merely a salvation from hell; they have not seen that salvation is also a deliverance from the world. Many people only see that being saved is receiving eternal life and blessing; they have not seen that being saved is for the Lord to gain them. If they realized that salvation is a matter of putting oneself absolutely in the hand of the Lord, many would turn away.

This distinction was present at the time of Jesus. It was recorded in the Gospel of Luke, which speaks of a man preparing a great feast and asking servants to invite the lame and crippled to come to the feast. This is the feast of the gospel, and many people came to the feast. The Lord spreads a feast before man, and whosoever will may come. Indeed men came. The Bible says that many people walked with Jesus. They thought that the gospel was wonderful because it was a word of grace out of the mouth of the Son of God. But the Lord told them that if they would not take up their cross to follow Him, they could not be His disciples, and that if they loved their parents more than they loved Him, they were not worthy to be His disciples, or if they would not leave behind everything in this world, they could not be His disciples. The Lord mentioned His relationship with us immediately after He preached the gospel. Many people consider salvation as merely a deliverance from judgment and hell; they do not have Christ's concept.

Many believe in Christ, not because Christ is believable, but because He is one of the ways for them to be saved. Many believe in Christ, not because they realize that Christ is the goal, but because they think that through Christ they can go to God and heaven. The Lord Jesus says that He is the way, the truth, and the life. Many believe that Christ is the way, the method. But they do not see that Christ is the life. They think that they should trust in Christ because He is a wonderful way for them to be saved. Many people want to come to God, go to heaven, or be saved through Christ; but they have not seen that Christ is the life and the goal. Many people want to go to heaven, be delivered from punishment, and be saved, but they cannot do it on their own. Therefore, they ask Christ for help. Christ is the means and not the goal for them. In other words, Christ is the means of salvation through which they reach their goal. The person, Christ, is not their goal. Believing in Christ and being saved are only means, not the goals, for them. They do not understand what Christ wants to accomplish. This is the danger of the gospel among us. This is why there is the need to speak of the story of Mary. It is not enough to hear and believe in the gospel; we must smell the aroma of the ointment. Salvation is not for ourselves but for Christ. This is what the story of Mary is all about.

In a Sunday School, a man asked a group of children once: "Who among you would want to be Lazarus? Who would want to be the rich man?" Some children said that they wanted to be Lazarus because they would enjoy the blessing in the future. Some said that they wanted to be the rich man because they did not know what would happen in the future anyway. One child said that he wanted to be the rich man when he was alive and Lazarus when he died. Many Christians think this way. They want to enjoy blessing while they live on earth, and enjoy blessing when they die. They want to come out ahead in both worlds. This is the way many Christians want to take today. But those who are like Mary are a Lazarus when they are alive and Lazarus when they are dead. They draw near to God after they die in the same way that they drew near to Him when they were alive. Just as they put the world aside when they die, they put the world aside while they are yet living. They are Lazarus when they die, and they are Lazarus when they are alive. This is what the story of Mary is all about.

We are not neglecting the preaching of the gospel. We know that we should pay attention to the preaching of the gospel. But the Lord Jesus said if there are thousands or tens of thousands of places where the gospel is preached, the story of Mary should be told also. A danger exists if one only preaches the gospel. This

is why the story of Mary must be told. On the one hand, we have to preach the gospel, but on the other hand, we must offer up everything to the Lord. Paul said, "We have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). This is the gospel. But it does not stop here. Following this, Paul said, "And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised" (v. 15). This was what Mary did. The Lord is the One who has died for us. The purpose of His death and resurrection for us is that we may live for Him. No Christian can just be saved, but not have to suffer tribulations. Paul said that we are not only appointed to believe in the Lord Jesus; we are also appointed to suffer for Him. We should know that we have been set apart to believe in the Lord and also set apart to suffer for Him. Many believe in the Lord Jesus only to the extent that they receive happiness from Him. They have not believed to the extent that they will suffer for His sake. Many people do not know what it is to believe in Christ. To believe in Christ is to believe in Him to the extent that we suffer for Him. But thank the Lord that this suffering is precious! Many have believed in the Lord Jesus only for the purpose of going to heaven; they have not believed to the extent that they go out of this world. They have believed only to the extent that they are accepted by God; they have not believed to the extent that they are rejected by men. But a perfected believer, one who belongs absolutely to Christ, is one who believes in the Lord to the extent that he is both accepted by God and rejected by men. This is why the story of Mary must follow the preaching of the gospel. We must speak of the story of Mary today. There are many who have believed in the gospel today, but there are not many who are like Mary. May there be not only those who believe in the gospel, but those who believe in the gospel as Mary did.

"A woman came to Him, having an alabaster flask of ointment of great value, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at table" (Matt. 26:7). According to Mark, she broke her alabaster flask and anointed the Lord's head. After she did this, Judas took the lead to condemn it as a reckless waste of God's gifts. She had wasted three hundred denarii. He thought this sum of money could be used for the poor. The ointment could have been sold for three hundred denarii. What kind of intention was this? What was the motive behind this? Mary poured the ointment on the Lord instead. What kind of intention was this? And what was the motive behind this?

WHAT MARY DID

Let us consider Mary first. Her pouring of ointment on the Lord's head and body was for His burial. Mary thought: "I have seen my brother being raised from the dead, and He has stayed in our house many times. He comes frequently to Bethany. He is indeed my precious Savior. He has told His disciples four times that He will die (Matt. 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:1-2), but the disciples did not understand what He meant. But I know that His death is for me. After He dies, men will surely anoint Him with ointments, frankincense, and myrrh. But I do not want to wait until He dies. I will anoint Him with the ointment, the frankincense, and the myrrh before He dies. I will pour out everything on Him. What is the use of pouring out all these things on Him after He has died? It is better to pour them on Him while He is living!" An alabaster flask of ointment worth three hundred denarii was very expensive. Even now we cannot find ointment more expensive than this. Therefore, at that time, this must have been the most expensive ointment.

When did she do this? She did it while the Lord was reclining at the table. In other words, she did it secretly while the Lord was rejoicing and taking no notice of her. She did not tell the Lord ahead of time and did not let Him know what she was doing. She did it secretly to the Lord while nobody was watching. What does this mean? Many people want salvation, but they do not want the Savior. They treasure salvation, but do not treasure the Savior. Many people treasure Christianity, but they do not treasure Christ. Many treasure the work of redemption, but do not treasure the Redeemer. Many people love the cross of Christ, but do not love the Christ of the cross. The first thing many people ask is what profit they will receive if they believe in the Lord. They do not ask what kind of love they will have for the Lord if they believe in Him. But Mary knew, and this is where the difference lies. She knew that the Lord died for us and resurrected for us, and that we should offer Him our love and everything. Although she did not come from a wealthy family, she exchanged everything she had for the ointment of pure nard, and poured it on the Lord. Mary poured out all she had on the Lord. Only she understood the Lord's death. On the first day of the week, several women went to the Lord's grave to anoint His body with ointment and myrrh. But they were too late! Only this woman made it; all the other women missed it. Only she understood the Lord's death, and only she had the offering and sacrifice.

THE DISCIPLES' ATTITUDE

The disciples thought that Mary's act was a waste and a throwaway. They thought that it was better to give the three hundred denarii to the poor. The same two principles exist in the church today. There is one group of people who, like Mary, give everything to Christ. They consider Christ to be worthy of everything, and their love for Christ prompts them to give everything to Him. Another group of people are more pragmatic. On the one hand, there are Marys, who are governed by their hearts. On the other hand, there are other ones, who are governed by their reason. On the one side, we have the ones who follow their hearts. On the other side, we have the ones who follow ways and methods. Objectively speaking, what Mary did was a waste and a throwaway. But we have to realize that not many believers are attracted by love. Not many consider love as their life, destiny, and everything. For those who love Him, three hundred denarii are nothing. Even three thousand or three million denarii are nothing. The question is not how much something itself is worth, but how much the person to whom it is directed is worth. The issue is not the thing, but the person. Man treasures only the things he loves. The worth of the thing he offers to the Lord speaks of the worth of the Lord to him. When many people offer money to the Lord, they carefully calculate over and over again. Actually, they are not calculating the amount they should offer; they are calculating the worth of the Lord. The amount you offer to the Lord speaks of the amount that He is worth to you. If you cannot give Him very much, it means that He is not worth very much to you. One alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard tells us of the worth of the Lord. This flask of ointment does not speak of Mary's consecration, but of God's worth and Christ's worth. A person's sacrifice to the Lord tells us not of his generosity, but of Christ's worth. A martyr is able to sacrifice his body because the Lord is worth more than his life, not because he is able to renounce everything. Every suffering and consecrated believer tells us the worth of Christ, and every person who is willing to offer up his time to the Lord tells us how much the Lord is to him. The only reason a Christian is willing to sacrifice everything is that Christ is worth everything.

Let me illustrate this further by considering the price of a piece of merchandise. The amount you are willing to pay for a piece of merchandise is the worth of that piece of merchandise to you. The price always matches the worth. The price one pays is the worth of the goods that one receives. If a watch is worth five dollars, you will not want to spend six dollars on it; you will pay only five dollars and no more. Therefore, the fact that you have spent five dollars on the watch means

that the watch is worth five dollars. The five dollars you put out equals the five dollars the watch is worth. The price always matches the worth. The price of an article determines its worth. The price you are willing to pay for the Lord determines the Lord's worth to you.

The disciples thought that the three hundred denarii could be given to the poor; that amount could have helped many poor ones survive for a few months. To do that would be the pragmatic and practical approach. There are these two groups of people in the church today. One group sees the love of the Lord and considers it worthwhile to offer everything to the Lord and give Him everything. They are not concerned about right or wrong, gain or loss, success or failure; they care only for the Lord's pleasure. They are willing to make the most uneconomical move. Another group considers it more appropriate to put everything in the most profitable area. They invest in areas that are profitable and generate results. "If you do this, you will save more souls, and if you do that, you can help more people. If you do such and such, your work will expand." Friends, this kind of pragmatism is actually the principle of Judas!

"Why this waste? For this could have been sold for much and given to the poor" (vv. 8-9). Judas was the first to say this, and the disciples followed and echoed his words. The record about Judas in the Gospel of John is not found in the other Gospels. Judas was a true economist. Whenever economy enters our heart, love leaves. If the relationship between Christ and us becomes a matter of economy, love is gone. The concern of many people today is, "What result will I get if I do this? Will I be of greater use if I will do that?" But the Lord's question is, "Was this done for My sake?" He is telling us one thing: "For the poor you have with you always, but you do not always have Me." This is a very serious word. In other words, He is telling us that there will be much time for us to work, but the opportunity to love Him is only here while the Lord is living. Today is the only time for us to express our love to Him. In the millennium, there will be plenty of opportunity for us to work. Matthew 25 tells us that if a man is faithful in the small things, the Lord will entrust great things to him. The kingdom is the time when we will do great things. Many poor people are with us, and there are many works waiting for us. But where is our love for the Lord? I am not saying that we will not love the Lord in eternity anymore, but I am saying that the opportunity to demonstrate our love to Him is today. In that day, it will not be a thing of surprise for us to see the Lord and love Him. What is precious is for us to love Him today

without seeing Him. We have not seen the Lord, yet we believe in Him and we love Him. How wonderful this is! In the eyes of love, nothing that we do is too much if we are doing it for the Lord; nothing that we sacrifice or spend is a waste. In the eyes of the world, it was impractical, wasteful, and foolish for Mary to throw away three hundred denarii in an instant. Judas was more down-to-earth, practical, wise, and thoughtful about humanity. But the Lord would rather see the church filled with foolish Marys than see one wise Judas. Once and for all the Lord laid down the rule of judgment for the church. Should the principle of the church life be one of loving Christ or one of pragmatism?

There is another thing which we should consider. We should be careful not to exercise our soulish power or fleshly energy. We should restrict and control ourselves, not working according to our own wisdom or strength in order to expand or prosper our work. Many people are doing things which are seemingly for the Lord, but are actually not. It seems that their work is for the hastening of Christ's kingdom; actually it is not. It is a pity that many such works are done in the principle of selling the ointment to give to the poor. What use is it if we can give to fifty, five hundred, five thousand, or even fifty thousand poor, but the Lord's head remains without the ointment? Men today like to care for the poor (the sinners, the church, the work, etc.) and are negligent of the ointment on the Lord's head. How much of our work is done to please the Lord? How much of our work is done because of need? There is a lack of talented ones who are being wasted on the Lord. Thank the Lord that since the time of the Lord Jesus until now, there have been many who are willing to waste themselves. Paul was one. He reached prominence in Judaism at a very young age. He would surely have gone down in Jewish history as a bright star of Judaism. But he ended up being a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth. Was that not a waste? He was taught by Gamaliel and well educated in philosophy. He could have studied more philosophy, and could very well have become one of the most famous philosophers. Yet he chose to become a disciple of a Galilean carpenter. Was that not a waste? We find many men like him throughout the history of the church. If we had put these talented, knowledgeable, eloquent, and thoughtful people into politics, literary work, commerce, philosophy, and science, they would surely have become outstanding people. But they did what the world considered as a waste. Thank the Lord that Christ is worthy of all their waste! These people are just flasks of ointment poured out on the Lord's head. The world says that these people have been wasted, and some in the church also consider them as wasted.

It is possible to be in the so-called churches today and be a person who is not "wasted." Many people have introduced pragmatism into the church. They calculate cost and talk about profit. Their thoughts are on the work and not on the Lord. Their concern is the need and not the Lord's heart. Their eyes are on the result, the number of souls saved, the number of people helped, and not on strict obedience to the will of the Lord. The Lord has to open our eyes to see that pragmatism is something the Lord rejects. Thank the Lord that while we are living today, we do not have to be concerned with the poor or everything represented by the poor; all we have to be concerned about is the Lord's pleasure. Otherwise, it would be hard for those who are not wise and calculating.

The great danger of pragmatism is that it replaces the Lord's pleasure. It is a little better than the unclean things of the world, but it falls short of the Lord's desire. Ignorant ones can easily be led to believe that pragmatism is a philosophy that pleases the Lord.

The concern among the churches today is how great can a work become, how much work can be shown in a report, and whether or not there are substantial benefits. In the eyes of worldly economics, Judas was better than Mary. In their eyes, Judas's way would take care of the poor, help them survive for months, and bring profit to many. Judas was for pragmatism, and he was better than Mary. But the goal of salvation is not that we would go to heaven, but that we would be brought into a proper relationship with Christ. It does not concern our earthly relationships, but our relationship with Christ. It is possible for a man to save many souls, give much to the poor, and render help to many, yet be rebuked by the Lord as having lost the first love. A man can have work, labor, and good conduct yet, at the same time, lose out on one thing, which is love.

Suppose a wife is busy all day long for her husband and submissive to him, yet at the same time, she loves another man. Would you want to have such a wife? You would probably rather have a wife who is slower and sloppier at her work but who is fully for you. You will not be pleased if she works for you while her heart is for someone else. Similarly, God is not pleased with our giving money to thirty or fifty poor ones. He is not pleased with our great works and numerous services to the Lord. God only wants us to pour out our hearts to the Lord. We should realize these two great principles: one involves the highest joy of those who pour out everything, heart and soul, to the Lord; the other involves those who say that they are for the Lord, but whose hearts are for the work and their "usefulness." Today men want to be "useful"; they are afraid that they will lose their

"usefulness." Thank the Lord that there are some on earth today who are not "useful." Thank the Lord that some have wasted their "usefulness" so that Christ would gain something in them.

I have mentioned Miss M. E. Barber many times. To me, no one living on earth today is as much like Mary as she was. She indeed wasted herself. When she was carried to the grave at her burial, one brother spoke on the story of Mary and said that Miss Barber, like Mary, had done all that she could. I agree with that brother. She was indeed a Mary. I know of very few people in this world like her. While she was still alive, I asked her once, "What is the qualification to work?" She answered, "The qualification to work is to be willing to not work for the Lord." When a man is willing to be "shut behind doors," to be insignificant for the Lord's sake, he is worthy to work for the Lord.

"She has done a noble deed to Me" (Matt. 26:10). "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). In other words, Mary laid down all that she had. We need to calculate the cost and spend everything on Christ. In other words, we should waste everything on Him. If we have not wasted ourselves completely on Him, we have not done enough yet. Thank the Lord that many people could have been very useful if they had not wasted themselves on the Lord. They could have become a famous writer, scientist, or doctor. But they wasted themselves totally on Christ. God is calling men to waste themselves on Christ! Friends, have you done all that you can do? The Lord said that Mary had done what she could! Have you done what you can? Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, the waste is also proclaimed. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, many useful and great works of men will be stripped away for the Lord's sake, and the desire for result and fruit will be lost. Wherever the gospel is proclaimed, everything is poured on Christ. Whatever is poured on Christ is not a waste, but will bring genuine fruit. Thank the Lord that the poor and works count little. The point is not how much the poor will benefit or how much society and the nation will benefit, but what the Lord will gain. Today in the church, men ask what the poor, the society, and the nation will gain. But we should ask what the Lord will also gain. May the gospel be preached here and the story of Mary also be preached here, and may more Marys be raised up here.

MAN'S ONLY SIN

Issue Nos. 2 and 3

Scripture Reading: Gen. 2:17; 3:12; 4:3; 25:30; Luke 15:18; John 3:18; 16:9; Acts 2:36-38; Rom. 1:21, 24, 26, 28; 3:10, 23

This morning, by the grace of God, I would like to deliver a gospel message to you. My focus today is on the one unique sin in the Bible. It is very strange that man's view concerning sin is completely different from God's view. It is unfortunate that in preaching the gospel, some have presented the principle of sin in a wrong way. They say that man needs a Savior because he has sinned, and if man had not sinned, he would not have needed a Savior. But what kind of sin has man committed? Sin is a general term. You have your sin, and I have my sin. If we have not committed the same sin, why do we need the same Savior?

The Bible focuses on only one sin from the first to the last page. Whether or not man receives eternal life depends on how he deals with this one sin. Whether or not a man will perish depends on how he deals with this one sin. Man's position before God depends on the way he deals with this one sin. The biblical emphasis is not on thousands of sins. Even if thousands of sins are dealt with, if this one sin is not dealt with, a person is still a sinner. What is this one sin? This sin is the failure of man to have a proper relationship with God. Something has gone wrong between God and man, and there is a kind of disruption. Sin is not just lying, pride, or jealousy. Although lying is a sin, and being proud or jealous is also a sin, these can only be considered as miscellaneous sins. There is only one sin that the Bible cares for; this is the sin that leads to perdition. You may not have committed many sins, but as long as you have committed this one sin, you are qualified to go to hell.

We may not have committed fornication, and we may not have gambled. But we all have committed the sin of failing to have a proper relationship with God. Something has gone wrong between us and God. Suppose that there is a man or woman who is very clean, but who has committed the sin of being wrong in his or her relationship with God. If there is anyone here who has not believed in the Lord, you may not have committed any other sin, but you are a sinner already. We have all committed the common sin of being wrong with God. As long as we have this sin, we are a sinner.

There are many names to sin. Enumerating all these names would take more than three days and three nights. You may not have committed any of these sins which would be enumerated during the three days and three nights. But you cannot deny one sin, the sin of having a breakdown in your relationship with God. If you do not have Christ today, you are a sinner. What is sin? It is being in a

position of having no fellowship with God. What is sin? It is being in a position that is in opposition to God. Sin is not murder, arson, pride, or jealousy. Sin is to be wrong with God.

Let me give you an illustration to show you the critical nature of this sin. Suppose a man has brothers, sisters, and parents at home and also has colleagues at work. In addition, he has many relatives and friends. Perhaps he is married and has children. He may be a very good brother at home. He may be a very good husband and father. He may be blameless in the way he handles business and very faithful to his friends. He may be an excellent person among his relatives. He may be good at everything. He does not smoke, drink, lie, and is not jealous of others. He abides by all the moral laws; indeed, he is a gentleman and a good person. However, he has one shortcoming: he hates his parents. He can get along with everyone but his parents. He is civil to everyone but his parents. He is polite to everyone but his parents. He can forgive anyone, but he is mad at his parents whenever he sees them. By himself, he is morally good in every aspect; he is good to his brothers, friends, and relatives. He has not committed any of the sins that men ordinarily commit. But he has committed one great sin, which is being wrong in his relationship with his parents. He has not committed sins which are commonly committed, but the one unique sin he has committed is being wrong with his parents.

This is where the whole world stands today. If you ask many people whether or not they are a sinner, they will say that they have not sinned very much. In man's eyes they are gentlemen, and they are moral and courteous people. Their conscience seems to testify that they are good people. But I have to ask one thing: is there any problem between you and God? It may be true that you have no problem with men and no problem with your relatives. You may be moral and courteous. But I have to ask: is there something wrong between you and God? There is not only a relationship between you and your wife, children, friends, and relatives; there is also a relationship between you and God!

Man is a sinner for no other reason than not having a proper relationship with God. A man is a sinner not because he has murdered, committed arson, or been darkened in his conscience. He is a sinner because he is not right with God; he is standing in a position that opposes God. He is a sinner because there is no communication between him and God. You can excuse yourself by saying that you have not committed this and that sin, but there is one sin which you surely have committed. You can say that you have not committed a hundred and one

sins, but you cannot excuse yourself from this one sin. This one sin makes us all sinners.

Friends, I am not asking how you are doing in your homes. You may be a good son at home. I am not asking if you get along well with your brothers. You may not have fought and gone to court with your brothers over your inheritance. I am not asking about your relationship with your colleagues. They may honor and respect you very much. I am not asking if you are a good citizen. You may be very faithful to your country, pay your tax faithfully, obey your government, and may have never engaged in any kind of activity that overturns the government. But I have to ask you one thing: can you say that there is no problem between you and God? What is your relationship with God? God is not asking about your relationship with your wife, brother, and colleagues. He is not asking if you have murdered anyone or if you have committed arson. He is asking about your relationship with Him. You may have handled many problems with the world properly, but if your relationship with God is not proper, there is still one problem that is unsolved, and you are still a sinner.

The Bible has clear teachings concerning this sin. How did sin enter the world? Sin entered the world not through murder nor through someone calling his wife his sister nor through someone usurping another's wife and sending the husband to be killed in the battlefield. Sin entered the world simply by the eating of a piece of fruit. Sin did not enter the first time through prostitution, gambling, pride, jealousy, murder, or arson. Sin entered the world through man eating one fruit that he should not have eaten.

God said to Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). I will not go into the reason the Lord said this. I will only point out the fact that man overturned God's word. God commanded that he not eat of the tree. This meant that he should not eat of it. Yet he ate what God had commanded him not to eat. The result was frustration for God and opposition against God. Once Adam ate of the fruit, he hid himself among the trees in the garden; he took up a position that was hidden from God. What is sin? Sin is having a wrong relationship with God; it is standing in an improper position in relation to God.

It was sin for Cain to murder Abel, but sin was already present before he murdered his brother. God did not reject Cain because he killed his brother. When Cain was offering the produce of the land, God was not pleased with him;

He was already shaking His head. Cain was rejected because his relationship with God was wrong. He wanted to please God. He would be what we commonly call a religious man. He worked hard to offer the produce of the field to God in order to try to please God. But sin was already in the world, and he should have stood on the ground of the blood. When he did not stand on the ground of the blood, he could not please God. His position was wrong.

Many of us are familiar with the story of the prodigal son. What sin did the prodigal son commit? Some have said that the prodigal son wasted his father's possessions; he squandered and wasted all that he was given and became a prodigal son. But I have to tell you that the first day he took his father's possessions, while he was yet rich, he was already a prodigal son. He did not become a prodigal son after he became destitute. The minute he left his father, he became a prodigal son. The day he left his father's house, he was a prodigal son. When he journeyed to a far land, he was a prodigal son. He did not become a prodigal son after he failed, spent all his money, and was feeding the pigs. As soon as he left his father, he was a prodigal son whether or not he still had money. He became a prodigal son due to one mistake and one mistake only: his departure from his father. Had he made a fortune and doubled his wealth from five thousand to ten thousand, his father could not have said to him: "Well done, you good and faithful son." Even if he had struck a fortune, he was still a prodigal son. The question is not whether the prodigal son was destitute, feeding the pigs, or hungry. The question is whether or not there was a problem between him and his father. As long as he was in a far country, he was a prodigal son. When the prodigal son came to himself, he did not resolve to be more diligent, save more money, or turn back from rags to become rich again. When he came to himself, what did he say? He said, "I will rise up and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Luke 15:18). He did not go back for food because he was hungry. He did not go back for shoes because he was without shoes. He did not go back for clothing because he did not have anything to wear. He said, "I will rise up and go to my father."

Being saved is having a proper relationship with God. Having eternal life is having a proper relationship with God. John 17:3 says, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Him whom You have sent, Jesus Christ."

If there was no problem between the prodigal son and his father, he would not have left even if the father had driven him away. Those who leave their homes

are prodigal sons; those who leave their fathers are prodigal sons. When the prodigal son returned, in the eyes of the father, the son who was dead, was now alive; the son who was lost, was now found.

We are not sinners because we have committed many different miscellaneous sins. We are sinners because we cannot face God. I am not saying that the many miscellaneous sins are not sins. I am saying that the unique sin is being wrong with God.

Paul shows us clearly in the first three chapters of Romans what the qualifications of a sinner are. He shows us the kind of sin we need to commit before we can be called a sinner. In other words, he tells us the way to be accredited a sinner, or the way to have the title of a sinner conferred upon us. Romans 1 through 3 shows us that the one sin a sinner commits is being wrong with God. In chapter one, there are three references to the fact that God "gave them up." Let us consider these instances one by one.

Chapter one, verse 21 says, "Because though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or thank Him, but rather became vain in their reasonings, and their heart, lacking understanding, was darkened." "They" refers to men in general. Men know that God is God, but they do not want to call God God. They know God, but they do not glorify Him as God. All the other miscellaneous sins are not the underlying sin. All the miscellaneous sins come from one unique sin. Because men do not consider God to be God, their understanding is darkened. Once the understanding is darkened, all the other sins follow.

Verse 24 says, "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, so that they dishonor their bodies among themselves." "Therefore" means that this is a continuation of the preceding verses. Because men changed God's glory into the likeness of idols, God gave them up. Consequently, they act in uncleanness according to the lusts of their hearts. Please remember that man's first sin was not his acting in uncleanness according to the lusts of his heart. The first sin was not his dishonoring his own body among other men. The first sin of man was his being wrong with God. Once man develops a problem with God, all the subsequent sins follow. Today we think that lying, pride, jealousy, fornication, murder, and arson are sins. Actually they are all symptoms of a sickness; they are not the sickness itself. Those who deal only with the symptoms are not good doctors. A good doctor is one who prescribes medicine according to the actual sickness. Man's unique sin is being wrong with God.

Verse 25 says, "Who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creation rather than the Creator." This shows that man has become more and more wrong with God, and is further and further away from Him.

Verse 26 says, "Therefore God gave them up..." The word "therefore" again shows that this verse is a continuation of what preceded it. This is the second mention of God giving them up. The sins have multiplied by now: "God gave them up to passions of dishonor." Man commits these sins because he has not worshipped the Creator. These sins are the fruits; they are not the root.

Verse 28 says, "And even as they did not approve of holding God in their full knowledge, God gave them up to a disapproved mind, to do the things which are not fitting." This is the third mention of God giving them up. Following this, more sins are mentioned.

Verses 29 through 32 say, "Being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity; whisperers, slanderers, hateful to God, insolent, arrogant, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, senseless, faithless, affectionless, merciless; who, though fully knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do them, but also have fellow delight in those who practice them." How did these sins come about? They came about because men "did not approve of holding God in their full knowledge." Man sins because he purposely refuses to know God. Man sins because there is a problem between him and God. Once the relationship between man and God is wrong, all other sins will follow.

Man's unique sin is being wrong with God. The only question today is whether or not there is a problem between you and God, and whether your relationship with God is proper. The first man sinned because he ate of the fruit. There was no murder, arson, lying, pride, fornication, or jealousy. None of these sins appeared there. There was only one sin at the beginning, which was his having a wrong relationship with God. God asked man, "Where are you?" Alas, man is no longer in his original position. His position is wrong; his relationship with God is wrong. Therefore, thousands and millions of sins are produced. Do not think that you are all right just because you have dealt with smaller sins.

