

THE EXPERIENCE, GROWTH, AND MINISTRY OF LIFE FOR THE BODY

(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Three

The Urgent Need of the Growth of Life and Growing in Life by Dealing with the Heart

Scripture Reading: Eph. 4:13, 15-16; 1 Cor. 3:6; Matt. 5:8; Jer. 17:9; Eph. 3:17

- I. Among us in the Lord's recovery, there is an urgent need of the growth of life; if we lack the growth of life, there will be no way for the recovery to go on, and eventually we will drift back into the situation of Christianity and become a repetition of the sad history of Christianity—Eph. 4:11-16; Matt. 13:31-33; 2 Tim. 3:1-4.**
- II. The most significant thing with life is growth—Eph. 4:13, 15-16:**
 - A. If there is no growth, it either means that there is no life or that there is something wrong; we need to grow in life—1 Cor. 3:6; 14:20; 16:13.
 - B. The best way to solve the problems among saints in a local church is to turn their attention to the growth of life—John 6:57; 1 Pet. 2:2-3.
 - C. The growth of life is the primary matter in the practice of the church life; hence, we should pay attention to the growth of life—Eph. 4:13, 15-16.
- III. We need to know what the growth of life is:**
 - A. The growth of life is the increase of the element of God within us until we are filled unto all the fullness of God—3:19.
 - B. The growth of life is the increase of the measure of the stature of Christ; the more we love Christ and pursue Christ, allowing Christ to live in us and to gain us, the more the measure of the stature of Christ will increase within us; this is the real growth of life—Gal. 2:20; 4:19; Eph. 3:17; 4:13.
 - C. The growth of life is the expanding of the ground of the Holy Spirit within us; when we pursue the working of the Holy Spirit within us and obey the teaching of the Holy Spirit within us as the anointing, the Holy Spirit can expand His ground extensively, and thus the divine life within us will grow to a great extent—Rom. 8:11; Eph. 5:18; 1 John 2:20, 27.
 - D. The growth of life is the decrease of the human element, that is, the decrease of the flavor of man and the increase of the flavor of God—Matt. 16:25; John 12:25.
 - E. The growth of life is the breaking of the natural life, that is, the breaking of our skills, ability, and capacity; if we desire to grow in life, our gifts must be stripped by God, and our shell of godliness and piety must be broken by God—2 Cor. 4:16-17.
 - F. The growth of life is the subduing of every part of the soul; the more our soul is subdued, the more life grows; and the more our soul decreases, the more life increases—John 12:24-25.
- IV. The proper growth of life comes only from direct, personal contact with the Lord—2 Cor. 3:18:**

- A. The growth of life comes from His living enlightenment and from His instant pointing out of things within our being—1 John 1:5:
 - 1. Then in His presence we will respond, “Lord, I love You. Lord, I take You according to Your enlightenment. I take You according to Your instant, present shining.”
 - 2. This kind of prayer will cause the growth of life, and we will take a great step in the growth of life—1 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 4:15.
 - B. We all need to go to the Lord and have direct contact with Him purposely and particularly concerning the growth of life; if we do this, something within us will be killed and eliminated, and the growth of life will come—Psa. 36:9.
- V. We grow in life by dealing with the heart—Matt. 5:8; James 4:8; Eph. 3:17:**
- A. After we receive Christ into our spirit, we need to be pure in heart because our heart is the field where Christ can grow and spread—1 Cor. 6:17; Matt. 5:3, 8:
 - 1. Christ has been sown into our spirit in order to grow and spread in our heart; the growth of life is the spreading of Christ in our heart—Eph. 3:17.
 - 2. Christ desires to make His home in our heart and to take possession of every part of our inner being—v. 17.
 - 3. The problem that limits the growth of many believers is in their heart—Matt. 6:21; 12:34-35; 13:15; 15:8; 22:37.
 - 4. If we have a problem with our heart or if our heart is wrong, the Lord will have no way to spread in us—15:8:
 - a. In the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:3-8 and 18-23, the Lord made it clear that the seed was unable to grow in the first three kinds of hearts because they had no room for the seed to grow and spread.
 - b. If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that we have withheld room in our heart from the Lord.
 - c. If Christ as the seed of life is to grow in our heart, we need to have a pure and unoccupied heart, a heart in which every inch is given to Christ so that He can spread within us; His spreading is the growth of life—5:8; Eph. 3:17.
 - B. “Purify your hearts, you doubled-souled!”—James 4:8:
 - 1. To purify our heart is to make our heart single, having only one goal; when we have more than one goal, our heart is impure and we are double-souled—Matt. 5:8.
 - 2. In order for our heart to be single and pure, we need to have a unique goal—God Himself—v. 8; Mark 12:30.
 - 3. To purify our heart, we need grace; we need to receive the Lord’s grace to deal with our heart continually—Heb. 13:9; 1 Cor. 15:10.
 - 4. We need to see the condition of our heart and deal with our heart so that the Lord will have the way to spread within us—Matt. 6:21; 15:8.
 - C. Our dealing with our heart is according to the Lord’s shining, and His shining is gradual; He progressively intensifies His shining as we deal with the items that He brings to light, so that each time our heart is more thoroughly examined and purified—2 Cor. 4:6; 1 John 1:5; Rev. 4:5.

