

Character of The Lord's Worker

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PREFACE

This book contains ten messages by Watchman Nee on the subject of the character of the Lord's worker. The messages have been previously translated into English and published as *The Normal Christian Worker*. These messages, however, have been newly translated and entitled *The Character of the Lord's Worker*, conforming to the original Chinese title. The book covers ten character traits that are crucial to the usefulness of a Christian worker in the Master's hand. The messages were given by Watchman Nee in 1948 during a training for the edification of his co-workers. The intimate and uninhibited nature of the messages derives from the willingness of the trainees to give Watchman Nee the freedom to speak and to rebuke. As such, the subjects touch the very core of a worker's being.

CHAPTER ONE

A GOOD LISTENER

The personal life of a worker of the Lord is intimately related to his work. Therefore, we have to consider matters of character, habit, and conduct when considering the qualifications necessary to be in God's employment. This relates to the constitution of character and the formation of habits. A man must

have not only a certain amount of spiritual experience, but a certain constitution in his disposition; the Lord must constitute a certain kind of disposition within him. Many things need to be built up, cultivated, and developed into habits within a worker. These things relate more to our outward man than to our inner man. As these things mold the outward man into a proper shape, we will become suitable for the Lord's use. It takes grace and mercy from God for this to occur; character is not built up in a day. But if the Lord gives a person enough light and if He speaks to him often enough, his natural and undesirable elements will be burned away; they will not be allowed to remain or grow. In His mercy, God will reconstruct a new character in him through resurrection. Let us now speak of a few things that all seasoned servants of the Lord have realized and apprehended. The lack of any of these will result in a breakdown in service.

ONE

The first thing we want to speak of is an ability to listen to others. A worker of the Lord must build up the habit in his daily life of listening to others. I do not mean that he should listen to others in the sense of obeying them. I mean that he should listen to others in the sense of being able to hear what they are saying and to understand what he has heard. There is a great need for this trait to be built up in a worker's personal life. No worker of the Lord can do a good job if he can only speak to others but cannot listen to them. A worker is of little use to God if he can only speak to others, if he can only blast incessantly at others like a firecracker. No worker of the Lord can be an incessant talker. If he can only speak to others, but cannot listen to them and realize their problems through conversation, his usefulness is very limited. If a Christian turns to a servant of the Lord for help, the worker should be able to discern three aspects of his brother's words while he is listening: the words that are being uttered, the words that are being held back, and the words that are lying in the depth of the brother's spirit.

First, you must fully understand what the person is actually saying. This means that you need to be a quiet person before the Lord. Your mind must be clear and your spirit must be calm. Your inner being should be like a blank piece of paper before the Lord. You should not have any prejudice, preconception, or inclination. You should not make any determination in your mind or pass any judgment on anything. You should remain perfectly calm before the Lord. When the other person opens his mouth and relates a story, you should learn to listen. As you listen quietly, you will know what he or she is talking about.

Listening is not an easy matter. When a brother is trying to explain his problem, how much do you understand of what he is saying? Sometimes when many people listen to the same person at the same time, there are as many impressions of that person's problem as there are listeners. You may have one impression, and another may have another impression. Many impressions are formed. It would be disastrous if there were the same diversity of impressions in relation to matters of the truth. Listening to others is a very basic training, and one of the basic qualifications for a worker is to be able to understand what others are saying. Others come to you with a burden on their shoulders; they try to unload their problems to you and expect some help from you. What would happen if you misunderstood their words or if you missed their problem altogether and gave them an answer based on what was in your mind the previous two days? Some have their mind on a certain theme for a couple of days. When a sick brother comes to them, they speak on the matter that they have been meditating on because their mind is full of thoughts on that subject. When a healthy brother comes to them, they bring forth the same thoughts. When another brother in distress or in joy comes along, they tell him the same thing. They cannot sit down quietly to listen to what others have to say. If a worker of the Lord cannot

listen to what others have to say, how can he expect to render help to others? When others are speaking, we have to listen carefully. We have to understand what they are talking about. Our work is more difficult than that of a doctor diagnosing his patient. At least he has a laboratory where he can make tests to aid him in his diagnosis of various cases, whereas we have to make our diagnosis without any such aid. Suppose a brother comes and talks to us for half an hour, relating all of his problems to us. We may have no idea how he has been living, what his family background is, or what his condition before the Lord is. Ten minutes, twenty minutes, or half an hour is a long time. If we cannot listen to what he is saying, how can we expect to render him the proper help? Every worker of the Lord has to build up a proper habit; we must have the capacity and the ability to sit down to listen and understand what others are saying. This is very important, and we have to pay much attention to this exercise. We have to learn to understand what others are saying as soon as they open their mouth. We have to be very clear about their condition, and we have to have a clear diagnosis of their case. We must have clear discernment and assurance. Only then will we know whether we are qualified to handle the need. Sometimes we know that the condition of our brother is beyond our ability to help, and we should tell him honestly that we are not the right one to help him. But we should know where he stands and where we stand as soon as he speaks. This is the first thing we have to do; we have to hear and understand what others are saying.

Second, we have to hear and understand what others are not saying. We have to discern before the Lord what others have refrained from saying. We have to know what a person has not said, that is, the things he should tell us but which have been kept back. Naturally, it is more difficult to get a clear perception of unspoken words than of spoken ones. After the first kind of words are spoken, we still have to listen to the second kind, the kind that are not spoken. When people come to talk with a worker about their affairs, it is not unusual for them to tell half of a story and to refrain from divulging the other half. This tests the worker's competence. An incompetent worker will not be able to discern what is not spoken. He may even project thoughts which were never in the heart of the speaker. This problem arises in his own mind, not in the mind of the speaker. Some preexisting concepts may be in his mind, and he may project these concepts into others, even though they have never spoken of such a thing, either from their heart or from their mouth. We have to exercise clear discernment before the Lord to know what a person has said and not said. Often a man utters things that are off the subject while omitting things that are crucial to the subject. How is it possible to know whether crucial words are being left out? We will only know if we have passed through sufficient dealings with the Lord. When a brother comes and says something to us, we must not only be clear about what he is saying, but also about what he is not saying. We must know what is roughly being referred to when he keeps something back in his words. Then we will have confidence before God, and we will know how to help, exhort, or rebuke the brother. If we are not sure of anything within ourselves and cannot hear what others are saying, always waiting instead for a chance to speak, we will only be burdened to say what we have to say. We will not know what others are talking about and have no way to render proper help to them. It is a fact that poor listeners are often less useful workers. This is a serious problem among many people; they simply cannot listen to others. They cannot discern what others have kept within themselves because they are too insensitive. It is impossible to expect such ones to "give...food at the proper time" (Matt. 24:45).

Third, we must be able to detect what others are saying in their spirit. Beyond hearing the words a person may utter and the words he may deliberately refrain from uttering, we have to hear what we have referred to as the words that his spirit is speaking. When a person opens his mouth and speaks, his spirit also speaks. The fact that he is willing to talk gives us an opportunity to touch his spirit. If his lips are sealed, his spirit is bound, and it is difficult to know what his spirit is speaking. But his spirit will find some measure of release in the opening of his mouth, however much he may try to contain

himself. Our ability to discern what his spirit is saying depends on the measure of our exercise in the Lord. If we are exercised, we will be able to discern the words he has uttered, the words he has refrained from uttering, and even the words in his spirit. As he speaks, we will know which words are from his spirit. We will be able to discern the intellectual difficulty as well as the spiritual difficulty he is facing. We also will have the assurance to offer a specific remedy for his case. If we are not that exercised, we may listen to a brother's problems for half an hour without realizing his real ailment and the remedy for it.

This is indeed a desperate need of those who are engaged in the Lord's work. It is unfortunate that very few Christians are good listeners. Some can spend a full hour talking to a believer. However, at the end the believer may still be quite hazy about what has been said. Our hearing ability is too poor. If we cannot hear what people are saying, how can we hear what God is saying? When a man sits in front of us, his words should be clear to us. But if we cannot understand what is being said, I seriously question our ability to understand God's speaking within us. If we cannot understand the audible words from man, how can we understand the words that God speaks to us in our spirit?

If we are unable to diagnose the ailment, condition, or problem of a brother who is in trouble, what word can we give to him? Brothers and sisters, let us not consider this as a trifling matter. If we do not deal with this matter and learn to listen, we will be unable to help a brother in need even if we become great Bible readers, great Bible teachers, or powerful workers. We must not only be preachers who talk; we also should be those who can solve others' problems. But how can this ever happen if we cannot hear what others are saying? We have to realize the seriousness of this matter. Brothers and sisters, how much time have you spent learning to listen to others? Have you spent enough time to learn this lesson? We have to spend time to learn to listen to others, to hear what they have said, what they have not said, and what is in their spirit. The words out of a man's mouth may not match his spirit. Many people say something with their mouth, but their spirit testifies to something else. Eventually, the mouth cannot cover up the spirit. Sooner or later the spirit will be revealed, and when it is revealed, you will know a person's real condition. Without such discernment, it will be difficult to render proper help to others. A joke is told of an elderly doctor whose entire stock of medicine consisted of two things: castor oil and quinine. No matter what his patients complained of, he invariably prescribed one medicine or the other. He applied these two medicines to every kind of ailment. Many brothers treat their "patients" the same way. They only have one or two pet prescriptions, and however varied the ailment of those who seek them out, they talk according to these one or two special lines. Such workers cannot be of any real help to others. Everyone who bears God's trust and commission possesses one common ability—he knows what others are saying as soon as they open their mouth. Without such an ability, a person cannot deal with others' illnesses.

How can we acquire the ability to listen and understand?

First, we must not be subjective. Please remember that subjectivity is one of the main reasons that people are poor listeners. Everyone who is subjective finds it difficult to understand what others are saying. If we have our own subjective concepts and ideas about people, it will be difficult for us to hear what others are saying because our mind is already full. We can be so set in our opinions that others' opinions cannot penetrate our mind. This is the situation with many people who are subjective. They are firmly persuaded of their own ideas, opinions, and views. Nothing can shake their ideas, opinions, and views. They have decided to give their "castor oil" to everyone, no matter how varied the needs may be. Their only panacea is their "castor oil." How can they hear what others are saying? When weak saints come to them, they have no heart to find out their problem. Instead, they are set in their mind as

to what they want to say, and they have nothing to say other than their own premeditated admonitions. They are very confident of themselves, yet they are completely ignorant of others' problems. How can these ones work for the Lord? We must ask the Lord to save us from this kind of subjectivity. We should pray to the Lord, "Lord, may I not be prejudiced when I talk with others. May I not force my diagnosis upon others. I should not be the one to determine their illness. Lord, You have to show me their illness." We have to learn to give up our subjectivity, to listen carefully, to hear what others are saying, and to find out their problem.

Second, our mind must not wander. Many believers have never learned the proper lessons in their mind. Their thoughts flow on uninterruptedly both day and night. Their thoughts are never in focus. They just let their thoughts roam hither and thither. They accumulate so many things in their mind that there is no room for anything more when others try to convey their thoughts to them. Many people are too active in their mind. They have a capacity only for their own thoughts and no capacity to take up other people's thoughts. As a result, they can never understand how others think. They cannot take up others' thoughts because they have never learned to be quiet in their own mind. In order for us to hear what others are saying, our mind first must be disciplined. If our mind is always turning like a flywheel, nothing will lodge in it. In learning to listen to others, a worker of the Lord has to steady his own mind. Not only must he reject all subjectivity; he must learn to be calm in his mind. We must learn to think as others are thinking and to understand what others are saying. We must also learn to comprehend the hidden meaning behind their words. If we are unable to do this, we will not be of much use to the Lord.

Third, we must learn to enter into the feelings of others. A fundamental qualification for understanding others' words is to be able to empathize with their feelings. We cannot understand what others are saying merely by understanding their words; we have to be able to feel what they feel. If someone comes to us in deep distress and trouble and we maintain a breezy manner, being untouched by his grief, we will never be able to help him, no matter how long we listen to his words. If our feeling cannot match his, we will not understand what he is facing. Those who have never been dealt with in their emotions can never feel what others feel. A person with hardened feelings cannot enter into the feelings of others, and he cannot understand what others say. If we have not been dealt with by God, we will not be able to sing "hallelujah" when others express their joy, and we will not be able to share their grief when they express their sorrow. We will be unable to identify with their feelings, and their feelings will never touch us. This is why we have to understand their words.