If you ask a man if he is a sinner, he may answer that he has not committed many sins. But I would ask all these "sinless" sinners, "What is your relationship with God?" I am not asking about your relationship with your brother, wife, or children. I am not asking about your relationship with your friends and

colleagues. I am asking about your relationship with God the Father. From the beginning, Cain was not accepted by God because he was standing on the wrong ground. He did not lose God's favor after he killed his brother. Rather, he killed his brother because he had lost God's favor. Abel gained God's favor and did not kill his brother. Only those who are accepted by God have the ability to not commit subsequent sins.

There was another man who fought with his brother even before he was out of his mother's womb. He was truly a very wicked person. He deceived his father, uncle, and brothers-in-law. He did whatever it took to benefit himself. He was a morally evil person. Who was this person? He was Jacob. His brother Esau was a straight and honest man. Although Esau wanted to kill his brother in his anger, he let him go once he saw that his brother had humbled himself before him. Esau was a nice man, yet God was not pleased with him. Although Jacob was evil, he had a proper relationship with God. Although his methods were wrong, his goal was right. He wanted the covenant which God had established with Abraham and Isaac, and he cared for the birthright. God's establishment of a covenant with Abraham and Isaac meant that they had established a proper relationship with God, and Jacob wanted this. What about Esau? He appeared to be a gentleman and was willing to give in on everything. But he was cut off from God. He did not care for his relationship with God, and he belittled his place before God. Therefore, he lost the kingdom. Although Jacob was wicked, his relationship with God was proper.

I must confess one thing before all of you. There are many believers who are morally less honorable than unbelievers. But I can testify one thing for them, which I cannot testify for the unbelievers: their relationship with God is right. Friends, you may be courteous, and you may do things correctly; others may commend you. But I have to ask you one thing: what is your relationship with God? Perhaps other believers are not as moral as you, but they are better than you in one thing: their relationship with God is proper. Their conscience is bold before God, and they can come boldly before Him. This is very precious.

Who among us today is still a sinner? Please ask yourself if there is something wrong between you and God? Can you face God? What is your relationship with Him? Will you perish? Perhaps you think that you are physically well—neither your heart nor lungs are sick—and will not perish. But you have to realize that this is only your appearance before men. You have to consider what you are

before God. The Bible pays much attention to only one sin. All of us have to deal with this one sin. We have to ask: What is our relationship with God? Is there a problem between us and God?

The Scripture says, "There is none righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10). Everyone is a sinner. Because men do not seek after God, they have turned aside and together they have become useless. The cause of sin is the failure to seek after God and understand Him. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23).

God has revealed Himself and come down to earth. He was incarnated on the earth, and He revealed Himself to the world through Jesus of Nazareth. God has lived on the earth and been manifested among us for the last two thousand years. He is preached among us. Today He is asking what kind of relationship we have with Jesus of Nazareth. In the past we did not know what kind of God our God was; He appeared to be mysterious. But thank the Lord that He has come to the world and is now living among us. He is not only God, but He is also a man. He was incarnated and crucified on the cross to redeem us. Today this Jesus of Nazareth is asking: What is your relationship with God? This man from Nazareth is still living on the earth today. We have to make a decision today. What is our attitude toward Him? Our attitude toward this man from Nazareth becomes our attitude toward God, because Jesus of Nazareth is the Word becoming flesh; He is God coming to the world in the form of the flesh. Therefore, the way men treat Him is the way they treat God.

Here is a precious thing for all of us! From now on, men will go to hell not for the many miscellaneous sins. For what reason then will men go to hell? In the future many will go to hell without knowing why. Men will go to hell not because they have lied, murdered, or committed arson. Whoever is in hell is there because they have committed only one sin, the sin of not believing in the Son of God. "He who believes into Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed into the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). A man is condemned not because he has murdered or committed arson. He is condemned for only one thing: not believing in the name of the only begotten Son of God. Not believing in the name of the Son of God is having an improper relationship with God. This is the Bible's logic: Unbelievers are condemned because they do not believe. This is the sin that God emphasizes.

How do you treat Christ today? What is your attitude toward Him? God cares for your attitude toward Christ, because He is the way that bridges the barrier between God and man. He is God as well as man. Today God in Christ is living among us. The way men treat Christ is the way they treat God. Once I shook hands with a friend. He said, "Let me take off my gloves first." I said, "There is no need. I am shaking your hand anyway; I am not shaking your glove." The same is true with Christ. He is God, and He has merely put on a human body. The hand is there; the only addition is a glove. Therefore, the way you treat Christ is the way you treat God. The Lord said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father...I am in the Father and the Father is in Me" (14:9-10). He also said, "I and the Father are one" (10:30).

The Bible shows us that since the time the Lord was born, the Holy Spirit has been convicting men for only one sin, the sin of unbelief. "And when He [the Holy Spirit] comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe into Me" (16:8-9). The Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning sin because they do not believe. Not believing is failing to have a proper relationship with Christ. The Holy Spirit convicts men not for their murder, arson, pride, or jealousy. The Holy Spirit convicts men because they do not have a proper relationship with Christ.

Friends, I have to mention one thing. I am speaking especially to the believers. In the church today, there are many wrong teachings: They not only teach concerning the Savior in a wrong way, they teach redemption in a wrong way; not only do they teach salvation in a wrong way, they teach sin in a wrong way. Men have preached sin in a wrong way. This is not my teaching. Man has no authority to invent a teaching; he can only discover a teaching. There is only one sin that man has committed for which he deserves to be in hell. This one sin is his failure to have a proper relationship with Christ. Most people prove man's sinfulness by pointing out the murder, arson, fornication, pride, lying, and jealousy, etc. Of course, we need to deal with these sins. Once we confess these sins before God, they are forgiven. But even if all these sins were forgiven, if we did not deal with God concerning the one unique sin, we could not be saved. Unfortunately, we do not pay attention to the one sin that the Holy Spirit emphasizes. The unique sin that the work of the Spirit is convicting us of is the very sin that is neglected by us. It is true that murder, arson, pride, jealousy, etc., are sins, but the root of sin is unbelief. The Bible tells us that the most important sin is

unbelief. Therefore, when we preach the gospel, we should not merely exhort others to refrain from murder, arson, pride, or jealousy. Even if a man has not committed murder or arson, and is not proud or jealous, he cannot be saved from perdition and receive eternal life. There are many like him who will eventually go to hell. We must repeatedly ask whether or not there is a problem between you and Christ. If there is not a proper relationship between you and Christ, you are still a sinner.

Friends, I know what I am talking about. Satan wants to destroy the work of Christ by changing the focus of sin. Our focus is on the many miscellaneous sins; we do not pay attention to the root of sin. If a man only pays attention to miscellaneous sins without paying attention to the root of sin, he is overturning the work of Christ. His salvation is merely a mental salvation and moral improvement; it is not a change in life or the gaining of life. A wrong emphasis on sin will not save men. Sin is a wrong relationship between God and man. The prodigal son was prodigal because there was a problem between him and God. Once there is a problem between you and God, you have sinned. I hope none of us would be wrong with God.

Acts 2:36 through 38 says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified. And when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, What should we do, brothers? And Peter said to them, Repent and each one of you be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The first time the Holy Spirit worked at Pentecost, those who heard the words were pricked in their heart. What did they hear? They heard that "God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you have crucified." This means that there was a problem between them and Christ; they did not have a proper relationship with Christ. There was a problem between them and God. Christ was appointed by God, yet they killed Him and came into conflict with God. When the people heard this, they were pricked in their heart. They were pricked in their heart not because they did not make peace with their brothers, or because they gambled, fought, murdered, or committed arson. They were pricked because their relationship with Christ was not proper.

They were pricked in their heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, "What should we do?" We should pay attention to Peter's answer: "Repent and

each one of you be baptized upon the name of Jesus Christ." Peter told them to first repent and then be baptized.

What is the meaning of repentance? Some have said, "Should we not repent?" It is true that we should repent, but we must ask, What is the reason for our repentance? Should we repent because we have murdered and do not want to murder anymore? Should we repent because we have committed arson and do not want to commit arson anymore? Should we repent because we have lied and do not want to lie anymore? Should we repent because we were proud and do not want to be proud anymore? Does repentance mean only repentance from these sins? No, repentance is to repent of our relationship with God. We should repent for only one thing: our relationship with God was wrong, and now we repent of it. This is why the apostle said, "Repentance unto God" (20:21).

Being baptized means coming out of everything; it means coming out of the world and coming out of Adam. How can we come out of the world and Adam? The only way is by death. Once we die, everything is over. Yesterday I read in the newspaper of a man who requested a change in his nationality. He has to be approved by the Department of the Interior before he can be exempt from taxes and before his name can be removed from the census. However, once a man is dead, he is free from these things. When a man has died, he will not be drafted into the army, and he will not be taxed. When a census is taken, his name will not be included. Being baptized is overturning our former position; it is acknowledging that when Christ died, we were brought to the cross as well. Crucifixion is Christ's work, whereas baptism is a testimony of this work. Baptism is the final chapter of our history. Death is not the end; burial is the end. Man comes out of dust and must return to dust before he reaches his end. Burial terminates everything in Adam. It is the last page in a man's history, and it concludes the history of a man. At the end of a book, the words "The End" are often present. Baptism is "The End" of a man's history.

Friends, please remember that the Bible only emphasizes the sin of not believing in Christ. If you have not dealt with this sin, that is, if you have not received Christ as your Savior, you have failed. If a man will deal with this sin, it will be easy for him to deal with all the other miscellaneous sins. But if he does not deal with this sin, he will go to hell even if he deals with all the other miscellaneous sins. May God grant us a proper relationship with Christ, and may God lead us to properly deal with sin. We thank the Lord that His view concerning sin is different from the world's view. May we also have the same proper emphasis on sin.

TWO STORIES

Issue Nos. 2 and 3

IF

A black woman was working as a housemaid and living poorly. Yet she was a Christian, and she was always happy. In her mouth there was always a "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord." One day the aunt of her mistress, a white lady, came and noticed her joy. She asked, "Why are you so happy all the time?" The sister answered, "I have believed in Jesus. He is my Savior, and He has saved me." The lady could not tolerate her happiness, and she asked again, "How can you be so happy? How can you be so unconcerned about your future? If your mistress does not want you anymore, if you get back pain and cannot do the laundry anymore, if your son becomes sick, if the money you have earned is stolen, if you have some accidents, or if..." The joyful sister did not wait for her to finish the next "if," and said to her, "Madam, you are good in everything. The only problem is your `ifs.' If you did not have all these `ifs,' you would have been as happy as I am a long time ago."

A WORD THAT IS NO LONGER SAID

AND A WORD THAT CAN NO LONGER BE SAID

A brother in the Lord went to Spain once to visit the great cathedrals. When he arrived, a monk welcomed him and took him to a few somber and ornate cathedrals. Everywhere they went, the monk pointed out to the brother the treasures that were stored in the cathedrals. There was gold, and there was silver; there were objects studded with diamonds and objects with rich histories behind them. In the end, the monk proudly told the brother, "Today, we do not have to say Peter's pitiable word: `Silver and gold I do not possess.'" The brother responded coldly, "Indeed, but neither can you say, `In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene rise up and walk.'"

CONFESSION

Issue No. 4

Scripture Reading: Lev. 6:1-5; Psa. 32:1-7; Prov. 28:13; Matt. 5:23-26; 3:7-8; Luke 3:10-14

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CONFESSION

The subject of confession is an important matter after one's salvation. First, we must be clear that no Christian in this world can be saved through confession.

Some have said that without confession, there is no salvation. This is a heresy. No one can be saved through confession. One does not enter the sitting room and then pass through the main gate. Neither does one eat his meal before cooking his meal. Although many things are turned upside down in this world, salvation cannot be turned upside down. Some have said that the extent of man's forgiveness is the extent to which he has confessed his sins. This is wrong. This is to bury the glorious work of Christ in the dust. Those who propose this have also said that if one's eyes have sinned, he should nail them to the cross, and then the eyes will be free from sin. One person said to me once, "Someone is preaching the message of the cross." I asked him whose cross he was preaching. It is true that many are preaching the message of the cross, but whose cross are they preaching? Paul said, "For I did not determine to know anything among you except Jesus Christ, and this One crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). It is not our cross, but the cross of the Lord Jesus. It is not our cross or crucifixion that will save us, but the cross of the Lord Jesus that saves us. If we nailed our mouth or eyes to a cross, it would only be our cross; it would not be the cross of the Lord Jesus. Only the cross of the Lord Jesus has borne our sins. If He had not died, we would not have been saved.

Therefore, our confession will not save us. I am not saying that we do not need to confess. But we must be careful not to put the sitting room in the middle of the street. We must distinguish between the first step and the second step. We have to see that we are saved first, and then we make confessions. Salvation comes first; confession comes later. Nothing can save us except the blood of the Lord Jesus. I am not ignoring confession, but I desire to see the Lord Jesus uplifted. We are not saved through confession; we are saved by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While confession has nothing to do with salvation, it has much to do with reward. Matthew 5:23-26 tells us that if our brother has something against us, the first thing we have to do is to be reconciled to him. We must do our best to be reconciled to him; otherwise, he will deliver us to the judge, and the judge will deliver us to the officer, and we will be thrown into prison. This shows us that when the Lord Jesus reigns in the millennium, this kind of Christian will suffer loss. Therefore, we must have this clear distinction before us. A Christian is saved through the Lord Jesus. But after he is saved, he will suffer loss when the Lord comes to reign in the millennium if he has not confessed all his sins.

THE NEED FOR CONFESSION

Proverbs 28:13 says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Brothers and sisters, we have to realize that all of our former sins must be confessed thoroughly. If we have sinned against man, we have to confess to man. If we have sinned against God, we have to confess to God. If we do not do this, we will suffer loss.

Mr. Roberts was once asked by a brother concerning the secret to Christian growth. He answered by asking, "When was the last time you made a confession?" The brother did not understand what this meant. He wondered if confession had to be made daily, as often as taking a meal, and he admitted that he had not made a confession for a few years. Later he found out what Mr. Roberts meant. A Christian grows by making confessions. When a man confesses to God what he has sinned against God, and confesses to man what he has sinned against man, he grows spiritually.

Brothers and sisters, many people do not feel sorry after they have sinned. The reason they do not feel sorry is they have failed in the matter of confession. After a person believes in the Lord, he will run a good race if he confesses thoroughly all the sins he has committed against God and man. He will run faster than many other Christians who have too little feeling concerning sin!

Many people refrain from sins only because they do not want to "lose their face"; they do not sin because they do not want to lose their family's face or their own face. Some do not sin because they do not have the "capital" to sin. Others do not sin because they are afraid of the consequence of sin; they do not sin because they are afraid that they will have to suffer as a result of sin. How many of us do not sin because of the evil and filthiness of sin itself and because it is against God? I am surprised that so many people can sin and still sleep and eat well. Our God hates sin. We should not hate sin because we are afraid of losing our face, because we do not have the "capital" to sin, or because we are afraid of the consequence of sin. We should not sin because of God. If a Christian wants to have a hatred for sin, he must confess his sins. I can at least say that confession helps us have a hatred for sin. When I sin, I always feel much suffering. But this feeling of suffering is good.

Are there any unresolved things between you and others? Rev. K. once wrote in his diary: "There is nothing unresolved between myself and others. I can die without the need for regret or redress, and there is nothing more that I need to do." Brothers and sisters, can we say that we have thoroughly confessed our sins? Is there anyone among us who has not dealt thoroughly with his sins? We

are often afraid to give an account of ourselves. This fear speaks of a problem on our part. If there is a small hole in a pear, we know that there must be something wrong inside the pear. Sometimes we want to eat the pear, but do not want to open it up to see what is inside.

THE EXTENT OF CONFESSION

The extent of confession should be the extent of the offenses. We cannot confess more than we have sinned, nor can we confess less than we have sinned. Suppose the extent of my sin goes only as far as offending God. Then the extent of my confession should be limited to God. If the extent of my sin is such that it offends both God and my brothers, the extent of my confession should correspondingly cover them both. If we confess to others or publicly confess what we have sinned only against God or against individuals, we will fall into the error of the Roman Catholic Church. Many revivalists charge people to confess their sins in public. This is wrong. This will only defile the minds of others. If we have sinned against one person, all we have to do is confess to that person. If we have sinned against five persons, all we have to do is confess to those five persons. However, if the extent of our sin is large, the extent of our confession cannot be small. If I sin against both God and my brother, it is not enough for me to just confess to God, without confessing to my brother also. The extent of confession should be the extent of our sin. It cannot be more, nor can it be less.

THE RESULT OF CONFESSION

I must confess that although I am a preacher of the Word, I am also ashamed to confess. However, I can tell you some of my past experiences. I studied once in a church parochial school. On every examination, I usually scored a grade between ninety and one hundred. My average grade in the school was about ninety-nine. But I could never do well in the class that taught the Bible. I was not interested in the subject. My grade-point average was always pulled down by this subject. In the third year, I still did not like this subject. (At that time I was not yet a believer.) The teacher would always tell everyone that a certain student did well in every subject except this one, and that it would be nice if the student did well in that particular subject as well. Therefore, I determined to study and prepare for the Bible course. That year we were on the book of Acts. I spent a few months studying it, and by the time the examination came, I decided to do well. I wrote down the crucial points of the book on my arms and covered them with my long-

sleeved shirt. I gave the right answer on many questions, but still my score was only a little over seventy. (Prior to that I had received grades of only forty to fifty.) Later, I was saved, and I had no peace about this matter. I dared not confess it, for if I did, the principal and the teachers would think that I did the same thing with the other subjects. I was afraid that the school would expel me because the school rules stated that anyone caught cheating would be expelled. Moreover, I had already voiced my disagreement with the Anglican Church concerning certain truths, and the principal was not very happy with me. I was afraid that if I was expelled, I would be too ashamed to face my parents. I struggled for many days. In the end, I realized that I would have no peace if I did not confess. The conscience can go to sleep, but it will never die. As a result, I wrote a letter to the principal and made the confession. Later, the principal called me and told me that he forgave my offense on behalf of the school.

Brothers and sisters, our conscience often can go to sleep. But after it wakes up, it will continue to remind us. Every unconfessed sin is an unremoved scar. Your conscience can be suppressed, but it will not shut up and be silent forever. Only those who confess their sins will obtain mercy, and only those who confess their sins will be at peace. The taste of sin is the taste of hell. We are often like David, who said, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away/Through my groaning all day long./For day and night Your hand/Was heavy upon me;/My life sap was dried up/As in the drought of summer" (Psa. 32:3-4). However, after he confessed his sins, he said, "You surround me with the ringing shouts of deliverance" (v. 7).

Previously, we have mentioned that if one does not make confessions, he will not have the proper feeling for sin. Now we must also say that if one does not make confessions, he will not have the proper feeling of joy. Some have wondered why some feel joyful after they are saved, but others do not have joy. Some do not have joy because they have not testified. Others do not have joy because they have not obeyed God in certain areas, or because they are not willing to give up some matters. Still others do not have joy because they are unwilling to confess their sins. The joy of confession is a great joy.

Once I was conducting a conference in Changchow, and the principal of a school wanted to bring some elementary school students to my meetings. I was somewhat reluctant to agree because I was afraid that they would disturb the meeting and distract others. But the principal was an experienced man. He said that there is power in the gospel, and that perhaps a few among them would be

saved. Eventually they were allowed to come. Afterward, one teacher from that school came and told me that something had happened in their school. I asked what it was, and he said that a wave of confession had swept through the school. He told me that one child was only seven or eight years old. He and a few other children had once picked loquats from the loquat tree next to the principal's office without permission. Now he realized that this was a sin. But he was afraid of the principal and dared not confess his sin. When he refused to confess, he did not have the peace. He cried for two days, and in the end he confessed to the principal.

Confession is necessary. If a sin is not confessed, it will follow you all your life. Moses said that "your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23). Sin does not sit still; it does not remain at a distance from us. Sin will follow us and find us out. The teacher I mentioned earlier told me similar stories. One child was eleven or twelve years old. Three or four years earlier, he had seen some of his friends buying candy at the entrance of the school. He did not have any money himself, but it occurred to him that a few pennies were lying on the desk of his teacher's bedroom. He went to see whether or not the teacher was there so he could take the money to buy some candy. He went and looked, and sure enough, the teacher was not there. He took six pennies and bought himself some candy. Now he felt sorry for his sin. He wanted to repay what he took, but he did not have the money. So he went to his sister and asked for six pennies. His sister asked for the reason, but he would not tell her, pleading only that he needed it, and that he could not get by without it. His sister eventually gave him the money, but followed him to find out what he was doing. He took the money to the teacher and said, "Three or four years ago, I took six pennies from your room to buy candies. Now I would like to return this money to you." When I heard this story, I mentioned it in my message the very next day. After the meeting, a few in the audience who were judges came to me and said, "If things go according to what you have said, there will be no need for judges anymore. If man returns what he has stolen, there will be no need for courts anymore. Although we have not seen much merit in Christianity, the few things that you mentioned are enough to show us the distinction of Christianity."

Confession brings not only peace, but joy as well. Not only does it bring joy, but it wins back the ones whom one has offended. Sometimes our hard-hearted friends will acknowledge with tears that Jesus is their Savior when we confess with tears our sins and acknowledge that Jesus is our Savior. I have experienced

this myself. If it were not for Christ's sake, and if there were no Christ, no one on earth would do such a thing.

Brothers and sisters, if there is some sin in you, you should confess it immediately. This is not an easy thing to do. Sometimes I struggled for a few weeks and even for a few months. At times I struggled for half a year. You may be better than I am, but I have to tell you that the year after I was saved, I confessed at least a hundred times to people. Have you offended anyone in anything?

Other than giving us peace and joy and winning people back to ourselves, confession can do another thing: it can be a testimony. Without confession, there is no testimony. If I do not confess my sins, my audience will wonder if a person such as I can give a message. We must confess our own sins, and we must condemn ourselves for our sins more than we condemn others. Only then will we have a good testimony. We must acknowledge that our sins are sins and that they are wrong before we can persuade others not to sin. We have to confess our own sins before we can testify to others. If we do not confess our sins now, we will not be able to touch others, and we will not have a proper testimony.

RECOMPENSE

Confession is one thing, and recompense is another thing. Is there anything that has ended up in your house? Is there anything that you have stolen? Is there anything that is not yours, but has become yours? Is there anything that you have secured by improper means? Is there anything that you have picked up from the street, or any debt that you have not repaid? Are you willing to clear up these things at the first available opportunity? If you are not willing to do this, God will not bless you. Many Christians are too negligent about these matters. According to Leviticus, not only should we pay back what we owe, but we should also add one-fifth to it (6:1-5). This means that we should not only repay, but we should also repay a little more. We must never allow others to suffer loss. As Christians, we should only allow ourselves to suffer loss from others. If we cannot make the recompense now, we still have to find a chance to do it later.

If the person who has suffered the loss is no longer present, you can hand the recompense over to his relatives. The ordinance in the Old Testament says that if a person's relatives are not there, one can give it to the priest. But if the person is still alive, the priest cannot accept the recompense. The same is true today. In Fukien there was a maid who had stolen about sixty dollars worth of goods from her master. Later she believed in the Lord and felt that this was a sin. She

proceeded to save about seventy dollars for recompense. One day she took this money to a worker of the Lord and told him to accept it and use it for God's work. The brother asked if her master was still around, and she said that he was. The brother then said, "Why don't you return this money to him?" Then he told her solemnly, "God does not need a thief's money for His work." If I had been there, I would have said the same thing to her.

If a person has sinned against anyone in material possessions, he should find that same person and make the recompense. If that person is not around any longer, he should look for his relatives. If he does not have any relatives, the recompense can go to the church. Brothers and sisters, may God dig deeper in us. Does Acts 19:19 not tell us that those who believed burned improper books worth fifty thousand pieces of silver? The book of James also tells us that we have to confess our sins to one another (5:16). You are not responsible for the sins that you do not remember. But you have to be responsible for the sins that you do remember. May no one wait until tomorrow to obey God's word.

SALVATION BY BAPTISM

Issue Nos. 5 and 6

Scripture Reading: Gen. 6:1-9; 8:1a, 4-5, 13-21; 1 Pet. 3:20-21; Mark 16:16a

We are all familiar with the story of Noah. Most church-goers are also well acquainted with this story. We have probably heard the story of the ark many times. Today we want to consider what the Bible really teaches us concerning the ark. In the Bible there are different meanings to the matter of salvation. In some cases, salvation has to do with our position before God. In other cases it has to do with our acceptance before Him. Some cases have to do with our fellowship with God, while others have to do with our position in the world. It seems that salvation is not that simple and is somewhat confusing. But I can explain and clarify this with a little illustration.

A FEW TYPES OF SALVATION

In Genesis 3 we see the coats of skins. "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (v. 21). This is a type of salvation. But which aspect of salvation does it typify? It typifies our justification before God. The sacrifice of Abel in Genesis 4 is also a type of salvation. God was not pleased with the sacrifice of Cain, but accepted the sacrifice of Abel. Because Cain offered his sacrifice out of himself, God was not pleased with it. Abel's sacrifice was based on the redeeming lamb and accepted by God. All the

sacrifices in the Bible speak of God's acceptance. The story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 also speaks of God's acceptance of sinners. Ephesians 1 says that God has accepted us in His Beloved. Hence, Genesis 4 is a type of salvation in which God accepts man. The rapture of Enoch in Genesis 5 is also a type of salvation. It is a type of salvation in the aspect of overcoming death.

Genesis 3 is a type of justification. Genesis 4 is a type of God's acceptance, and Genesis 5 is a type of victory over death. The ark in chapter six is also a type. But this type is different from those in Genesis 3 through 5. The first type speaks of our justification before God; the second type speaks of our acceptance before God; while the third speaks of victory over death and receiving eternal life. In chapter six we see the relationship between a Christian and the world. How can a Christian be delivered from all the things that God has condemned? How can he be delivered from all the things that are under God's judgment? The way we receive God's salvation speaks of the way to be delivered from God's condemnation and judgment. This kind of deliverance is one in which we escape out of a certain kind of snare.

There are different kinds of sins. The sins mentioned in Genesis 3 through 6 are all different. Sin against God is mentioned in chapter three; it is a sin before God, a sin of disobedience against God. Man's sin before God requires God's coats of skins for covering so that man can be justified before God. Sin against both God and one's neighbor is mentioned in chapter four. Cain committed the sin of murdering his own brother. He broke two of God's commandments: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our mind, and all our soul and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This sin requires a sacrifice before one can be accepted again before God. Even when a person has committed a sin before men, he has to be accepted before God first; without this his sin is not yet behind him. The sin of forgetting God is mentioned in chapter five; it is different from the sins in chapters three and four. Men ignored God and acted according to their own will. Daily they ate their own bread and lived their own lives. But in this chapter we see one man who walked with God. While the whole world was filled with death, and man rejected God, He delivered Enoch out of that world of death, and caused him not to see death. The sin of the world as a whole being in opposition to God is mentioned in chapter six. The sin in chapter three is personal sin; the sin in chapter four is one person's sin against another; the sin in chapter five is the sin of the majority of the people; while the sin in chapter six is the corporate sin. Chapter six is on humanity as a world organization, association, and sphere.

Consequently, the sin in chapter six speaks of the whole human race sinning against God. Chapter six presents the sphere of the world; it speaks of the world having sinned.

THE JUDGMENT OF THE FLOOD

Now let us consider chapter six. The beginning of this chapter speaks of fallen angels and sinful men, and how they collaborated to sin. We do not have to ask about the special significance of this passage. All we need to know is that the sons of God, who were fallen angels, and the daughters of men, who were sinful men, were both created by God; they both had spirits. When they collaborated to sin, that was the end of the world. In the first world the angels sinned, and in the second world men sinned. Hence, when angels and men joined together to sin, we know that the end was near, and the sinful angels and sinful men were about to be judged by God.

By this time, man had become extremely fleshly. Whether he was practicing good in the flesh or committing sins in the flesh, he had become utterly fleshly. Therefore, God would not strive with him anymore. Originally, the Spirit of God strove with man. But now man had disobeyed God and degraded to the point where God's Spirit could no longer strive with him. In other words, man had become so corrupt that God's Spirit was no longer able to contend with him. To put it in another way, man had become so corrupt that even the Holy Spirit could not change him. When a man has become fleshly, the Holy Spirit can do nothing about him; even his own devices cannot change him. As a result the Holy Spirit could only retreat and allow the world to go through judgment. Please remember that our flesh today is no better than man's flesh in Noah's time. If a man has not crucified his flesh with its lusts on the cross, the Holy Spirit cannot operate on him. The Holy Spirit does not exhort man to improve himself, because man can never improve himself. The Holy Spirit only convicts man to be born again. There is no ability in the flesh to do good and not sin. Only those who are regenerated and who have received the new life can meet God's standard. Being regenerated is not merely to weep, confess, become zealous, study the Bible much, or pray much. Being regenerated is to receive another life, a life that comes from God. It is inheriting another life from God. Regeneration is being born a second time.

