

TAKING THE LEAD AS ELDERS AND RESPONSIBLE ONES

(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Three

Taking the Lead to Minister Life

Scripture Reading: 1 John 5:14-17; 2 Cor. 1:9; 4:10-12; Josh. 3:17; 4:10, 17

I. We not only have eternal life and enjoy eternal life, but we can also minister this life to other members of the Body—1 John 5:14-17:

- A. God wants us to have life, and He wants His life to flow out of us—vv. 11-13; John 3:15; 7:37-39:
 - 1. When we received the Lord's life, we were joined to the fountain of life—Psa. 36:8-9; John 3:15; 4:14.
 - 2. The living water is not only within us, but it also has become rivers of living water, flowing out of us into others and supplying them with life and satisfying their thirst—7:37-39:
 - a. God is seeking those into whom He can dispense Christ's life more and more so that they can supply others with His life—Rom. 8:2, 6, 10-11.
 - b. Life needs channels, and God wants us to be the channels through which His life can flow into others—1 John 1:1-2.
 - 3. The eternal life within us can overcome death both in ourselves and in other members of the church—3:14; Matt. 16:18.
- B. First John 5:16 refers to the ministering of life, to the imparting of life; when we have a surplus of life, we can minister life to others:
 - 1. In verse 16 *he shall ask* and *he will give* refer to a believer who is abiding in the Lord and who is one with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17), indicating that such a believer can become the means, the channel, by which God's life-giving Spirit can give life to others; this is a matter of the ministering of life in the fellowship of the divine life.
 - 2. In order to be those who can give, impart, life to others, we must abide in the divine life and live and have our being in the divine life—1 John 1:1-7:
 - a. We need to experience and enjoy the eternal life within us, and we need to minister this life by being a channel through which eternal life can flow to other members of the Body—5:11-13, 16.
 - b. If we would be a channel for eternal life to flow out to others, we must be deep in the Lord, and we must know the Lord's heart by being in His heart—Psa. 25:14; Gen. 18:17, 22-33; Amos 3:7.

II. The building up of the church requires the ministry of life—2 Cor. 4:12:

- A. Throughout its history the church has been divided by gifts, but it cannot be divided by the ministry of life; if we pay our full attention to the ministry of life, we will always be kept in oneness—1 Cor. 12:4-11; 2 Cor. 3:6; 4:1.
- B. The ministry of life is to minister as life the Christ whom we have experienced—1:3-4:

1. The ministry comes out by the working of the cross; it is by the way of the cross that we have the riches of Christ as life to minister to others—4:12.
2. How much life and how much reality of the riches of Christ we can minister depends upon how much revelation we have received and how much we have suffered for what has been revealed to us—Eph. 3:8.

III. If we would minister life, we need to know, experience, and gain God as the God of resurrection—Rom. 4:17; 2 Cor. 1:9; John 11:25:

- A. God is working through the cross to terminate us, to bring us to an end, so that we will no longer trust in ourselves but in the God of resurrection—2 Cor. 1:9.
- B. When the God of resurrection works in us, His life and nature are wrought into us—4:16.
- C. The killing of the cross results in the manifestation of resurrection life—vv. 10-12:
 1. The putting to death of Jesus destroys the natural man, the outer man, and the flesh, with the result that the inner man is given the opportunity to develop and be renewed to live out the resurrection life—v. 16.
 2. All the work that the Lord is doing on us is to destroy our outer, natural man so that we can live out the life of Christ from within us; this is the deepest thought in the New Testament concerning the life of a Christian—John 12:24-26; Phil. 1:21a.
 3. Remaining in the death of Christ and being conformed to His death is a profound principle of the Christian life—Rom. 6:4-5; Phil. 3:10:
 - a. When we remain in the death of Christ, we experience the power of Christ's resurrection—vv. 10-11; Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 1:8-10; 4:14.
 - b. The more we die with Christ in this way, the more His resurrection power will be manifested in us and the more we will be able to minister life to the Body of Christ—John 11:25.
 4. Our natural strength and ability need to be dealt with by the cross so that they may become useful in resurrection for the ministry of life—Phil. 3:3.
- D. The budding, blossoming, fruit-yielding rod signifies the resurrection life of Christ for us to minister life to the Body—Num. 17:8.

IV. Like the apostles, we minister life by dying—2 Cor. 4:10-12; Josh. 3:17; 4:10, 17:

- A. "So then death operates in us, but life in you"—2 Cor. 4:12:
 1. The work of the apostles is the work of death operating in them so that life may operate in the believers; this is the real work of the new covenant ministry—3:6; 4:10-12.
 2. In the Lord's recovery we need to die in order that life may work in others:
 - a. When we are under the killing of the Lord's death, His resurrection life is imparted through us into others—vv. 10-12; Phil. 3:10.
 - b. The impartation of life into others is always the issue of our suffering the killing of the cross—1 John 5:16; John 12:24-26.
 - c. The Lord does not need us to accomplish a work for Him; He needs us to die—1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 1:9.