How can we feel what others feel? In order to do this, we must be very objective in regard to our own feelings. We may feel something, but we must be objective in regard to our own feelings before we can have the capacity to feel what he feels. But if we are too busy with our own feelings, we will not be sensitive enough to consider his feelings. We must remember that we are the servants of the saints for Christ's sake. Not only should we give our time and strength to them; we should make our affections available to them as well. This is a crucial matter. Not only should we help them solve their problems; we should accommodate their feelings with our feelings as well. Our feelings should be available to share in others' feelings. This is what the Scripture means when it says that the Lord Jesus, who was tempted in all respects like us, is touched with the feeling of our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15).

Brothers and sisters, our emotions have to be dealt with by the Lord so that they can become available. If our emotions are overactive and we are preoccupied with our own feelings, we will never be able to enter into others' feelings. Hence, we must make not only our time available to others but our emotions

as well. This means that our love, joy, and sorrow should not be occupied, but rather available, when others are speaking to us. If our whole being is occupied by a certain feeling, there will not be any space within us for others' feelings; we will not have the capacity to meet others' needs. If we do not have any joy or sorrow of our own, but are fully available before the Lord, we will be able to enter into others' feelings. If we are constantly busy with our own feelings, we will be too preoccupied to feel for others when they come to us.

God has a very high standard for those who serve Him. A servant of the Lord has no time to feel happy or sorry for himself. If we indulge in our own laughter and tears and in our own likes and dislikes, we will have no room within for the needs of others. We must remember that a servant of the Lord must be empty within. If we cling to our own pleasures and griefs, begrudging the letting go of this and that, we will be too full to take care of others. We will be like a room that is full of furniture; it has no space to accommodate anything further. Many brothers and sisters cannot work for the Lord because they have expended all their love on themselves and have none to spare for others. We need to realize that there is a limit to our soul-strength just as there is a limit to our physical strength. Our emotional energy is not boundless. If we exhaust our soul in one direction, we will have nothing to give in another direction. For this reason, anyone who has an inordinate affection for another person cannot be the Lord's servant. The Lord Himself said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters,...he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). This is because when we love these things, our love is exhausted on them. We have to love the Lord our God with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind, and our whole strength (Mark 12:30). This means that we have to give all our love to God. It is a good thing for us to discover that we are limited in many ways. We must realize that our capacity is limited. Our vessel is limited. If we fill it with other things, we will not have any space for more. We are limited by our capacity. In order to enter into others' feelings, we have to make our own feelings available. Our mind and emotions have to be available before we can identify with others' feelings. If our hands are filled with assignments, we cannot take up any requests from others. If our hearts are weighted down by burdens of our own, others cannot share their burdens with us. Hence, whoever makes himself most available is capable of embracing the most. Those who love themselves or their families too much have little love for the brothers. A man's capacity for love is only so big; he has to drop all other loves before he can love the brothers and understand the meaning of brotherly love. Then he will be able to work for the Lord.

The fundamental requirement of everyone who is engaged in the Lord's work is to know the cross. A man who does not know the cross is useless in the Lord's work. If you do not know the cross, you will always be subjective. Your thoughts will wander unceasingly, and you will live constantly in your own feelings. You have to come back to the knowledge of the cross. There is no cheap and easy way. You must receive fundamental dealings from the Lord. Without these dealings, you will be spiritually worthless. May the Lord be merciful to us and deal with us so that we will not remain complacent in our subjectivity. We do not want to have unchecked thoughts, nor do we want to be insensitive in our feelings. A worker has to open up himself to embrace others' problems. If we do this, we will know what others are saying as soon as they come to us. We will know the words that they have not said, as well as the words that are in their spirit.

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We need to be enlightened within. We need to spend considerable time learning to listen and to touch others' feelings. If we do not learn this lesson well, we will encounter problems in our service. We have to try our best to listen. When a person is speaking, can we hear what he is saying? Do we understand his words? In order to understand others' words, it is not enough for us to be undisturbed outwardly. The Lord must deal with us in a fundamental way. Our subjectivity, thoughts, and feelings must be dealt with. We can skip many things, but we can never skip the basic dealings, without which no one can serve the Lord in a proper way. Without experiencing the basic dealings, we cannot even read the Bible properly. There are certain qualifications to reading the Bible. One cannot just exercise his mind. It takes more than a smart mind to read the Bible. Basic dealings are indispensable. Without such dealings, a man can outwardly listen to every word that others are saying, but he will be in total darkness within; he will not understand anything. A brother may talk to him for a whole hour, yet he will not know what is being talked about. How can he be expected to render any help? We are God's vessels. We should know when a man is hot or cold, well or sick. We are the measuring stick. But when we are off, we give the wrong diagnosis.

There is a prevalent misconception among Christian workers that the most essential thing is to be able to speak. Far from it! The Lord's work has to do with our spirit, not just with our words. We have to identify the spiritual problems plaguing the brothers and sisters, and we have to know how to deal with them. If we are not clear within, we will not understand their inward condition. How can we render them any help at all? How do we know if a sinner is saved when we preach the gospel to him? Do we judge only by the words of his mouth? Are his words the only means of discerning his condition? No, we know his condition through our inner registration. How do we know if a person is of the Lord? Do we judge him merely by a few words, such as, "I believe in Jesus; I am saved"? Do we baptize a person simply because he has memorized a formula? No, we make judgments based on our inner registration. We are the measuring stick. We test an unbeliever according to this measuring stick, and we also test a child of God according to this measuring stick. How do we know whether or not the spiritual condition of a child of God is healthy? If we are walking in the light of the Lord, we will know. Brothers and sisters, we must be dealt with by the Lord to the point that we become His measuring stick. If we are off within, we will easily make a wrong judgment, and once we make a wrong judgment, we will spoil His work. This is the reason that we must walk in the light inwardly; we must have genuine light within us. What a tragedy it is that many brothers and sisters are not only dark within, but they are even incapable of sitting down and listening to others. Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to be calm. We have to learn to hear what others are actually saying. We have to open ourselves and allow the affairs of others to enter into our hearts. We must have a keen inner registration within ourselves before we can discern the real problems of others. Only then can we render them the proper help.

CHAPTER TWO

A LOVER OF MEN

ONE

Every worker of the Lord must have not only a love for the brothers but also a love for all men. Solomon once said, "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker" (Prov. 17:5). God is the Creator of all men; therefore, every man is worthy of our love. A servant or worker of the Lord is not fit to serve Him if he is lacking in brotherly love or if he only has brotherly love but is lacking in love for all

men. He must have a love for all men, a genuine affection for men, before he can serve God. All those who find men to be wearisome, troublesome, or contemptible are unqualified to be God's servants. We must see that in God's eyes man was created by Him. Man certainly has fallen, but he has become the object of the Lord's redemption. Although by nature man is stubborn, the Holy Spirit has chosen to touch man. Even the Lord Jesus became a man when He came to earth—a man like other men, gradually growing from infancy to full maturity. God's intention is to set up a "standard" man, a representative man, in whom all the plans of God are realized. After the Lord Jesus' ascension, the church was brought into being, which is the "one new man." The whole plan of redemption involves the uplifting and glorification of man. When we really come to understand the Word of God, we will realize that the term children of God is not so weighty as the term man, and we also will realize that God's plan, selection, and predestination have a glorified man as their objective. When we see the place that man occupies in the purpose of God, when we see man as the focus of all His plans, and when we see how the Lord humbled Himself to become a man, we will learn to appreciate all men. When our Lord was on earth, He said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The Lord's word is clear. The Son of Man came to serve many. Many does not refer to the church or to God's children, but to all men. Furthermore, He did not say that the Son of God came to serve, but the Son of Man. Here we see the Lord's attitude toward man.

A serious problem with many who are engaged in God's work is their total lack of love and respect for man, and their total failure to realize the value of man in God's sight. Today we feel as if we have attained great heights when we begin to love God's children. Formerly we did not love anyone. Now that we can love the brothers a little, we feel as if we have done a tremendous thing. But, brothers and sisters, this is not enough. We need to be enlarged by God; we need to see that all men are precious to God. Whether or not we will build up a good spiritual work depends on how much we love man and how much interest we have in man. What I want to know is not whether we are interested in a few particularly intelligent men, a few who in one way or another are outstanding, but whether we are interested in man in general. This is a matter of great importance. The Son of Man's coming firstly implies that the Lord was intensely interested in man; He was so interested in man that He became a man. The Lord was very interested in man, but what is the extent of our interest? We may not think much of this or that individual. But how does our Lord look on those people? The Lord said that the Son of Man came. This means that He came into the midst of men as the Son of Man. It also means that He is interested in man, that He has a feeling for man, and that He has a high regard for man. He so values man that He took the place of a man in order to serve men. It is amazing that many of God's children have little concern for men. We cannot help but be somewhat indignant about this apathy. Brothers and sisters, do we know the meaning of the phrase the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve? We should ponder these words before the Lord. They tell us that Christ cared for man. Brothers and sisters, it is absolutely wrong for anyone to say, "I am among men, yet I have no interest in them whatsoever."

An interest in man is a basic requirement in the life of every worker. This does not mean that one picks out certain individuals and develops an interest only in them. It does not mean that one can be exclusively interested in and affectionate towards certain men. It means an interest in all men. We must pay attention to the Lord Jesus, whose outstanding characteristic is a feeling and a love for all men. He was so interested in man that He could say, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve." If we go to a certain place and insist on not being served by the men there but instead serve them, we are not far from the attitude we are talking about. This would put us on the right track with the right stand. Brothers and sisters, God's servants cannot reserve their love just for their brothers. A worker of the Lord is a total failure if he selfishly reserves his love for his brothers. Brotherly love is not the first thing on our list. It is something in addition to our love for all men. We have to have a love for all men.

John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world." What does the world refer to? It refers to everyone in this world, including unsaved ones and those who have no knowledge of God. God loves the world; He loves everyone in this world. This is the meaning of God so loved the world. If God loves everyone yet you do not, or if you extend your love only after a person has become a brother, your heart is different than the Lord's, and you are not qualified to serve God. Your heart must be broadened to the extent that you love everyone and are interested in every man. As long as someone is a man, you should be interested in him. This is the only way to serve God.

TWO

The Lord Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). In other words, the Lord never asked for anything from men. We should be interested in men, and we should find men lovable. Moreover, we should not take advantage of men or be served by men. We should not embarrass them or hurt them. We should not even accept service from them. Brothers and sisters, years of instruction have accustomed us to address all men as our "fellow men"; however, this is not a matter of words but a matter of feeling. For example, we have a certain feeling for our brothers. We feel that certain ones are our brothers and that we are "fellow brothers" to them. But may I ask if we have the feeling with all men that we are their "fellow men"? Do we have a feeling that they are our fellows? If we do not have such a feeling, we cannot serve God. All servants of the Lord should have a broad heart. Their heart should be so broad that they can include and embrace all men. They should be able to embrace the whole human race into their bosom. The biggest problem among many workers is that they lack this love for men. Their love for the brothers is already short. Their love for all men is almost nonexistent. Perhaps they can pick out one from among a hundred or even from ten thousand that they can love! If this is our condition, we do not have a love for all men. We must remember that God is our Creator and we are all fellow creatures; we are fellow human beings. We must enlarge our heart's capacity to love every person created by God, every fellow human being. We should not allow them to suffer, we should not take advantage of them, and we should not seek for any service from them. The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.

Brothers and sisters, we should not take advantage of others in any way. A Christian should realize that it is shameful for him to take advantage of his fellow men while on earth. It is wrong to take advantage of the brothers, but it is equally wrong to take advantage of anyone at all. As far as receiving from others is concerned, our Lord's basic attitude is that He would never allow Himself to be served by men. He did not have the slightest intention of receiving anything from anyone. We must remember that we should never selfishly receive the services and ministrations of others at the expense of their sacrifice and loss.

God's children should not take advantage of others, not only because the Lord has forbidden it, but because we are fellow human beings. We should not seek for profit from our fellow men. We must realize that all men are lovable in the eyes of God. If we have no interest in man, our work will be of very limited value in the sight of God, no matter how great it may be outwardly. God wants to see His servants increased in their capacity and interested in all man. This is the only way to become a gracious person; this is the only way to serve the Lord.