Because the world is full of sin, some groundwork must be done before the Holy Spirit can operate. After man fell into sin, it became difficult for the Holy Spirit to do anything. The first thing God did after man sinned was to send the Lord Jesus

to the world. Since man had become a sinner, the Lord Jesus had to first come. It would have been useless for the Holy Spirit to come first. The Lord Jesus must first judge a sinner before the Holy Spirit can begin His work. This is why the first parable in Luke 15 is on the good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, who came to seek the lost sheep. The second parable is on the woman, the Holy Spirit, who came to sweep the house and look for the lost coin. Without Christ's work of redemption, the Holy Spirit cannot work. The work of the Holy Spirit cannot commence until the work of Christ has been completed. Because the work of Christ has been completed, the Holy Spirit can begin His work. Therefore, there must first be the work of redemption in Genesis 6, before there can be the work of the Holy Spirit, as typified by the dove, in chapter eight. God must do one thing first before the Holy Spirit can come to perform His work.

Genesis 6:13 says, "And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth." In God's eyes, the whole world was full of sins and violence; it was fully corrupt. God said that its end had come. Men had reached the end of themselves. God could do nothing except to bring them to their end. When God saw that the earth was full of sins and violence, He judged it. God put all flesh and all living creatures through the judgment of the flood and destroyed them all. Many Christians are not clear about the place of the world in the eyes of God. Exhorting the brothers and sisters to forsake the world is like a mother trying to pull a piece of chocolate out of the mouth of a child. This is so difficult because men have not seen the significance of the world in God's eyes. Salvation is not just a personal matter, but a corporate matter. Sin is not only a personal matter, but a corporate matter. It was not just the Jews who crucified the Lord Jesus; the world crucified Him. The Jews are not the only ones who are at enmity with God; the whole world is at enmity with God. If a nation is at enmity with another nation, is the enmity a personal matter or a national matter? We know that it is not a personal matter. If a few citizens of one hostile country are well-disposed toward the citizens of another country, the relationship is a personal matter. Whether or not a citizen of the hostile nation is good is not the question. The fact is that the whole nation is at enmity with another nation. One does not hate a citizen of a hostile nation because his own parents are killed by the hostile nation. This is a relationship between one nation and another. Not only is the world at enmity with God as far as each individual person is concerned, but the total realm, organization, tradition, system, and everything of the world is at enmity with God.

As long as you have a part in the worldly realm, organization, tradition, or system, you are at enmity with God, and you are in need of being saved from it. If you see this, you will not exhort others to do this and that to improve themselves, remove their shortcomings, amend their ways, do good, or free themselves from other ills. All these efforts are useless. In God's eyes, the whole world is corrupt. God is at enmity with the world. Those who love the world cannot love God. If anyone loves the world, the love of God is no longer in him. Those who want to be friends with the world are at enmity with God. This is God's view.

Brothers and sisters, do you want to be delivered from hell, that is, the lake of fire? I suppose we all do. We want to be in the New Jerusalem. Many people want to be saved because they want to be delivered from hell, the lake of fire, and go to heaven, the New Jerusalem. This is the kind of salvation many people want. But the Bible speaks very little of this kind of salvation. The Bible calls this kind of salvation justification, or acceptance by God. But there is another kind of salvation in the Bible, which is salvation from the world. If we are not saved from the world, we cannot be saved from the lake of fire.

Genesis 6:8 says that God found only one man, Noah. The first man was corrupted and had come to his end; he was hopeless. Therefore, God found a second man, Noah. This second man found favor in the eyes of God; he is a type of Christ. Through him God established a way of salvation for man to be delivered out of the world. God ordered him to make an ark of gopher wood, and all the living creatures—the fowls, cattle, and every creeping thing, each after its kind—were brought into the ark. Then He sent rain to the earth, and the flood came and covered the whole earth. Who were the saved ones? They were the ones who were delivered from the world, the ones who were in the ark. The ones who were delivered from the world were the ones who were delivered from the flood. Those who are saved from the world are the ones who are saved from the lake of fire. It will not be sinners who will go to hell, but the world that will go to hell. Preachers always tell others that sinners will go to hell. Actually, the world will go to hell. As long as you are a person in the world, you will go to hell.

Once I met a person on a boat, who asked, "Who deserves to go to hell?" I answered, "People like you." Every person, as long as he is a human being, deserves to go to hell. The meaning of salvation is to be saved from the community of the perishing ones. It is to be saved out of the perishing realm. Although we are not individual criminals, we are still sinners. The Bible does not say that we are criminals, but that we are sinners. It says that everyone in the

world is a sinner. Suppose a brother has not committed a certain kind of sin. Since he has not broken the law, he is not a criminal. Therefore, we cannot say that everyone in the world is a criminal. Yet everyone is a sinner. Hence, salvation is being delivered from the world; it is to save a person out of the God-condemned world.

THE SALVATION OF THE ARK

At that time, Noah and all the living creatures—the fowls, cattle, and creeping things—were saved. Noah is a type of the Savior, and the ark is also a type of the Savior. Noah is a type of the Son of God, while the ark is a type of the Son of Man. The ark was made of gopher wood, and it is a type of the humanity of the Lord Jesus. The salvation that they experienced was a salvation out of the world. At that time, all the fountains of the great deep burst open, the windows of heaven were opened, and the flood came upon the whole earth. This was not a judgment on individuals, but a judgment on the whole world. Salvation is being saved from the world community. All those who were in the ark were saved out of the world. A saved person cannot be saved on the one hand, yet still remain in the world on the other hand. He cannot ride on the fence, with one foot in the ark and the other foot in the world. Everyone who entered the ark was locked inside the ark. After a person is saved, he cannot love the world on the one hand, and love the Lord on the other hand. You may try to do this in secret, but God will not allow you to do this before Him. Therefore, every saved person should reject the world completely and have no love for the world. We should not think that even though certain matters are worldly, we only need to change them a little or turn them around a little. Fundamentally speaking, God has delivered us totally out of the world. Since we are out of the world, we should live a life that is out of the world. This is different from exhorting people to not love the world. The citizens of one nation are at enmity with those of a hostile nation because a hostile relationship exists between the two nations, not because they have been slapped on the face by someone in the hostile nation. This is the issue among us today. We are those who are delivered out from the world. How are we saved from the world? The world has been usurped, and mankind in general has stood against God. As a result God saves men out of the world. He prepared an ark and brought man out of the world and into the ark. God brought all the living creatures on earth into death, but the human beings and the living creatures within the ark were brought out of the world and through death. Then He released them out of

the ark, in order that they would fill the earth. This earth was a new world. This means that the old head, Adam, and everything in him was rejected, while the new head, Noah, and everything in Noah was ready to express the new life so that his descendants could inhabit the whole earth. Those on the new earth typified those who would be in Christ in the future, inheriting the new heaven and the new earth. The ones within the ark typify those who are in Christ. Therefore, the ones who are in Christ will be in the new heaven and the new earth. The ones outside the ark typify the ones who are in Adam, who will be judged by God in the future. The ones within the ark are in Christ; they have the new life to enter the new heaven and the new earth. The descendants of the new life will fill the new earth. Everyone who entered the ark was brought through the water of judgment into the new earth. This signifies that Christ will fill the new heaven and the new earth.

"And the ark rested...upon the mountains of Ararat" (8:4). The name Ararat means "holy ground." This typifies resurrection, the coming out of death; it also typifies the Lord's ascension. The ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, which means that the mountaintops were visible. Today we are also on top of our "Ararat"; we have seen the mountaintops, and we are waiting for the land to dry. Our Lord has died, resurrected, and ascended. We are remaining on the mountains of Ararat, waiting for the land to dry. This means that we are waiting for God to judge the earth.

THE ARK AND BAPTISM

Our focus is not on the many things mentioned in the previous paragraphs. Our special attention is on the matter of baptism. We have seen what Noah did, and how he passed through death. We have seen the flood, and how the saved ones entered the ark to pass through death and were then ushered into the new earth. First Peter 3 says that the ark's passage through the water is a type of baptism. Some who are sitting here are already baptized. Some are not yet baptized. The water of the flood is a type of the water of baptism. First Peter 3:20-21 says, "Who had formerly disobeyed when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared; entering into which, a few, that is, eight souls, were brought safely through by water. Which water, as the antitype, also now saves you, that is, baptism." What saves us? What is the subject of this clause? The subject is the baptism typified by the water. The verb is "saves." What saves us? Baptism saves us. Is this not amazing? Can baptism save a person? I must tell you that unless you are baptized, you will not be saved. Peter

said the same thing, that the baptism, signified by the flood, saves us through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. In addition, Mark 16:16 says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved."

Many of us have changed Mark 16:16 to read, "He who believes and is saved shall be baptized." But the Bible says that baptism comes before salvation. Many of us are confused. We think that we have to be saved before we can be baptized. But the Bible says that those who are not baptized cannot be saved, and that once a person is baptized, he is saved. If a man is saved, it is because he is baptized. If there are a million people in heaven, they are there because they have been baptized.

Do not misunderstand the meaning of salvation by baptism. The Bible speaks of salvation in different aspects. The part of salvation that is known as justification deals with man's position before God. The part of salvation that deals with God's acceptance of man emphasizes the distinction between the world and the believers. The part of salvation that has to do with forgiveness deals with the propitiation of our past sins. The part of salvation that has to do with receiving eternal life points to our separation from death. The part of salvation that deals with the kind of deliverance spoken of here has to do particularly with our relationship with the world. Salvation does not mean merely a deliverance from hell in the future. Strictly speaking, according to the Bible, salvation refers to our deliverance from the world today. How do others know that we are saved? How do others know that we belong to Christ? We say that we are saved, but can we open up our hearts to show others that we are saved? We cannot see faith with our eyes. Who can see faith? God sees and knows that we are justified, accepted, forgiven, and have received the eternal life, but man does not see it. James told us that man's eyes cannot see our faith; they can see only our work. The first work of every Christian before men is the act of baptism. Our first work before God is to believe, but our first work before men is to be baptized. Baptism is salvation from the world into Christ. It is coming out of one's own house into the ark. Baptism is a declaration to the world, as Noah declared that God's judgment, wrath, and punishment would fall upon the world because of its opposition, rebellion, and rejection of God. He was no longer one of them, and he left them to enter the ark that God had prepared for him. Therefore, baptism is not just a sprinkling of water on the head, nor an immersion of the body in the water. Baptism is a declaration to the whole world that the world has nothing more to do with us and that we are delivered from the world. The real

significance of baptism is that we are no longer living in the world, we are now dead through the judgment on the Lord Jesus, and we will never rise up again. Although we are in the water only for a brief moment, it spiritually means that we will never come out of the water again. From this point on, in the eyes of the world, we are forever separated from it and have no share in it anymore; we will never come back again. Men of this world are most attached to their parents, wife, children, and dear ones. But if one of their dear ones were to die, they would not want to have the dead person around anymore. They would never take a dead man out of the grave and put him in their house to live with them. This should be the way the world looks at a Christian; they should consider him a dead man who has been buried in the grave.

There are two great communities in this world: one is the world community, and the other is the community of those who are saved in Christ. Being saved is being delivered out of the world community which opposes God, which is sinful and unclean, and entering into the community of Christ. This is why we have to be baptized. By baptism we are saved. (Of course, we must first believe in the Lord. Those who do not believe in the Lord cannot be saved.) Mark 16:16 says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." Baptism signals a deliverance; it is a great deliverance. It delivers us from the world and everything that is of the world. But baptism is not only a deliverance out of something; it is also an entry into something. Baptism is a grand entry. It is to enter into Christ and enter into His death.

Everyone who believes will have eternal life because of the blood of the Lord Jesus. We cannot deny this. However, we are saved from the world because of our entry into the ark. Baptism signifies that we are delivered from the world community. Suppose someone asks if you have believed in the Lord. You have to say yes; your sins have been forgiven because of the blood of the Lord. The Bible says that he who has the Son of God has life. You may know that you have life, and you may be very clear that you have believed in the Son of God as your Savior. But suppose you lose your temper, argue, and even fight with two or three brothers. After the fight, if you check with yourself, you will realize that you are still a believer and that you are still saved. You will not have any doubt about this. But the other brothers will doubt that you are saved. What does this mean? I can tell you that many people are qualified to go to heaven, but they are not qualified to live on earth. Many people are qualified to live before God, but are

not qualified to live before their family. Many people are good enough to live in heaven, but are not good enough to live on earth. This is why you cannot allow others to baptize you into the water or sprinkle water on your forehead based on what you have believed. You must know yourself what baptism is, before you can be baptized. You must know that you have been delivered from the world already. Baptism is a declaration and an announcement to the world that you are no longer joined to the world and that you are no longer standing on its side. You are delivered from the world, and baptism is your declaration that you are standing on the side of Christ from now on.

I am not trying to persuade you to be baptized. I am showing you that before you are baptized, you have to realize that there are two opposing camps, the camp of Adam and the camp of Christ. There is no middle ground between these two camps. At the time of Noah, God declared that the world was His enemy and that the world was at enmity with God. He appointed a way of salvation—everyone who entered the ark stood on God's side and obeyed God. It is interesting to see that the Bible refers to the entry into the ark and the deliverance from the flood as a type of baptism. Therefore, we have to speak this word to all the ones who are about to be baptized, as well as to all the other brothers and sisters. Many people are baptized already, and a good number are also baptized among us. Why were you baptized? Was it because it was a church practice, a church ritual, a commandment of the Bible, a sign of seriousness in being a Christian, or because other Christians were doing it? Baptism is turning one's back to the world and facing Christ. It is being delivered from the world community and entering into the community of Christ. There is no middle ground between the world and Christ. There was a door on the ark. This door signifies that everything within the door was in the realm of Christ, and everything outside this door was in the realm of the world. If we see this, we will not need anyone to come and tell us at the time of baptism that we need to change ourselves in certain matters. We will know what to do. We will not have to deal with the world like pulling out hairs, plucking them out one by one; instead we can shave them off all at once. It is a pity that many among us do not see this.

We try to change the world, but God is giving us a new world. No human method, such as religious dogmas, literature, science, philosophy, or moral teachings, can change this world. God shows us that even though the world is lovable and enjoyable, it is God's enemy. Living in the world means that you cherish the hope that it will change. Yet God has no hope of changing the world. He has no other

way of dealing with the world than to judge it. For the world to improve and be reformed through human methods would take many many years. Thank God that He needs only to wash the world with water and it will become the new earth. In the days of Noah, God washed the world with water. In the future He will burn it with fire. Are we like Lot, tarrying in Sodom and Gomorrah, waiting to be burned by fire? Or are we untouched by the world? Unfortunately, many are like Lot's wife; they live in the world. Are we living in the world, or are we letting all these things go and looking forward to the new heaven and new earth, where righteousness dwells?

On top of the ark was a window or a "light-inlet." This word is used in the Old Testament twenty-four times. The word is translated as noon twenty-three times. This is the only place where it is translated as window or "light-inlet." The light that passed through this window was not a weak light, but a bright light. This is living in the light of God.

A FEW WORDS TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT CLEAR ABOUT SALVATION

I have to say a few words to those who are not saved. It is an undeniable fact that we cannot improve the world and God will judge it. How are you going to escape God's judgment? There was pitch within and without the ark. The word pitch is the same word as redemption in the original language. Therefore, pitch signifies redemption or propitiation. The ark was pitched within and without, which is a type of the Lord's redemption. Redemption is brought in by the blood of the Lord Jesus, and the lives of all those who are in the ark are preserved. The flood was outside the ark. The world was filled with the flood, and it was dying because of the flood. Yet within the ark everything was living. All punishment has fallen on Christ, the ark; it is no longer on us. The only way for those who desire peace, forgiveness, and deliverance is to enter into the ark. Even if the world were to make ten thousand ships, it would be to no avail.

The world was filled with God's judgment, yet the ark was pitched within. This is a type of the redemptive work of Christ. The ark was also pitched without, which also is a type of the redemptive work of Christ. If you are inside the ark, God's judgment will not come upon you. Suppose there is a person, let us say that she is Japheth's wife, or Noah's wife. Suppose she is weeping inside the ark, saying, "What will we do if the ark leaks and sinks?" We would all laugh at her. Let me ask: If you acknowledge the redemptive work of Christ and believe that His

crucifixion on the cross is for your redemption, why are you afraid to declare that you are saved? Why are you still restless? You may consider what would happen if the blood of the Lord Jesus became ineffective. You should ask yourself at this hour if you have truly believed, and if you have truly put your faith in the accomplished work of Christ. Would the ark leak? A person once came to Mr. D. L. Moody with tears on his cheeks. When Mr. Moody asked him for the reason, he said, "I am afraid of perdition. I have believed in the Lord. But what should I do to save myself from perdition?" Mr. Moody told him the Scripture says that those who believe have eternal life, and that he who comes to the Lord will not be rejected, and that God will save to the uttermost those who come to Him. He used similar texts to talk to the man for two to three hours, but the man's problem was still not resolved. He continued to say, "I have indeed believed in the Lord, but I am still afraid that I will perish." Mr. Moody then said, "You remind me of one of Noah's daughters-in-law, who perhaps wept within the ark for fear of the ark leaking." The man said, "Sir, how can that be? The ark would never leak." Mr. Moody then answered, "You are the person who is weeping inside the ark. You are afraid that the ark will leak." When that man heard this, he became clear.

The Lord Jesus is able to save to the uttermost all those who come to God through Him. It does not matter whether you are wise or foolish. Whether or not you are saved depends on whether you are inside the ark. It has nothing to do with whether you are intelligent or foolish, rich or poor. None of these things counts. The only question is whether or not you are inside the ark. Only those who enter the ark through the work of Christ are saved. The number of people who enter the ark will be the same number that come out of the ark. The number of lives within the ark is the number of lives preserved by God.

If you want to be a genuine Christian, you have to be within the ark; you cannot remain on the earth. You cannot be saved by your own works. You must declare to the Lord: "Everything that is of the world has nothing to do with me. I stand on Your side." Salvation is accomplished once you enter the gate. Unfortunately, many people have only believed in the Lord; they have not cut off all ties with the world. Therefore, you must not only be faithful to serve God, but you must be faithful to do what you testified at the time of your baptism.

Baptism cannot save a person. Salvation comes through the Lord's death and resurrection alone. However, baptism is an expression of our salvation. The blood of the Lord Jesus saves you into God's presence, while the water of baptism saves you out of the world. Even if you forget everything that we have

spoken of today, as long as you can remember the difference between these two salvations, it will be good enough.

BAPTISM AND SALVATION

Issue Nos. 5 and 6

Scripture Reading: Mark 16:16; Rom. 10:9-10

In the mind of many people, Mark 16:16 reads, "He who believes and is saved shall be baptized." They think that as long as they believe in the Lord, they will be saved, and that after they are saved, they should be baptized. But my Bible does not say this. It says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." This means that it is not enough for a person to believe; he must also be baptized before he can be saved. What does this mean? You have to realize that there are many meanings to the word salvation. One meaning refers to the blessing in the kingdom. Another meaning refers to our departure from the world when the Lord comes back. Still another meaning refers to our present overcoming, and a fourth refers to our going to heaven. Romans 10 and Mark 16 mean none of the above. They do not refer to the blessing in the millennium. Neither do they refer to the redemption of our body at the coming of the Lord, nor to the salvation of our soul-life in the future. They refer to something else, something special. Every believer can experience the various aspects of salvation mentioned above. I cannot speak on all these today. When I heard that someone would be baptized today, I thought about the matter of salvation. I wonder how many people understand the salvation that is spoken of in Romans 10 and Mark 16. Therefore, we will spend some time to consider this matter today.

There is a common thought that one is baptized when he has believed and been saved. But the Bible clearly says that he who believes and is baptized is saved. Baptism comes first, and then salvation. You may ask what this salvation refers to. Please recall how a person receives eternal life. He receives life through believing. He receives eternal life through accepting the Lord Jesus into his heart as his life. The gospel of John clearly speaks of this. Although you may have believed, how do I know that you have believed? Although you say that you have received eternal life, how do I know? Suppose a man has believed, but he never comes to the meeting, never breaks bread with us, and has not been baptized. He continues to be a Christian in secret and lives like the worldly people, without letting anyone know that he is a Christian. I would say that he has life, but that he is not saved. Truly, he is saved before God. But he is not saved before us and

before the world. Therefore, you have to remember that one aspect of salvation has to do with our separation from the world. A man can be a Christian in secret and go to heaven when he dies. Although he may not know what will happen when the Lord comes to judge the believers, he knows that he will have eternal salvation. But during the fifty or sixty years of his life on earth, he is not saved. In the eyes of the Lord, he is saved. However, in the eyes of man, he is not saved because even though he has believed, he has not been baptized. Therefore, he is still not saved to others. Our salvation before the Lord merely gives us His life. But we must live out this life so that others can see His life; then we are saved in their eyes. After doing this, other believers will recognize us as brothers, and the Gentiles will call us Christians. The world will realize that we no longer belong to it, and the brothers will say that we belong with them. Then we will have a change. We will be freed from the old realm and enter a new realm, and others will sense that we are really separated from them. This is what is meant by salvation through believing and being baptized. I will take this opportunity today to say a few words while some of you are being baptized. As long as a person believes in the Lord, he has life. But he must be baptized before he can be saved. There are many Moslems who are Christians in secret. No one bothers them if they only believe in the Lord. But the minute they are baptized, they may even be poisoned to death, because the minute they are baptized, they are saved and separated from the others, and others see a difference in them. They have proven in an outward way that they are Christians and demonstrated the faith that is in their hearts. Therefore, they can no longer be tolerated. To believe is to have life within, while to be baptized is to be saved without. When a person is baptized, he demonstrates in an outward way that he belongs to Christ, and others realize that there is a difference in him. This is why baptism is not a small thing.

Romans 10 says the same thing: "With the mouth there is confession unto salvation" (v. 10). Does this mean that as long as one confesses with his mouth he can go to heaven? Must one confess with his mouth before he can go to heaven? No, there are many dumb ones who can go to heaven. Confession with the mouth merely shows those in the world that you are different from them, and that you have been delivered out from their midst. Therefore brothers, let us pay attention to this aspect of salvation. Numerous Christians have life within, but this life cannot be seen outwardly at all. Although they are saved before the Lord, before their friends, brothers, family, and colleagues, they are not saved. I can

illustrate this with an example. The last time I took a boat on a journey, I talked with many passengers on the boat who asked me what my line of business was. It was difficult for me to explain to them. What could I say? I could not say that I was a preacher, because I do not recognize this as a profession or as a special class of people. I could not say that I was a Christian, because a Christian is not a profession or business; saying this would not be answering what they had asked. Later, I thought about the fact that I wrote many articles, and I told them that I was a writer. But the minute I said this, I became as one who was not saved among them, because I did not show others my difference. I became the same as they were. One could be a reporter, another a cashier or bookkeeper, while I was a writer. In this way, all of us became the same. In their eyes, I was not a person being delivered from among them. I could have been different from them by following my statement with the words: "I am a Christian." This would have marked a clear boundary between them and me, and would have shown them that they were sinners, while I was saved. They and I were totally different. Truly, we may be saved, but others may not know that we are saved; they may think that we are the same as them. This is the meaning of the verse, "With the mouth there is confession unto salvation."

The question today is not whether you have believed, but whether or not you have been baptized. We are not asking if you have received the Lord, but if others have seen this change in you. Believing involves a breakthrough in your spiritual life and passing from death unto life inwardly. Being baptized involves a breakthrough in the physical realm and passing from death unto life outwardly. Believing is to pass from death unto life before God, while being baptized is to pass from death unto life before men. Believing is to inwardly receive the eternal life, while being baptized is to outwardly announce to others that from now on, you have opened up yourself to showing others that you are a Christian, that you are hidden no more. Prior to this, you were a hidden Nicodemus, but now you are telling others openly that you are saved and different from them.

A baptized person is like a person who has entered the grave. The ultimate destination of our most loved ones is the grave. Marriage lasts until the grave. The grave is one's final destiny. When a man dies, his corpse can still be seen, but after he enters the grave, he is gone forever and never seen again. Baptism means to be seen no more. It is not a "See you tomorrow," but a "See you never again." The water is a symbol of the grave. When we enter the grave symbolized

by the water, we are separated from the world; the world will acknowledge that we are delivered out of it, and that we no longer belong to it. This is why Acts indicates that saved persons are added to the church, because the local church is the outward gathering of all the saved ones. "The whole church" in Acts 15:22 means the gathering of all those who are called by the Lord.

Let me ask you once more. What are you doing when you are baptized today? You are telling others that from now on, your coming and going will not be the same as before; your view toward the world has changed. Although you have taken the same way as others for many years, that relationship is over today. From now on, you stand in a different place; you have been delivered out of them, and are no longer among them. To believe is an inward deliverance, while to be baptized is an outward deliverance. To believe is a deliverance in the spirit, while to be baptized is a deliverance in the body. To believe is to be delivered from the world morally, while to be baptized is to be delivered from the world in one's conduct. This is the salvation spoken of in Mark 16 and Romans 10.

You must also remember that you are not the only one who is saved in this world. There are many others who are also saved. Most of the ones who are sitting here today are saved. There are many saved people, and you are only one of them. In the past, you were in the world; you helped the world, tried to improve the world, and exercised your strength to serve in the world community. Now you have been delivered from it, and you belong to another community. As before, you have many companions. They are the believers, and they are now joined to you. Therefore, you can no longer be an individual Christian and no longer act independently. Because you are joined to them, everything that you do represents your brothers and sisters. After we are baptized, we become one Body. Wherever you are, the church is there. If there is a place where someone should not go, yet he goes there, he damages the oneness. If we are restricted in every way by the oneness, we will be preserved in our footsteps and avoid many problems. Therefore, we should remember that whenever we do anything, we should take the brothers with us. One Western brother once related a story. A sister went to listen to a modernistic theologian's blasphemous preaching. When she came back from the meeting, she told an elderly brother that even though the teaching was wrong, his English was good. The elderly brother said, "If you went, I was there also." She said that it was impossible for him to have been there. He said, "Indeed, I did not want to go, but you carried me along with you." This is very true. We all are related to one another as members of the Body.

When one member goes somewhere, the other members go along with him. When you are baptized today, you are declaring to others that from now on you are separated from the world and are choosing to live with the Christians. Whatever you do now, all the other brothers are included in your actions. Therefore brothers, please do not carry me to places where I do not want to go, and please do not do what I do not want to do. This may be a difficult thing to practice at times. But we must always wait to see if our brothers agree to our actions.

I hope that all the brothers and sisters would know that being saved is not just going to heaven, but being different from the world and being separated from among them. May the Lord bless His word, and may we have a clear vision of it. May we know that the border of our garments should be fringed with blue. Every one of us should be heavenly and belong to the Lord; all of our actions and walk should express this blueness. Brothers and sisters, baptism is just the beginning of this journey; there is much ahead of us! May we be encouraged to go on.

THE FOOD OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Issue Nos. 7 and 8

Scripture Reading: Exo. 12:8-9; 16:2-4, 14-16; 17:1-7; Num. 11:5-6

Today we will speak on the food of God's people. In Exodus we see three kinds of food. The first is the meat of the lamb, described in chapter twelve. The second is the manna in chapter sixteen, and the third is the water that flowed out of the rock in chapter seventeen. All these are the food that God prepared for the Israelites. No item could be missing from this provision. If there had been only the meat of the lamb without the manna and the water, it would not have been sufficient. If there had been the manna without the water, it would not have been sufficient either. There first had to be the meat of the lamb and then the manna plus the water before the Israelites could be led out of Egypt, pass through the wilderness, and enter into Canaan.

THE MEAT OF THE LAMB

Let us first consider the lamb. The Bible clearly tells us that the lamb refers to our Lord Jesus. The Israelites not only put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts; they had to eat the meat of the lamb. Not only did they trust in the lamb to bear their sins and deliver them from perdition, they had to receive it into them for their strength. For this reason, we must not only believe in the Lord; we must also receive Him into us. The Israelites not only trusted in the blood of the lamb for the

passing over of the destroyer's sword, but they ate the meat for their strength so that they could leave Egypt in the morning. Some have believed in the Lord and received forgiveness of sins, but they do not have the strength to renounce the world. The reason for this is that they have not eaten the meat in their heart yet. The blood has been applied, but they do not have the strength to leave Egypt. Therefore, in order to take our journey and obey the Lord, we need the meat, not the blood.