- D. “The heart is deceitful above all things, / And it is incurable; / Who can know it?”—Jer. 17:9:
1. It is difficult to deal with our heart because our heart is deceitful.
 2. Part of the deceitfulness of our heart is manifested in our self-pity and self-love; because we love ourselves and sympathize with ourselves so much, it is difficult for the Lord to spread within us—2 Tim. 3:2.
 3. The Lord may have been in our spirit for a long time, but because our heart is complicated, mixed, confused, and deceitful, He may not have had the opportunity to spread from our spirit into our heart—4:22; Jer. 17:9; Eph. 3:17.
- E. The genuine growth of life is not our growth but Christ’s growth in us—Col. 2:19:
1. Because such growth depends on our heart, we need to deal with our heart so that Christ will have a way to grow within us—James 4:8; Matt. 5:8; Eph. 3:17.
 2. The Lord as the life-giving Spirit has entered into our spirit, and He is presently waiting in our spirit for the opportunity to spread Himself into our heart—John 3:6; 1 Cor. 6:17; Eph. 3:17; 1 Thes. 3:13.
 3. This spreading is His growth in us, and His growth in us is our genuine growth in life—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

GROWING IN LIFE BY DEALING WITH THE HEART

God’s writing of His laws into our inward parts goes together with our confession under His shining in our spirit through our conscience. The more we confess our failures, wrongdoings, and weaknesses, the more we afford God the opportunity to move in us and work in us in order to write His elements into our inward parts. All the divine elements that have been worked into our inward parts spontaneously become the inner regulating laws. It is in this way that God’s divine essence eventually becomes our inner law regulating us all the time. Such a law is according to God’s holy nature because it is of God’s divine element.

God’s divine element is God’s nature, and God’s nature is holiness. When God works His divine element into us, our heart is established, firmly grounded, in holiness as God’s nature (1 Thes. 3:13). This kind of holiness is not a performance or a pretense; rather, it is God’s divine element that has been wrought into us. When our heart is established in holiness, we have a new heart (Ezek. 36:26).

THE POSITION AND FUNCTION OF THE HEART

The Heart Being the Entrance and Exit of Our Being

In this chapter we will consider the position and function of the heart. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, / For from it are the issues of life.” The word *issues* here connotes source as well as issue, or going out. Out of our heart come all the issues, the goings out, of our daily life (cf. Matt. 12:34-35; 15:18-19). The fountain, the source, of what we are, of our real being, flows out of our heart. Our heart is the exit as well as the entrance of our being. Thus, our heart spontaneously

becomes the guard, the watch, of our being. We need to keep our heart with all vigilance, for to keep our heart is to keep, to guard, our entire being.

When a security officer guards a building, his main position is at the entrance of the building. Likewise, when we go to bed at night or leave our home, we ensure that the door is locked. This illustrates the importance of the entrance and the exit when it comes to guarding something of value. If we would guard our being, we should not guard only our mouth, eyes, or ears but also our heart, because our heart is the passageway into and out of our being. To neglect our heart is similar to leaving the door to our house ajar when we go to bed or leave the house. If we do this, many undesirable things may come in. When we neglect our heart, we leave a way for all the little “devils” to come into our heart. This is why the book of Proverbs charges us to keep our heart with all vigilance. Whenever we lock the doors of our house, we need to be reminded that we need to “lock” our heart so that all the “germs” can be kept out of our being.