THREE

Mark 10:45 says, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many." Luke 19:10 says, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost." John 10:10 says, "I have come that they may have life and may have it abundantly." The Lord

Jesus came to the earth for man. According to Mark 10, He came to serve men even to the point of giving His life as a ransom. The purpose for His coming was to serve men. In His service to men, there was the need for Him to give His life as a ransom, and that is what He did. His becoming a ransom was the highest and consummate act of His service to men. The Lord did not say that the Son of Man came only to be a ransom. He said that the Son of Man came "to serve." The goal was service. He was interested in man, and He considered man precious and worthy of love and service. He served men to such an extent that He met their need by becoming their Savior. This is why He gave His life as a ransom. If we preach the gospel of the Lord's sacrifice of His life as a ransom without having the Lord's heart of service, we are not qualified to be called His workers. Man is lovable. Because he is lovable, the Lord did not say that it was "the Son of God" who came to serve, but "the Son of Man" who came. The Lord Jesus first loved and served men, and then He gave His life for them. Love comes first; the sacrifice of life comes afterwards. When we work among men, we cannot preach the Lord's sacrifice without first having the proper love. We should not think that we can first preach His sacrifice and then love the listener after he has received the Lord. If we have no interest in man and do not find him precious, and if we have no awareness that we are all fellow creatures of God, we cannot preach about sacrifice. If we have never been touched by the expression God created man or have very little feeling for it, we are unfit to preach Christ's sacrifice. Brothers and sisters, we must first love all men before we can lead them to the Lord. We cannot hold back our love until they receive the Lord or until they become our brothers. Unfortunately, this is a problem with many people; they come short in this matter. Many people hold back their love for a person until he or she has become a brother or a sister. Brothers and sisters, this is not the way our Lord works. He first loved, and then He gave His life. We who preach His redemption also should love first and then preach redemption. Our Lord first served and showed mercy to others before giving His life as a ransom. In the same way, we should be interested in men, counting them worthy of our love and grace, before we present the Lord's redemption to them.

If God opens our heart to see that we are fellow men among all men, our attitude towards them will drastically change. We will find man lovable and precious. Brothers and sisters, it needs to dawn on us that man is precious in God's eyes because He created man in His likeness. Even today, man is still in the likeness of his Creator. Unless man becomes the object of our affection we cannot possibly become a servant of men. We must find man lovable and valuable in the sight of God. Many brothers and sisters have an altogether wrong attitude, temperament, and sentiment toward their fellow men. They consider them a burden, trouble, nuisance, or an annoyance. This is totally wrong. We must learn to see man as God's creation with God's image. Although man has become fallen, his future remains bright. If we regarded man as lovable, we would not feel that man is a burden, trouble, nuisance, or an annoyance to us. The Lord went to the cross for man. Can our love be anything less than this? If a man is touched by the Lord in a genuine way, and if he really sees the Lord's goal in coming to the earth, he will spontaneously conclude that man is lovable. It is impossible for anyone who has a genuine knowledge of the Lord to despise man.

Man is worthy of our love. All sins can be forgiven; we can sympathize with all weaknesses and activities of the flesh. We are sinners, and we know what sinners are like. Yet, at the same time, we know that man is precious. Brothers and sisters, the Lord did not die for men because there was a great number of them. He said that the Good Shepherd forsook all to seek one lost sheep. He did not come to seek to save the lost sheep because there were ninety-nine of them. The Good Shepherd came for one lost sheep. In other words, even if only one person in the whole world were lost, the Lord would still have come to the earth. Of course, historically, all men needed to be saved. But as far as the love in His heart is concerned, He was ready to come for one man, for one lost sheep. The Holy Spirit did not

begin searching because ten coins were lost; He searched because one coin was lost. The Father did not wait for His prodigal because all of His sons had become prodigal; He opened His arms to one prodigal who returned. In the parables in Luke 15, we see that in His work of redemption, the Lord was willing to spend Himself freely to meet the need of even one soul. He did not wait for the needs of many to arise before He would work. This shows us the intense love that the Lord has for man.

Brothers and sisters, if we want to serve the Lord in a proper way, we have to cultivate an interest in man. If we cannot cultivate this interest, we will not be able to do much. Even if we do something, our work will be very limited. When we are limited as a person, we will not have the capacity to embrace many people. We will not fathom the full significance of redemption until we become interested in man and our hearts are enlarged to see his worth in God's eyes and in His plan. Without this, it is vain for puny creatures such as we to try to have a share in the great work of God. How can anyone be used to save souls if they do not love souls? How can anyone try to save man without loving man? If this fundamental lack of love for men is removed, many other difficulties in relation to men will vanish. We think that some people are too ignorant and others are too hard, but these problems should not stop us from loving them. If there is love, there will not be any disdain for man, and God will bring us to the point that we take our place as men among our fellow men.

When some Christian workers in urban areas go out into the country to work among farmers, they have an inordinate sense of superiority toward them. This is a despicable attitude. Our Lord did not say that the Son of God would not be served by men. He said that the Son of Man would not be served by men. If we go anywhere to preach the gospel, we have to go as a son of man. Many times, however, workers consider working among some people as a humbling experience! It is right to humble oneself, but it is wrong to consciously think that we are humbling ourselves by walking among certain kinds of people. If we feel that we are humbling ourselves when we walk among less educated ones, this is proof that we are not humble enough. Such humility is manmade; it is unnatural. When our Lord came to earth, men only recognized Him as the son of Mary or as the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. They only knew Him as a son of man. Brothers and sisters, we have to be real men. When we are among our fellow men, we should not give them the flavor that we are above them in any way. This is not how a Christian should behave. When we are among men, we should be one of them. We should not give others the impression that we are condescending ourselves. If we do, we are not qualified to serve anyone, and our way is totally wrong. We can only serve men by being a man ourselves. We should never give others the impression that we are always humbling ourselves. We should not give others the impression that we are different. If others have that kind of impression about us, it proves that we are not God's servants. In order to serve the Lord, we must be genuinely emptied of self. When we talk with those who have less education than we have and we stand aloof from them, we are telling them that we are not one of them.

Unless we can humble ourselves to the lowest level, we cannot serve God. We must be brought to the lowest point; we must never feel that we are better than others. No brother or sister can despise a man of little knowledge. Such a person has a place in God's creation; he has a place in God's redemption and plan just as you and I have. The only difference between us and an unsaved man is that we know the Lord. Brothers and sisters, we are wrong in our attitude in many ways. We must turn away completely from such an attitude. We must see that all men are equal in the sight of God. Our Lord came to earth for all men. Therefore, we should humble ourselves for them as well. We should never categorize men based on the amount of education they possess.

You may say, "The ignorance of men presents no problem to me; my difficulty arises when I come in contact with men who are deceitful, sinful, and wild. What should be my attitude toward them?" You only need to take a retrospective look at your own life. Were you better than they are now before the grace of God reached out? How much better would you be today but for the grace of God? Who has

made you holier than they? When you look at yourself outside the realm of grace, you cannot find any difference between you and them. Except for grace alone, what makes you any different than them? You can only bow before God and say, "I am the same as they are, nothing more than a poor sinner." Only grace can teach you to prostrate yourself in the dust and say, "Lord, You are the One who has saved me." Grace will never cause you to uplift yourself; it will always cause you to see that you are the same as the wicked and the sinners. It is God's grace that sets you apart from them, not you yourself. If what you have is yours through receiving, what is there for you to boast of? If grace is the only thing that makes you different, you have no ground to exalt yourself with such grace. You should give more thanks for grace; you should spend more time thanking the Lord for grace instead of giving glory to yourself. You should realize that you are the same as all other men in the eyes of God. You should love them. Their sins should cause you to recoil, but you should still go out in love for them. With such an enlarged heart, you will bring them to the Lord.

FOUR

In remembering that every servant of God has his own special characteristic and function to God, we should not forget that, no matter how different one's function may be, all true servants of God are alike in this respect: They are interested, intensely interested, in men. If a brother has an enlarged heart and is interested in men, his usefulness in the hand of God will be greatly enhanced. Brothers and sisters, we have to be interested in men. If we are indifferent to and disinterested in men, how can we preach the gospel to them? We are here to deal with men, to gain them, and to save them. If we have no interest in men, how can we accomplish our task? No doctor should shrink away from sick patients, and no teacher should shrink away from students. It is strange indeed for us to be preachers of the gospel and to be afraid of meeting people at the same time! In order to work for the Lord, we must be interested in men. This must not be something out of compulsion. We must have an interest in contacting people, in communicating with them. There should not be the need for anyone to tell us to contact or communicate with men. A worker should feel in his heart that man is lovable and precious. Brothers and sisters, we have to realize that all men were created by God and are loved by Him. God wants them, and He gave His only begotten Son for them with the expectation that they would receive His life through believing into Him. The only difference we have with unbelievers is that we have believed. This is why we have to help them to believe. We must cultivate a great interest in them. If we do this, we will find a boundless field of service opening up to us, and under the mercy of God we will become servants who are of some account to Him.

Brothers and sisters, in order to serve the Lord in a proper way, we have to take the straight pathway. Please remember that in the eyes of God, everyone has a spirit. In this respect everyone is equal. Everyone ranks the same because everyone has a soul and a spirit. As soon as we touch a person with a soul and a spirit, we should love him and strive to serve him. If we do this, our attitude will be different every time we meet a person on the street. When a man is enlightened by God to see that he is begotten by the same Father as his brothers, he develops a special taste for them. A worker similarly has to be enlightened to see that he is created by the same God as his fellow men. This light will cause him to have a different taste every time he meets someone. Among the saints, we do have the feeling that we are brothers and sisters. Now we need a further enlightening to see that among all men, we are fellow men. Everyone is precious and lovable, and everyone is worthy of our service. If we have this attitude, we will touch the things of God while living on earth today, because God's attention is always directed towards man. Men were created by God, and from such God-created men, we can rescue some into His church. God's goal is the church, but God's attention is still on man. He wants to gain man. No worker of the Lord can despise any person with a soul and a spirit. If we despise any man in attitude or in conduct, we are unworthy to be called servants of God. If we want to serve the Lord in a proper way,

we must not despise any soul. In fact, we have to learn to be servants to all men. We have to learn to render others service in all things and to serve them with a willing heart.

Many people have the habit of despising those who seemingly are inferior to themselves while flattering those who seemingly are better than themselves. It is shameful for such things to be found among God's workers. We should not despise those who seemingly are under us in any way. We should consider a man's position according to God's worth. If we do not deal with this matter, we cannot serve God. It is a great and joyful thing for us to realize man's worth. If we see how the Lord has died for men, we will echo that very character that led Him to suffer such a death for men; we will feel what the Lord feels and conclude that man does deserve all of our love and interest. Unless we can do this, we will not be able to identify with the Lord's feeling, and we will not be able to work for the Lord.

CHAPTER THREE

HAVING A MIND TO SUFFER

ONE

In addition to the character traits already mentioned, every Christian worker should have a mind to suffer (1 Pet. 4:1). This is crucial. Before we consider this subject from a positive point of view, let us first consider the common Christian concept of suffering.

The teaching of the Scriptures is very clear: God has no intention for His people to suffer. There is a certain philosophy which promotes physical suffering as a means of depriving the body of all enjoyment. Those who hold to this philosophy maintain that every form of enjoyment is wrong. As the Lord's workers and those who represent Him, we must be clear that this philosophy should not be in a Christian's mind at all. God's own Word declares that God has no intention for His children to suffer. The Bible says that God has not withheld any good thing from us. Psalm 23:1 says, "Jehovah is my Shepherd; I will lack nothing." The words lack nothing do not mean that we have no further needs. Rather, they mean that we do not have to ask for anything because the Lord is our Shepherd. Psalm 23 tells us that we will lack nothing when we have the Lord as our Shepherd. In other words, God has no intention that we lack anything. His intention is for us to be filled. He has not withheld any good thing from us. The entire Bible portrays to us the loving care of the Lord. He watched over His own faithfully, relieved their distresses and pains, and drew a clear distinction between His people and the nations. The land of Goshen was always different from the rest of Egypt; God's blessing was always there. We must never introduce any kind of ascetic philosophy into Christianity. Once we introduce non-Christian elements into Christianity, we confuse the latter. We must pay attention to this point.