Exodus 12:8 indicates that the meat of the lamb had to be eaten on the same night. Although this was a commandment, the experience of many people is exactly the opposite. When you ask someone if he has believed in the Lord and if his sins are forgiven, he may give you a very clear and eloquent answer about the Lord's salvation. But if you ask why he still loves the world so much, he will say that he does not have the strength to give it up. (The world does not have to be something big. The extent of the world which we love and hold onto may be very small; it may be only a few dollars, or a few persons.) He is this way because he did not eat the meat in the beginning. The Bible tells us that the meat had to be eaten the same night. This is the way to be delivered from the bondage of Egypt. Eating the meat means to receive the Lord Jesus into our heart to be our Savior so that we can experience freedom in our practical daily life. Comments that are similar to the following often can be heard: "Why does So-and-so have such a holy living since he believed in the Lord? Why has there been so much change in him? I have believed in the Lord Jesus also. Why do I still love the world so much and find it so difficult to give it up?" Here we see that in order for a believer to be delivered from the world, it is a matter of eating the meat, not of applying the blood. All believers have experienced the application of the blood. Any difference between Christians is the result of whether or not they have eaten the meat.

We have covered the need to eat the meat, but how do we eat the meat? The second part of verse 8 speaks of eating the meat with two things. The first is bitter herbs. Bitter is not the name of an herb; it refers to the taste of the herb. Any herb, as long as it is bitter, can be used. The meaning of bitterness is hatred and displeasure in the heart. Spiritually speaking, it means to repent of past sins and mistakes. Repentance in the Bible carries only the sense of regret; it does not carry the sense of reform. It is better to understand it as a regret over past errors. The second thing we need is unleavened bread. First Corinthians tells us the meaning of the unleavened bread; it means the removal of sin. On the one

hand, we have to regret our past sins. On the other hand, we have to repudiate our present sins. No one who has the strength can excuse himself from forsaking sin. No one can hold onto sin with one hand, and hold onto God with the other hand. Those who have Egypt in their heart cannot leave Egypt. Regretting past mistakes means to remove the past errors. If we do not remove the leaven, we cannot leave Egypt even if we eat the meat of the lamb. We have often said something wrong, and our heart feels condemned. At these times Satan says, "Help me a little! Just be wrong all the way to the end!" However, we should say that we would rather stand on God's side, and that we will not be Satan's companion. We would rather "lose our face" and tell those whom we have offended, "I have just said something wrong. Please do not take heart in that word." Some may say that it is meaningless to do this. But this is very important. I have done this kind of thing many times. For our past we need bitter herbs, and for our future we need unleavened bread. These qualify us to eat the meat. Many people do not grow spiritually because they are running around in circles like horses in a race. It seems that they have traveled a long way, but actually they remain in the same place because they are not willing to regret and remove their past sins. Whoever does not want to remove their past sins cannot go on, and whoever keeps their sins will never grow.

THE MANNA

Is eating the meat of the lamb all that we have to do? No, this is not enough. We may have left Egypt, but there is still a wilderness journey which we have to take. In the wilderness we still need to eat the daily food. The meat of the lamb is eaten only once. This means that we need to receive the Lord Jesus as our Savior only once. But after this, we still need daily food in order to have strength for our daily life. Every day we have to face works, confrontations, affairs, and warfare. We need strength to deal with all of them. What is this food? John tells us that this food is the Lord. I would like to ask you a very frank question: Since the time you received the Lord Jesus as your Savior, how much experience have you had of eating the manna? Since the day you received the Lord, have you discovered new sins that you need to deal with? This is the most important issue. A person cannot stop eating after one meal; he has to eat every day. The same is true with our spiritual food. We cannot stop eating after taking one meal of the lamb at the Passover. After that meal, we must take in daily food. We can never

neglect this. If we do, we will die in the wilderness, and there will be no possibility of going further.

What is this daily manna? Is it the reading of the Bible? It appears to be, but it is not. Is it prayer? It appears to be, but it is not. Is it waiting on the Lord? No. These are only the means. The manna itself is the strength of Christ. We merely use these things as the means to take in the strength of Christ. Why do we study the Bible in the morning? Is it for understanding the Bible? If it is merely for the understanding of the Bible, I feel sorry. We rise up early in the morning to study the Bible so that we would receive the strength of Christ to sustain us to live our daily life. We should rise up early to spend a half hour or hour to pray in order to contact God and draw the life-power from Him to be our strength.

Let me relate a real story. I have a friend who is a co-worker. She is very afraid of water buffalos and dogs. But we co-workers encounter these two animals all the time when we preach in the villages. Every time this sister saw a strong, black water buffalo, she would run away. Once she was walking along a country lane and a few dogs were barking continuously from behind, while a herd of strong, black water buffalos were coming toward her from the front. She was so scared that she almost fainted. If she tried to run away from the dogs, the water buffalos would be in front of her, and if she tried to avoid the water buffalos, the dogs would be in her way. The lane was narrow, and there was no way to turn. She was about to pass out under this double stress. At that instant, she prayed and said, "Lord, give me the life and the strength." As she took one step, she would repeat the prayer over and over again. Eventually she managed to pass all twelve water buffalos peacefully. This is what it means to appropriate His strength.

I have another friend who prays a wonderful prayer every morning: "God, I consecrate myself to You once again today." I asked him what he consecrated himself to God for, and he answered that he consecrated himself to God so that He would fill him up. This is indeed the best prayer for us every morning.

If we do not contact the Lord in the morning in this way, we cannot make it through our day. We study the Bible to gain Christ, and we pray to draw in strength. What does it mean to draw in strength? To draw in strength is like eating food; every time we take in food, the food becomes our strength. We draw in our spiritual strength in the same way. We have to taste Him day after day. Sometimes we are drawn by the taste of prayer. This is to eat of the manna. If we have a fresh touch with God every day in this way, He will take us on in our daily

journey. The Bible tells us that no manna can be saved for the next day. Every day we have to touch God in a fresh way and receive fresh strength from Him. We have to develop such a habit of gathering the manna. Daily we need to receive a fresh message and fresh impact from God, and we need to have a fresh touch with Christ. Why do we have to read the Bible and pray every day? It is because this is a habit. We have to make drawing our strength and gathering manna a habit. It is useless for us to know the Bible without knowing Christ, so let us pursue after the precious experience!

We have read Numbers 11:5-6, which speaks of the murmuring of the Israelites. "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our soul is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna before our eyes." One thing is certain: when we are tired of the manna, the food of Egypt will appear before our eyes. Leeks, onions, and garlic are strong in flavor. The Egyptian food has a strong flavor, and every food that has a strong flavor tends to stick in our memory; we remember it very readily. It is interesting that the Israelites only remembered the good food of Egypt; they had forgotten the sufferings in Egypt, how their male babies were drowned in the river, how they labored and toiled to make bricks, and how they were beaten by the taskmasters. Many backslidden ones have forgotten the frustration of sin, the bondage of Satan, and the struggle they experienced when they were under these things. They only remember that they could do this and that before they believed in the Lord, and that their present life is too much of a bondage and suffering. You can say that they have a good memory, because they can remember so much. You can also say that they have a poor memory, because they have forgotten even their own salvation. Many Christians cannot bear fruit because they have forgotten their initial salvation. Strictly speaking, it does not matter even if there are the leeks, onions, and garlic. These are merely strong in taste. What is indispensable is the manna. All those who are tired of contacting Christ have been distracted in their mind to Egypt; the smell of garlic is in their nose. Therefore, every Christian should maintain his daily portion of manna. Most Christians eat only once every three or five days, or only a little on the Lord's Day. This is not sufficient. We have to touch Christ every day. Only this kind of contact will afford us the strength.

THE WATER FROM THE ROCK

Eating the meat of the lamb marks the beginning of our life, while eating the manna is for the sustenance of life and growth in life. Since this is the case, drinking the water must mean the enjoyment of life. Water signifies awakening, refreshment, and a kind of renewing power. Since water serves such a function, there is water in the wilderness as well as in Egypt. The meat of the lamb is for our life; it signifies the Christ who lives in us. The indwelling Christ requires the nourishment of the enthroned Christ before He has the strength to take the journey. But if we only have these two things, there is not much enjoyment, and a Christian will have a long face all day long. He will live in a miserable way and murmur like the Israelites, who complained that they only had this coriander-seed-like food; it was so plain that they were tired of it. Therefore, one cannot get by without the water of enjoyment.

How did this water come? Exodus 17:5 says that the first thing needed was the ancient rod. The Bible calls this the rod "wherewith thou smotest the river" (Exo. 17:5); it does not call it the rod of God. This served to remind the Israelites of the story of the smiting of the Egyptian river. The waters of Egypt became blood at the smiting of God's rod. Blood denotes death, and this signifies that all the enjoyment and pleasure of Egypt were under God's judgment. All of the entertainment in this world is blood. Many of these things were quite enjoyable to the Egyptians; they were as drinkable as water. But to us, they are blood; we cannot draw pleasure from them. We could do certain things in the past, but now they have all been turned to blood. This is why many people have said that being a Christian involves too much bondage. Does this mean that a Christian has no enjoyment at all? They have enjoyment, but the nature of Christian enjoyment is different from that of the Egyptians. This is why God reminded them of the ancient rod.

We have seen that we receive our life from Christ, and our life is sustained also by Christ. But where does the enjoyment come from? Some mothers derive enjoyment from their children. Our enjoyment, however, comes from the rock smitten by the rod. God told Moses to go up to Mount Horeb, which is one of the peaks of Mount Sinai, and He said, "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink" (v. 6). Our water comes from the rock before God. First Corinthians 10 says that this rock is Christ (v. 4). The smiting of the rod signifies His death, and the outflow of water signifies the Holy Spirit. Our joy and enjoyment are found in the Holy Spirit. This joy is enough to compensate for

all our loss. In this age of darkness, many times our feet are sore, our hands heavy, and we do not find any enjoyment at all. During these times, the joy from God will compensate for all of our loss. Isaiah referred to the Lord as the One who grew up out of dry ground (Isa. 53:2). What does this mean? Roots cannot grow in dry ground. This shows us that the One the Lord trusted in was God. The world could not supply Him with anything. The same is true with the world today. We thirst for water, but only find blood. Even if we drink, we cannot quench our thirst. However, Christ is the living water; He can quench our thirst and satisfy us. Today our God is standing on the mount. He is standing before the rock which has passed through death. Therefore, spiritual joy is not far from us, but right in front of us. Many years ago, during an earthquake in Italy, many people were moving things out of their houses and running for their lives with their young and their old. At that time, one woman stood at her door and roared with laughter. Although her house had collapsed and her possessions were buried, she was not concerned at all; she was laughing. When others asked why she was laughing so hard, she said, "All it takes is for my God to shake a little, and you can do nothing except run. How great is our God!" Indeed, often before our tears have dried, we are already filled with laughter and joy.

RISING UP EARLY

Issue Nos. 7 and 8

Scripture Reading: Psa. 5:3; Isa. 50:4

The matters we have covered during the past few weeks are related to young believers. (Please note that "young" refers to spiritual age not actual age.) We have covered what they should do so that they can be perfected and grow in God. Last week we spoke on confession and its necessity for our growth before God. Today we will speak on another matter which young Christians should pay attention to. Some people may take this matter lightly, but every experienced person knows the importance of this matter.

Rising up late in the morning is a great loss to a Christian. The Bible shows us that if we sleep too much, our spiritual life will suffer loss. Brothers and sisters, why does God give us days? They are like the pages of a book, which are blank on one side and black on the other side. Do you know why there is day and night? Do you know why day and night interpose each other? Why must there be a day between two nights? We believe that life is too long. If we tried to write

down everything on one page, it would be black with ink. Life is too long; therefore, one page is not enough.

The life that God gives us contains page after page. Every page is blank on one side; it is a new and fresh beginning. Many times, night is a time of blessing. But it is also a time of curse. When we are tired, we can rest at night. We may fall, become weak, and dirty a page. But thank the Lord that there is a night in which to turn the page, so that we can start a new page. Do not think that rising up every morning is an insignificant thing. Every morning when we rise up, we turn a new page, and we have a new beginning. If we want to measure a Christian's growth, all we have to do is to ask when he rises up in the morning. Some say that they rise up very early, but actually they rise up at eight o'clock. Some may even rise up at eleven or twelve o'clock. But I have to give you my own testimony, and I must say a strong word to you in this matter. Please do not be offended by my frankness. A Christian who rises up late cannot make any progress at all. I am not saying this hastily. I know what I am saying. All those who have some experience know what I am saying. Which do you love more, your bed or the Lord? Brothers and sisters, do you not realize that our bed is the place of our failure? If we sleep too much, every page of our life will become pitch black. Let us consider this subject in the following sections.

THE PATTERN OF EARLY RISING

Genesis 19:27 says, "And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord." Abraham was an early riser. He rose up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord. If you want God to speak to you, you have to go early in the morning to the place where Jehovah speaks with you.

Genesis 22:3 says, "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him." The previous day God had spoken to him, and on this day he obeyed. The previous day God made a demand, and on this day, he consecrated himself to God. He did not go there to seek for blessing, but to obey God and consecrate himself to Him. Those who want to obey God must rise up early.

Genesis 28:18-19 says, "And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel." Jacob dreamed of a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. This ladder

reaches from earth to heaven, and not from heaven to earth. It typifies the way man draws near to God in the coming kingdom. When Jacob woke from his dream, he rose up early in the morning, took the stone that he had put for his pillows, set it up for a pillar, poured oil upon the top of it, and called the name of the place Bethel. The name Bethel is made up of two parts; Beth means a house, while el means God. Bethel means the house of God. Those who desire to fellowship with God must rise up early.

Exodus 8:20 says, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh; lo, he cometh forth to the water; and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me." Moses received the command from the Lord to rise up early to do something. Those who want to obey the Lord's command and those who want to testify for Jehovah must rise up early.

Exodus 24:4 says, "And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel." All those who desire to build altars and communicate with God have to rise up early.

Exodus 34:4 says, "And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone." In order to go up to Mount Sinai and receive the commandments from the Lord the second time, Moses had to rise up early.

Joshua 3:1 says, "Then Joshua rose early in the morning; and they departed from Shittim and came to the Jordan, he and all the children of Israel; and they stayed there overnight, before they crossed over." To lead God's people into Canaan, one must rise up early. Joshua had to lead the people over the Jordan into Canaan, and he had to rise up early. Those who rise up late are not qualified to be the leaders.

Joshua 6:12 says, "And Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of Jehovah." This is a record of Joshua leading the Israelites to take the city of Jericho. All those who want to overcome their enemies must rise up early.

Joshua 8:10 says, "And Joshua rose early in the morning and mustered the people; and he and the elders of Israel went up before the people against Ai." This is the second time Joshua led an attack on Ai. In order to take the lead

among God's people and recover them from their past failures, one must rise up early.

Judges 6:38 says, "When he rose up early the next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung dew from the fleece, a bowlful of water." When the Midianites were persecuting the Israelites, God chose Gideon to come to their rescue. But Gideon could not believe this. He used the fleece to prove God's calling. "Early the next morning" is early in the morning. Whoever wants to prove the faithfulness of God's promise must rise up early.

First Samuel 1:19 says, "And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah." This is a record of Elkanah's household. They went up to Shiloh to worship the Lord. Everyone who desires to worship the Lord or learn to serve Him must rise up early.

First Samuel 15:12 says, "And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning." This is a record of God's rejection of King Saul. Samuel rose up early to take care of God's business and the affairs of the nation of Israel.

First Samuel 17:20 says, "And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him." If a son has to rise up early to obey his earthly parents, how much more should we do the same in obeying our spiritual Father?

Second Kings 19:35 says, "And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." In order to see God's deliverance, and the miracles He performs for us, we should rise up early.

Job 1:5 says, "And when the days of feasting ran their course, Job would send word and sanctify them; and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, Perhaps my children have sinned and have cursed God in their heart. This Job did continually." Those who have children should rise up early in the morning to pray for them. This is the responsibility of the parents.

Not only were the men in the Old Testament early risers; the Lord Jesus was also an early riser.

Mark 1:35 says, "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still night, He went out and went away to a deserted place, and there He prayed." Our Lord rose up early. This was His habit. As far as His divinity is concerned, He did not

need to pray. In Himself, there was not that much need for prayer. But for our sake, and to leave us a good pattern, He rose up early to pray.

John 8:2 says, "And early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him, and He sat down and taught them." Our Lord not only prayed in the morning, but taught in the morning. The morning is the good time to pray and to do God's work.

Luke 21:38 says, "And all the people would come early in the morning to Him in the temple to hear Him." Have we done this? Perhaps we are wrapped up in our sheets in the morning, and are unable to go early to the temple to listen to the Lord's teaching.

Mark 16:2 says, "And very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb as the sun rose." These women came early in the morning to seek after our Lord. Although others did not find Him, Mary found Him.

The Bible speaks of many people who rose up early. We have quoted enough cases already. Brothers and sisters, what time do you rise up from your bed? This is a very straightforward question. We have to learn to rise up early.

THE BENEFIT OF RISING UP EARLY AND THE HARM OF RISING UP LATE

If we do not rise up early, what harm will it do to us? We are purchased by the Lord. Therefore, our body, energy, ability, wisdom, and everything belong to the Lord. Even our time is the Lord's. If we spend our time in bed, we offend the Lord. Many people will not waste their money but will waste their time. Why should we waste our time, which is more precious than money? Is not time more precious than money? Let us realize that our time is for the Lord. Would it not be better if we rose up early and used the time to pray for others, to testify, to draw near to the Lord in fellowship, and to study the Bible?

This is not all. Common medical knowledge tells us that it is not beneficial for the body to sleep too long. Not only is overeating harmful to the body; oversleeping is also harmful to the body. If we sleep too long, our mind will not be that sharp. This is not only a neglect of the body, but also a neglect of the Lord.

The morning is the gateway to the day. If the morning gate is not properly opened, we will have a bad start, and it will be difficult to continue the day properly. If the beginning is bad, it is difficult to have a good ending. If we cannot control ourselves and bridle our lust in the matter of rising up, how can we bridle our lusts in other matters? If we cannot master our dreary eyes in the morning,

how can we master other things? If we break our promise to God of rising early in the morning, what other promise can we keep that we have made to God?

Everything natural has laws. When the body is tired, it needs to rest in order to be refreshed again. The same is true spiritually. When we rise up early in the morning, we receive a fresh supply in our spiritual life. Late rising is not only harmful to our body; it is a great loss to our spiritual life. If a guest comes to visit you in the morning, and you are not properly dressed and have not washed yourself, will you not be embarrassed to meet your guest in such a sleepy state? If we do not spend time before the Lord in the morning to be properly taught by Him, but rush to our work—office workers rushing to the office, students rushing to school, doctors rushing to the hospital, and shopkeepers rushing to the shops—we will not have any spiritual strength. If we are in this condition, we are not qualified to engage in the business of the day.

Many worldly people can rise up early. Vegetable hawkers can rise up at two or three in the morning. Should we, who have been taught of God, not rise up early also? Those who sell vegetables, fritters, bean curd, and newspapers rise up at midnight or at four or five o'clock in the morning. They only do this for a little money. Unfortunately, we are not willing to rise up early even though we have more important messages to receive from God. Both sleep and food are important, but sleep as well as food can become our god.

THE PURPOSE OF RISING UP EARLY

I am not just exhorting you to rise up early at four, five, or six o'clock in the morning. There is a purpose for early rising. The reason we rise up early is to meet the Lord. This is my intention in reading Psalm 5:3 and Isaiah 50:4.

A Western missionary said once that the first thing he does in the morning is to let God hear his voice. He has done this for over forty years without skipping a single day. Every morning, his first sound is uttered to God. We often speak many things to men before we get up from our bed. We often consider this and that matter on our bed, wasting much time before we rise up. We often spend only ten minutes to contact the Lord, and a half hour to wash up and dress ourselves. Are these other things more important than contacting the Lord? The Lord can do nothing with a man who does not wait on the Lord afresh every morning, even if he understands God's will and was once filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will not be power to him. This does not mean that the Lord cannot do anything in Himself, or that the Holy Spirit is powerless. But it means that such a person has not afforded the Lord and the Holy Spirit the opportunity.

Our physical life needs to be maintained properly. In the same way, our spiritual life needs to be maintained properly. If we do not do this, the truths we receive will become merely theories to us, and will not be proven in us.

The missionary that I mentioned above said that he offers his first prayer in the morning this way: "Lord, let me rise up again, so that I can see the sun once more." Early rising is not the goal; it is for the purpose of attaining a goal. Let us communicate with God and draw near to Him before we see any person, talk to any person, or conduct any business.

Some say that early rising is for reading the Bible. Others say that it is for praying. I do not mean that we do not need to read the Bible or pray when we rise up early. I simply mean that the purpose of early rising is not for these matters, but for drawing near to God. Some have likened early rising in the Christian life to pumping gas into a car; once the tank is filled, the car can run for a few days. But the Christian life is not the life of a car, but the life of an electric tram. In order for a tram to run, the wire on the tram must be connected to the cable above the tram, or else the tram will stop and not move. The Christian life must be one that is joined to God moment by moment. Otherwise, it will stop like a tram that has been disconnected and will not move. Many people think that as long as they can have some extraordinary experience, it will carry them through for a few days. They do not realize that we have to trust in God and draw near to Him daily and moment by moment. We should rise up early every day and be revived again and again by drawing near to God through prayer and the reading of the Word.

Titus 3:5 speaks of two things: "the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." The washing of regeneration happens only once, but the renewing of the Holy Spirit happens again and again. The washing of regeneration occurs at the time of our regeneration, but the renewing of the Holy Spirit is an anointing that enlightens us every day. Many people care about spiritual breakthroughs, but we need to touch the Lord in a continuous way more than we need breakthroughs. We should pay attention to the study of the Bible in our morning watch, but we should pay more attention to contacting the Lord. At such times, we should ask if there is any sin that has not been removed, if there is any problem that we need the Lord to solve. We should bring the things that we will face that day to Him, or any similar matters. During the day, we may have to work busily beside noisy machines in a factory, and we may not have the time to pray to God right there. Or we may be so busy during the day that we do not

have the time to contact Him. But if we will spend the time in the morning to contact Him, the time in the morning will carry us through our day.

One brother said that he usually does well in the morning and not so well in the afternoon. If that is the case, can a person do well in the afternoon if he does not do well even in the morning? If he does not do well in the morning, he will surely do worse in the afternoon. But if he does well in the morning, he may have a chance of doing well in the afternoon. There is a difference between going to work after one has broken through in his prayer in the morning, and going to work without having broken through in prayer in the morning. All those who are experienced in this matter can testify to this, but this is not a matter of feeling. I am not telling you to try to feel the Lord or bring Him into your memory. Some have said, "It is true that I remember the Lord many times, but there are also times when I forget about the Lord. What should I do?" I can illustrate the point by considering our eyelids. Our eyelids alternately open and close many times during the day. Why do they do this? They do this in order to protect the eyes. If dust or sand is blown in our face, we do not have to say, "Eyelids, hurry up and close!" The eyelids will close automatically. Sometimes, someone inadvertently touches my eyes. I do not have to tell myself to protect my eyes; the eyelids spontaneously close. God said that He will protect those He loves like protecting the apple of His eye (Psa. 17:8). He will protect us. If we have a proper relationship with the Lord in the morning, we have put ourselves in a well protected position under God, and there is no need for any feeling on our part. As long as our intention is to put ourselves in a trusting and obeying position, and as long as we remove all that does not please God, He will protect us. If we do not do this, we will not grow.

THE SECRET TO RISING UP EARLY

In order to rise up early, one must go to bed early. If you cannot overcome the habit of going to bed late, you cannot rise up early. If you go to bed late and rise up early, your health will be affected; you will be tired all the day, like one floating in the clouds. Therefore, all those who desire to rise up early must overcome human affairs and attachments and go to bed early at all cost. One can set the time for going to bed at nine or ten o'clock at night. But the matter of rising up early should begin tomorrow. Do not wait until next week to begin. If you wait until next week, you will never begin.

Different people need different amounts of sleep. Some have said that on the average a person needs six hours of sleep. Others say that he needs eight hours. There can be much controversy concerning this matter. Recently an article in the newspaper said that those under twenty-eight years of age should sleep nine hours, but ordinarily the need is eight hours. If one goes to bed at ten, he can rise up at six. If one goes to bed at nine, he can rise up at five. I cannot make a decision for you; you have to decide for yourself before God. May we all learn to do this before God. Those who are psychologically weak or who cannot control their sleep are exceptions. As for the rest of us, we should find the number of hours of sleep that we need and start this practice tomorrow.

Suppose you decide to rise up at half past five tomorrow morning. When you wake up, however, it is already seven o'clock. Many young believers have probably experienced this. You may become disappointed. The best thing is to instruct your servant or someone else to wake you up in the morning. You may also spend a dollar or two to buy an alarm clock and put it beside your bed. You can also pray that the Lord would wake you up at the assigned hour. Mr. Müller said, "Every day I ask God to wake me up at a certain hour, and I always find myself waking up at that very hour." This is a word of experience.

Every morning when we wake up, we have to get out of our bed immediately. We should not wait five minutes before getting out of bed. If we do, we will not be able to get out. Proverbs 6:9-11 says, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that traveleth, and thy want as an armed man." Is this not the condition of many people? If we sleep a little and slumber a little, we will rise up the same time as we did before. The bed is not the place to contemplate; the place to contemplate is the study room. The bed is not the place to read books; the place to read is the reading room. The bed is not the place to plan our business; the place to plan our business is the office.

Proverbs 26:14 says, "As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed." No matter how much the door turns, it cannot move away from the hinges. The same is true with a slothful person on his bed. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we will not be slothful, turning around on the bed all the time yet never being able to get out. In the beginning when we start rising up early, our head may ache, our feet may be weak, and we may be drowsy all day and walk with unsteady steps. But after four or five days, all these will pass away.

But we should not think that we are strong. After a few days, we will find that we cannot make it, and we will realize that we are very vulnerable in the matter of sleep. As men of God we often do not persevere in many things. We are weak and without perseverance. Some have asked why they cannot persevere. I would ask if they persevere in everything except the matter of early rising. I am afraid that some people do not persevere in anything. No wonder they cannot persevere in early rising. Some people cannot be persistent in anything. No wonder they cannot be persistent in the matter of rising up early. Many people cannot control themselves in many things. No wonder they cannot control themselves in the matter of rising up early. Being unfaithful and loose are simply manifestations of our flesh. The first day an athlete exercises, he may feel sore. The second day he exercises, he still may feel sore. But after a week, he will not feel sore anymore. The same is true with rising up early. As long as we develop this habit, we will not find it difficult anymore.

I remember the first year after I became a Christian. I went to see a missionary, who asked if I had read through the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. I read by skipping from one book to another, and could therefore only answer no. She then asked if I had read through the New Testament. I said no. She then asked me what time I rose up in the morning, and I answered, "Six o'clock." She said, "You are nineteen years old now, and I am over fifty years old. For the past thirty years or more until now, I have been rising up at four o'clock every morning." I asked how she could do this. She said, "If you exercise yourself enough, your body will spontaneously behave a certain way." She went on to say, "If you rise up late, the manna will all melt away."

Mr. Müller also benefited greatly during his life by rising up early. Once he traveled to another place and lived in a brother's home. He rose at six o'clock, but the other brother rose earlier than he did. He wondered and asked why the other brother would rise so early. The brother answered, "The book of Leviticus says that one cannot offer the dung of the sacrifices on the altar. I cannot offer my dung-hour to God." From that day, Mr. Müller prayed to have the strength to do the same. He agreed that if a young Christian does not rise early in the morning, he cannot grow.

Recently, I read from a book some words written by Mr. Andrew Murray. He said that he once read that a person must first receive the Lord; second, he must be filled with the Holy Spirit; and third, he must rise up early every morning. When he first read this, he thought the three points were unrelated. But later he realized

that they were not unrelated at all. If a person is to have a sustained experience of the first and second points, he must rise up early. Otherwise, he will not enjoy what he has obtained through the first and second points.