- d. If we die, life will work in others; we minister life to others by dying—4:12.
- B. “The priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant of Jehovah stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all Israel was crossing over on dry ground, until all the nation had completely crossed over the Jordan”—Josh. 3:17:
1. God put the priests in the place of death so that all Israel would have a way into the land of life; the priests were the first ones to go into the water and the last ones to come up out of the water—vv. 11-17; 4:10, 17.
 2. Before others can receive life, God must first put us in the place of death so that death may operate in us and life in others; this is to minister life by dying—2 Cor. 4:12.
 3. Today God is seeking those who are willing to stand in the place of death in order that the church may find the way of life.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE MINISTRY OF LIFE FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

Throughout its history the church has always been divided by gifts. But it can never be divided by the ministry. If we focus our attention on the gifts, we will be divided within a short time. But if we forget about the gifts and pay our full attention to the ministry of life, we will always be kept in oneness. This is why we stress again and again that the gifts cannot build up a local church, but the ministry can.

If you are a Christian worker and you are always trying to argue with others, this proves that you merely have a gift. People with the ministry of life will never argue. Argument goes along with gifts and doctrinal teachings. If we pay our attention to gifts and teachings, we will argue. But if we focus our attention on the ministry of life, we will not have anything to argue about. Gifts and teachings with doctrinal debates and arguments tear down the local church. The local church can be built up only by the ministry of life. Some may not like noisy meetings, whereas others do. We should not debate about this. What we need is the life of Christ, not a certain kind of meeting. The ministry of life does not come out of the doctrinal study and teaching of the Bible. It comes out of sufferings. If you are really in the hand of the Lord, the Lord will form a ministry with you through all kinds of sufferings.

It is so strange and wonderful that there is nothing mentioned about the gifts in 2 Corinthians. Instead, there is a list of Paul’s sufferings in chapter 1, chapter 4, chapter 6, and chapter 11. Then in chapter 12 he told us of such a subjective suffering—a thorn in the flesh. He asked the Lord particularly to take this away, but the Lord refused. There would be no miracle, no divine healing. Instead, there would be suffering. Through the suffering, Paul experienced the Lord as the sufficient grace, which was the perfect power in his weakness. Eventually, Paul learned to say, “I will rather boast in my weaknesses” (12:9). He also said, “I am well pleased in weaknesses, in insults, in necessities, in persecutions and distresses, on behalf of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am powerful” (v. 10). This is the way to have the growth in life so that a ministry might be produced for the building up of the Body of Christ.

What is needed for the building up of a local church is the ministry of life, not the gifts. In order to illustrate this point, I would like to tell a story about Brother Watchman Nee and an elder sister by the name of Miss Barber, who helped him very much. As a young man, Brother Nee always admired good speakers. When he and Miss Barber went to hear a few speakers,

Brother Nee told her how wonderful they were. But Miss Barber would say, “That is just doctrine with human eloquence. There is no life there.” In other words, there was no ministry with these ones.

Brother Nee told me this at the beginning of my service in the Lord because he was trying to help me to know the difference between a ministry and a gift, that is, between the utterance of something of life and human eloquence. A person may be born with the gift of eloquence, but his speaking may be merely sounding brass. It is nice for listening, but there is no content of Christ as life. Another may be awkward in his speech, but you realize that there is something weighty with what he speaks because he has the ministry of life. This can come only out of the sufferings. The building up of the church needs this ministry of life. We all need to continue in the growth in life so that we may have more ministries among us for the building up of the church. (*The Experience of Christ as Life for the Building Up of the Church*, pp. 128-129)

A MINISTRY THAT SUPPLIES LIFE

The Gospel of John is a book that is particularly devoted to life. Chapter three speaks of regeneration through water. This water is for burying the old man. In chapter four the Lord says, “But the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water gushing up into eternal life” (v. 14). This water is the gushing forth of God’s life within man. When we received the Lord, His life entered into us. This is like putting a fountain within us. When we received the Lord’s life, we were joined to the fountain of life. In chapter seven the living water is not only in us, but it also has become rivers of living water. It flows out of us into others and supplies others with life and satisfies their thirst. God is not satisfied with us only having His life; He wants His life to flow out of us.