Having said this, we also should realize that God does not exempt His children from trial or chastisement; indeed, God gives His children trial and chastisement. But we must make a clear distinction between these and forms of asceticism. Under ordinary circumstances, God always blesses, cares, supports, and supplies His children. But when it becomes necessary for Him to chastise and try His children, He will not hesitate to do so. This does not mean that He tries them every day. He

chastises His children only when the need arises; He does not do this every day and every minute. God does not send trials and chastisements to His children continuously. Sometimes He resorts to such methods, but He does not dwell on them all the time. On the contrary, under ordinary circumstances, He always cares for us and makes provisions for us. Of course, when we are stubborn, He will allow trials and chastisements to come upon us. But under His usual provisions, He carries out what He ordinarily would do. He does not want to see us suffer. We must be clear about this. God is reserving all the good things for His children. We can enjoy all of His provisions which He has given to us.

What then does the Scripture mean when it speaks of suffering? In the Bible, suffering refers to a deliberate choice one makes before the Lord. The Lord has arranged for our days to be filled with gracious blessings, but for the sake of serving Him and being a servant to Him, we would rather choose a way of suffering. Hence, the way of suffering is a way of choice. David's three mighty men could have lived in safety beside David, but when they heard him expressing a longing for a drink from the well of Bethlehem, they endangered their lives and broke through the ranks of the Philistine host to fetch the water (2 Sam. 23:14-17). Suffering is a matter of choice, not a matter of imposition. We choose the way of suffering. We suffer willingly for the sake of serving Him. According to God's plan, we can avoid many sufferings. However, for the sake of serving God, we would rather gladly choose a way that is different from that of ordinary people. This is what it means to have a mind to suffer. Having a mind to suffer is a fundamental necessity in the character of a servant of God. Without such a mind, we will produce little results in our work, and the work we do will be very superficial in quality. If a worker of the Lord does not have a mind to suffer, he cannot work at all in the eyes of God. Let us speak of a few things related to this subject.

TWO

We have to realize that suffering and having a mind to suffer are two different things. Having a mind to suffer implies that we have a desire to willingly suffer for Christ's sake; it means that we have a heart and a willingness to endure affliction on His behalf. This is the meaning of having a mind to suffer. Those who have a mind to suffer may not necessarily be suffering. But in their mind they are prepared to meet all sufferings with fortitude. For instance, the Lord may put you in circumstances where you are provided with food and clothing and a nicely furnished home. It does not mean that you cannot continue to enjoy all the provisions He has given you. If the Lord has made such provisions, you can accept them from the Lord. But within, you still have a mind to suffer for Him. Although you are not suffering physically, you must have a mind to suffer. It is not a question of whether you have encountered something outwardly, but whether you have a mind to suffer inwardly. Do you have a mind to suffer even when circumstances are smooth and easy? The Lord may not arrange for you to suffer every day, but every worker of the Lord must not be short of a mind to suffer, not even for a single day. Suffering may not come to us daily, but a mind to suffer must be with us daily.

The problem is that many brothers and sisters, and many families of Christian workers too, seem to shrink back the minute affliction comes to them. They do not have a mind to suffer. When the Lord provides smooth circumstances, abundance in material supply, and good health to them, they can serve Him happily. But as soon as they experience a little setback or affliction, their whole being collapses. This means that they do not have a mind to suffer. Without a mind to suffer, you cannot withstand any trial.

Having a mind to suffer means that we are prepared before the Lord to suffer. It means that we are ready to suffer and that we choose the way of suffering. If the Lord does not allow suffering to come our way, that is His business. On our side, however, we are always ready for suffering. When the Lord changes His course circumstantially and trials come upon us, we will accept them fortuitously, not

counting them as strange. If we can only accept the good provisions of the Lord, but cannot take any trial, instead backsliding at any change and ceasing from our work, we do not have a mind to suffer. We must remember that our work does not sit and wait on us. We have to work when there is food, and we have to work when there is no food. We have to work when we are adequately clothed, and we have to work when we are not adequately clothed. We have to work when we feel happy, and we have to work when we feel uncomfortable. We have to work whether we are in good health or in ill health. The Scripture shows us that we should arm ourselves with a mind to suffer; that is, our mind should be an armory, a weapon, to us. This is a sharp weapon, something Satan cannot prevail against. Without this kind of mind, our work will cease as soon as we experience setbacks and afflictions.

There are some brothers and sisters who endure suffering, but they have no conception of the preciousness of the suffering. They go through it without any sense of gratitude to the Lord. They may even murmur and complain continually, hoping for the day when they will be delivered from their suffering. They pray, but they never praise. They do not heartily accept the discipline of the Spirit which comes upon them. Instead, they pray that these days will go away quickly. Their attitude betrays their lack of a mind to suffer. Brothers and sisters, if we do not have a mind to suffer during peaceful times, we will only be fit to travel on smooth roads. Once the road becomes muddy, we will stop serving the Lord. This will not take us very far. Let me repeat: A mind to suffer is different from suffering itself. If we have a mind to suffer, the Lord may not necessarily give us sufferings, but when we do encounter sufferings, we will be inwardly prepared, and we will not draw back. Those who suffer do not necessarily have a mind to suffer. Many people are suffering, but they do not have a mind to suffer. Among the suffering ones, some may have a mind to suffer, while others may not have a mind to suffer. When many brothers and sisters encounter sufferings and afflictions, they complain and cry for help day after day. They pray for deliverance from their afflictions every day. Such ones do not have a mind to suffer at all. They are suffering, but they do not have a mind to suffer. Brothers and sisters who are undergoing sufferings in physical health, in financial supply, or in other matters should realize that the Lord only counts a mind to suffer as being precious. He does not pay attention to whether we are suffering. We should not think that we are suffering for the Lord simply because we are put in trying situations. It may be true that our situations are unpleasant, but how much of a willing mind to suffer for the Lord do we have? How much of this is by choice? Or are we merely murmuring, begrudging, self-pitying, and self-justifying? It is possible for us to suffer a great deal of heartache and hardship without having the will to suffer. A will to suffer is something deeper than suffering itself. Those who have a heart to suffer may not have any outward suffering at all, and those who are outwardly suffering may not have a mind to suffer. Brothers and sisters, do you see the difference? This is like saying that those who are poor in material things are not necessarily poor in their spirits. Many people are poor materially, but they are not poor spiritually. In the same way, many brothers and sisters are indeed suffering, but they do not have a mind to suffer at all. If the Lord were to offer them the option of choosing, they would most definitely choose not to suffer, not just for a month or for a day, but even if it was just for a minute of their time. They have absolutely no mind to suffer. If a man does not have a mind to suffer, he can not go anywhere with his work. When the outward demands exceed his inward ability, he will shrink back. When a situation requires that he make an additional effort, he will find no strength to meet the need. He cannot relinquish his own treasures and can only carry on an easy work under an easy environment. He needs the Lord to remove all hurdles before he can work in peace. It is surprising that many servants of the Lord would have such a demand.

We must be clear what it means to have a mind to suffer. A brother living in peace may have a greater mind to suffer than a brother living in tribulation. The first one may have a mind to suffer; he is prepared to suffer for the Lord. The second one may be suffering, but he has no heart to suffer for the Lord. There is little sign of hardship in the circumstance of one, while the other may be obviously in great distress. Humanly speaking, the one in great distress is the one who is suffering. But in the eyes

of the Lord, He values more the one who, even though he has less hardship, has a mind to suffer. We should not think that suffering alone qualifies us for anything. We must remember that God has demands on us, and in order to meet these demands, there is the need for us to have a mind to suffer. We must arm ourselves with this mind. Without such a mind, there is no possibility for us to fight the spiritual warfare. As soon as we face troubles, we will draw back, and as soon as we are called upon to pay a price, we will give up. When the Lord allows a little affliction to come our way, we withdraw. We are not concerned with how much suffering a person experiences; we are concerned with how much of a mind to suffer one has. According to our natural concept, we would conclude that a brother who suffers much knows God's grace in fuller measure. But many times, we do not receive any help from a suffering brother when we meet him. We may soon discover that he lacks the mind to suffer; he is only suffering reluctantly. If he were given a choice, he would run away from his trials at the first possible moment. He may indeed be suffering, but he has not yielded to the suffering, and he is going through his experience reluctantly. He has not learned any lesson before the Lord, and he is filled with rebellion inwardly. This shows us that a mind to suffer is very different from suffering itself. What the Lord treasures is a mind to suffer—a conscious readiness for suffering, not the experience of suffering itself. We cannot replace a mind to suffer with suffering itself.

THREE

Now we have to consider some common problems we encounter in the Lord's work. Suppose our work appears to encounter financial difficulties. What should we do when God puts us through a trial of material shortage? If the shortage in provision halts our work, the Lord surely would put a question mark on what we are doing. He would probably ask, "What are you serving Me for?" Brothers and sisters, whether or not we will perform well in our work depends a great deal on whether we have a mind to suffer. We cannot quit just because a little trouble comes our way or a little trial bothers us. No servant of Christ can stipulate that he will go to work in fair weather but stay at home if it rains. If we have a mind to suffer, we will defy difficulties; we will defy hardship; we will defy physical infirmity; and we will even defy death. A mind to suffer stands up to the devil and declares, "I will go on no matter what may happen to me!" If we are inwardly afraid of anything, Satan will threaten us with that very same thing, and we will be defeated. If we say, "I am not afraid of hunger!", Satan will not be able to do anything to us when he sends us hunger; he will have to flee. If we say, "I am not afraid of the cold!", Satan will not be able to do anything to us when he sends us cold weather; he will have to flee once again. But if we say, "I am afraid of sickness," Satan will surely send us sickness, because he knows that sickness will bring us down. If we say, "I am not afraid of sickness!", Satan will not be able to do anything to us. If we do not have a mind to suffer, Satan will use whatever we are afraid of to attack us, and we will be defeated. Every servant of God must be well prepared and not afraid of anything. We must persist when this and that happen to us. We must persist when trials come to our family or sickness comes to our body. We must persist even when hunger or cold comes our way. If we have this attitude within us, Satan will not be able to do anything to us because we will have a mind to suffer. Without such a mind to suffer, we will fall as soon as Satan confronts us with the very thing we fear. We will shrink back from God's work and become useless.

Brothers and sisters, we should declare to the Lord, "Because of Your love and the power of Your grace, I am committed to do what I am doing whatever the consequences may be, whether it be heaven or hell. This will be my stand, whether or not I think I am up to it!" If we do not have such a mind, Satan will seize our weakness, and we will be finished and proven unprofitable for anything. We have to pray for mercy to know what a mind to suffer is. A mind to suffer is a settled decision within oneself to be on the Lord's side, no matter what the future may hold and no matter what circumstances one may encounter. A mind to suffer does not necessarily lead to suffering. It is possible that one will not suffer.