Brothers and sisters, I will stop here. Now is the time for you to test if you can control yourselves. How great is your faith? How great is your consecration? And how great is your self-denial? If you pray for the Lord's blessing, beginning tomorrow, you will see that the Lord will readily help you. In the morning, you should spend at least half an hour to touch the Lord. You can spend as much as an hour or even two to three hours. If you do this, you may not have a whirlwind of joy every day, but you will surely experience a peaceful sky every day.

FIVE PARABLES

CONCERNING THINGS NEW AND OLD

(1)

Issue Nos. 9 and 10

Scripture Reading: Matt. 9:9-17; Luke 5:27-39

In these two passages the Lord mentions five parables. You may think that there are only two parables: the new garment and the new wine. But according to the record of Luke, there are five closely related parables. These five parables deal with: (1) the unfulled cloth, (2) the old garment, (3) the new wine, (4) the old wine, and (5) "no one who has drunk the old desires the new, for he says, The old is better." Let us consider how these five parables show us the salvation that God has prepared for us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

THE REASON FOR THE PARABLES

The records of Matthew and Luke reveal that while He was journeying the Lord met Matthew, who was Levi, the tax collector, sitting at the tax office. The Lord said to him, "Follow Me," and he followed the Lord. Friends, can you follow a man just at his words "Follow me"? If a stranger were to come to you and ask you to follow him, would you do it? You surely would not do it. There must have been something unusual about this man that attracted Matthew like a magnet and that forced him to give up his former living, wealth, and everything to follow Him. Matthew did not understand why there was such power behind this man's word, that made him forsake his sinful living and everything. This One turns men to repentance and salvation the minute they meet Him. At the voice of this One, the dead receive life, and at the call of this One, men follow. This man caused

Matthew not only to give up his position, but also to open up his home and prepare a feast for his friends and relatives; even strangers were invited to dine. While they were attending the feast, the Pharisees and the scribes became jealous. They asked why Jesus and His disciples ate and drank. Not only did they eat, but they ate with the publicans and sinners. They began to condemn them. Yet they dared not ask Jesus directly, for they knew that if they asked Him, they would be embarrassed. They could only criticize the Lord's disciples behind their back, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" The disciples could not answer. Perhaps even they did not understand why the Lord did this. The Lord did not tell the disciples why He went to the house of Levi. But when the Lord heard this, He answered, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13). This was the purpose for His coming. He did not go to the house of the publican because the opportunity arose for Him to go, nor was He compelled to change His mind because of the circumstances. He did not eat with sinners and publicans through a coincidence. He came with a purpose. The words "I did not come to call" imply that His coming was with a purpose. His incarnation was with a purpose. His walk and His healing were with a purpose. He did not do anything or say anything haphazardly. His life was not purposeless. He said that He came with a purpose. He did not come because He saw the nation of Israel or the Gentiles behaving in a certain way. He did not change God's purpose because of changes in the environment. It seemed as if He was saying, "You think that I communicate with the sinners because I was invited by the publicans and the sinners. Actually, this was the purpose of My coming from heaven. I came to call the sinners to repentance. This is the purpose of My coming." This is like saying that I came from Nanking purposely to Shanghai. I did not come to Shanghai just en route to Soochow. The Lord Jesus came to the world for an express purpose. He did not change His original plan; He did not adjust His plan or alter His reason for coming into the world. His actions on earth were a demonstration of His original intention for coming to earth. He had the intention from the beginning of doing what He did. Whether in opening the eyes of the blind or in cleansing the lepers, He worked because it was His original intention to work. His actions were not an alteration of His purpose.

The Pharisees were very clever. They could be the teacher of many people, but they could not be the teacher of one Person. You may also be very clever and may qualify to be the teacher of your friends, your relatives, and even us. But you

cannot be the Lord Jesus' teacher. You are not qualified for that. You cannot say that the Lord Jesus has eaten too much, or that He has done something wrong, because He knows what He is doing. Eating at the house of the publicans and sinners was something that He foreordained. He did not do this mindlessly, and you cannot say anything about it. This was His decision, His original intention. We human beings have one weakness: we often talk to others for an hour or two hours and do not know what we are talking about. We do things without knowing why we did them, and we are bewildered at what we have done. Perhaps you think that just because there are times when you do not know what you are doing or saying, the Lord Jesus is also the same. The Pharisees thought that just because they did not know what they were doing or saying, the Lord Jesus would be the same. However, the Lord does not do anything foolishly. He said that He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. He did everything with a purpose; He is never haphazard.

Why did He do this? He said that He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Moreover, He said that those who are healthy have no need of a physician, but those who are ill. Why did the Lord say this? I have said that after the law came, many people still did not know what the law was. Many people think that the law is just a few commandments. Actually, the law is not just the Ten Commandments; it is what God demands of man, and what man ought to give to God based on His demands. God has demands, and man has to fulfill these demands; this is the meaning of keeping the law. The purpose of the law is for man to break it and be stumbled on it. God gave us the law, not for man to keep, but for him to break and be stumbled upon. Are you surprised by this? This is not surprising at all. The Scripture says that the law was added because of transgressions. The law merely shows man that he cannot render anything to God. God knows that man is sinful. But man does not know that he is sinful. Therefore, God gave the law in order for man to break it, so that he would know himself. The law was given by God through Moses with the intention that man would realize that he cannot keep it. Friends, do you think that the Lord Jesus is ignorant of this? Since the law was given to expose man's inability to keep God's law, would the Son of God come to the world to ask man to keep what he cannot keep? If the law cannot stop man from sin, would the Son of God require man to do what he cannot do? Since the law cannot save a man, would God give us His Son, whose work is to save man, to cause man not to be saved instead? If the law cannot save man, would the Son of God come, only to find that man is still

not saved? God sent His Son in order that man would be saved through Him. In other words, we were all ill. What then should God do?

God wants us to do two things. First, He shows us that we are ill. The worst thing that can happen to a patient is to avoid the doctor. But unless a sick person admits that he is sick, he will not consult a doctor. Second, we have to go see the doctor. This is also very important. Suppose I have a friend who has tuberculosis but does not admit it. He argues that he is tall and strong and big, and that he is not sick. I would advise him, saying, "You have a slight fever every day, and your health is not good. You should rest more and work less. Otherwise, it would be hard to recuperate and be healed if your illness progresses to the second stage." But this friend of mine does not admit that he is sick. He argues: "Am I not well? Do I not have the strength to work?" He still goes to bed late and rises up early, and lives as he pleases. It does not mean that he is well; he is merely denying his own illness. As such he can never be healed. This is the way God treats the world. It does not mean that God does not have the way, the means, or the salvation ready. The trouble is that man does not realize that he is sick and that he is a sinner. This is why it takes God two stages to enlighten man. John 1 says that the law was first given by Moses, and then grace and reality came through Jesus Christ (v. 17). God took four thousand years to show man that he is sick. God gave the law to man in order that he would see that he is a sinner, and that all men are sinners. God did not give the law for man to keep, but for man to realize that he is a sinner. The purpose of the law is for man to know himself. The law cannot justify man, nor can it save man. The book of Romans makes this point very clear. It says that "through the law is the clear knowledge of sin" (3:20). After we have the clear knowledge of sin, the Lord Jesus comes and says, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

In the first stage, God gave the law. In the second stage, God gave us the Lord Jesus—grace came. When a doctor diagnoses a patient, the first thing he does is to ask the patient to stick out his tongue, feel the patient's pulse, and measure his temperature. He will show the patient that he is sick and then tell him the kind of sickness that he has. Then he gives the patient a packet or a bottle of medicine. First, the doctor shows the patient that he is sick, and then he tells the patient the way and method to be healed. Therefore, the work in the second stage must be related to the work in the first stage. First, God gave the law so that man would realize that he is a sinner. Second, God sent grace, which is the Lord Jesus, so

that man would be healed. But there are some stiff-necked ones who say that they are not sick, and that they do not have any sin. So the Lord Jesus said that He had not come to call the righteous (those who consider themselves righteous). Let the others keep the law and be Pharisees. Now that the Lord Jesus has come, He is telling us that a man must receive help in the first stage and then receive help in the second stage. Yet some men are not willing to receive the testimony of the law. If a man refuses to receive help from the law, he will not receive help from grace and reality. If a man does not receive help in the first instance, he will not receive help in the second. I may think that I am healthy, and I may stand tall. But after the doctor measures my pulse and temperature and examines me, he will tell me that I am sick. I may think that I am a good man, but now that the law has come, it tells me that I am a sinner. I may think that I am a wonderful man, but once the law comes, it will tell me that I am a sinner. This leaves me helpless. But the second man comes; He helps me and saves me. The law can only define a sick man. The commission of the law is to show man that he is sick. If you do not admit that you are sick, you must submit to the law.

A healthy person does not need a doctor; only a sick person needs a doctor. This is a great and universal principle. Friends, are you sick at heart? Do you have any hidden illness? Do you have any secret sins that no one can touch? Do you have sins that you have committed in darkness? Do you have some illness that cannot be told to others? God will touch your secret and hidden illnesses. It is a pity that, although man knows very well that he is naked and laid bare in God's eyes, and that he has a part in all kinds of unclean evils and human sins, he still tries to hide himself and mend himself. He still tries to improve his conduct a little before believing in Jesus. It seems as if he is trying to recuperate a little before going to the doctor. This is foolish. If you do not admit honestly that you are a sinner, you cannot be healed.

I like the song we sang today. It says, "Just as I am...I come! I come!" [Hymns, #1048]. I have told you before that this hymn was written by a woman in her twenties. She said that she had the sense of sin since she was very young. She wondered how a person like herself could face God. To her this was impossible. She visited many churches and talked with many pastors. She asked them questions and tried to find out from them how she could be saved. This went on for seven or eight years. Many told her that she had to do better before she could believe in Jesus. Others told her that she should pray more and study the Bible

more. Still others told her to do good and perform noble deeds, or to do this or do that before she could believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved. As time went by, she found herself worse than before. In the end, she met an old preacher. She asked the old man what she must do before she could be saved. The old man put his hand on her back and said, "Go to God just as you are." She jumped up and asked, "Do I not have to do better, make more progress, and improve more before I can believe in the Lord Jesus?" The old man said, "There is no such need. You can come just as you are." On that day, she became clear and realized that she could come to the Lord just as she was.

God knows that we are sick. This is why He sent us the Doctor. Friends, have you ever been sick? Suppose I have a fever of one hundred five degrees. If I ask the doctor to come, will he say that he will come when the temperature drops to one hundred three? The sicker I am, the faster the doctor will come. If a person's temperature is ninety-eight degrees, the doctor may say that since it is only ninety-eight degrees, there is no need to go. The more serious your illness is, the faster the doctor will come. The woman admitted that she was a sick person and that Jesus Christ is the Physician from God who came to heal her. Not long after she returned home, she wrote this hymn: "Just as I am...I come! I come!"

Friends, what is grace? Grace is to come just as we are. There is no need to change or reform ourselves. We come just as we are. Many people think that a preacher is one who exhorts others to do good. But I never do this. If I exhort others to do good, I am merely putting powder and cosmetics on their faces and then sending them to hell. The Shanghai mortuary does a good job of grooming and touching up dead people and putting them into coffins. If I am a preacher exhorting men to do good, I am doing nothing except telling them to improve themselves and then go to hell. But hell does not need any improved or reformed persons. The Lord Jesus did not come to first make men better and then save them. He came to redeem us. He died and shed His blood for our sins. He died on the cross to accomplish redemption. He resurrected in order that we may not only be redeemed and forgiven, but receive the life of God, be saved, and have eternal life.

The Question of Fasting

When the Lord Jesus said this, the Pharisees immediately raised a question. They did not care if they were sick or well. They wanted to say what they said because they had judged that the Lord Jesus and His disciples were gluttons.

They asked why the Pharisees and the disciples of John fasted (fasting being exactly the opposite of feasting), but the Lord's disciples did not fast. They fasted, but the Lord's disciples did not fast. Here was a difference.

What is the meaning of fasting? According to the tone of those who asked the question, fasting meant two things to them. The first kind of fasting was one in which they ate five days out of a week and did not eat the other two days. The Lord's disciples, in contrast, ate all seven days of the week. This is the literal meaning of fasting. But there is a second meaning. They were religious in their background. Their background was excellent. They were not like the Lord's disciples, who enjoyed whatever was before them. They had good works according to their religion and were able to achieve what men found hard to achieve. This is like Chinese ascetics who cultivate themselves by suffering. It is also like the vegetarians who extol vegetarianism. The Pharisees were even more "noble"; they even refrained from eating. They seemed to have achieved the virtues that ordinary men were not able to achieve. We can see these two meanings here. One said that they fasted while the Lord's disciples did not fast. The other said that they were able to achieve all that the flesh could achieve and had gained for themselves the name of godliness and service to God. They seemed to be saying, "We do all these. Why are Your disciples not doing the same?"

The Reason for Not Fasting

Since there were two implications in their question, the Lord's answer was divided into two parts. The first part was an answer according to the literal meaning of the word. He said that the sons of the bridechamber cannot mourn while the bridegroom is with them. He meant that He was the Bridegroom and that the disciples were the sons of the bridechamber. While the Bridegroom was there, the sons of the bridechamber did not need to fast. This pointed out to the Pharisees why the disciples did not fast. They did not have to fast because the Lord Jesus was not yet "taken away" (Luke 5:35). After He was taken away, His disciples would have to fast. Before the Lord was rejected and crucified, the disciples did not have to fast. After He was rejected and crucified, the disciples would have to fast. This was the Lord's answer according to the literal meaning of the question on fasting. In the second answer, the Lord used five parables to explain the reason that the new and the old cannot be mixed together. These five parables are: (1) the impossibility of patching an old garment with unfurled cloth; (2) the impossibility of patching an old garment with a patch from a new garment;

(3) the impossibility of putting new wine in old wineskins; (4) the need for new wine to be put in new wineskins; and (5) "no one who has drunk the old desires the new, for he says, The old is better." Why did the Lord use these five parables? The Pharisees thought that they ought to do good, have religious works, try their best to keep God's commandments, and please God. The Lord told them that the literal fasting could come to His disciples only after He had departed from them. But if fasting refers to good works, there should not be any fasting even after He has left the disciples. That kind of fasting would be useless even after the Lord left them. The Lord used these five parables to show the Pharisees that the things He brought in were completely incompatible with the ordinances and ceremonies of the law. The grace which He brought in was absolutely incompatible with the law. The five parables signify that the law and grace can never be mixed. If they are mixed together, the law will no longer be the law, and grace will no longer be grace.

THE UNFULLED CLOTH AND THE OLD GARMENT

Matthew 9:16 says, "No one puts a patch of unfulled cloth on an old garment, for that which fills it up pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear is made." Here the Lord shows us a parable concerning the unfulled cloth and the old garment. These are common things which we see all the time. But the Lord has much to say about them. If one puts unfulled cloth on an old garment, the unfulled cloth will pull away from the old garment, and the tear in the old garment will become worse. What does a garment in the Bible signify? It signifies our righteousness before God. In this parable, it is taken for granted that the garment is torn already. This means that all of our garments are torn. The Lord does not say that this is a new garment; the old garment is torn. All old garments are torn garments. Every person, male or female, young or old, rich or poor, noble or mean, is a piece of torn garment in the eyes of God. Friends, you have to remember that every one of us is a sinner before God. I am afraid that many Christians (I speak only of Christians, and not of others) are willing to admit that everyone in the world is a sinner, but do not realize the seriousness of such a word. Many Christians are willing to admit that Genesis 3 is the beginning of man's fall. But they have not seen the seriousness of such a word. Our garments are torn. Yet we have not seen our raggedness.

What is the meaning of a torn garment? This verse is not speaking of putting on many garments such as vests and jackets. If so, an outward garment could be torn, and the inner garments could still be whole. Here there is only one garment.

When this garment is torn, the flesh is exposed. In other words, our shame is exposed. While you are sitting here, you may feel comfortable and at peace. (When we leave our home, we often ask our father or wife if our dress is proper. Most likely you have asked such questions before. We want others, especially those around us, to see that our dress is proper.) But there is One who is in secret, yet who is in the light, who sees you everywhere, and who says that your garment is torn. You cannot hide your sin and shame. Your past history is filled with filth and sin, and you will never tell others about them. These things are hidden in your heart and held under your tongue. Yet you cannot hide yourself before God. God is speaking through the mouth of His Son that your garment is torn. Under the light of the law, your righteousness is a torn garment; it cannot cover your shame before God. It is not a question of whether or not your garment is torn; it is already torn. There is, however, a question of what we should do about it. Suppose it is summer, and your garment is torn. What are you going to do? If you do not know that your garment is torn, you will not feel ashamed. But if someone tells you that your garment is torn two inches along the seam, how will you feel? You cannot cover it with your handkerchief or with your hat. While you ride on the bus, you cannot cover it with your umbrella. You feel ashamed and want to run home immediately to change your clothes. You will not think about doing something else or visiting your friend and, therefore, not go home. You will want to go home immediately to mend it or change into another garment. You have been sunk in your sin for twenty, thirty, or even fifty years, and your garment is torn. Do you feel the shame? You may think that since others do not see it and God does not see it, you can get by easily. But there is not such a thing. Your garment is torn, and the only way you have is to mend it. Let us see what the Lord Jesus says about the mending. In the past, we did not pay much attention to this matter. But during the past few weeks, I have been paying special attention to this passage. The word unfulled in Greek does not mean something new; rather, it means something unfinished. An unfulled cloth means a piece of cloth that has not been bleached, dyed, ironed, or starched. It is an unfulled cloth, not an unfulled garment. Although it is a piece of cloth, the process is not yet complete; it is still unfulled. Why did the Lord use this word? This kind of cloth ruins the old garment. Anything new is from the Lord Jesus. Anything that we have is natural and old. Friends, do we see what is being shown to us here? Many have received something of the Lord Jesus, but they have not received the work of the Lord Jesus in full. They have the outward name of being a Christian,

but they have not received the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. If you ask many people who Jesus Christ is, they say that He was a great Teacher. Many nominal Christians say that Jesus was a great model of love and equality, and that we have to imitate Him so that the world can become the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven can be brought to earth, and the world can evolve into a golden age. This is the message of "preachers without the blood." Friends, this is unfulled cloth. This cloth is not bought from the fabric store; it is a patch cut out and stolen from the factory; it is unfinished cloth that is being used to mend the torn garment.

We have met some so-called evangelistic ministries or some preachers who have said that Jesus was not born of a virgin, that He is not the Son of God, that His blood is not for redemption, that He had died but did not resurrect, that His deeds and works before His death were patterns, and that His death is not important. The people who say this only care for what the Lord Jesus did during His thirty-three years on earth. They do not see the necessity of the Son of Man being lifted up. They have not seen that the Son of Man would be lifted up just as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14); they do not realize how important this matter is. They consider the Lord Jesus' death to be nothing more than the death of an ordinary person. They do not believe that the Lord's death is the death of God. They do not realize that if the Lord had not died, we would have to die. They take the Lord's teaching as unfulled cloth, and they try to cut out a patch to mend their torn garment. Friends, many people may not say this with their mouth. But they say this in their heart. I once met an unbeliever and gave him a copy of the New Testament. After he read the four Gospels, he still would not admit that he was a sinner. He only admitted that his conduct was not as good as Jesus', and that he should imitate Him. Not only do unbelievers think this way, but Christians also think this way. If you ask whether their Christian conduct is as good as the Lord's, they will readily answer no. But if you ask them what they should do, they answer that they have to donate more money to the church or do more good works. They admit that their garment is torn, but they try to cut off a patch of the unfulled cloth—the Lord's teachings—to mend their tear. But the Lord said that if anyone tried to patch the old garment with unfulled cloth, the tear would become worse. Friends, the Lord's word is very careful: "No one puts a patch of unfulled cloth on an old garment, for that which fills it up pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear is made."

Some think that since their garment is torn and they are a sinner before God, they should fast twice a week. Some wonder what they should do about their torn garment and decide to take five dollars out of their monthly income to give to the church. Others say, "I have sinned. What should I do? Perhaps I should rise up every morning to read one chapter of the Bible; perhaps I should kneel down while I read." (Please be clear: I am not saying that we should not fast, pray, read the Bible, or offer our money. I am saying that it is futile to try to please God by doing these things or to count them as merits toward patching up our torn garment. Even if a Christian does these things, it is still wrong for him to regard them as merits toward pleasing God, because all these can be works of the flesh.) There are those who say, "I have sinned. What should I do? I will try not to lie or go to movies, and I will try to be good and answer to my conscience so that the world will say that I am an upright and clean person and God will be pleased with me." We think that since we have sinned, we should try to make up our lack by doing these things, and patch them on our torn garment piece by piece. But the Lord Jesus said that this is impossible. You can try to mend the tear, and you can try to make many resolutions. But the more you mend and the more resolutions you make, the worse the tear becomes. For example, you may love the game of mahjong, but you are determined to stop playing it. But the more you make up your mind not to play, the more you cannot stop playing; in fact, you find yourself playing the whole night. You may have a habit of smoking. If you make up your mind to quit, you will find that you will be making resolutions over and over again. You may think this will never happen to you. But in reality, it always happens. The more you mend, the worse will be the tear. There was a student who spent only half an hour on his homework each day. When the examination came, he tried to hastily prepare his lessons, only to find that he could not catch up with his work. He made up his mind that after his examination, he would spend two hours every day to prepare his lessons. But this resolution, instead of resulting in two hours of work every day, made him incapable of keeping up with even his half hour of work. A person once said that he hated lying, but that he always lied; he was determined not to lie anymore. He was afraid to put this resolution down in his diary, for fear that others would see it. He put a big black circle in his diary every time he lied. As a result, he found that his diary was full of black circles. Why is this? This is the result of the work of mending; the tear becomes worse. Previously, the tear could escape men's eyes. But the more one

mends, the worse the tear becomes and the more obvious it becomes. This is a fact.

I have not met all that many people in my life. But I can testify that I have never seen one person who could maintain his good works to the very end, without acknowledging the Lord Jesus as Savior and admitting that he is a sinner. He can be zealous for good works temporarily, and he can be inspired temporarily, but after a few months, everything is usually over with him. At any rate, his condition will never last for more than a few years. Someone once told me about the story of his cousin. This cousin was the chairman of the chamber of commerce, but he became a Christian through the influence of a missionary. For a while, he helped the YMCA and other Christians. But now he has become one of the strongest opponents of Christianity. He opposes Christians and has become a Buddhist. I asked him why his cousin turned out this way. He answered that the gospel his cousin believed in was different from our gospel. His cousin wanted to help Jesus. He thought that Jesus was too busy, and that he had to help Him out a little. Actually, we are the ones who are too busy, and the Lord Jesus is here to help us. The gospel his cousin believed in is different from the gospel we believe in. I agree with his answer. Friends, we can never patch up our life with the life of Jesus. We cannot just accept His teaching and assume that He is here only as our Teacher or wonderful model. If we do this, we are as far away from the kingdom of God as are all great sinners.

Some think that since we cannot mend with the unfilled cloth, we should mend with the old cloth. But the Lord Jesus was very careful. He only spoke of mending the old garment with the unfilled cloth; He did not speak of mending the old garment with old cloth. If unfilled cloth cannot mend the old garment, how can old cloth mend it? We cannot mend the lack of today with the things of yesterday. The Lord never said anything about using old cloth to mend the old garment.

The picture that Luke presents to us is different from the picture that Matthew and Mark present. Luke 5:36 says, "And He also spoke a parable to them: No one tears a patch from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise, he will tear the new garment." Suppose a man has two garments, one old and the other new. On returning home, he sees that the old garment is torn. Will he cut out a patch of the new garment and mend the old? If he does, he is either a mad- man or an idiot. Can he say that he loves his old garment so much, and has been wearing it for so long, and is so attached to it, he does not want to

throw it away? Can he say that since it is torn, he will cut out a patch from the new garment to mend it? Materially, no one would do this. But spiritually, many people are doing this.

The cloth mentioned in Matthew and Mark is the unfulled cloth. It refers to the time before the Lord's death and to the fact that His work was not yet finished. His work was accomplished after His death. When the Lord was dying, He said, "It is finished." His death completed the work of redemption. His living was just an unfulled cloth. Luke shows us not just cloth, but finished cloth. It is not unfulled cloth, but fulled cloth. Trying to put the Lord's finished cloth on an old garment is like someone calling on the Lord Jesus to help him after he has tried his best to do good and cannot. Some Christians I have met have said that they should keep the Ten Commandments. I asked if they had kept them, and they said that they had so far. I asked them what they would do if they could not make it all the way, and they answered that they would ask the Lord for help because the Lord had accumulated so much merit already. I told them that their logic was wrong. I know that I cannot do good, so I ask the Lord to do it for me right from the beginning. I know that I cannot make it even if I try hard, and I cannot improve myself or do good even if I try. I can only commit myself fully to the Lord Jesus. Some think that they will ask the Lord for help only if they cannot do a proper job. But the Lord Jesus said that no one tears a patch from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If one cannot do good, it is better to throw away the old garment and put on the new garment. If I cannot expect the Lord Jesus to mend my old and torn garment, I might as well not mend it and put on a new garment instead. No sound and reasonable person would do such a thing to his garments. Yet spiritually, many try to tear a patch from the new garment and put it on the old garment.

Where does the cloth mentioned in Luke come from? It comes from the new garment. Today we have a new garment, which is the righteousness of God. We have no other way to save ourselves. We can only confess our sins; there is no other way to remove our sin or please God. Our only way lies in removing the goodness of our flesh and everything that we consider good, that is, in removing our own torn garment, and acknowledging that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior, and that His cross has accomplished the work of redemption. He was crucified on the cross, and He has satisfied God's righteous demand. The garment He gives us is new and perfect; nothing more needs to be added. On the cross the Lord Jesus said, "It is finished." Many people do not realize that

God's redemption has been accomplished. They think that in order to be saved, they have to do some good. This is a foolish attempt to tear a patch of new cloth to mend the old garment.

I will illustrate this with a story. Once two persons were discussing religion. Mr. A asked Mr. B if he had a religion. Mr. B said that he did. Mr. A asked further what his religion was. Mr. B said that his religion was to try his best to do good, and that if he was good enough, he would be saved, but that if he was not good enough, he would perish. Mr. B then asked Mr. A what his religion was. Mr. A said that his religion was different from Mr. B's. He said that Mr. B had a "doing" religion, while his religion was a "done" religion. Indeed this is true. Many people today have the same kind of thought; they think that they have to do something. But the Bible shows us that it is not a matter of doing something or improving something, but a matter of what the Lord has already done. Jesus Christ has borne our sins on the cross. He declared on the cross, "It is finished." He has absolutely and fully accomplished everything. Therefore, we do not have to do anything anymore. All that we have to do now is to acknowledge that our garment is torn, that we are corrupt and cannot perform any good, and that we need the Lord to give us a new garment. If we try to make penance or resolutions to do good, we will end up making more penance and more resolutions. We can be saved only through trusting in the accomplished redemption. There is no other way except this way.

A carpenter once handed over his possessions to his son (who was also a carpenter) before his death. He told his son, "I have a wood cabinet in my room that I have finished. It is the best and most precious item among my possessions. I built it with the best wood and coated it with the best coatings. I built it and intended to use it myself. But now I am giving it to you." The son was also a carpenter, but was not as skillful as his father. In fact, he was a novice. Nevertheless, when he looked at the cabinet, he felt that something was missing. Before his father died, he took the cabinet and tried to add one or two drawers and some molding to the furniture. But what he added only diminished the beauty of the cabinet. His mother went and told the father about this, and he called his son over and said, "The cabinet was finished. You have only ruined it by your additions." Indeed, everything is ready, and there is no need to add anything.

This illustration shows us that the Lord has accomplished the work of redemption. He does not want anyone to add anything or do anything more. Suppose I invite you to a meal at my house. You may think that there are not

enough bowls in my house and secretly hide a bowl and a set of chopsticks in your handkerchief. Or you may think that there will not be enough food and bring some bread along. Doing this would embarrass me as the host. As hosts, we may be negligent, but as the Host, God will never be negligent. The Lord says that those who come to Him, He will by no means cast out (John 6:37). Luke 14:17 also says, "Come, for all things are now ready." Friends, do you think that salvation is a matter of our bringing a bag of merit or a bag of good works to the Lord? Some say, "It is true that Jesus saves me, and that by believing in Him I will have eternal life. But I have to add some merit also, so that I can become more worthy of salvation and eternal life." If you do this, you are putting God to shame. We should realize that God has finished the work of redemption; there is no need to add anything to it. It is useless for us to try to be saved through our own works.