Miss Barber was such a person. As soon as others touched her, they touched life. If you sat down and fellowshiped with her for a minute or two, you would feel life flowing out of her. If a person with life sits beside you, his very presence will bring life to you. Today God is seeking people into whom He can dispense Christ’s life more and more so that they can supply others with His life. Life needs channels, and God wants men to be the channels through which His life can flow to others. May the Lord gain us so that we can have a life-supplying ministry and supply others with life. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 44, p. 851)

ASKING AND GIVING LIFE

In 1 John 5:16 John comes to his point in this section: “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask and he will give life to him, to those sinning not unto death. There is sin unto death; I do not say that he should make request concerning that.” Literally, the Greek word rendered “unto” in this verse means toward. Here John is saying that if anyone sees his brother, someone close to him in the Lord, sinning a sin not unto death, he should ask concerning that one. The word “ask” here must refer to a prayer made when we are abiding in fellowship with God.

No doubt, “he shall ask” refers to the one who sees his brother sinning a sin not unto death. But to whom does “he will give life” refer? There is a problem with the second “he” in this verse. Some translations capitalize the second “he” and thereby make it refer to the Lord. Actually, in both cases “he” refers to the same person, that is, to the one who sees his brother sinning and who asks concerning him.

The subject of “will give life” is still he, the subject of the first predicate “shall ask.” This indicates that the asker will give life to the one asked for. This does not mean that the asker has life of himself and can give life by himself to others. It means such an asker, who is

abiding in the Lord, who is one with the Lord, and who is asking in one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17), becomes the means through which God's life-giving Spirit can give life to the one he asks for. This is a matter of life-imparting in the fellowship of the divine life. To be one who can give life to others, we must abide in the divine life and walk, live, and have our being in the divine life. In James 5:14-16 the prayer is for healing; here the prayer is for life-imparting.

The vital point here is that if we would pray for a brother according to what is described in verse 16, we need to be one with the Lord. We must abide in the Lord and ask in one spirit with Him. Because we are so one with the Lord, we can become the means, the channel, through which God's life-giving Spirit can impart life to the one for whom we ask. This imparting of life takes place in the fellowship of the divine life.

Undoubtedly, "life" in verse 16 refers to spiritual life imparted into the one asked for through the prayer of the asker. However, according to the context, this spiritual life will also rescue the physical body of the one asked for from the danger of suffering death because of his sinning (see James 5:15). (*Life-study of 1 John*, pp. 330-331)

LIFE-IMPARTING IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE DIVINE LIFE

What is described in 1 John 5:14-17 concerning the life-giving petition can be experienced only by those who are deep in the Lord. In verse 14 John speaks of prayer that is according to God's will. In order to pray this kind of prayer, we must be one with the Lord. If we are deeply one with Him, we shall know His will, and we shall also know the situation of the one who is sinning. Because this one is our brother, someone very close to us in the Lord, we shall know his real situation before the Lord. This matter is deep.

If you are one with the Lord and know a sinning brother's condition and situation before the Lord, you will then know the Lord's will and be able to pray according to His will. Because you know the Lord's will, you will also know whether or not this brother will die because of his sin.

These verses indicate that we who have eternal life can pass this life on to others. This means that we can be a channel through which eternal life is supplied to others. We can be a channel for eternal life to flow out of us and into others. Verse 16 refers to this. In this verse the one who asks is also the one who gives life to the sinning brother. This indicates that the one who asks will give life to the one concerning whom he asks. The asker, who is abiding in the Lord, who is one with the Lord, and who is asking in one spirit with the Lord, becomes the means through which God's life-giving Spirit can give life to the one for whom he asks. This is a matter of life-imparting in the fellowship of the divine life.

My burden in this message is to show you that the eternal life within us is real and practical. On the one hand, we can enjoy this eternal life within us. On the other hand, we can pass on this eternal life to others. We can be a channel for eternal life to flow out from us, or through us, to others. However, the experience of being a channel for eternal life to flow out to others is a deep matter. This cannot be done in a superficial way. If we would be a channel for eternal life to flow out to others, we must be deep in the Lord, and we must know the Lord's heart by being in His heart. If we have entered into the Lord to such a degree, spontaneously we shall know the Lord's will concerning a brother close to us who has sinned. Because we know the Lord's will concerning the brother's situation, we shall know how to pray for him.

In 5:14-17 John shows us that eternal life is practical and can be experienced by us in a deep way. In these verses we see the need to live in the divine life to such an extent that we are absolutely one with the Lord. Then as we pray we shall know whether or not there is the

anointing in our prayer. If there is the anointing, we should go on to pray for a brother according to the anointing. But if there is no anointing, we may be praying in ourselves. When we have these experiences, we know that eternal life is real and practical. (*Life-study of 1 John*, pp. 337-339)