But an inward conviction is always present. Without such a conviction and determination, a little difficulty will knock a person off his feet. But if this inward conviction is present, whether or not there is outward trouble will mean little. Do you see what I am saying? The way of service for a Christian is not the way of suffering but the way of having a mind to suffer. You can thank the Lord if He provides you with food and clothing, and you also can thank Him if He does not provide you with these things. These things do not mean much to you—they can be in abundance or scarcity. Please remember that a Christian does not need to go out of his way to look for suffering. However, he should have a mind to suffer. A Christian is one who is prepared to accomplish his task whether or not difficulty lies along the way. He does not draw back at the face of difficulty. If the matter of his mind-set is not settled, all other issues will not be settled. Consider the example of traveling. If you are physically weak, you naturally need a more comfortable bed than a stronger person. But if you say, "I must have a comfortable bed because I am not very strong," you will be vulnerable to the enemy in that point; he will give you an uncomfortable bed. A mind to suffer ignores the issue of a bed and continues with one's work. If you have been provided with a comfortable bed, however, there is no virtue in going out of your way to sleep on the floor. If the Lord gives you a good bed, take it, and if He gives you a bad bed, take it also. You have to continue with your work no matter how bad your bed is. You must never shrink back for the sake of a bed. This mind-set is what the Bible calls a mind to suffer. Some brothers have less than favorable material provisions in their life. Yet this does not necessarily mean that they have a mind to suffer. Do not imagine that Christians who live in unfavorable circumstances will have, as a matter of course, more of a mind to suffer than those who live in more favorable circumstances. Only those who have consecrated themselves to the Lord will have a mind to suffer. A mind to suffer is not limited by anything; it does not have a bottom line. You may be provided with a hard floor for your bed if you go to one place. You may not even have a hard floor in another place. Your bed may just be straw strewn on muddy ground. What would you do? Some force themselves to accept such beds. They are indeed suffering, but there is a limit to their suffering. They can tolerate a hard floor but nothing more. They seemingly tell others that they have stooped low enough and that they can stoop no lower. This is having the experience of suffering without the mind to suffer. Some brothers may go through their life with relative ease and enjoyment, yet they can always adjust themselves happily to lower standards of living. They can sleep on a hard floor as well as on straw. They have no complaints, and they are happy to take whatever comes along the way. This is having a mind to suffer. God is calling for men to have a mind to suffer. We must remember that it is not a matter of suffering but a matter of a mind for suffering. In order to serve the Lord, we must have a mind to suffer; otherwise, God cannot use us. Those who do not have a mind to suffer will collapse at the mildest trial. They will quit their work as soon as Satan puts something in their path. Brothers and sisters, do you see this? A mind to suffer is an ability to lower one's standard of living unconditionally.

This is not a matter of how much we suffer, but to what extent we can endure suffering. Suffering is not a necessity, but a mind to suffer is. The Lord's intention is not to keep us in sufferings but to wrought such a mind into us. No brother or sister learning to serve the Lord will be strong if he or she does not have a mind to suffer. If we do not have a mind to suffer, we will be the weakest of all men. As soon as we touch any difficulty, we will give way to self-pity. We will weep for ourselves and sigh, "How did I become this way?" On a certain occasion a sister, who had been serving the Lord for years, came upon another sister shedding tears, and she asked her, "Who are you shedding your tears for?" Many people shed tears for themselves. They consider themselves dear and precious, and they feel sorry for their own fall. Their tears are shed for themselves. Such ones are the weakest of all men; they collapse as soon as they encounter challenges.

The important question when trials and pains come is where our heart is. On the one hand, there is the issue of our pain. On the other hand, there is the issue of the Lord's work. If we do not have a mind to suffer, we will immediately sacrifice the Lord's work. We will be too busy feeling sorry for ourselves

and loving ourselves, and there will be no more energy to take care of the Lord's work! Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to have a mind to suffer. It is true that our suffering may go away if we abandon our work, but then the work will suffer a loss. If a mind to suffer is absent or lacking, Satan can force us to abandon and sacrifice our work at any time. We must remember before the Lord that we are here to uphold God's glory. God can order life or death for us, but on our part we have to be faithful to our responsibility. We cannot forsake our work. We must persist to the end. It is not our desire to see our brothers and sisters go through sufferings. If at all possible, it is good for them to take care of their daily needs in moderation. We are not asking them to go out of their way to look for sufferings. We do not impose sufferings on others. Our hope is that God would supply all of our needs. But we must realize that a mind to suffer is very necessary. On the one hand, we must believe that God has not withheld one good thing from us. On the other hand, we must have a mind to suffer. If we do not, we will collapse as soon as we encounter difficulty or setbacks in our lives.

FOUR

A question naturally arises: To what extent should we be prepared to suffer? The Bible's standard is "Be faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10). In other words, we have to be prepared for any suffering, even the suffering of death. Of course, we do not want to become an extremist. Yet there is no compromise as far as a mind to suffer is concerned. If there is any compromise, we would rather let the Lord do the compromising; we would rather let the church or the more mature brothers balance us. As for ourselves, we have to give our all. If we compromise ourselves, how can we be effective in the work? We will have no way to go on. If we consider our own life to be so precious, and hold ourselves carefully by the hand all the time, we will not accomplish much in God's work. We all have to be faithful even unto death. This is our way. The Lord will not sacrifice our life simply because we have vowed to be faithful. Nevertheless, it is the Lord's business to preserve our life; we do not preserve it ourselves. It is the Lord's business to arrange everything for us. On our side, we have to be prepared to sacrifice ourselves. We have to be prepared to face every kind of suffering. Brothers and sisters, if you love your life, you will not be able to be faithful even unto death. Those who are faithful even unto death do not love their own life. This is the Lord's basic requirement. Our mind to suffer should be so strong that we can say, "Lord, I will die for You! I do not care for the circumstances around me. I am willing to give up my life for You!" Brothers and sisters, without such a determination, we will stop as soon as we encounter difficulty. Every worker of the Lord has to learn to not love himself. Those who love themselves are limited in their works. When they reach a certain point, they will stop. God wants absolute men to serve Him. He wants those who are willing to lay aside their life to serve Him. Do not worry about becoming an extremist. That is a totally different issue. On our part, we should never make any provision for ourselves. We all should be absolute in our mind to suffer. Let me repeat: We do not have to suffer, but we all must have a mind to suffer. We must always be prepared to cast every care aside. We must cast aside not only our outward difficulties but should sacrifice our own health. If we love ourselves and are too afraid to give ourselves up, we will not accomplish much. We have to tell the Lord, "I am willing to consecrate everything. From now on, no suffering will stop me from serving You. This is my choice, no matter what the outcome, whether it is death, life, suffering, or joy!"

Brothers and sisters, only one thing is effective—a service that is faithful even unto death. The more we take this stand, the less Satan can do anything to us. He will have no place to flee. Those who love themselves are truly bound by themselves. A little pain and they are in constant tears and sighings. They love themselves too much! If we do not love ourselves, our tears and sighings will be gone. Brothers and sisters, we who are taking this way have to give up our very lives. If we want to take this way, we have to say to the Lord, "Your ordained way for me may or may not be a way of suffering, but I am ready to meet any sufferings." Forgive me for repeating this again and again. But we must realize

that even though our suffering is limited, our mind to suffer should be unlimited. The actual amount of suffering which the Lord has measured to us may be limited, but our readiness for suffering should be unlimited. If our readiness for suffering is limited, it means that we do not have a mind to suffer. As soon as we put a limit on our readiness for suffering, we will not be able to get very far. This is a high demand, but this is what the Lord is after. Anything short of this will not qualify us for His service. We should not think that a mind to suffer is limited to just a little suffering. No, a mind to suffer has no limit; it is not even limited by death. Anything that comes short of this will not withstand any temptation from Satan. "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their soul-life even unto death" (Rev. 12:11). If our conscience does not condemn us, if we declare our testimony of victory in the face of Satan, and if we love not our soul-life even unto death, his assaults against us will be futile. He cannot deal with a person who does not seek to preserve his own life. We are familiar with the story of Job. Satan attacked Job because he scoffed at the idea that Job could possibly not have a desire to preserve his own life. He said to Jehovah, "Skin for skin! Indeed all that a man has he will give for the sake of his life. But stretch forth Your hand, and touch his bone and his flesh; and he will surely curse You to Your face" (Job 2:4-5). Satan knew that he could have a way with Job if Job had the slightest love for his own life. The passage in Revelation shows that Satan cannot do anything about those who do not love their soul-life even unto death.

This is where many of God's servants have failed. They love their own life. May I ask: Is the preservation of our lives more important or the preservation of the Lord's work more important? Is our life more important or is our responsibility more important? Is it the saving of souls that matters or is it the saving of our lives? Which is more important, our own life or the church of God? Is God's testimony on earth more important or is our own life? No one who indulges in self-love can serve God. Those who are suffering may not be qualified to serve God. Only those who have a mind to suffer, who have an unlimited capacity to suffer, who will not love their soul-life even unto death, can serve Him. Today we have to consecrate ourselves once again to the Lord. We do not consecrate ourselves to suffering, but we are ready to sacrifice everything. The Lord may not want us to give up our life, but we should have the conviction that we will love not our soul-life even unto death. Brothers and sisters, too many failures in the work have resulted from man's own laziness, self-protection, and self-preservation. We must not think that the eyes of the world are blind or that the eyes of the brothers and sisters are blind. When we set out for our work, others will see whether we are fully consecrated. If we hold something back for ourselves and if we take the compromising way, others will see it. Brothers and sisters, when the Lord calls us, He wants us to give up everything. May the Lord be gracious to us, and may none of us treasure ourselves or love our own soul-life. We have to learn to not love or pity ourselves. This is our way. If we do not take this way, our work will become very limited. The degree of our willingness to suffer determines the amount of spiritual work we will perform. If our mind to suffer is limited, our spiritual work will be limited, our blessing to others will be limited, and the result of our work will be limited as well. No other measurement of God's blessing is as accurate as our willingness to accept sufferings. If our mind has an unlimited capacity to suffer, we will know the boundless greatness of His blessing.

CHAPTER FOUR

BUFFETING THE BODY AND MAKING IT A SLAVE

ONE

First Corinthians 9:23-27 says, "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel that I may become a fellow partaker of it. Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold. And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things; they then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible. I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved."

Verse 23 says, "I do all things for the sake of the gospel." This shows us that this passage is about the way of a gospel preacher, a servant of the Lord. Verse 27 says, "I buffet my body and make it my slave." This is a fundamental requirement that a servant of God imposes upon himself. Verses 24 through 26 show us how Paul buffeted his body and made it his slave.

We wish to immediately make it clear that Paul was not speaking about asceticism when he said that he buffeted his body and made it his slave. He did not agree with those who, under the influence of asceticism, teach that the body is an encumbrance which we must seek to get rid of. Ascetics believe that the body is the source of sin, and that one must treat it severely before the problem of sin can be resolved. But the Bible does not teach that the body is an encumbrance, much less a source of sin. The Bible tells us that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19) and that a day is coming when this body will be redeemed and glorified. We should never bring in the thought of asceticism when we speak of "buffeting the body." If we introduce such thoughts into Christianity, we are making it another religion altogether. This is not what we preach. We repudiate the thought that the body is a hindrance or the source of sin. We readily acknowledge that the body can lead us to sin, but the body is not the source of sin. We can still sin no matter how drastically we deal with the body.

In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul confronts Christian workers with the problem of their bodies. Verse 23 says, "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel." This means that he was standing on the ground of a gospel preacher when he spoke this word. What did he do for the sake of the gospel? Verses 24 through 26 show us what he did. In verse 27 Paul points out that what he did was a buffeting of his body. According to the Greek text, the word buffet means to batter the face until it bruises. To buffet one's body and to make it one's slave means to put one's body into subjection and to "hit" it so much that it obediently becomes one's slave, yielding to the will of the gospel preacher. (This, of course, does not mean a literal buffeting of the physical body, which is like the "severe treatment of the body" spoken of in Colossians 2:23.) Paul said that he did this "lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved." This shows us that for every servant of God, buffeting the body and making it one's slave is a basic way of life. Every servant of God should walk by one basic rule—his body has to be brought into subjection. If his body is not brought into subjection, he cannot serve God. How did Paul resolve the problem of his body? He buffeted his body and made it his slave. Verse 27 is the subject, while verses 24 through 26 are the explanation of the subject. In verses 24 through 26 we see how Paul buffeted his body, and in verse 27 he stated the subject. Let us consider this passage point by

point.

TWO

Verse 24 says, "Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run?" Paul illustrated his point with the example of a runner in a race. A Christian's service to the Lord and labor for his Master can be compared to a race. Everyone is running in this race; this is compulsory. No one can exempt himself from it. "Do you not know that those who run on a racecourse all run, but one receives the prize? Run in this way, that you may lay hold." Only one of the runners in a race receives the prize. But if we all run, everyone can receive the prize. This is the difference between their running and our running. Paul used the illustration of a racecourse. This illustration leads to verse 25.