Although we often need to close our heart, we also need to learn to open our heart. We need to shut our heart toward the devil but open our heart to the Lord. In keeping, or guarding, our heart, we need to learn how to close our heart to the enemy and open it to the Lord. In order to be proper and living Christians, we need a heart that is easy to shut to all the negative things and willing to open to the Lord, to the church, to the saints, and to the heavenly things.

The Fellowship of Life and the Heart

First John 1:1-3 says, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (And the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and report to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us); that which we have seen and heard we report also to you that you also may have fellowship with us, and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” These verses speak first of the divine life as manifested in Christ as the Word of life, and then of the fellowship of life. The Gospel of John is a book on life, whereas the first Epistle of John is a book on the fellowship of life. At the beginning of this Epistle, life is testified, announced, and proclaimed (vv. 1-2). When this life is received, it brings with it fellowship (v. 3). Thus, according to 1 John 1, life brings in fellowship.

The Fellowship of Life

John’s first Epistle is not doctrinal; it was written according to the experience of life. After we receive the Lord as life, we have a tendency and a desire to contact the Lord and to contact other believers. This tendency and desire are the fellowship that comes with life. Life produces fellowship, and fellowship comes out of life.

Verses 5 and 6 say, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and are not practicing the truth.” When we are in the fellowship of life, our condition is exposed

and brought into the light. Thus, fellowship brings in light. Many times when we contact the saints individually or in small groups, or when we attend the church meetings, we sense that there is light. We may walk into a room where some saints are having fellowship, and although none of the saints may say anything concerning our situation, there will be the shining of light, and we may have the sense that we have been brought out of darkness into light. The issue of fellowship is light, and light shines on and exposes our situation.

The shining of light is even more intense when we contact the Lord directly. Sometimes we may not feel that we are wrong in anything, but as soon as we contact the Lord, light shines and exposes our need for the cleansing blood. First John 1:7 says, “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin.” Thus, in 1 John 1 there is a progression consisting of life, fellowship, light, and the blood. Life issues in fellowship, fellowship brings us into the light, and light exposes our situation, causing us to confess our sins and apply the cleansing blood of Jesus, God’s Son.

After we experience the cleansing of the blood in chapter 1, we have the anointing in chapter 2 (vv. 20, 27). When there is the application, the sprinkling, of the blood, there is the anointing (Exo. 29:20-21; Lev. 8:23-24, 30). Thus, life brings in fellowship; the shining of light comes from fellowship; light exposes the need for the blood; and the sprinkling of the blood paves the way for the application of the anointing. These five items—life, fellowship, light, the blood, and the anointing—go together in a continual cycle.

The Fellowship of Life Being Guarded by the Heart

In the past we emphasized the relationship between the divine Spirit, our human spirit, and the fellowship of life, but we have not considered the relationship between the fellowship of life and our heart. As a result, many among us may think that the heart has nothing to do with life or fellowship. Contrary to this concept, 1 John shows that the fellowship of life is preserved and guarded by our heart. After the anointing is spoken of in 1 John 2:20 and 27, chapter 3 speaks concerning the heart. Verses 20 and 21 say, “If our heart blames us, it is because God is greater than our heart and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not blame us, we have boldness toward God.” The conscience in our heart is the representative of God’s ruling within us. If our conscience condemns us, surely God, who is greater than His representative and knows all things, will condemn us. The consciousness of condemnation in our conscience, which is a part not only of our spirit but also of our heart (Heb. 10:22), alerts us to the danger of breaking our fellowship with God. If we attend to this, it will be a help to our fellowship with God and will keep us abiding in the Lord.

Although some Christian teachers have spoken concerning the fellowship of life in 1 John, and others have written good books concerning the anointing and the blood, I have never heard a message or read a book that puts life and the fellowship of life together with the heart. Nevertheless, 1 John shows that the fellowship of

life is preserved and kept by our heart. If our heart is wrong, our fellowship with the Lord will be broken. First John 3:19 says that we need to persuade our heart before God. This means that we need to guard our heart by keeping it free from accusation and condemnation. This is to maintain a good conscience, a conscience without offense (1 Tim. 1:5, 19; Acts 24:16), so that our heart may be conciliated, convinced, assured, and tranquilized. Any condemnation in our heart indicates that our heart is not being properly guarded.