What will happen if you try to add something or cut out something? "No one tears a patch from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise, he will tear the new garment, and also the patch from the new will not match the old" (Luke 5:36). This means to ruin the accomplished work of Jesus Christ. It also means that the new and the old do not match one another. The words "will not match" in the original language mean "is not harmonious with." What is the meaning of not being harmonious with something? Suppose an old green gown is torn. If we mend it with a patch of new green cloth, the contrast in color will be like putting a piece of jade on a gold ring. In mending clothes, we have to put patches of similar color on the garment. If we put a patch of new cloth on an old garment, the color of the patch will show a sharp contrast at the torn spot and speak loudly that there is a mismatch. Friends, God's salvation is not only incompatible with our old garment, but it actually exposes our raggedness. The new and the old are totally incompatible with one another. If you have an old garment that needs to be mended, the best kind of mending is one that no one notices. What kind of mending is most conspicuous? It is mending with patches that are different in color from the garment. Although one may be very skillful in needlework, everyone will know that it is a mended garment if he puts white patches against a background of red or blue. (Of course, there is the question of the texture of the fabric also.) What is a mismatch? It is making others see the difference. Are you trying to patch your shortcomings with what the Lord Jesus has? The two do not match. If you believe in the Lord Jesus, you have to accept a brand-new garment. If you will only take a little patch, it will make things look worse. If you

accept the Lord absolutely, God's righteousness will cover your shame. But if you try to take a patch of God's righteousness (the new garment) and mend it to yourself, it will only make you look worse.

The teachings of Jesus Christ are the unfulled cloth; they cannot save us. It is His finished redemption that saves us. However, we cannot take a patch from this redemption to mend our ragged conduct. We can only totally place before God the best of humanity and human behavior and put on God's new garment. We can never say, "It is true that Jesus has saved me. But I am merely patching His redemption onto my torn garment." Today God wants us to throw away our torn garment and put on a new garment. Thank the Lord that I have never seen one person without a torn garment; I have never seen one person who is not a sinner. Even among us today, everyone has a torn garment, and everyone is a sinner. Every man is a sinner; there is no exception. Everyone's garment is torn. But thank the Lord that with Him is the new garment. There is no reason that a person should refuse this new garment. Hallelujah! The redemption of Jesus Christ is sufficient to save us. Even if there is a man who is called the greatest sinner on earth, a new garment is waiting for him. If there is a woman who is called the greatest sinner on earth, a new garment is waiting for her. From now on, if a man is not saved, it is not because there is not a new garment. If anyone perishes, it will not be because he is incapable of mending clothes, but because he will not put on the new garment. From now on, man is not saved by his works; he is saved by one thing only: believing and receiving the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus. In the future, when one goes to heaven and finds Paul, or Peter, they will admit that their garments are torn. No one can boast that his mending work is better than others. As long as one believes, he will enter into heaven. Sinners, you have heard today that salvation is not a matter of being a good person or a bad person. Salvation depends on whether you will receive Him or reject Him today. All those who receive Jesus Christ will be saved.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life." Hallelujah! This is a fact. If there is a trembling sinner sitting here, he should listen. The Son of God has passed through death, and the new garment is ready. All you have to do is to put it on. Hallelujah! Salvation does not depend on how much your work is worth, but on how much the cross of Calvary is worth. Your work is worth nothing with respect to salvation. The only thing that has real value is the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

FIVE PARABLES

CONCERNING THINGS NEW AND OLD

(2)

Issue Nos. 11 and 12

THE NEW WINE

What is the difference between the garment and the wine? And why can new wine not be put in an old wineskin? Garment refers to the outward work of the gospel; it is something visible to man. Wine refers to the inward work of the gospel; it is something that man does not see. There is no difference between the contrast of new and old in the case of the garment and the wine, but the garment is outward, while the wine is inward. We must remember that God's gospel is (1) Christ becoming our righteousness. We can live before God because of this righteousness, and there is no need to add anything to it. Christ has accomplished God's righteousness, and even if we try, we cannot add anything to it. Anything that we are, or any good work of ours will not please God. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has pleased God. When I am in Christ, God sees me as He sees Christ. I am saved, not because I am different from others, but because I am in Christ. I can present Christ before God and say, "God, I can come to You because I am in Christ." We are in Christ, and we have put on Christ. Therefore, we can live before God, and God can be pleased with us. God's gospel is also (2) Christ living in us. Based upon this, we live before men. Spiritually speaking, we live before God. Physically speaking, we live in the world. The garment speaks of the Christ from God who has become our righteousness for us to live before God. The wine speaks of the Christ from God who has become our power and our spring—like the spring inside a clock, which regulates the movement of the clock—for us to live before men.

Why did the Lord Jesus speak of new wine being put in an old wineskin, instead of an old wine bottle? The Chinese put wine into bottles, but in the Old Testament, wine was put into leather skins. This is why the Lord did not speak of putting the wine in a bottle. One cannot put new wine in an old wineskin because new wine ferments, while old wine no longer ferments. If new wine is put in an old wineskin, the old wineskin will help the new wine to ferment, and it will burst at the force of the fermentation. This will cause the wine to spill.

Some wonder why the Lord mentioned these few parables—the unfulled cloth, the old garment, the new wine, and the old wine. Garment refers to our outward

justification. We do not need to mend the tear of our old conduct; all we have to do is to put on the new garment. Friends, it was difficult for us to be saved, but living is not as difficult as you may think. In fact, it is easier than you think. We are saved, and our sins are forgiven, but what are we going to do with the sins that we still commit while living on earth? Please remember that the Lord has not only given you a new garment outside of you, but has put new wine inside of you. Not only is there a new garment outside to cover you and adorn you, but there is a power within you, a power like the power of the new wine, which bursts apart all the old things.

Every time the Bible speaks about salvation, there are two aspects. One is the objective aspect, which is before God, and the other is the subjective aspect, which is within us. Some may not understand the difference between the objective and the subjective side. I will put it in another way: salvation has two aspects. One is justification, and the other is regeneration. No one can be justified without being regenerated, and no one can be regenerated without being justified. Justification is before God; it secures a new position for us. Regeneration is within us; it secures a new life for us. Many people only pay attention to justification and do not care for regeneration. Others pay too much attention to regeneration and do not care for justification. Some think that regeneration and justification are two different things which are not obtained at the same time. Such a teaching is a biased teaching. There must be a balance between justification and regeneration.

The word "must" appears three times in John 3. I will mention only two of them. Verse 7 says that one "must" be born anew, and verse 14 says that the Son of Man "must" be lifted up. In both instances the word "must" is the same. The "must" in verse 14 is objective. The Lord Jesus must be lifted up before man's sins can be forgiven and before man is justified. The "must" in verse 7 is subjective; it results in us receiving a new life. One must be justified before he can be free before God, and one must be regenerated before he can have a new life in himself.

Are you afraid of meeting God? The young ones always say that they are afraid of meeting God. Will God save us, or will He not save us? Will God say to us, "You workers of iniquity, depart from Me"? When they come to God, they do not know if God will accept them. Many people wonder how they as a sinner can come to God. When you are in sin and you are swept away by the tide of sin, you do not realize how sinful you are. But once you stop and consider, you begin to

wonder what a person as evil as you should do. Do not worry, because the Lord Jesus has come. He has died for your sins and fulfilled God's righteousness. He is now resurrected. All those who come to God through Jesus Christ will be saved. The Lord said that whoever believes in Him will have eternal life. Paul also said that "from all the things from which you were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, in this One everyone who believes is justified" (Acts 13:39). You should know that you can come to God through Him. Your conscience need not fear, because in Christ there is no longer any condemnation.

Even though you are saved, you may still feel that you are constantly suffering. The will to do good is present with you, but the working out is not. Other believers have experienced changes in their lives, but you do not have the same experience. Even though you are just as saved as they are, they experienced these changes, but you have not. Why is your walk the same as before? Why is there no change in you? You may sense your backslidden condition and sinfulness and often weep. You may think, "I have eternal life, and I am saved, but do I look like a saved person?" You can hardly believe that you are saved. As a result, you exert more effort to do good, to pray, to study the Bible, and to control yourself, in order that God will be pleased with you.

But such an effort only works for three to five days. After three or five months, it is no longer effective, and in one or two years, its effect will be completely gone. This is what the Lord Jesus meant when He said that we cannot be saved by mending the old garment with new cloth. (In order to be saved, one must put on the new garment.) Even after we are saved, we must continue taking the new wine, which is the power of the new life, before we can overcome all the outward things. The new wine within us gives us the new life and the power of life.

All the justified ones are regenerated. Those who have the new garment surely have the new wine. But where are you going to put the new wine? All those who have the new garment have the new wine. Hallelujah! Thank God that He has put in us the regenerated life. From now on, we are a new man. The new wine is the power of the gospel. We have such a power within us, which enables us to have a new living and to have the power to overcome everything.

THE NEW WINESKIN AND THE OLD WINESKIN

What is the meaning of a wineskin? Why can new wine not be put in the old wineskin? Some have said that we are the old wineskin. This is wrong. If we are not the old garment, can we be the old wineskin? We should consider the

context. It is impossible for the previous verses to refer to one thing and the following verses to refer to something else. Since the old garment refers to human righteousness in the previous verses, the old wineskin in the subsequent verse must refer to our natural conduct. In other words, the old wineskin is related to the fasting mentioned above. To fast means to boast; it is saying that one is not like the publicans, that one fasts twice a week, and that one tithes. In other words, one can boast before God. This is the old wineskin. The old wineskin is the goodness we had before we believed in the Lord. It is the aspects of our temper and good behavior which excelled above the temper and behavior of others. The old wineskin is not sin, and it is not something torn. (The torn garment is the only thing that is torn.) The old wineskin is our natural, good behavior. It is also the good works which we perform after we are saved. It is going back to being a Galatian again after one has become a Christian, trying to accomplish what man cannot accomplish through the law. It is trying to please God through keeping the law and trying to gain God's favor through one's own strength. This is what Paul meant when he asked if the Galatians could be perfected by the law, after they had begun by grace. "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (3:3). All those who have begun by the Lord Jesus, but who nevertheless try to be perfected by themselves, are putting the new wine into the old wineskin.

I can say strongly that never in history has there been a case where a person tried to mix Christianity with Judaism and the two were preserved. The result of such a mixture always makes Christianity no longer Christianity, and Judaism no longer Judaism. In the end both are not what they were. God has no intention to have such a thing. Throughout history, Catholicism has tried to mix Judaism with Christianity. On the one hand, they adopted the customs and ceremonies of the Old Testament, and on the other hand, they displayed a signboard on the outside which said, "The New Testament." They say that the high priest is on earth and the temple is also on the earth. Actually, the temple is no longer on earth; it is in heaven. Is Catholicism Christianity? No. Is Catholicism Judaism? No. We do not recognize Catholicism to be Christianity, and Judaism will never recognize Catholicism to be Judaism either, because the Catholics have been the ones who persecuted Judaism the most. Catholicism combines Judaism and Christianity together, like patching a tear together. The result is that the tear becomes worse. The end result of putting Christianity and Judaism together is nothing.

The new wine can only be put in the new wineskin. Only then will the power and effect be preserved. The new wine can perform only that which pleases God according to the ordinance of the new covenant and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once you have the new wine within, you have the power to uphold yourself. If you are not saved, you will not have the experience, and you will not see much change. But if you are saved, you will feel a law controlling you within. One sister has many relatives on her husband's side. There is always the danger of engaging in gossip when she is with them. As a result she is very careful in the things she says. But her son is very talkative. Every time she goes to her relatives' homes, she reminds the son not to speak too much and that when she tugs his sleeve, he should shut up and not speak further. But every time her son opens his mouth, he cannot stop; it is useless for the mother to do anything. He will say, "Let me finish this and I'll shut up." I have personally witnessed this. This boy has his mother beside him to tug at him. But when a Christian walks about, it seems that he walks alone; no one is beside him tugging at him. When he goes to his relatives' homes, he may act politely when others are very polite to him. But after half an hour or an hour, his conversation may heat up. Then something within will seem to be tugging at him, saying, "That's enough. If you go on, it will become ungodliness, and you will not be behaving like a Christian." If he listens to this inner voice and stops, he will have the peace. What is this? This is the new wine. This is not the only experience a Christian can have; there are hundreds of experiences that are similar to this.

But friends, can the new wine be put in the old wineskin? No, it will not work. It is right to put the word of the Scripture within us. But some have tried to put the word of the Scripture on the wall in order to practice according to what is written. This is an act related to the old wineskin. In other words, this is to act according to oneself. The law in the Old Testament was on the outside, while the law of the New Testament is on the inside. This is the difference between the New Testament and the Old Testament. An Old Testament saint cannot keep the Ten Commandments. Neither can a Christian keep the Ten Commandments. The old wineskin is a kind of outward restriction; it requires that we do things ourselves and remember things with our mind. The Old Testament was written on tablets of stone, and it did not give anyone the power to keep it. The New Testament is written on tablets of the heart (2 Cor. 3:3), and we have the power to keep it. Thank the Lord that we do not need slips of paper here and there to remind us; there is One within us to remind us.

The new wine cannot be put in the old wineskin, because the old wineskin cannot preserve the new wine. The new wine can only be put in the new wineskin. We have to realize that God has not asked us to keep the outward law, but to keep the inward law. God asks us only to keep His law of freedom. This law is not dead, but living. Romans 7 speaks of the law of the Ten Commandments, but Romans 8 speaks of the law of the Spirit of life. This law brings the Spirit of life to us, and it abides in us, enabling us to keep God's law.

One day I was talking about 2 John 7-9 to a brother who could not read very well. He had had a very interesting experience. He said, "It is strange that the Bible would write about such things. I once met an old pastor in a chapel who did not believe that the Lord was born of a virgin; he did not believe in resurrection or ascension. Yet at the same time, he was a pastor of a Presbyterian church and the editor of a certain publishing house. He was actually an outsider as far as Christianity is concerned. When I realized that he was such a person, I began to wonder if I should have communications with him. I turned the pages of the Scripture and could not find any answer, and besides, I did not understand the words. Then I knelt down and prayed, 'God, You have put the Holy Spirit within me to be my overseer. Please ask this overseer to show me if I should communicate with this man.' I then knew that I should exhort him, and that if he ignored my exhortation, I should not communicate with him anymore. I did not realize that this word of the Bible exactly matches the Holy Spirit's leading within me!" This is a fact. Although this brother could not read very well, he was led by the new wine within. If God required that we depend on the outward letter alone, what could the people who cannot read do? God is not a respecter of persons. Man despises the illiterate ones, but God does not despise them. Not only do we have the new garment outside of us, we have the new wine inside of us. It is useless for us to make a resolution to fast twice a week. We are not merely justified and saved, we have the new wine in the new wineskin, which enables us to overcome all outward things.

THE OLD WINE

"And no one who has drunk the old desires the new, for he says, The old is better" (Luke 5:39). This is common knowledge in the world. Everyone who has tasted old wine does not like to taste new wine. I have a friend who always insists on drinking old wine. It is true that man likes old wine and thinks that new wine is not as good. But God does not give man old wine. Why is this? It is because the old wine does not have the strength; its fermenting power is gone. The new wine,

however, has the strength. The Jews rejected the Lord Jesus because they had drunk too much of the old wine. I am not saying that Christians do not need to fast, to offer money, or to do good. I am saying that it is useless and meaningless to try to use these things to obtain our salvation and please God. Our mentality is the mentality of those who have drunk the old wine. We all want to do good. We think that with some change and improvement all will be well. Actually, if a man drinks only old wine, he will not have the fresh strength and the bursting power. Day after day, and even year after year, it will be ineffective. It is futile to try to please God by fasting and by good behavior. Only those who drink of the new wine through the Lord Jesus Christ will be accepted by God.

GOD INTERRUPTING MAN'S SPEAKING

Issue No. 13

Scripture Reading: Luke 9:33-35; Matt. 17:24-27; Acts 10:34-35, 44-46

God is a speaking God. Many portions in the Bible are God's direct speaking. Although other portions are not God's direct speaking, they are nevertheless spoken by God. Consequently, the Bible says that these other portions are also the word of God. In this world, only human beings can speak. But man's speaking cannot be compared with God's speaking. God is best at speaking. Nearly the whole Bible is filled with God's speaking. He is constantly speaking.

One interesting thing that the Bible shows us is that God is not only the best at speaking; He is also the best at listening. Many times, while men speak, God listens. In the Old Testament, a few men spoke, and their speakings were very unpleasant and rather meaningless. Even I am annoyed by their speakings. Yet God listened; He listened to their speakings.

Of the sixty-six books of the Bible, do you know which one contains the most of man's speaking? There is one book in the Bible which records more of man's speaking than the rest. It is the book of Job. Of the forty-two chapters in Job, thirty-five chapters are on man's speaking. We see Job speaking and his three friends speaking. We see Elihu speaking. One by one they spoke. In reading through the whole book, some of their speakings were not at all pleasant. In the end God came in and said, "You have all talked about Me. But you are all wrong; you are speaking blindly and guessing blindly." Job's friends spoke, and Job argued with them. This goes on chapter after chapter. Job's first friend gave his sermon, and Job spoke a sermon back to him. A second friend gave a sermon, and Job followed it with another sermon. A third friend gave a sermon, and Job

followed it with another sermon. There are six sermons in a row. The three friends of Job each gave a sermon, and Job gave three sermons. What was God doing? He was silent. Elihu eventually became angry! He was a man who knew God. A man who knew God became angry! "You are all talking nonsense here. You are all wrong." Elihu became stirred up! He could not hold himself back any longer! He had to speak! But still God was not stirred up! God did not speak until chapter thirty-eight, after Elihu had finished his speaking. The book of Job shows us that God is very capable of listening; He is never hasty. Even though these men were speaking nonsense and making wild guesses, God was still listening. If it were us, we would have stopped them after one or two wrong words; we would have interrupted their speaking with our words. We cannot listen. Yet we see in the book of Job that God is a listening God; He listens all the time.

In the Old Testament, the book of Job contains man's speaking the most. In the New Testament, we do not have a similar book. But there is a talkative person in the New Testament. The Old Testament contains a talkative book, which is Job. The New Testament contains a talkative person. Who is this talkative person? I believe all of us know him, and there is no need for any introduction. In the New Testament, one person was very talkative. The minute there was an opportunity, he would speak. Who is this person? I believe we all know that he is our brother Peter, the apostle. He loved to speak. The minute he showed up, he was speaking. The minute an opportunity arose, he spoke. Three passages—in Luke 9, Matthew 17, and Acts 10—show us that Peter was full of speaking. In these three instances, there is one thing in common: God never allowed Peter to finish his speaking. Peter spoke three times, and in every instance God did not allow Peter to finish his speaking. Peter would speak only a few words, and before finishing one sentence, or a long discourse, God would come in and interrupt his speaking. Hence, our subject today is "God Interrupting Man's Speaking."

We are very familiar with these three stories. But I will repeat them once more. Peter beheld the glory of the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. At that time, the Lord Jesus put aside His own flesh and revealed Himself in the glory of God. Both Moses and Elijah were there, and when they were about to leave, Peter said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You are willing, I will make three tents here, one for You and one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Matt. 17:4). Immediately, God spoke from heaven, "This is My Son...Hear Him!" (v. 5). As Peter spoke, God interrupted him. We do not know what else Peter wanted to say. But God interrupted him and did not allow him to go on. "Hear Him! Hear

Him!" Peter needed to exercise his ears, not his mouth. When you are before the Son of God, it is not the time to use your mouth. It is not the time to tell God what He should do. When you are before the Son of God, you should use your ears to hear what He has to say. It is not the time to speak; it is the time to hear and see. This is why God interrupted Peter with His speaking from heaven.

Once a few tax collectors came to him. They did not come to collect Caesar's taxes; they collected taxes for the temple. They came for Peter. They did not come to anyone other than Peter. This is like newspaper reporters, who look only for the government spokesman. They do not look for anyone else; they always go to the spokesman because through his mouth they can always hear something. Others may not be willing to say anything, but the spokesman will always leak some kind of news. They might not be able to find out anything from the other disciples, but they should be able to find out something from Peter. Hence, they went to see Peter. Peter did not go into the house to check with the Lord. Verse 25 says, "He came into the house." This proves that Peter and the Lord were in two different places. Perhaps one was inside the house and the other was outside the house. Peter did not go into the house to ask Jesus. He answered rashly, "Yes." But then he thought about it and wondered what would happen if He did not pay the tax. The word was out, but he went into the house anyway to ask the Lord whether or not he should pay. When Peter entered the house, the Lord Jesus anticipated his question. Please pay attention to the word anticipated. Jesus asked him first. This means that Peter was about to ask a question, but the Lord asked him first. Suppose that there are two persons. Both want to speak, but one speaks first. This is what it means to anticipate. The Lord anticipated Peter. His interruption came even quicker than the time on the Mount of Transfiguration. On the Mount of Transfiguration, God interrupted after a few sentences. But here, no word had even been spoken. The words were interrupted while they were still inside Peter's mouth. The Lord Jesus asked him, "From whom do the kings of the earth receive custom or poll tax, from their sons or from strangers?" (v. 25). Peter answered, "From strangers." Jesus answered, "So then the sons are free" (v. 26). When the Lord said that the sons do not need to pay tax, He annulled Peter's word outside the house or in the courtyard. Later the Lord Jesus said, "But that we do not stumble them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And when you open its mouth, you will find a stater; take that and give it to them for Me and you" (v. 27). Here

Peter's words were interrupted the second time. The talkative Peter was interrupted by God the second time.

The third time was in Acts 10. Peter did not have the intention at first to go to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. He went because he saw the vision; he saw a big sheet coming down from heaven. As a result of the vision, he went to Caesarea. After he arrived at Caesarea, he began to preach. The Bible says that Peter gave a long message. He talked about God being no respecter of persons and about God sending His Son Jesus. If you read that message, you will see that it was very incomplete. The beginning was great but the last part was brief. It was like someone with a big head, a small trunk, and a lower part that has disappeared altogether. Just when he was coming to the practical application of the message, he stopped. Just as he was about to speak about Jesus, about God appointing Him, about man rejecting Him, about God resurrecting Him, and about how He accomplished redemption, God interrupted the speech. Acts 10:44 is very interesting. It says, "While Peter was still speaking these words..." Please note the word "while." This indicates that Peter did not intend to stop there; he was about to go on. He was prepared to speak more; there were more things in his heart. His mind had prepared more things to say, and he was about to continue, but the Holy Spirit interrupted his words. The Holy Spirit was poured out, and everyone spoke in tongues and magnified God. This interrupted Peter's speaking.

It is strange that during the three times Peter spoke, he was interrupted. The first time God the Father interrupted his words from heaven. The second time God the Son interrupted his word on earth. The third time God the Spirit interrupted his word in Caesarea. God the Father interrupted his words from heaven. God the Son interrupted his words from the house. And God the Spirit interrupted his words in the midst of the Gentiles. God did not allow him to go on; He interrupted Peter. In one case, He interrupted after Peter spoke a few words. In another case, He interrupted before anything was said. The third time, He interrupted Peter after he had spoken a long discourse. There was an interruption after a few words, an interruption after no word, and an interruption after a long discourse. Of the three times that Peter spoke, God interrupted each time. If you compare these three cases with the story of Job in the Old Testament, you will find one very interesting thing. In the Old Testament, God would listen to man's speaking. Man was always speaking, and God did not object. God allowed man to speak;

He was willing to let man speak so much. If this was the case, why did God interrupt Peter's speaking when he spoke these three times in the New Testament? If you read the book of Job, you can see that God is capable of listening to man's speaking; He can patiently listen. Why then did He not allow Peter to speak? Why did He not allow him to continue? Why did He not allow Peter to finish what he wanted to say? You must realize that God is a God who can listen. He can listen patiently to man's speaking. His interruptions of Peter's speaking show that his word needed to be interrupted. If God did not allow him to continue with his words, it means that the words should not have continued. His words should not be heard anymore; they were not worthy words and had to be interrupted. If the listening God interrupts man's word, it must mean that his words should be interrupted and should not be allowed to continue.

If we spend some time to consider these three passages, we will find out that Peter's words in each case had to be interrupted, because they were too crucial to Christianity. If those three speakings had continued, there would be no Christianity left. If the three speakings had continued, Christianity would have been overthrown. God interrupted all three speakings. This shows us that Christianity is something very special. We have to have God's viewpoint, and cannot have man's viewpoint. If we take the human view, God will come in to interrupt our speaking. Let us consider these three instances, and why God interrupted Peter's speakings.

The first instance was on the Mount of Transfiguration. We know that on the Mount of Transfiguration the Lord manifested His own honor and glory, and He showed men the kind of Christ He was. He put on the flesh and came among men. We can say that the Jesus who began from Bethlehem was a disguised Christ. Because He put on the human body, men did not recognize the kind of Christ He was. On the Mount of Transfiguration, He removed His disguise for a short time and showed the three disciples the kind of Christ He was. He showed them what He was like originally. Many people claimed to be His disciples, but few knew about Christ Himself. Many people knew that He was Jesus of Nazareth, but few saw Him as the Son of God and the Christ. They did not know who He was, and their eyes were not yet open. Peter might have said, "You have talked much about Christ, and my ears have heard of Him. My hands have touched Him, and I have heard His words. I have seen a little of the kind of person He is. But there is something that I do not know. I have seen Him, and I have heard Him, but there is still something that I have not seen or heard." The

Mount of Transfiguration was a removing of His disguise. A new revelation was opened to the disciples, and they saw who Christ was.

While this was going on, Moses and Elijah also appeared. We all know that Moses represents the law, while Elijah represents the prophets. Both the law and the prophets were on the mountain. The main features of the Old Testament are the law and the prophets, while the main feature of the New Testament is Christ. According to God's ordination, the law and the prophets, as shadows, will pass away. When the substance is here, the shadows will pass away. Peter saw Moses and Elijah; he saw the main features of the Old Testament. He also saw Christ, the main feature of the New Testament. Therefore he exclaimed, "It is good for us to be here." While he was speaking, God came in to interrupt his speaking. God's interruption of his speaking means that the law and the prophets cannot be mixed with Jesus Christ. God said, a few chapters previous, that "all the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Matt. 11:13). "Until John"! From that time the kingdom of God began. We can see that the law, the prophets, and the kingdom of God are consecutive and not parallel to one another. Peter was saying that the law, the prophets, and Christ were coexisting, rather than in sequence. He was saying that Moses, Elijah, and Christ were equal, instead of being consecutive. God interrupted his speaking in order to show him that the law, the prophets, and Christ are not equal, with the latter superseding the former. Once the former two are finished, the latter begins. The latter starts when the first two end. The two parties cannot coexist. No one in the Old Testament occupied a higher position than Moses and Elijah. Yet they cannot stand side by side with Christ. Peter said that he would build three tents, one for Christ, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. He meant that even though the Lord Jesus should occupy the first place, a second and third place should be reserved for the law and the prophets. God in heaven pronounced that the law and the prophets should not step back to a second and third place, but should not occupy any place at all in Christianity and in the New Testament. In Christianity, in the New Testament, and in the church, the Lord Jesus occupies everything; the law and the prophets must step aside completely. Listen to the voice from heaven. While Peter was saying that one tent was for Christ, one was for Moses, and one for Elijah, the voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, the Chosen One. Hear Him!" (Luke 9:35).

There are two meanings here. The first is that now is not the time for us to speak; this is the time for us to listen. This is not the time for us to say what is in Christianity; this is the time for us to listen. Hear Him. This means: "Peter, shut up. There is no place for you to speak. You should listen instead." The second meaning of this word is that even though there are Christ, Moses, and Elijah, we should hear only Him. We should not hear the others. We should hear only Him! Peter spoke of three persons, but heaven spoke of only one. Peter spoke of three names, but God recognized only one. In other words, Peter nominated three names, but God accepted only one.

Up to this point, it is still "all walls and no door." The law and the prophets are no more. Moses is gone, and Elijah is gone. Only Jesus remains. But what do Moses and Elijah represent? Moses represents the law and Elijah represents the prophets. But what are the law and the prophets? Let us spend some time to consider what the law and the prophets are. The brothers and sisters who have been meeting with us for some time may be quite familiar with these. But many others may not be familiar with their significance, and I should repeat it for their sake. What are the law and the prophets? What is Christ? The law, the prophets, and Christ are related to the foundation of Christianity, the foundation of the New Testament, and the foundation of the church. What is the law? It is a dead code of right and wrong that exists apart from God. It is dead moral standards that exist apart from God. This is the law. It is something that leads men away from God; it shows men what is right and what is wrong, apart from God. The law tells men what is right and what is wrong, without having anything to do with God. The law is a collection of regulations apart from God which tell man what he should do. What is the law? It is something that helps you distinguish right from wrong. When one knows the law, he does not have to go to God anymore.