Verse 25 says, "And everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things." This is Paul's emphasis: In order for a man to contend, he has to undergo training. He has to exercise self-control in everything. He cannot eat as he wishes or skip eating as he wishes. He cannot sleep as he wishes or skip sleep as he wishes. All athletes who compete in games are strictly disciplined during their training. They are strictly regulated as to what they can eat and what they cannot eat, when they can sleep and when they should wake up. Before a game begins, they have to follow strict rules such as not drinking or smoking. Once the game starts, there are stricter rules to follow. This is why verse 25 says that everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things. Some may think that it is hard to drop their smoking, drinking, or favorite pastimes. But when a man prepares for a race, he has to strictly control his own body. "Everyone who contends exercises self-control in all things." What are the things he has to exercise self-control in? He has to exercise self-control in the demands of his body. He cannot allow his body to have too many demands or to have too much freedom. In running a race the body is reserved for only one thing—the race. It is not for eating, clothing, smoking, drinking, or sleeping, but for running. Many runners have to abstain from sweet and starchy food. This does not mean that these foods are harmful or useless; rather, they do not help a runner in his race. In order to be a runner, a person has to exercise self-control in all things. Verse 27 speaks of buffeting the body; that is, the body is brought into the discussion. The body has to be under control; it has to obey. All of the faculties of the body are reserved for just one thing—running, the kind of running that will win first prize.

Verse 25 continues, "They then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible." The runners exercised much self-control for the sake of a corruptible crown. Should we who are after an incorruptible crown not exercise much more self-control? The corruptible crown refers to the Greek garlands of flowers, which lasted only for three to five days. A runner had to go through long periods of training before he could have a chance to win such a corruptible crown. Paul said, "They then, that they may receive a corruptible crown, but we, an incorruptible." We should pay attention to Paul's comparison. The Greek runners ran on the racecourse, while we run in the world. Their running was an exercise of the body, while our running is our service to God. In their running, only one received the prize, but in our running, everyone can receive the prize. Their prize was a corruptible crown, but our prize is an incorruptible crown. These are different contrasts. However, one thing holds true in both races—exercising self-control in all things. Self-control is necessary in both cases. They exercised self-control to win the race, while we exercise self-control to preach the gospel. The goals may be different, but the discipline imposed on the body is the same. One has to exercise self-control in running the race, and as Christians we also have to exercise self-control in our Christian life.

Verse 26 says, "I therefore run in this way, not as though without a clear aim; I box in this way, not as though beating the air." This means that Paul was not running in an aimless way; he knew where he was going. He said that he buffeted his body. This means his boxing was not beating the air; he was beating his own body. We should consider verse 26 together with verse 27. Verse 26 tells us that Paul

was not without a clear aim. He did not run in whatever way others directed him to; he had a definite direction in his running. Neither was his boxing a beating of the air. Then in verse 27, he immediately points out that he was buffeting his body. He was hitting his own body. We pointed out earlier that buffeting means a kind of hitting, one which produces bruises all over one's body. It is not ordinary hitting, but a kind of severe beating. Ordinary hitting does not produce bruises. Paul dealt with his body in a harsh way so that his body would come under his control. He did it to make his body his slave. This means he would not allow his body to become loose. He brought it under his own control.

The goal for such an exercise is to make the body the slave, while the means is the buffeting of the body. We buffet our body so that it may become our slave. Brothers and sisters, if we do not overcome in this matter, it would be better for us to wait for three to five years and learn this lesson before we attempt to touch God's work. Every servant of God must learn to bring his body under his control. The Bible shows us that a worker of the Lord is like a runner. He may take great pleasure in the work, but it will have little value if his body is not under his control. Service to the Lord is not a simple thing; it is not merely a matter of preaching sermons from a platform. There is no such thing. Paul shows us here that only those who will buffet their bodies and make them their slaves can serve the Lord. If your body cannot obey, you need more training from the Lord. Do not think that a little aspiration will qualify a person to serve the Lord. God's workers must buffet their body and make it their slave. If their body will not obey them, they are of little use to the work.

THREE

What does it mean for our body to become our slave? In order to understand this, we must first understand what the demands of the body are. We shall only mention a few practical examples—food, clothing, rest, sleep, comfort, and special care in times of sickness. All of these things are demands of the body. Making the body our slave means that, through long periods of buffeting our body during ordinary times, we are able to put it under our control at the time of a race. If we are easy with our body at ordinary times, our legs, feet, lungs, and every other organ will not come under our control at the time of the race, and we will not be able to meet the demand of the race. In order for our body to obey, there is the need for long periods of training. If there is no such training, it will be impossible to steer the body on the spur of the moment. If we lack such training at ordinary times, and if we have never buffeted our body or dealt with it, it will not submit to us at a time of need. When we set out for our work, we will find that our body does not obey us. We will not be able to meet the demands of the body, and we will have no control over our body.

We should not think that a certain measure of spirituality is all that is necessary to engage in the Lord's work. There is still the matter of the body. Paul showed us how real this problem is. I am not asking whether we have a healthy body. I am asking whether or not we are the master of our body. Will our body obey us? If our body will not obey, we cannot serve God in the gospel. This kind of training cannot be completed in a short time. Some spiritual problems can be solved in an instant, but the buffeting of the body requires three, five, or even ten years. Those who have developed a habit of loose living need all the more to impose a strict discipline upon themselves.

For example, the body demands sleep under ordinary circumstances. Sleep is not wrong; it is not sinful, and the demand is surely legitimate. God has divided the day from the night to provide man with the opportunity to rest. It is right for man to sleep. If a man does not sleep, how can he work? But in order for us to buffet our body and make it our slave, we should not insist on sleeping when there is the need to be awake. This is what it means to make our body our slave. Suppose I have scheduled eight hours of sleep every day. It is right for me to take care of my body in this way. But in order to buffet my body and make it my slave, I will act in such a way as if I am beating myself and forcing my body to follow

my instruction. I will train myself to such an extent that if I decided not to sleep today, I could do so. When the Lord was in the garden of Gethsemane, He took three of His disciples aside and said to them, "Watch with Me." When He found them sleeping on His return, He said to Peter, "So were you not able to watch with Me for one hour?" (Matt. 26:38, 40). The Lord wanted them to watch with Him, but they fell asleep. They could not watch with our Lord for even an hour. Is it wrong to sleep? No, sleep is legitimate and necessary. But if the Lord requires us to watch with Him and we cannot overcome this "legitimate" need, we will hinder His work. If any of us cannot give up our demand for sleep, we cannot serve God. This does not mean that a servant of God has to go without sleep night after night. This would be the life of an angel. We are not angels, and we need a good night's sleep every day. But for the sake of learning to follow the Lord and to buffet our body, we should learn to forsake our sleep for a night or two when necessary. This is what it means to make our body our slave.

What does it mean to run the race? Does a man run every day and every minute of the day? Walking is ordinary, but running is something extraordinary. Walking is a daily demand; normally, we walk step by step. Running, however, is not a daily thing. On a racecourse we have to quicken our pace. The normal capacity of the body can support our walk, but in running the body is called upon to put forth extra effort. The normal capacity of the body has to be stretched in order to take care of the extra need. At such times the body needs to obey. In running, the body is asked to supplement its normal functions with extra energy. Running imposes additional demands on the body. The demand on our body is not as strenuous during normal times of walking; it only becomes strenuous when the body has to run. In the same principle, we may need only eight hours of sleep during ordinary times. But if our work requires that we work four more hours one day, we should be satisfied with only four hours of sleep. This is what it means to run the race. To run the race means to meet the extra demands. When the three disciples failed to watch with the Lord, He pointed out the trouble to them: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (v. 41). What good is there in having a willing spirit if the flesh is weak? A willing spirit and sleeping flesh amount to the same thing as an unwilling spirit and sleeping flesh; both amount to nothing. It is not enough for the spirit to be willing; the body has to be willing as well. If the body is not willing and insists on sleeping, it is no longer one's slave. If the body is not a slave, it would be futile to claim that the spirit is willing. This is not to say that the body is the source of sin or that it is an encumbrance. We are saying that, for the sake of serving the Lord, there are extra demands on the body at times, and the body should rise to meet these demands. This is what it means to make our body our slave. We must train our body not just to meet ordinary demands but to have an extra supply when there are extra demands.

When the Lord was on earth, Nicodemus came to Him by night. The Lord could receive him without succumbing to tiredness. A few times He spent whole nights in prayer. All these activities interfered with His sleep. We are not advocating that God's children should make a habit of spending nights in prayer. But if a man wants to serve the Lord, it is a shame if he never spends a night in prayer. It is wrong to constantly spend the night hours in prayer. If you are doing this, you are heading the wrong way. But it is a strange thing to serve God for ten or twenty years without having once prayed all night long. We are not advocating the extreme way. We are not telling people to pray throughout the night all the time. Making a habit of praying all night long is damaging to the body and even to the mind. We do not agree with those who do not pray during the day but who give up their sleep at night for prayer; this is not normal. But if a worker of the Lord never gives up his sleep for prayer, there is something wrong with him also.

Running in a race is not a daily thing, but exercise is a daily thing. We have to exercise to the point that our body will no longer rebel against us but will be subject to us. If we have never exercised in this way and our body is never put under control, sleep will become our first priority when we set out for our work. Our sleep will become our master. If others do not touch our sleep, we can do anything. But as

soon as others touch our sleep, we cannot do anything. It is imperative that a servant of God exercise himself to make his body his slave. To make our body our slave means that when the Lord has a need and a demand, and when circumstances call for it, we can put aside the demands of our body temporarily. We can direct our body to provide the extra supply, to ignore its need, and to be under our control and rule. If we cannot do this, we love ourselves too much and are useless in the Lord's work.

The same principle applies to the matter of eating. Many times our Lord went without food for the sake of His work. He did not make His eating a priority. But this does not mean that our Lord never ate. He could eat well at ordinary times. But when the need was before Him, He could forsake eating. This is to put the body under subjection. We are not so dependent on food that our work has to stop if we have to go hungry. Unfortunately, in the Lord's work, many cannot function without food. We undoubtedly need food, and we have to take care of our physical body, but the body must be trained to go without food when special circumstances call for it. Remember the occasion when the Lord sat down at noon beside Jacob's well to rest while the disciples went to get some food in the city. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and the Lord asked her for a drink. At the same time He opened up the matter of the living water to her. In the end the woman did not give Him anything to drink. It was high noon, the time for a meal and a drink, but the Lord patiently explained to this spiritually thirsty and suffering Samaritan woman the word of life and the meaning of the living water (John 4:5-26). This shows us how one can carry on God's work without the interruption of food. If we arrive at a certain place and cannot do anything until we have had a meal, our body is not serving us as it should. We should not be extremists, and we should not skip our meals all the time. But when there are special demands, we should be able to forego our eating. Bread is not the most important thing. We should be the master of our body. When we need to go without a meal, our body should obey us. We should not be overcome by our body's insistent cries for food. This is what it means to make our body our slave.

In Mark 3 the Lord was surrounded by such a multitude that He had no time to eat. His relatives reacted by seeking to drag Him away from the crowd, for they said He was beside Himself (vv. 20-21). Yet the Lord continued with His work. He was not beside Himself, but the multitude had their pressing needs. He was able to forego His food and drink for the sake of the work. If we can never forego our own needs when the work demands our immediate attention, we will have little effective work. At critical times we have to push ourselves a little to the extreme; we have to be somewhat beside ourselves. When the need calls for it, we should be able to bridle our body and ignore the demands for food and drink. We should not consider these demands to be mandatory.

The Bible plainly states that Christians should fast when occasion requires. The meaning of fasting is to temporarily put aside the legitimate demand of the body. Sometimes a special need calls for serious prayer. At these times we should fast before the Lord. We do not advocate fasting three or five times a week. But if a man has been a Christian for eight or ten years and has never fasted once, something is not right. The Lord spoke of fasting in His teaching on the mount. If we have never fasted, we lack something in our experience. The purpose of fasting is to make our body our slave.