Although fellowship is a matter in the spirit (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1), it is guarded by the heart. Many dear saints have suffered the loss of broken fellowship because they neglected the matter of keeping their heart with all vigilance. We need to pay attention to the function of the heart in 1 John. Chapter 1 speaks concerning the fellowship of life, chapter 2 speaks concerning the anointing, and chapter 3 speaks concerning a proper heart, which is needed to maintain our fellowship with God. If we are careless and do not pay attention to our heart, we may feel that we are not wrong in anything and that we have no condemnation in our heart, but if we would call on the name of the Lord for some time, we would realize that our conscience is full of condemnation. The accusation in our conscience is the condemnation in our heart, because our conscience is a part of our heart. Hebrews 10:22 says, "Let us come forward to the Holy of Holies with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." An evil conscience is a conscience full of accusation. If we would meet with God in the Holy of Holies, we need to have a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience.

If we do not take care of the accusation in our conscience by confessing our sins and receiving the Lord's forgiveness and the cleansing of His blood, we do not guard our heart in a proper way. If we do not guard our heart, we will lose our fellowship with God, and all the "germs," the negative things, will enter into our heart. In order to recover from such a situation, we need to deal with our heart afresh. In order to have fellowship, we need to exercise our spirit, but in order to preserve this fellowship, we need to guard our heart.

Although we may consider certain offenses to be small, we need to realize that our fellowship with the Lord and with the saints is a delicate matter and that the smallest offenses can disrupt and even cut off our fellowship. For instance, an older brother may have a slight intention to speak something critical about a younger brother. If this older brother neglects to guard his heart in this small matter, he will sense a deadening in his spirit, and gradually he will lose his fellowship with the Lord and with the saints. Our spirit can never be deceived. When the older brother tries to have fellowship with the younger brother, he may pretend to love the younger brother and have no problem with him. However, if the younger brother is a person who exercises his spirit and guards his heart from any condemnation, while the older brother is speaking to him, he will sense in his spirit that something deep within the older brother is wrong and is hindering their fellowship. In a normal situation, the more two brothers talk to each other, the more the fellowship between them will be intensified. However, in this abnormal situation, the more the older brother speaks to the younger brother, the more the younger brother will

sense that the fellowship is gone. This is because the heart of the older brother is wrong. This sort of problem cannot be covered by outward performance, because it is not an outward matter but a matter of the spirit passing through the heart. When the older brother speaks, his spirit passes through his heart, in which there is a problem. If the younger brother pays attention to the older brother's words, he may be deceived, but if he pays attention to the spirit that passes through the older brother's heart, he will be clear. The kind of heart that we have determines the kind of spirit that comes out. Hence, if our heart condemns us, the spirit that comes out will not be a spirit of fellowship.

**GUARDING OUR HEART
BY DEALING WITH IT BEFORE THE LORD**

We all need to go before the Lord to have a thorough dealing with our heart. This kind of dealing is the guarding of our heart. The more we deal with our heart, the more we guard our heart. When our heart is properly dealt with before the Lord, it will not only be pure, simple, honest, and faithful but also easy to open when it needs to be open and to close when it needs to be closed. Then we can open to the Lord and to the saints for fellowship without any kind of hindrance. In certain situations we may try to fellowship with a brother, yet there may be no thoroughfare in his heart. We may try in every possible direction to help him to open, but we may not be able to break through. On other occasions, we ourselves may not be able to open our heart to others for fellowship. This kind of problem is due mainly to a long period of neglect in taking care of the heart. The only way to get through such a problem is to have a thorough dealing with our heart before the Lord and to continually keep our heart.

For a believer to lose fellowship with the Lord, the church, and other believers is a dreadful matter. Thus, we need to guard our heart so that we can preserve the fellowship. After presenting the matters of life, fellowship, light, the blood, and the anointing, 1 John, a book on the fellowship of life, presents the heart as the guard, the organ that preserves the fellowship. We all need to practice the matter of dealing with our heart in the way of life. It is through our heart that our real being comes out. The real traffic of our being is through our heart. Our spirit is the source of our being, but our heart is the passage, the entry and the exit, through which the traffic in our being passes. In order to be a proper Christian, there is no doubt that we need to exercise our spirit, but we also need to guard our heart by keeping it with all vigilance. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1970, vol. 1, pp. 431-437*)