Take, for example, the elementary school system we had in China twenty years ago. At that time, there were not as many elementary schools as there are now. We all spent some time in the private tutorial schools. In those schools, there was only one teacher with seven or eight students. There was absolutely no curriculum and very little printed material. There was no set hour for the school to begin and no set hour for it to end. There were no set rules to follow. The teacher was at one end of the room, and the students sat facing him. School did not begin at seven or eight o'clock, but whenever the teacher arrived. School was not dismissed at one, three, or four o'clock in the afternoon, but whenever the teacher left. The rules were with the teacher. If you arrived after the teacher, you

were considered late. If you left when the teacher was still there, you were considered as having left before the scheduled time. The teacher was the rule. What was right and what was wrong? Whatever the teacher liked was right, and whatever he did not like was wrong. There was no rule that said: number one, we should do this; number two, we should do this; number three, we should do that; and number four, we should do that. Whatever the teacher liked was done. Whatever the teacher did not like was not done. A holiday was not a day of a festival or a set date; when the teacher did not show up, it was a holiday. Everything hinged on one man. His likes and dislikes were the standard of morality, his conduct was the yardstick of approval, and his movement was the gauge of time. While we studied the classic books, our eyes had to be set on him. If we did not set our eyes on him or if he was not there, there was no rule, and we would not know what to do and not do. We had to be related to him day after day. Whatever he liked was the norm. If he wanted you to come, you had to come. If he wanted you to go, you had to go. You had to be related to him. Now schools are different. There are school rules, laid out in thirty or fifty items. If the principal of a school has a detailed mind, he may lay down even a hundred rules. There is a set time for the school to begin and a set time for the school to dismiss. There are certain books that one has to read, certain uniforms that one has to wear, and certain clothes that one cannot wear. There are certain things that one can do and certain things that one cannot do. Those who set the rules, whether the principal or the directors, are the lawmakers. You may never see them in your life and still be a good student. This is because the rules are on the walls and in the books. If you are properly related to the rules on the walls and in the books, that is good enough. You do not have to be related to the teachers, the principal, the directors, or any of the lawmakers. As long as the rules and the laws are in your hand, you can take the teachers away. As long as you abide by the rules, you are a good student.

This is the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is like our present-day schools. God laid down a few rules. In the Old Testament, men did not need to draw near to God. In the Old Testament, as long as men kept the laws, and as long as they knew what they ought to do and what they ought not to do, they could be a good disciple of Judaism. They could become righteous without coming to God. Zachariah was a very righteous man in the Old Testament, or at least we can say that he was a very good disciple of Judaism. In today's term, he would be considered a good "Christian." But a man

as righteous as Zachariah did not receive any answer to his prayers. According to the law he was a righteous man. According to the ordinances, he was a perfect man. But he did not know God Himself; he did not know God's face. What then is the law? It is regulations which exist apart from God. It is moral standards which exist apart from God. It is standards of right and wrong which exist apart from God. The law is anything which exists apart from God. Anything which exists apart from God is the law. Regulations which are apart from God are the law. Hence, in the Old Testament, men did not have to come before God or be related to God. Throughout their lifetime they just abided by the dead laws.

What is the New Testament? The New Testament is a return to the private tutorial school. We have a perfect Teacher. The failure of the traditional private tutorial school was not that the system was bad, but that the teachers were not qualified. If a sage would come and be the teacher, that school would be better than the present-day schools. What is the New Testament? The New Testament takes away the law and allows Christ to be the Master; the law is no longer the master. Today we do not go to the Bible to find out what is right and what is wrong. Today it is a matter of the Son of God being glorified. God's Son is glorified not only on the heavenly throne, but in our hearts as well. On the Mount of Transfiguration, He received honor and glory. Peter said that he beheld the honor and glory of the Lord Jesus with his eyes (2 Pet. 1:16-17). God has bestowed honor and glory on the Lord Jesus. Today should there be one tent, two tents, or three tents? Tents are man-made. In other words the tents are our hearts. On the throne in heaven, there is only Christ. But are there three places in our hearts, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Christ? Or is there only a place for Christ? God's requirement is that we receive Christ. But within us, not only do we have Christ, we also have outward things such as the law and the prophets. (We will speak on the prophets in a minute.) The guidance we receive today should come from the indwelling Christ, and not from any outward dead regulations or lifeless laws. I do not despise the Bible. Some of you have been meeting with us for many years; you know that we pay much attention to this Book. But I say that we can even make this Book a book of regulations and laws. Today I dare not say and I will not say that the Bible does not contain regulations and laws. I am saying that it does not contain just regulations and laws. The question today is not what the Bible says, but what Christ within us says. The question today is not what the law written by Christ says, but what the Christ within us says. This is the difference between living in the New Testament age

and the Old Testament age. In the Old Testament age, one looked up the Scripture and tried to find out what the laws said. The New Testament age is different. Besides the Bible, what is the Lord Jesus saying within us? If we care only for outward things, God will interrupt our speaking. The question today is whether or not we have something within us.

Brothers often come to me and ask, "Mr. Nee, in your opinion, should we do this?" I ask why they have asked, and they say, "When I read the Bible, I found that one person expounded this passage one way, and another person expounded it another way. I am confused." Do you see my point? The principle of their living is the law. When others present them an interpretation of the law, they become confused. Is our emphasis merely the outward laws? If our emphasis is merely the outward laws, we will not be clear about the inward guidance. We are not clear, because we are already assured of the outward laws. I often hold my brother's hand and point to his heart, saying, "Forget about what your head thinks and what your ears hear. Listen to what your heart has to say." Many times theologians who have a very good knowledge of the Bible and who are very educated make judgments that are worse than those of illiterate, simple people who cannot read the Bible and who have no knowledge of the Bible. A simple person can tell you that he does not have the peace or that his conscience bothers him. The judgments of simple people and those without Bible knowledge are often better than those of famous, knowledgeable, and educated theologians. The issue today has nothing to do with outward matters. It is not what men say. Please be clear that it is not only a question of what the Bible says, but absolutely a question of what the Christ within us says. If Christianity were not built upon this, we would have to say, "Blessed are the clever," "Blessed are the literate," or, "Blessed are those who have Bible knowledge." Thank the Lord that Christianity is not built upon knowledge or literacy. Christianity is built upon the fact that Christ lives within us. A clever person will receive God's guidance if he obeys the inner voice. A simple person will also receive God's guidance if he obeys the inner voice. Recently, I met a seventy-year-old lady who could not read anything, and who had not read the Bible before. Yet I have never met another person who had received as much guidance as she had. She had been a believer for only four months; she could not read and did not have any Bible knowledge. If you had talked to her about the law, she would not have been able to tell you anything about it. She could not

memorize any commandment. But her inner being was very clear. Her inner being directed her in everything. Our rights and wrongs should come from within us and not from anything outside of us.

However, man prefers the law, because he does not need a personal relationship with Christ. To follow the law, there is no need to face a teacher. There is no price to pay, and one can get by easily. One does not have to be related to Christ in any way. As long as there are the outward qualifications and the knowledge, everything is all right. But in the New Testament, unless a person waits at the door of Wisdom and listens to His voice, he will not know what to do and where to go. Many brothers have come to me to ask me what the Bible says about Christian conduct. Friends, if you do this, you do not know Christianity at all. The revelation of Christianity comes from this Book, but personal revelations do not come from this Book, but from within. If you want to know general revelations, you can find them in the Bible. But if you have only a general revelation, without personal revelation, you still do not understand Christianity, and you are still in the Old Testament. Christianity is not a matter of what the Bible says or what the law says. Christianity is what the One within you says. One day a brother came to me and said, "Some say there is no difference between the soul and the spirit. When I read the Bible, I also do not find any difference between the soul and the spirit. It seems that the two are indistinguishable. I don't know if this is right or not." I held his hand and said, "What is important is not how the Bible distinguishes them, but whether or not there is a distinction within you." The Christianity that many speak about only has the Bible; it does not have Christ. Many people only have a Bible, without the living Christ. We have the living Christ dwelling within us to be our life and our right and wrong. He is our moral standard. Whatever He likes is right; whatever He does not like is wrong. If He says it is right, it is right. If He says it is wrong, it is wrong. Inner guidance is all that matters.

But Peter, as well as many modern Peters, thought that the law needed to be added to Christ. He said that there should be three tents, one of which should be for Moses. This is why God had to come in to interrupt. God was saying that Christ is important, not the law. I am not saying that this Book is useless. In the future, when there is the opportunity, I will tell you how useful this Book is. But I am saying that Christianity is not just this Book. Christianity is absolutely Christ, the Christ who lives within us.

What then are the prophets? The law can decide only certain things for us; it cannot decide everything. The law can tell us what is right and wrong about many things; but it cannot tell us what is right and wrong about everything. The law can tell us not to covet, steal, or commit fornication. But it cannot tell us if we should go to Nanking. The law can tell us what can be eaten and cannot be eaten, but it cannot tell us what we should eat when we go home tonight. Leviticus 11 tells us what food is clean and unclean. But the law cannot tell us what we should eat when we go home tonight. The law can tell us what we should do when we are sick, but it cannot tell us if our sickness will be healed, or if we will die of our sickness. This is why there are prophets in the Old Testament. The Old Testament not only has the law but the prophets as well. There is not only Moses, but Elijah as well. What is a prophet? A prophet fills up the lack of the law. The law is dead, while a prophet is living. The law is written down, while a prophet speaks, guides, and tells men which way they should take. This is the main difference between the law and the prophets. The law tells us God's general principle of right and wrong, while the prophets tell us God's fine details concerning right and wrong. The law deals with right and wrong in principle, while the prophets deal with right and wrong in specific details. The prophets give us the guidance and the way for us to take personally. What is a prophet? A prophet is one who tells you if your sickness will be healed or if you will die. He is one who tells you if God will punish you or if He will bless you. In other words, the law is the abstract guidance, while the prophet is the specific guidance. I believe it is right to say it this way. One is abstract, while the other is specific. The law merely shows us the moral principle before God. But the prophet shows us what we should do today and where we should go. This is absolutely something specific and personal. This is the prophet. We can go to the Bible to find out if God has commissioned us to preach the gospel; it is easy to find the basis and principles for matters like these. This is the aspect of the law. But there is also the aspect of the prophet, which is personal and specific. Does God want me to go to Yungnan or Annan? Does God want me to go to Tibet or Siam? How should we go, and when should we go? These are specific; they are not abstract principles. This is why there is not only the law but also the prophets in the Old Testament. When the two things were present, God's children were guided on the proper path. The prophets are a special class of people who help others to know God's will. Do not think that the prophets only foretell. In the Old Testament the prophets find out God's will on behalf of others.

Peter felt that Moses and Elijah were very important. He felt that a tent should be made for Elijah also. He thought that it was important to have the prophets, and that a place should be reserved for the prophets. God interrupted his speaking. In God's eyes, the prophets could not be allowed; there could no longer be any prophets. What is the new covenant? The new covenant is one in which the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth and the sea. In the new covenant no one needs to teach his neighbor or his brother to know the Lord. In other words, the class of neighbors and brothers is annulled. There is no need for such a class of people in the new covenant. A brother once asked me to pray for him so that I would know God's will concerning him and tell him. He thought that I was not just a teacher, but a prophet as well. "Mr. Nee, please pray for me. If God tells you anything concerning me, please come and tell me." You have to realize that this fundamentally overturns the New Testament. In the New Testament, not only must the law go, but the prophets have to go as well. Not only should there be no ordinances, but there should be no persons as well. No one should tell you what is right and what is wrong. No one should tell you that he has a message from God for you, and that God's will is for you to go to Nanking or Soochow. This is impossible. This oversteps the Lord Jesus' work. These directions should come as a result of the Lord's work within us. Today the Lord is within us; He is showing us what is right and what is wrong. The Lord is telling us if we should go to Nanking or Soochow. Now we can understand why Paul went to Jerusalem against the advice of a few saints. He went to Jerusalem because they wanted to be his prophets. Whether or not something is from God, or whether or not something is right is not what is important. It was a matter of how Paul felt within. We cannot choose our pathway based on what others feel. Today there is no longer a class of prophets. It is over; it has forever passed away. Today the Lord Jesus is exclusively in charge. It is not a question of asking others what to do. We should not go to others to ask them what we should do concerning the affairs of our lives. A Bible teacher can teach others the principles. We can teach the principles, but we have to be careful when it comes to telling others what to do; we should be careful not to get involved in these matters. There is no such thing as a special class of men. Every person must be guided inwardly by God alone. We cannot allow dead laws or living persons to replace Christ. What then is Christianity? Christianity is Christ living within us, telling us what is right and what is wrong. Christ living within us is Christianity. Nothing else counts.

This was Peter's mistake. He thought that there should be Moses, Elijah, and Christ, but God said that there is only Christ; Moses and Elijah should go. What kind of Christianity do we have today? We cannot say that we do not need Christ, because only unbelievers would say this. We say that we need Christ, but we also say that we sometimes need Moses and Elijah as well. This was Peter. He surely put Christ in the first place, but he also wanted the law and the prophets. I am afraid we have not seen this clearly. But we must see this. I am afraid that some do not just want Christ; they also want the law and the prophets. They want three tents. These people need a voice from heaven to tell them, "This is My Son, the Beloved...Hear Him!" Now is not the time to hear Christ, the law, and the prophets. Now is the time to hear Him.

Let us go on a little faster. In Matthew 17 something else happened. Peter answered the question concerning paying the temple tax. We know that the Jews had to pay the temple tax. This is not the kind of tax that we Chinese pay today. The question was not whether the Lord Jesus would pay the tax, but whether He should pay the tax. Some Bible scholars tell us that there are two meanings to the tax in this verse. The first meaning is that of a kind of poll tax, and the second meaning is that of ransom money, like that used in the Old Testament for the redemption of souls. Exodus and Numbers speak of this matter a few times. There were two issues. The tax was levied upon the strangers, and not on the sons. If the Lord Jesus paid the tax, it would mean that He was a stranger and not a Son. If He paid the tax, it would mean that He had denied that He was the Son. But what is the foundation of Christianity? Is Jesus of Nazareth just a man, or is He the Son of God? If Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, there is Christianity. If He is not the Son of God, we can give up this meeting hall tonight and go away to take care of our own business. The question today is whether or not Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God.

Perhaps some brothers and sisters have not seen how particular our faith is. I am always reminded that every Christian in this world has a particular faith. I often feel that the community of Christians is indeed the household of faith. Within the family of believers, there is a particular faith. What is this particular faith? What is the faith? It is being able to pick out One from among the myriads of men throughout the world—in China, in other lands, and including the past and the — of whom we can say, "This man is not just a man, but God." This is Christianity. This is our faith. God is not just God alone. We do not just have a book, the Bible; we have the revelation of God. What is the revelation of God? In order for

God to reveal Himself to man, He had to come to the world. We do not believe merely in a God, but in His revelation. We do not believe merely that there is a God, but that there is a revelation of God. Many people believe that there is an unapproachable God in heaven; they believe that God is unknown and mysterious. The God that many people believe in is like the god of the Athenians, whom one does not know, or whom one cannot know (Acts 17:23). If you ask those in the world today if they believe in God, and what kind of belief in God they have, they will tell you that they believe in a God that is unfathomable and untouchable. But this is absolutely not Christianity, and it is absolutely not the New Testament. We believe that there is a God and that we can know this God. We believe that God is a revealed God and not a mysterious God in heaven. God is a God who has manifested Himself among men. By what means can we know this knowable God? God became a man like us. After He became a man, it was possible for us to know Him and to know the kind of God He is. God has put on humanity and come among men to show men what He is like. The only Begotten of God, the only Begotten in the bosom of the Father, has manifested God. This is Christianity. Because God has manifested Himself on earth, it is now possible for us to identify One from among all men who is God. We can identify this man and say that He is God. We have found Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Son of God. He is the same as we are, but at the same time, He is somewhat different from us. So what is Christianity? Christianity is built upon this foundation. Matthew 17 shows us the story about the paying of the tax, while chapter sixteen shows us the declaration of Peter. The Lord Jesus did not care for so many things; He did not ask many questions. He cared for only one thing, and He paid attention to only one thing, which is: "Who do you say that I am?" He did not care if others said that He was good or bad, or if they liked or disliked Him. He did not care for these things. He paid attention to only one thing, and He asked only one question: "Who am I?" Whether or not Christianity stands depends on who we say Jesus of Nazareth is. If we do not resolve this issue, we do not have the proper foundation. If the Lord Jesus is merely an Elijah or a Jeremiah or one of the prophets, we do not have Christianity. But Peter declared in chapter sixteen that the Lord is the Son of the living God. How did the Lord respond? He said, "Peter, you are Peter. I will build My church upon this rock." Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build My church" (v. 18). Upon what is the church built? The church is built upon the foundation of "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Lord said

something wonderful after this: "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Why? Because the church is built upon this rock; it is built upon the words "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." I have often asked myself who Jesus of Nazareth is. There are many people here today. I cannot come to you and take your hand, or anyone else's hand, and say, "You are the Son of God." But I can take the hand of Jesus of Nazareth, and say, "You are the Son of the living God." I feel that this is the greatest joy of my whole life. To discover that Jesus of Nazareth is my Savior is not a marvel. To discover that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of the living God is a marvel. If Jesus of Nazareth was merely a man, a man from a nation far away, the church would fall, Christianity would fall, and the New Testament would fall. The whole issue rests on whether Jesus of Nazareth was man or God.

Peter saw the tax collectors coming, and he made up his mind to tell them, "Yes, yes. I can guarantee that we will pay the tax. I have been with the Lord for so many years. I know that He will pay it." But the Lord would not allow him to speak. There was no reason to allow him to go on speaking in this way. If he had gone on speaking, the whole foundation of Christianity would have been shaken. The previous passage concerned a question about the content of Christianity. What was at stake now concerned the foundation of Christianity. The Mount of Transfiguration speaks of the content of Christianity, while in the house, we see the foundation of Christianity. The fact that He is the Son of the living God cannot be challenged.

There is another significance to paying the temple tax. If He needed to pay this tax, it meant that Christ also required redemption. Therefore, this is not merely a question of paying or not paying the tax, but of whether or not He should pay the tax. If the Lord Jesus paid the tax, it would mean that the Son of God required redemption just as we do. I once met a Catholic who condemned me for not worshipping Mary. I told him that I do not worship Mary. He asked me why, and I told him that Mary was the same as us; she needed the Savior just as much as we do. On what can I base this? When she was pregnant, she said, "My spirit has exulted in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). She also needed a Savior. But the Lord Jesus did not need a Savior, because He had no sin. If the Lord Jesus wanted a Savior, it would not be humility but lying. The Lord Jesus is most humble, but He cannot be so humble as to say that He has sinned. If the Lord Jesus needed to pay tax, it would mean that He needed redemption also. What is

Christianity? Christianity is built upon these two foundations. One is that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, and the other is that Jesus of Nazareth has no sin. Jesus of Nazareth not only is the Son of God, but is God's Beloved. The Son of God speaks of His position, while God's Beloved speaks of His morality. This is why the Lord would not allow Peter to continue. He could not say anything or open his mouth anymore. He did not have the position to speak. The Lord Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Thank the Lord that He did not have to pay the tax. Peter should have known that the Lord did not have to pay the tax. But then the Lord presented another principle. This principle should render us much help. "But that we do not stumble them." This means, "Lest we stumble them, lest we offend them, you should go and fish, and take the fish that you catch and open its mouth, and you will find a stater; take that and give it to them for Me and you." The Lord Jesus tried to make it clear to Peter that He did not pay the tax because He was a stranger. He paid the tax because He did not want to stumble them; He did not want to make them feel uncomfortable or unhappy. Peter did not realize this. He only knew to pay the tax. The Lord realized that the whole foundation rests on the fact of who He is. Never think that our foundation lies in something that we do. That is a fallen Christianity, a backslidden Christianity. Christianity is not a religion in which we do something. It is not a matter of us doing something, but a matter of who He is. Is He man or is He God? Some have asked what they should do in order to be saved. The apostle answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus." He is the Lord. We have to see that He is the Lord. Man's eyes are blind. Consequently, he asks what he should do. But this is not the issue. The issue is Himself. Who was the One who was born in Bethlehem two thousand years ago and grew up in Nazareth as a carpenter? The Jews said that He was a bastard. Some said that He was Elijah or one of the prophets. But who do you say that He is? If God gives you a little insight, you will see that Jesus of Nazareth is God coming to earth; He is the manifestation of God. If you see this, all problems will be solved. The problems of all those who believe that He is God are solved. Once we acknowledge Him as God, the issue of work is over. This is the main issue. However, although He is the Son of God, He paid the tax because He did not want to make others unhappy or uneasy. This is a lesson for us. There are many things which we do not have to do, which we nevertheless do. We often have the right to not do certain things, but we give up that right anyway. We can maintain our right, but we often do not, because we do not want to stumble or offend others. We should obey His word, take out a

stater from the fish we have caught, and use it as tax money. To be afraid of others' criticism is to follow a wrong principle; if we do something because we are afraid of others' criticisms, our way is too broad; it is no longer a narrow way. However, it is equally wrong for us to try to maintain our right or save our money. This is not an ordinary case of fear of criticism. We have the right not to do things, and we have every reason to protect ourselves. But we may do something because we are afraid of alarming or stumbling others. For the sake of others, not for the sake of ourselves or for the sake of upholding our own right, we cannot insist on our own right. Instead, we can learn to bear the cross and lay down our own right.

After a long time, perhaps half a year after Pentecost, Peter went down to Caesarea. Before he went, he had a prejudice against the Gentiles. He was a Christian, but he was a Jewish Christian. He was a Christian, but he was also a Jew, just as you are a Christian, but also Chinese. This is why God sent a sheet from heaven. The sheet indicated to him that as long as he was in Christ, there was no difference between the Jews and the Gentiles. In Christ there is no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles; there is only one church, and everyone is a Christian. The Lord showed him a vision and pointed out that everything inside the sheet was clean. Peter thought that the Jews were a special, privileged group, that they received special grace from God, and that it was hard for the Gentiles to receive God's grace. But God showed him that only the inner man is related to God's grace; there is no difference between the Jews and Gentiles in this respect. Therefore, God sent him to the house of Cornelius. He found himself preaching in the house of Cornelius. Yet one thing still could not be erased from his mind. The middle wall of partition was still there. He considered the Gentiles as dogs. He thought that God had granted special privileges to the Jews, and that they were a special group of people. He could not believe that the Gentiles could receive the same grace that the privileged Jews had received. He had seen the principle and the vision, and he confessed with his mouth that God is no respecter of persons. But in practice, there was still some problem. This is the same with us today. We say with our mouth that there is no distinction between the Chinese and other nationalities. We know this as a principle, and we have seen the vision. But when it comes to practice, we act differently. Before Peter finished his words, while he was yet speaking and about to continue, the Holy Spirit came in and fell upon them all. All the Gentiles, with no exception, began to speak in tongues. The tongue-speaking interrupted

Peter's word. Later, Peter realized that the Holy Spirit had descended upon the Gentiles in the same way that He had descended upon them. He testified that just as the Holy Spirit had fallen on them, the Holy Spirit had fallen on the Gentiles. He had no choice but to baptize them and recognize them as Christians.

We have seen three important matters. The Mount of Transfiguration involved the matter of the content of Christianity, the house involved the matter of the foundation of Christianity, and Caesarea involved the matter of the sphere of Christianity. The foundation of Christianity is Jesus of Nazareth. The content of Christianity is just Christ. There is no Moses or Elijah. But for whom are these blessings? They are for all men. These blessings are for the whole human race. We often think that it is possible for certain people to receive the gospel, but not possible for other people to receive the gospel. Some have thought that a person ought to be changed and adjusted before he can become a Christian, or that certain people have to make some adjustments before they can become a candidate for salvation. Thank the Lord. He has shown us that a Gentile does not need to become a Jew before he can be a Christian. Every Gentile can become a Christian immediately. Today no Gentile needs to be a Jew; he can be a Christian immediately. Some people think that a man must first be converted to Judaism before he can become a Christian, and that he cannot jump from being a Gentile to being a Christian. But thank the Lord that grace is always given to those who are standing on a lower ground. As long as we are standing on a lower ground, grace is for us. Hallelujah! As long as we are on the lower ground, we have it. Thank the Lord that we can all come to God just as we are. There is no difference between a Jew and a Gentile. There is no need to improve ourselves or to change for the better. We do not have to be a Jew before we can be a Christian. We can come today. After his experience Peter realized that a person can be saved as long as he is a sinner; no one has the privilege of receiving special grace. Peter thought that there was a special, privileged class and a class who was set aside. But Jews are sinners in the same way that Gentiles are sinners. Romans 3 says that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles; they are all sinners. All have sinned. The Jews thought that they were privileged sinners, while Gentiles were unprivileged sinners. But thank the Lord, privileged or unprivileged, the Holy Spirit has fallen upon all the sinners. All have received the Holy Spirit, and there is no difference. Thank the Lord. If there

is anyone here this morning who is not yet saved, and who thinks that you have to advance to a certain state or change to a certain condition before being saved, you are absolutely wrong. There is no need to change or improve at all. Just come as you are. This is all you have to do. This is indeed a great privilege.

Second, there is no distinction of nationality in the church. There is no separation of men into Jews and Gentiles. Yet today some are inventing something like the Chinese Christian Church. I once met a very good man who told me that he was organizing a Chinese Christian Church in his locality. I told him that it was an antique. He said that what he was starting was not an antique, because they had just started it. I told him that it was not only an antique, but a museum piece, good only for the museum. If there is China, there is no Christian Church, and if there is the Christian Church, there is no China. Is not the Chinese Christian Church a monster? If we are in Christ, there is no China, and if we are in China, there is no Christian Church. How can there be a Chinese Christian Church? If the church is built upon Jesus Christ, there cannot be a Chinese Christian Church. In Christ there is no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. How do you come to God today? How did you become saved? The only basis for you to come before God is that you have partaken of the life of the Lord Jesus. You have become God's children through the life of the Lord Jesus. Therefore, you are children of God before Him. It does not matter whether you are a Jew or a Gentile. You have become a child of God through the life of the Lord Jesus. No matter what color your skin is or what type your blood is, everyone who comes to God comes on the basis of the life of the Lord Jesus. Everyone's sins are washed through the blood of the Lord Jesus, and everyone comes to God by His life. We do not receive grace because we are Chinese, or because we are foreigners. We obtain grace because of Christ. In Christ there is no distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles. If we come to God through a foreigner or a Chinese, perhaps that foreigner or Chinese can claim a share of the merit. But the Bible says that we all are what we are because of one Lord. There is only one Lord. We must say that some of the things that are in the church today are not necessarily the things that will be there in that day.

So what is the church? I have pointed out before that a Cyrenian was a black person, while Manaen was raised up with the king (Acts 13:1). In addition there was a good man, Barnabas, and a highly educated man, Paul. They were all in the church, and there was no distinction between them. If we see this, and if God's children today see this, that is, if we see our oneness in Christ, everything

will be all right. When we speak of oneness or unity, is it a matter of me obeying you or you obeying me? Are you right or am I right? If we are left to ourselves, we can never be one. Thank the Lord that we are already one in Christ. I have to repeat this word already a thousand and even ten thousand times. We are already one in Christ. We were one in Christ long ago. You are related to Christ before God, and I am also related to Christ before God. Therefore, we are one. This is why the Bible never exhorts Christians to be one. Is not this interesting? There is no place in the Bible which says that we should be one. Rather, it says that we should maintain the oneness. We do not need to create a oneness; we could never be one. But thank the Lord that we have received the same life in Christ. Therefore, we are already one.