Another demand of the body is comfort. We dare not find fault with a worker for enjoying a measure of ease in his living. But when his work calls for his sacrifice, his body should not ignore the call of the work if the comforts he was accustomed to are not provided. If our body will not respond to our call, we cannot work for the Lord. Some brothers and sisters move around often, not because of the Lord's command, but because they are unhappy and uncomfortable with where they live. We can say that comfort has become their way of life; comfort is leading them by the nose. Such ones cannot be of much use in the hand of the Lord. God's servants should learn to thank Him for easy conditions when the discipline of the Spirit so orders them and when the Lord makes provisions for them. But when the Lord's provisions turn the other way, and they are stripped of ease and comfort, they should be the master of their body and continue with their work. We are not for a life of extremes. Under ordinary

circumstances, we may enjoy better conditions. But when the Lord's need calls for it, we should be able to bear what others normally cannot bear. Some brothers and sisters can only live a comfortable life. As soon as their standard of living is slightly lowered, they are finished. Such ones are of little use to the Lord. In running the race, we have to make our body our slave. We must be able to live under any circumstance. Making our body our slave means that we will not be affected by our circumstances when the work calls for our attention. It means that we can carry on our work even when we have to live at a substandard level. If we are unable to do this, we will retreat as soon as our conditions fall below our accustomed standard. This does not mean that those whose lot is inferior will better withstand harsher environments. Many poorer brothers collapse physically as soon as they are given a lot that is inferior to what they are used to. They love themselves too much, and they have never made their body their slave.

Another example is our clothing. While we should eat well and clothe ourselves, we should not give undue attention to the matter of clothing. John the Baptist was a person with little concern for his attire. The Lord Jesus said of him that if anyone wanted to see an elegantly attired person there was no need to look in his direction; the place to look was the royal palace. Unfortunately, some Christians have set too high a standard in the matter of clothing. They cannot go on without maintaining such a standard. We hold that it does not glorify the Lord for us to wear ragged garments; they are not a glory to the Lord. We should, whenever possible, be clean, tidy, and suitably dressed. Nevertheless, when a need arises, we should be like Paul, who, even though he was in hunger and thirst and nakedness, continued to serve the Lord (1 Cor. 4:11). If God's servants will exercise themselves at ordinary times, their body will be under their control, and their work in the Lord will not be affected by an issue such as their clothing.

Another example is sickness. In times of sickness or weakness, the body makes heavier demands than usual. Many workers of the Lord love themselves so much that they excuse themselves from work as soon as they are slightly sick. How could Paul ever have written his Epistles if he had called a halt whenever his eyes were hurting? At least he would not have written the book to the Galatians, for that book was written at the time when his eyes were very weak. This is why he said, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand" (6:11). If Paul had to wait for his eyes to get better before he could make his tents, he would never have made any tents, because it surely requires eyesight to make tents. Yet he worked during the day and made tents during the night. He did not stop because of his eyes. If Timothy had to wait until his stomach was well before he would go on with his work, there would have been no one to continue Paul's ministry, because Timothy's stomach never became well. On the one hand, it is necessary for us to take reasonable care of our bodies. But on the other hand, when the work requires us to sacrifice a little, we must never spare ourselves. When our work calls for it, we should set aside the demand of our sickness and take care of the demand of the work. It is true that sickness demands rest, but when the work calls for sacrifice, even a sick body has to heed to its call. We have to buffet our body and make it our slave. This is a basic requirement in the work. If we cannot direct our body, with what means shall we engage ourselves in the work? If a servant of the Lord is seriously sick and the Lord has not imposed a special burden upon him, it is right for him to take care of his sickness; the church should know what to do with him, and the other co-workers should also know what to do with him. But if a need exists in the work and the Lord's command is clear, he cannot be bound by his sickness. Sometimes, there is no time for sickness; we must put aside temporarily the care of our sickness. This is a lesson we all must learn.

This principle applies not only to sickness but to pain in general. Sometimes we are in so much physical pain that we feel that our body can no longer bear the torment. At ordinary times, we should provide suitable rest and therapy to the body and take care of its needs. But when the Lord's work demands and commands us to do something, we have to do it, even though our body may still be in

pain. Our body should always obey us. Sometimes we have to lift up our eyes to the Lord and say, "Lord, my body has to obey me this one more time. I cannot satisfy its need this one more time!"

This principle should equally be applied to sexual desires. It is not mandatory that we gratify our need for sex. We should learn to give His service the priority over everything else.

Let us consider Paul's story. In 1 Corinthians 4:11-13 he said, "Until the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked and buffeted and wander without a home; and we labor, working with our own hands. Reviled we bless; persecuted we endure; defamed we exhort. We have become as the offscouring of the world, the scum of all things, until now." Please pay attention to the words in verse 11: "Until the present hour." This means that these conditions were still present at the time of his speaking. It shows us that Paul's body was under his control all the time. Nothing was ever allowed to hinder his service to the Lord. In chapter six of this same Epistle, from verse 12 through the end, he referred to two matters—the matter of food and the matter of sex—and he made it very clear that we are not servants of the body. Whether in the matter of food or sex, there is no need for us to become slaves to our bodies. In chapter seven he shows clearly that a man does not have to be a slave to his body in the matter of sex, and in chapter eight he shows that a man does not have to be a slave to his body in the matter of food. What then does it mean for us to buffet the body and make it our slave? It means that we buffet our body and "hit" it to the extent that it comes under our full control. Brothers and sisters, in working for the Lord and in our service to Him, we often have to restrict the demands of the body. When a need arises in the work and the body is called upon to deny its cravings, can we be strong enough to deny them? Of course, all human cravings are created by God and are given to us by Him. There is nothing wrong with the legitimate demands of the body. But are any of these demands preventing us from serving our Lord?

FOUR

Brothers and sisters, do not think for a moment that you can relax your rein on the demands of the body. You have to realize that laxity and discretion are two entirely different things. You must exercise discretion to care for your body, but at the same time, you must take full control of your body. To buffet the body does not mean that you starve all the time. It means that you can go on without food even when your stomach is empty. At the same time, you should still take care of your body. However, if you are involved in God's work, yet are very inflexible with your eating, you will not be able to go on as soon as the food falls below your accustomed standard. We are not for asceticism, and we do not agree that the body is the source of sin. We acknowledge that God is the One who has created in us our physical needs. We readily agree that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. But at no time are we under any obligation to follow the needs of the body. This does not mean that we have to be without clothing, food, and sleep all the time. If at all possible, we should clothe and feed ourselves properly and rest properly. Our eating can be the result of our buffeting the body, or it can be the result of not buffeting the body; the two things are entirely different. The problem today is that many brothers and sisters are very loose with their body. If we cannot put our body under strict control, as soon as we face any trial in our work, we will grumble, complain, or run away. We have to exercise endurance before the Lord. We should say, "Lord, my troubles can never match the troubles You faced when You were sojourning on the earth." The Lord lowered Himself from the loftiest height and descended to the lowest depth. Today we have not lowered ourselves from the loftiest height nor descended to the lowest depth. We should say, "Lord, we can never come up to what You have done." We must learn to accept all the restrictions imposed upon our body.

Some people have allowed their body to go unchecked for a long time. These ones need to spend more time to learn the proper lessons. We hope that they can be useful in the work within a short period of

time. But if they do not deal with their problems and cannot overcome them, they cannot participate in God's work. Those who have never buffeted their body or made it their slave will fall back as soon as they are put in a race. We must remember that the work of the gospel is like a race. If we have never exercised ourselves and our body has never been under our control, we will fail and not be able to run when God puts extra demands on us. Running is an extraordinary demand that one imposes on his body. We can never be loose with our own body. All the great servants of the Lord are under His strict rule; they all exercise strict control over their own body. If we do not rule over our body, we will fail as soon as we are challenged by additional needs. All extraordinary and valuable works are performed under extraordinary demands. If we cannot work under extraordinary demands, how can we be useful in any way? We should not be loose. We should not allow our body to relax. We have to tightly hold the rein and put our body under strict control. We must be able to give up our sleep, give up our food, and give up our comfort when we are called to do so. We have to persist in the work and insist on our body being our slave. Today we take our body along with us to the work, and even when our body is sick or in pain, it still has to obey us.

Paul said, "See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand" (Gal. 6:11). He was doing more than what his capacity allowed him to do. We can sense our brother's feeling here; he was forcing himself to do what he could not do. Throughout the ages, this is how the Spirit is expressed. If a servant of God is in good health at ordinary times and experiences no hardship in the environment, sleeping well and eating well, yet finds his body uncooperative when the need arises, he is not a useful servant of the Lord. Paul said, "I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest perhaps having preached to others, I myself may become disapproved." In other words, he was afraid that others would receive the gospel while he would miss the reward and the Lord's commendation: "Well done My servant." Remember that a man who loves himself cannot serve God. Those who are loose in their living and who cannot discipline themselves strictly cannot serve God. If we want to learn to serve the Lord, we have to exercise ourselves, control ourselves, and rule over ourselves every day. If our love for the Lord is strong enough, we will not be led away by the demands of the body. If our spirit is strong enough, we will not allow our flesh to remain in weakness. When the resurrection life in us multiplies, it will give life to our mortal body. We have to be brought on until our body will obey us and us alone, until it no longer frustrates us. When this happens, we will be able to serve the Lord in a good way.

CHAPTER FIVE

DILIGENT

The daily life of a Christian worker often determines whether he is qualified for the Lord's work. Some young people manifest qualities that give you the confident expectation that they will develop into useful servants of Christ. From the very beginning, they give others the impression that they are good seeds and that they will blossom and bring forth fruit. There are others who are quite confident of themselves and who consider themselves quite highly, but before long, they fall by the way. In addition to being useless, they also bring dishonor to the Lord's name. They chose a way that is too broad and too wide. Still others are not very conspicuous at the beginning. However, they prove their worth before the Lord in later years. You may ask how we can account for these wide differences. Let me answer frankly that there are certain fundamental features in the constitution and character of every person which account for his usefulness and without which no one can be of any use in the service of the Lord. A young man may hold great promise in many areas, but if fundamental features are lacking, he cannot work for the Lord, even though his desire to serve the Lord is genuine and even though he

has prepared himself for it. He can never carry out a proper work for the Lord. We have never met anyone who cannot control his body, yet who can be a good worker of the Lord. I do not know what these ones make of themselves in other professions, but I have never seen a person who is unable to control and rule over his body prove to be a useful servant of the Lord, nor have I seen a man who does not have a mind to suffer who can serve the Lord. I have never met a person who fails to listen to others who is good at serving. All servants of the Lord have to have certain basic character traits. In other words, they must possess such qualifications; they must receive mercy from the Lord to possess these qualities before they can serve the Lord in a proper way. Serving the Lord is not simple. A breaking-down and building-up process is necessary for the outer man. If you are wrong, loose, and undisciplined in many things, you are not qualified to do the Lord's work. Many are not qualified to do the Lord's work because of flaws in their character and personality, not because of a lack of technique, knowledge, or doctrine. This frustration has delayed the Lord's work in many instances. We have to learn to listen to the brothers, to humble ourselves before the Lord, to seek after Him, and to deal with Him in many aspects. We should never despise the training of our character. If our character and disposition do not go through some severe constituting work of the Spirit, we cannot expect much result from our work. None of the basic training in our character can be overlooked. If we are constituted in our character, we can work for the Lord. Without such a character, we cannot work for Him. Let us spend time before Him to deal with these character issues one by one.

In this chapter we come to another character issue—diligence.

ONE

Matthew 25:18, 24-28, 30 says, "But he who had received the one went off and dug in the earth and hid his master's money....Then he who had received the one talent also came and said, Master, I knew about you, that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow. And I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the earth; behold, you have what is yours. And his master answered and said to him, Evil and slothful slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I did not winnow. Therefore you should have deposited my money with the money changers; and when I came, I would have recovered what is mine with interest. Take away therefore the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents....And cast out the useless slave into the outer darkness." This passage shows us that one of the basic requirements of a worker of the Lord is diligence. It clearly portrays the fundamental trouble in the life of a servant. The trouble was twofold: He was both "evil" and "slothful." His evil was manifested in his calling his master "a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow." We shall not dwell on this aspect of his character, but we shall speak of the other, that is, his sloth. He hid his talent in the earth because his heart was evil and his hands were slothful. In his heart he had certain thoughts about his master. These thoughts were evil. At the same time, he did not do what he should have done, but instead he hid the talent in the earth. This is simply slothfulness. We want to pay attention to this aspect of his character. A slothful character is the biggest weakness among many people.