Friends, there is not only a difference between the Chinese and the foreigners; there are also the differences between rich and poor, free and slaves, and wise and foolish. If there are such differences in the church, the church is no longer the church. I wish that among us the rich, poor, wise, foolish, free, and slaves could all say that we are brothers and that we all have the Lord's life. This is the church. Some time ago, I was working in one place, and some government officials were telling me that they could not go to the ordinary churches. I asked them why, and they said that others were common citizens, while they were officials. I asked them what they wanted to do, and they said that they intended to donate five or six thousand dollars to build a meeting hall and invite a pastor to come. I asked them what they would do with the name of the hall. They said that they had not thought about this yet. I asked if I could suggest a name for them, and they agreed. I then proposed to call it "The Church of the Officials." They said that this did not sound right. Then I said that if the name was not right, the people within were not right either. Today everyone who is in Christ is the same; there cannot be any distinction based on differences in the flesh. Thank the Lord that in the Bible there are only the churches in Judea; there are no Judean churches. These churches are in the land of Judea, but these churches do not belong to the Jews. Thank God that there are churches in China, but there is no church of China; there are churches in England, and there are churches in America, but there is no church of England or church of America. If there is, the sphere of Christianity will be damaged.

We thank the Lord that the foundation of Christianity is Christ, the Son of God. Without this, there is no Christianity. We thank the Lord that the content of Christianity is Christ Himself as our personal revelation and guidance. Without

this, there is no Christianity. We also thank the Lord that the sphere of Christianity includes all regenerated and saved persons. Tonight when we come together to break the bread, if we only see the group of people who are with us, we do not have the right to touch this bread. What we are touching is the whole church. If we only see our own group, we do not have the qualification to touch this bread. Our heart should be broad enough to include all of God's children, and we should declare that they all are our brothers and sisters. We cannot have any concept of differences in class, race, social status, or intelligence. There cannot be these things in our meetings. The Holy Spirit has descended upon us in the same way that He has descended upon others; there cannot be any distinction. All distinctions are in Adam. We cannot say that we are this way and others are that way. Please do not bring the things of Adam into the church. If we bring the things of Adam into the church, the church will not be helped, but will be damaged instead. May the Lord bless all of us.

LEAKING AND DRIFTING

Issue No. 14

Scripture Reading: Heb. 2:1-4

The book of Hebrews contains various passages of warnings. Every time there is a word of warning in Hebrews, we can find an important teaching immediately preceding or following the warning. An important teaching may appear first, and then a word of warning follows. Or an important teaching may be preceded by a warning. This is the structure of the book of Hebrews. In this book, there are five or six warnings. The passage we read in Hebrews 2 comprises the first warning. This warning is placed in between chapters one and two. What does chapter one cover? Chapter one is on glory. What does chapter two cover? Chapter two is on shame. Chapter one is on God and chapter two is on man. Chapter one is on glory and chapter two is on suffering. Chapter one tells us who Christ is from eternity past to eternity future, while chapter two tells us what He has accomplished in time. Chapter one is on His person, while chapter two is on His work. In between these two chapters, we have a word of warning. What is this warning about? It is a warning for us to give heed concerning the person of Christ and His work. What kind of attitude should we have when speaking of the person of Christ and His work?

First we must be clear concerning the teaching and the background of this book. Before we study the first warning in Hebrews, we must briefly mention the ones

to whom this book was addressed. We know that the book of Hebrews was written to the Hebrews. A group of Jews were saved; they understood the things concerning the Old Testament, the temple, and the worship in the temple. At the same time, they also knew about the New Testament and the worship in the New Testament. They had known Christ and believed in Him, received Him, and were saved. Now they had both of the above things. They were Christians and not outsiders. This letter was not written to the Gentiles, nor to those who had never known salvation. This letter was written to those who knew salvation already. They were not unbelievers, but Christians. The word Hebrews is very meaningful; it means river crossers. The first Hebrew was Abraham. Abraham lived first on the east side of the river. Later he moved to the west side. Because he crossed the Euphrates River to the west side, he became a Hebrew. Hebrews means the river crossers. The book of Hebrews was written to the river crossers. It was written to those who had given up something behind them and were pursuing toward something before them. They left the former world behind, and following God's word, they journeyed on to a new place. God wrote through the apostle to the Hebrews who had forsaken the world and who were standing in a new realm. They were like us who have believed in the Lord Jesus, who have denied the former world, and who are standing today on a new ground and in a new sphere. This letter was written to this group of people.

It is very interesting that such a warning was given to this group of people: "Therefore we ought to give heed more abundantly to the things which have been heard lest perhaps we drift away." This is the first warning; it was given to the Hebrews, the Israelites. Behind them was one world, and before them was another kind of life. God issued a warning to this group of people through the mouth of the apostle. This warning also tells us what the present danger is. The danger is to drift away. Today we will study this warning in detail. It says that we should give heed, and that if we do not give heed, there is the danger of drifting away. This warning is needed because there is the danger ahead, the possibility, of drifting along with the current. The result of drifting along with the current is to miss so great a salvation. Why do we have to give heed? It is because this great salvation has been accomplished by God already, and we have to give heed lest we lose it. We have to give heed because there is the possibility of missing this great salvation. Who is behind this great salvation? It is God, the Lord, and the Holy Spirit; They have distributed it to us.

Let us now consider Hebrews 2:1. We cannot study all four verses. We can study only the first verse, using the other three verses as supplements. Verse 1 says, "Therefore,..." This means that this verse is a continuation of what was spoken of before. Because the Lord Jesus, as spoken of in chapter one, is so lofty, glorious, and excellent, because He is such a God, full of glory, and above all men and even the angels, we have to give heed to the things that we have heard. Because the things that we have heard convey such a Jesus to us, we have to give heed. The Bible is a wonderful book. The Gospel of John is different from all the other Gospels, and the things it records are different from those that are recorded in the other Gospels. When one reads Matthew, Mark, and Luke, he can place them side by side. But one cannot put the Gospel of John alongside the other Gospels; it has to be placed in a different category. It does not record the birth of Jesus by Mary, because it starts from the beginning, from eternity past. Everything it says has to do with things that are in glory, at the beginning, far above all, and before the ages. Our gospel today does not merely tell men, either sinners or believers, about a fisherman who walked by the Sea of Galilee nineteen hundred years ago. Nor do we want to show men merely a carpenter from Nazareth who lived nineteen hundred years ago. Neither are we presenting to men a Jesus who is merely human, a son of man born of Mary. Rather, we are presenting One whom God calls His companion. We want men to know the Lord Jesus as the One who was there from eternity past and who is in the glory now. We have to speak about His relationship with us, and about the things we have seen. He is not a bastard. The Jews thought that He was just a bastard born in the land of Judea nineteen hundred thirty years ago. But this is not what we preach. We begin from eternity past; He was there in eternity past. This is why we have to give heed to the things which we have heard.

Friends, we have to give heed today. But to what do we have to give heed? We have to give heed to the things which have been heard. What have we heard? We have heard the things concerning the Lord Jesus. How much have we heard? I believe those who are sitting here have heard a great deal about the Lord Jesus. We have heard so much. What should we do now?

We ought to give heed! The apostle included himself in this admonition. I do not know who the writer of Hebrews was. Some have said that it was Paul, and others have said that it was Luke. Since it does not tell us who he was, we do not need to say anything about it. God did not tell us his name, and we do not have

to guess it. I will not say who wrote this book. I will not do what the Bible has not done. Let us suppose that it was written by the apostle. We can see how careful the apostle was. He said we and not you. The danger of drifting could happen to the apostle also. There was danger to not only the Hebrews or the new believers. All the river crossers are included; even the apostle was included in this category.

Here we find the Greek word *pararrhueo*. This word has two meanings. The first meaning is to leak away, to slip away; the second meaning is to drift away with the current and become lost. There are different translations of this word. Some convey the sense of drifting, while others convey the sense of leaking. But both meanings are present in the word. Since both meanings are present, we will consider both meanings. This morning, my intention is to show you both meanings of the word.

What is leaking? Here is a pan of water. Suppose there is a hole in the pan, and you have to bring the pan from one end of the room to the other end and back, or suppose you have to bring the water from the well to the kitchen. You have to run quickly because the water will drip away. By the time you have the pan in the house, the water will be gone. The apostle said that we should give heed lest we leak away. This means that since we have heard so many things concerning the Lord Jesus, we should not allow them to leak away. In some respects, I am very unhappy about Christians today. If you ask them the names of their sons, they can tell you right away. They never forget the names of their sons. But if you ask them what the Bible speaks of, what Matthew 1 or Mark 16 speaks of, they will not be able to remember a thing. I am afraid that many people do not have the slightest idea what John 1—3 is about. They may remember something while they are listening to a message in the morning. But by the afternoon, they have forgotten many of the things. Many people have a good memory about many things, but the things concerning Christ always leak away. It is impossible to talk to them about the things concerning Christ. Friends, may I say an honest and seemingly unkind word: this proves where our heart is. We know where our door is and where our home is. Yet many of us are unclear about too many of the crucial matters in the Bible. These things have leaked away. God has often given us the opportunity to hear things about Christ. Yet much of what we have heard has leaked away. We cannot deny this fact before God. We cannot deny the fact that we have forgotten many things concerning Christ. We can say our mind is not sharp enough, but it is not a matter of the mind. If there were something

wrong with our mind, how could we still eat our meals properly and manage our houses properly? Why do we not forget about the things of others? I can accept our negligence of our own affairs or the affairs of others, but I cannot accept our negligence of the things of Christ. We have allowed them to leak away. The problem among Christians today is that they have allowed God's word to slip away from them. When temptations come, everything of the Lord has leaked away. It is a dangerous thing to be leaking. This is not only my danger; it was the apostle's danger also. Temptations often come, and we desperately try to find a verse, but we cannot find one. We cannot find our weapon at the crucial hour, because there is leakage. Why do we never forget the things that our children have asked us about? Why is it that they never leak away from us? This is one reason why so many people fall into the hand of the enemy. If we do not have any leakage, we can immediately deal with Satan. We cannot say, "Satan, I know that you are coming to tempt me. I can do nothing. So please wait, and let me go and find a verse." If we do this, we will fail immediately. In His three dealings with Satan, the Lord Jesus did not slip once. The problem today is that there is the leaking and there is the drifting. We can remember everything except the things of Christ. Friends, I must say an unkind word (we preachers often have to speak unkind words). I have to say that this condition proves that our heart is not on Christ. Our heart is on the things of the world. This is why we have forgotten Christ. If there were no hole, there would be no possibility of any leakage. I do not know what your holes are. In order to leak, there must be holes. Without a hole, there cannot be any leakage. It may be only a small hole, but as long as there is a hole, there is the leakage. Without a hole, there would be no possibility of any leakage. Why is it that many people have allowed the things of Christ to leak away? The only reason is that they have paid too much attention to their family, their money, their children, their possessions, their business, or their education. There has to be something to which your heart is attached, which becomes your hole and results in the leakage. Some may be worse; they may have sins which they have not properly condemned. A few days ago, a missionary told me that he has met a few Christians who are not very honest and who lie a great deal. It is very pitiful that a Christian can lie and be dishonest. We all have to find out where our hole is. I do not know what kind of worldly things or sins have caused us to forget about and lose the things of Christ. We must find out if we have any holes and if the things of Christ have leaked away. If there is

dishonesty or other transgressions in us, we have to deal with them. When the sins are dealt with, the leaks will be stopped.

I know a brother who has a poor memory. If you say two things to him, he will listen to the second and forget about the first. He easily forgets. He has been a Christian for six years. Has his forgetfulness been a hole to him? Not at all. He forgets about everything, but he never allows anything concerning Christ to leak away. If you speak to him about Christ, he remembers it very well. If you speak to him about the world, he forgets about it right away. He will tell you that he cannot remember so many things. I cannot excuse anyone for forgetting about the things concerning Christ, because God's Word does not excuse anyone. Do not think that a clever person with a good memory will remember every spiritual thing; do not think that they have an edge over the not-so-clever ones. There is not such a thing. The wise ones are the same as the foolish ones; both are sinners. There may be differences in secular things, but there is no difference in spiritual things. We cannot judge whether or not a person has had any leakage based on his memory. I can prove to you in many ways that many people with poor memories do not have any leakage, because they are single in following the Lord. You may not have lived in rural communities, and consequently, may not have seen many of these cases. If you go to a country girl, or an old woman from a village, who does not have much knowledge, she may not be able to tell you much about the world. But if you tell her about the Lord, she can understand very well. I met one Christian who was ninety-seven years old. The book he wrote had the third largest circulation in the world. The book with the most circulation is the Bible. The second best-read book is *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Other than these two books, no other book has been more widely circulated than the book this old man wrote, which is called *Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment*. I met this old man once when he was ninety-seven years old. His memory had faded, and many times he could not even recognize his own daughter-in-law. When I went to see him, I greeted him five times, but he could not respond to me. By the sixth or seventh time he was able to respond. All the worldly things had leaked away from him. But the things of the Lord had not leaked away. He had not allowed anything that was revealed to him to leak away. He kept repeating, "I cannot live without Him, and He cannot live without me." This was the only thing he said: "I cannot live without Him, and He cannot live without me." Everything with him was gone. I can say that all the gray matter in his brain was practically gone. But the things of the Lord had not leaked away from him. Was not the woman by the well of

Sychar able to drink to her satisfaction? That Samaritan woman could fill herself up with the living water. But if there had been a hole in her, everything would have been gone from her in two days. I must warn you honestly that you must deal with the things that cause the leakages. Perhaps you are not single enough, or perhaps there is sin in you. I must say a word at the risk of offending you: The way we spend our money often exposes our holes. We allow ourselves to get by with a torn Bible, but we have the money to buy toy cars for our children. This shows the kind of things that we remember and the kind of things that we forget. It shows where our heart is. O Lord, be merciful to us! What we forget in our heart can be expressed in the things that are without. If there is no hole in our heart, there is no possibility of a leakage. Many people are not concerned about the things of Christ. I have to ask you to pardon me again for saying these things, but I feel that I have to say them. Among us, many brothers and sisters are too pitiful. No matter what subject is brought up, they can easily join in the conversation; they have answers for everything and can carry on any conversation. But once you speak of spiritual matters, they immediately become silent, as if this subject is beyond them. Many people are clever in many things; they are astute and clear in their mind and sharp in their memory. But they cannot conduct any conversation on spiritual matters. This is a bad sign. May the Lord be merciful to us. Here are holes! We have allowed everything that we have heard to leak away. We have heard so much concerning Christ. Where have we kept it? May the Lord be merciful to us!

The word pararrhueo not only means leaking; in the original language it also means drifting past. Drifting means that there is no need of exerting any strength. It requires strength to sail a boat. But if one drifts along with the current, there is no need to exert any strength. To drift is to go along with the power of the current. It means to follow the direction of the flow; wherever the water goes, one follows along. Please remember that it is impossible to arrive at one's destiny by drifting. If you want to go to Pu-tong, you have to hold firmly to your rudder and steer forcefully. You cannot drift along. If you drift along, you will never arrive at your destiny. If you want to reach the Kao-chang Temple, you cannot follow the current down to the Wu-soong River mouth. You cannot drift. In order to arrive at a specified destiny, one cannot drift; he has to fight against drifting with singleness of effort. It takes effort to arrive at a destiny. But it does not take any effort to drift; all that one has to do is to lie on the water and float along.

Wherever the current takes him, he follows along. Wherever the water carries him, he goes with it. He goes where the wind carries him. This is drifting. Friends, all spiritual things, all spiritual walks, and everything related to Christ require that we firmly grasp the Lord and also require a conscious effort to oppose Satan, the world, and ourselves. Can we rest and be at ease? Is it easy to be a Christian? Can we be careless and drift with the tide? There is no such cheap thing. Please remember that in order to have a single destiny in our heart, we cannot drift. Let me ask what the goal of our Christian life today is. If we wanted to go to Pu-tong and our boat was moving west, we would surely become worried. If the boat continued in the westward direction, we would never reach Pu-tong and we would miss our destiny. But if we had no intention of going to Pu-tong, and if we had no destiny at all, we would drift along and be satisfied with whatever came along the way.

Every Christian should have an ambition to please the Lord. Needless to say, our ambition is not to please ourselves. We cannot be satisfied with whatever comes along. We have to have a goal and we should press toward the mark, forgetting what is behind and pressing forward to what is before. Many people do not have anything behind them, because they do not have a goal ahead of them. If one does not have a goal, he does not have anything behind him or in front of him. To him every place is the same. In traveling from Nanking to Shanghai, and especially around the Kun-shan district, one sees many buffalo-driven water mills. The water mills are geared to large treadmills, and the buffalos walk around the treadmills day and night, circling them continuously. They are constantly walking, yet they remain in the same place all the time; everywhere is the starting point and everywhere is the ending point; there is no beginning and no ending. They do not know which way is east and which way is west, which way is north and which way is south; they do not have a goal, and all they do is walk around the treadmills. You have to realize that many Christians are the same. They go around in circles every day. There is no front and no back. They are drifting because they do not have a goal. What is the purpose of becoming a Christian? Do you really intend to glorify God as the Scripture says? If you do, you have to show me your faith, and you have to press forward all the way to the end. You have to set your eyes on the goal, and you must resolve to reach your goal. If you see anything contrary to this goal, you have to exert your effort to resist it. If you see the race ahead of you, you will surely forget the things that are behind and press forward toward the goal. Otherwise, you will be drifting. Young men

and women, does your Christian life have a goal? Those who do not have a goal will surely drift. Recently I was in Hong Kong, and I visited a co-worker there who is also my friend and whom I have not seen for a long time. He told me about a very rich man in Hong Kong who is a nominal member of the Anglican Church. He told my friend, "Don't visit me anymore. You are serving God, while I am serving mammon. You should serve God with all your heart and all your soul, and I must serve mammon with all my heart and all my soul. You have your way and I have my way." You can see that although this man took the wrong way, he nevertheless had a goal. He wanted to serve mammon with all his heart and all his soul. What I am the most afraid of is drifting. Today many Christians are drifting. Sometimes they serve God, while at other times they serve mammon. They do not have a direction, and they are drifting. If the water carries them to Pu-tong, they go to Pu-tong, and if the water carries them to Pu-si, they go to Pu-si.

Do you know what the danger of drifting is? Drifting is something that goes on unnoticed. If a whirlwind comes and takes you away, you feel it right away, because the change is sudden. If a large steamer comes and tugs you along, you feel it immediately. Drifting, however, goes on unconsciously. But drifting always goes from a higher place to a lower place. There is no question about the direction; it is always from the higher place to the lower place, from the upper ground to the lower ground. Drifting does not take any effort. Moreover, it does not take any feeling. A boat ride from here to Wu-soong takes an hour or more. But if one drifts along, it may take six or more hours. Drifting is slow, and there is not much difference between one minute and the next. There is not much difference in three or five minutes. But in six hours, one can find himself in Wu-soong and in a very different place. Many brothers have not committed any gross sins; they are still quite good. They still read the Bible, come to meetings, offer money, and seem to be the same as before. But after one day, two days, one month, two months, in three or four years, they are very different. One does not backslide suddenly or instantly. There is no such thing as an instant backsliding. No spiritual experience occurs suddenly; everything manifests itself in time. It is a very bad thing to drift along. In the end everything drifts away. You may not have committed any gross sins, but you have backslidden imperceptibly. Perhaps nothing will manifest itself immediately, and perhaps no one sees much of a difference in your Christian life. But you must remember that drifting will never carry you upward; it always carries you downward. Conditions deteriorate day

after day, one day at a time. You may not feel this deterioration, but others can feel it already. All pianists know the truth in the adage: "If a man does not practice his piano for a day, he knows it. If he does not practice for two days, his wife knows it. If he does not practice for three days, the whole world knows it." A little slippage every day will eventually manifest itself. In the beginning, there is very little difference, but in the end, the difference will become very great. God requires that we live before Him every day. Every day, we have to exercise our spiritual strength, and like the apostle, we have to exercise all our inner strength and the power of our spirit and our soul to stand fast and not drift. If we do this, we will see some progress in spiritual matters. If Satan gave us the whole world in one instant, we would not take it. What he does instead is to cause us to stand still and not advance, to gradually drift along with the tide, until one day we fall. I am convinced that Satan is not hasty in dragging us into gross sins. If Satan tried to induce you to kill a man today, you would surely not do it. He will not induce you to commit any great sins. He always comes slowly. Today he will put a hatred within you. Tomorrow he will put a jealousy within you. Perhaps after twenty years, you will have the thought of killing someone. (Please be reminded that Satan is very patient. His patience far exceeds our patience.) It is not inconceivable for us to do such a thing. Every day we need spiritual strength, and we need to maintain the condition that we had at the beginning. God's hand will preserve us. Do not become careless just because today is more or less the same as yesterday. A little bit of difference every day will become a big difference in ten or twenty years' time. May the Lord be merciful to those Christians who think that everything is more or less the same! Drifting is being without a goal. It is not feeling anything. But the result of drifting is always a downward trend; one always travels from a higher ground to a lower ground. We must be clear that no one can drift from the Wu-soong River mouth to the Kao-chang Temple. The current will never carry one upward. No one can drift from the mouth of the Yangtze River to Wu-han. This is impossible. It is impossible for you to expect growth in your spiritual life if you are drifting. I have never seen a person who does not exercise his will experience any progress. D.L. Moody said that he never saw a lazy person be saved. I can also say that I have never seen a lazy person who grows. It may be possible to strike a fortune by being lazy, but being lazy will certainly not work in spiritual matters. If one does not press forward, he will receive nothing. If one is not hungry, he will not be satisfied. If one does not pray and fast before the Lord, he cannot expect to receive

anything. The word perhaps is not applicable here. Drifting is always downward; never think that perhaps one can drift upward. To hope that things will get better in a few days, that the weather will get better in a few days, and that you will feel better is to drift along.

Let us consider some of the dangers a Christian can face. According to the apostle, the greatest dangers are to drift and to leak. Let us take this first warning as our reminder. Everyone can leak, and everyone can drift. We can lose everything that God has given to us by leaking, and we can miss everything that God will give to us by drifting. Pararrhueo means to slide past or miss. You may want to board a big ship moored in the middle of the Whampoa River. When your little boat tries to come close to the ship, the current will be too strong, and you will not be able to resist the current. It will be impossible to fight the current, and you will slide past the ship. This is what the apostle meant. You follow the tide and do not resist the power of the current. As a result, you miss your target. Therefore, we have to find out where our leakage is. If we continue to drift, we will miss our mark. Our present danger lies in our leaking and drifting. This is why the apostle told us to give heed and not to be careless. A careless man cannot be a government official. A careless woman cannot be a good mother. A careless person cannot be a good child or a good teacher, and a careless person cannot be a proper Christian. No careless person can be a proper Christian. All careless people fail to see the danger of drifting and leaking. Only the people who give heed will have the eyes to see, and only they will grow spiritually. We do not give heed enough, and we are too careless concerning spiritual matters. This is why we often slide back gradually. For this reason, the apostle exhorted us to give heed more abundantly to the things that have been heard. Paul said that we have to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). We have to work out our own salvation by cultivating a fear for our own weakness and a fear for God. Many Christians are fearful of nothing today. In spiritual matters, fear is one thing that is very necessary. If we live in jesting and laughter every day and if we are careless in everything, without seeing the need of fearing God, and if we do not have any feeling for anything, but are nonchalant and unconcerned about spiritual matters and ignorant of their value to us, we have not seen our need and have not realized our danger.

What is the result of such dangers? The following verses tell us where we will drift to and what we will lose. We may think that to drift and to leak are not

serious. But the apostle warned us soberly concerning what we will lose by drifting and leaking this way. What did the apostle say? Verse 3 says, "How shall we escape if we have neglected so great a salvation." Sin is present. How shall we escape? What are we neglecting? We are neglecting so great a salvation. In a minute we will see what this great salvation is. Perhaps we can touch upon it briefly now. Many sinners perish because they would not let go of one meal. Many others perish because they refuse to let go of a little sleep. There are many instances like these. Sometimes a gospel meeting starts at six, and a sinner needs to eat at half past six. Because of his meal, he perishes. He has neglected so great a salvation. Sometimes a gospel meeting starts at eight, but a person needs to go to sleep early. As a result he misses his opportunity again. But many Christians are negligent also. They have allowed the gospel which they have heard and the things of Christ which they have heard to leak away. They do not care if these things have leaked away. The result is that they miss so great a salvation.

What is the salvation spoken of in the book of Hebrews? I dare not say anything about the salvation mentioned in the other books. But the salvation spoken of in the book of Hebrews is a salvation that saves us to the uttermost. Jesus lives forever and will save us to the uttermost (7:25). This is an uttermost salvation. What is this salvation? This salvation is not just the forgiveness of sin through the blood shed by the Lord Jesus on the cross, and it is not just deliverance from hell into heaven. Of course, the salvation in Hebrews includes the cross. But it has to do particularly with us becoming a fully saved person while living on earth, and with our receiving the glory together with Christ in the millennium. Let me ask you a question. Suppose a brother has done something which is not very proper. His family may say, "Would one who believes in Jesus do such a thing also?" Although this person is not going to perish again, and although he will not become unsaved, one does not find him different from other men; there is no distinction in him. He is standing on the ground of an unsaved person. Suppose you have a bad temper, and you have believed in the Lord. You have heard about the Lord Jesus being your overcoming life. Yet this matter has slipped away from you. Because you have drifted, you do not have the experience of it, and you lose your temper again. What will your classmates and colleagues think of you? They will think that you are the same as they are, and that you lose your temper just the same. The unbelievers will say that such a believer still loses his temper, and is no different from anyone else. In this way, you have neglected so

great a salvation. You have not allowed the Lord to save you out of the sin of your temper. You have not distinguished yourself from the unbelievers, and have missed so great a salvation. Suppose there are many clerks working in a shop. It is a small thing in the world to receive a little bribe. But suppose you are one of the clerks. If you are the same as the others and are not separated from them, you have neglected so great a salvation. When unbelievers take a taxi, they often argue with the drivers. But if you do the same thing, others will say that you are the same as everyone else. They will not sense your difference among them, and you will miss your great salvation. You have not shown your distinction among them in these matters. Among us there are many who are children to their parents. Last night I heard someone say that he did not agree with his mother because she was not fair. The worst thing for a mother to find is that her children complain that she is not fair. Before a mother is saved, her children can say such a thing about her. But what happens now that she is saved? If her children still say the same thing about her, and if she has not changed at all, she has missed so great a salvation. Sometimes people say, "Your children are the same as my children. There is not much difference." When this happens, you have lost your testimony. Many times, we would rather be ridiculed than lose our distinction before our family. They can be wrong, but we must not be wrong. Our difference and our contrast with others is our strongest testimony. I know of one mother who is much opposed by her children, only because she wants them to be different from others. But she insisted that her children be different from the time they were very young. This is the proper way for children in Christian families to be; they are different from the whole world around them. That mother has been a real Christian. She has not neglected so great a salvation. She is distinct, and she maintains her testimony. We have to be afraid of not being distinct. We have to be different from the world in the way we dress, in the way we handle affairs, and in the way we use our money and our time. You have to be different from the world even in the way you use your towel. Please remember that we should never drift or slip with respect to God's gospel. We have to preserve ourselves from drifting away from so great a salvation. God's salvation not only includes our life in this age, but it includes the kingdom and being in glory with the Lord in the millennium. Salvation is not just for this age; it is for the coming kingdom as well. In order for us to have so great a salvation, and share in the glory of the kingdom, we have to preserve our distinctiveness and should not drift or slip.

Finally, let us consider this whole passage briefly. We will read from verse 1 on. "Therefore we ought to give heed more abundantly to the things which have been heard..." We have to give heed to the things which have been heard, which are the things concerning Christ, lest we drift away, lose, or leak away. We must not leak away or drift away, because there is "the word spoken through angels," which is the Old Testament law. The law was ordained through angels (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). Such a word through the angels should not be transgressed against or disobeyed. (To transgress is on the positive side, while to disobey is on the negative side.) "Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense." How much more serious will it be if we neglect so great a salvation? This salvation is different from anything else in the whole world. It was not preached by men, but by the Son of God; it was conveyed to us by the glorious Son of God. How shall we escape if we have neglected so great a salvation? We cannot escape, because this salvation had its beginning in being spoken by the Lord, which is different from the law described in verse 2. If the law was spoken through the angels, and those who transgressed against it suffered great punishment, "how shall we escape if we have neglected so great a salvation, which, having had its beginning in being spoken by the Lord, has been confirmed to us by those who heard, God bearing witness with them both by signs and wonders and by various works of power and by distributions of the Holy Spirit according to His will"? This is the apostle's warning to us. He exhorts us not to drift or leak away. This is the Lord's own word to us, and it is testified to by God and the Holy Spirit. May the Lord be gracious to us, that we not be careless in the things which we have heard from God. Never think that only those who have committed gross sins have backslidden. We should not drift, and we should not leak away!

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