Slothful people never look for things to do. If work comes their way, they seek to evade it. Many Christians also adopt this attitude; they view big matters as being small, and small matters as being nothing. They try to reduce a big work to a small work, and they try to make a small work nothing at all. This is their attitude all the time. Based on our experience, we can say that only one kind of person is useful—those who are diligent. A slothful person is detestable. A brother once said that even Satan can do nothing about a slothful person. Proverbs 19:24 says, "A sluggard burieth his hand in the dish, and will not even bring it to his mouth again" (Darby). It is hard for a lazy man to do just about anything. It is hard because he is afraid of becoming tired. He puts his hand in the dish, but cannot even bring it to his mouth again. He has to eat, but he wishes that others would bring the food in the dish to

his mouth. If there is ever a useless man on this earth, he has to be one who is slothful. God will not use a slothful person. Brothers and sisters, have you ever known an effective Christian worker who is slothful? Everyone who is ever used by God labors and works diligently in His service. He is always on the alert lest he squander his time or strength. Those who are always looking for an opportunity for rest and recreation are not worthy of being called God's servants. God's servants cannot adopt a lazy living. They seek to buy up every opportunity that is available to them.

Look at the apostles in the New Testament, from Peter to Paul. Can we find one lazy bone in them? They did not have any trace of laziness. They had no thought of wasting their time. All of them labored diligently and sought for every opportunity to serve the Lord. Paul said, "Proclaim the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). The proclamation of the word must be done in season and out of season. One has to labor diligently, whether in season or out of season. A worker of the Lord has to work in season and out of season. This means that he has to be very diligent. All the apostles were extremely diligent. Think of the colossal amount of work Paul accomplished. We may be eighty years old before we have done one tenth of what he did. We must realize that all servants of the Lord are diligent. In considering Paul's work, we can see that he was truly diligent. There was no laziness in him whatsoever. He was either traveling from place to place, preaching the gospel wherever he went, or reasoning intently with individuals and teaching them. Even when he was in prison he was still writing his Epistles. The Epistles which touched the peak of spiritual revelations were all written in his prison cell. Although he was bound within the cell walls, God's word was not bound. Paul was truly a diligent man. He was like his Master, who was never slothful.

In the original language of the New Testament, there are three Greek words for slothfulness. The first is *argos*, the second is *nothros*, and the third is *okneros*. All three words mean slothfulness. They are translated differently in the New Testament (1 Tim. 5:13; Rom. 12:11; Heb. 5:11; 6:12; Matt. 12:36; 20:3, 6; 2 Pet. 1:8; Phil. 3:1; Titus 1:12). Whether the words are translated as idle, slothful, sluggish, irksome, or dull, they all mean a refusal or reluctance to work or do things. To be slothful means to ignore the work or to reduce the work until it becomes no work. There is a joke about a doorkeeper whose responsibility was to open the door whenever visitors rang the bell. One day the bell rang, but he did not open the door. When asked why he did not open it, he answered, "I am hoping the bell will stop ringing!" Visitors were waiting to come in, yet he was hoping the bell would stop ringing. Brothers and sisters, what kind of person is this? Unfortunately, this is the way many behave in God's work. They hope that things will go away. Even when things do not go away, they hope that they will not become a burden to them. In their mind they are saying, "How I would thank the Lord if these things went away and I did not have to deal with them!" What is this? This is slothfulness!

What is slothfulness? It is to procrastinate, to drag on for as long as possible, and to take time in doing something. Perhaps a work can be finished in one day, yet the person drags it out for ten days. Or it can be finished in a month, yet the person drags it out for three months. He takes his time to finish the work. This is slothfulness. In some instances the word is translated "idle" (Matt. 20:3, 6). An idle person is one who mills around aimlessly. He is tossed between acting and not acting, and his mind is never set on what should be done. In Philippians 3:1, it is translated "irksome." Paul said, "To write the same things to you, for me it is not irksome, but for you it is safe." As soon as you put something on the shoulders of some brothers and sisters, they are reluctant to take it up. It is irksome to them. They sigh and grumble. It seems as if they are being asked to take up an impossible task and that a very heavy burden has been placed upon them. But this is not the way Paul acted. He was in prison when he wrote his Epistles. It would indeed be a challenge for anyone to write in a situation as dire as his. Yet in writing to the Philippians, Paul exhorted them to rejoice. "Rejoice in the Lord always" (4:4). As far as

his circumstances went, he was in grave hardship. Yet he said, "To write the same things to you, for me it is not irksome." He was not slothful. He did not consider it irksome; rather, he considered it a joyous thing. He did not know the meaning of laziness. In him we find a zeal which is prominent among all servants of God. They are not slothful and do not consider it irksome to take challenges upon themselves.

Many brothers and sisters have become useless in God's service because they are afraid to take on any responsibility. They are irked by everything. They constantly hope for less work. They would rather choose less responsibility than more responsibility, and they would be happy to settle for no responsibility at all. They do not have a diligent character. If we are lazy, we are disqualified not only from God's service, but from man's service as well. Many brothers and sisters cannot be servants of the Lord because they are lazy. Some so-called servants of God sit high on a pedestal. It seems as if no one has control over them; no brother or sister can touch them, and no one can say anything to them. They regard themselves as servants of God alone. If their master was changed for a brief moment, they would be shown to be total failures. No human master would allow them to be as sloppy as they are. Our disposition and walk must be so exercised that we would never shrink back from troubles, but would instead prefer service and sacrifice for God's people, both materially and physically. We should prefer to labor and work with our own hands. If this is not our way, we are not qualified to be called God's servants! Paul said, "You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me" (Acts 20:34). He had two good hands; they were not slothful at all. They worked during the day and during the night. Such a person is truly a servant of God.

TWO

What is diligence? It is the opposite of slothfulness. It is not shirking from responsibility. A diligent person does not try to reduce his work to nothing. On the contrary, he tries to create work out of nothing. In the Lord's service, it is quite possible for us to take a day or two of rest if we do not look for work. We should not be those who stand around idly waiting for something to turn up. If we work only when work turns up, we are not diligent persons. A diligent person is never idle; he is always looking for things to do. He is always pondering, praying, contemplating, and considering before God as to what he should do. Unless he exercises himself this way, he can find himself with nothing to do. If we only act "according to the book," we may soon find that there is not much of a book left. We should expect to find much work in our service to God. We should discover many needs. We have to pray much to the Lord and look to Him all the time. We should open our eyes, and as soon as we find something that needs to be done, we should do it. After we finish a job, we should wait on the Lord and look to Him again. And as soon as we find more to do, we should tackle it. Following this, we should seek God's will again, and take on yet another task. This is what it means to serve God. The Lord said, "My Father is working until now, and I also am working" (John 5:17). We must never change this verse to read, "My Father is resting until now, and I also am resting." Laziness is not our way; our way should be, "My Father is working until now, and I also am working."

We should ask the Lord, "What work do You have for me to do?" After the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman, He asked His disciples a very strange question: "Do you not say that there are yet four months and then the harvest comes? Behold, I tell you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are already white for harvest" (4:35). According to His disciples, the harvest would not be ready for another four months. But according to the Lord, the harvest had already come. In man's view, one had to wait four months, but the Lord said, "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are already white for harvest." The lack today is men who would lift up their eyes. Everyone wants to wait for four months to work. Today many people are hiding at home instead of journeying in God's way. Their eyes are not on what God is doing today. In John 5:17 the Lord said that He was always doing

what His Father had sent Him to do. In John 4:35 He told us to lift up our eyes and look. If we do not lift up our eyes, we will not see anything. The matter of work is altogether related to the matter of diligence. It involves our conscientiousness. It is not a matter of taking care of what is in our hands, but a matter of lifting up our eyes to look for things to do. God is moving and acting behind many things, and we have to lift up our eyes to look for them in order to find them. We have to lift up our eyes to see the harvest and to see if it has ripened. Once we look, we will find work to do. How strange it is that so many people seem so idle; they seem to have nothing to do!

Those who have the intention to work will always find work to do. Those who have no intention to work are always afraid that work will come their way. A diligent person always waits on God. As soon as he is free, he goes to the Lord and looks for things to do. He is always seeking an opportunity to work. A brother once said, "Brother So-and-so is not doing his job. So many brothers from out of town are here, and he will not spend any time to fellowship with them." Another brother asked, "Why do you not tell him?" The first brother answered, "Does something like that have to be said?" This is right. A servant of the Lord should always be waiting on God for things to do. Of course, this does not mean that he should move around and make a fuss ostentatiously. But it does mean that the Lord's servant should always be seeking God and looking to Him. He should build up the habit of lifting up his eyes and looking. If he is truly busy, God will not burden him with further work. But as soon as his time becomes available, he should ask, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" As long as we will lift up our eyes, we will find that many people need our service.

Those who always have nothing to do have only one reason—they are used to being lazy. They live a lazy life. They are lazy by nature. When something is put in their hands, they take more than ten days to finish what others can finish in a day. They have no motivation for work. Brothers and sisters, we have to actively seek for work. If we have not looked to God for work, prayed for work, and found work, we are lazy, and we will not be able to accomplish much work. Even if we are given five or ten more years, we still will not get very far with our work.

A basic requirement of a worker of the Lord is to be quick with his eyes. As soon as a need arises, he should know what to do and how to move. Without this trait, he will not find any work. Our spirit has to be sensitive to the Lord. If we are not sensitive, we will be slow to react to things. We have to pay attention to lifting up our eyes. We should not follow what others say. We should not assume that there are four months to the harvest. We have to hear what the Lord is saying: "Behold, I tell you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are already white for harvest." It is amazing that some walk by the fields every day and yet have no eyes to behold. They think that they still have to wait four more months! They walk by needs every day, yet they do not find anything to do! Their hands have already touched the things that they should do, yet they still say that they do not know what they should do. How strange this is! Brothers and sisters, we have never seen God use a man who was slothful. Those whom God uses are men who expend their energy, who always look for things to do, and who are never loose. They jealously guard the passing moments and never put off until tomorrow what can be done today. Those who are loose with their time have little use in the hand of the Lord. Some people will not move unless they are pushed to do so. They are like grandfather clocks; others have to set them in motion before they do anything. If no one pushes them, they will not move by themselves. Such ones are of little use in God's work. No matter where we go, as long as we find brothers who are laboring and diligently working, we find results. God has done great works in many places because many people labored diligently behind the scene. In some places God's work suffers a setback because some have been slothful. We have never seen a lazy person who was greatly used by God. Often the underlying reason for failure in the work is nothing but slothfulness.

The word in Greek for diligence is *spoude* or *spoudazo*. It is also translated as zeal, earnestness, eager,

and haste (Rom. 12:8, 11; 2 Cor. 7:11-12; 8:7-8, 16; Heb. 4:11; 6:11; 2 Pet. 1:5, 10; 3:14; Gal. 2:10; 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:9, 21; Titus 3:12; Jude 3; 1 Thes. 2:17; Eph. 4:3; 2 Pet. 1:15; Mark 6:25; Luke 1:39). Romans 12:11 puts the words diligence (zeal) and slothful together. It says, "Do not be slothful in zeal." In other words, to be slothful is to not be diligent. In spiritual work one person should count for ten or even a hundred. If God's servants are lazy, no work can be done. If we are slothful, and ten of us are needed to do the work of one man, how can we meet the need of the work? Brothers and sisters, we have to acquire a diligent character. Whether or not our work is actually overwhelming is a secondary issue. The primary issue is whether or not we have a diligent character. We should be those who are desperate to seek for work before the Lord. Of course, this does not mean that we should pretend to be busy. It is useless to pretend. We should be diligent, and this means that we should not be afraid of responsibility, that we should serve the Lord with zeal, and that we should be burning in spirit. We have to find out what we can do in God's service. This may not be manifested in outward activities, but it should be manifested in our character and disposition. If we are lazy by nature, it will be useless even if we are busy twelve hours a day for days, because eventually we will revert to our same old habits. We must have a character that is diligent and conscientious before we can become useful to the Lord. Some people can force themselves to work for two hours, but in essence they are still lazy persons; they are still very much afraid of responsibility. They pray day and night for their responsibilities to be reduced or eliminated altogether, and they yearn for the day when they will have no responsibilities at all. This is not the way our Lord works. He came to the world to seek out men, to take on responsibilities. He said that He came "to seek and to save that which is lost." He did not come just to make contacts with men; He came to seek them out. We must have this kind of character before we can go on with the Lord.

Second Peter 1:5-7 says, "Adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue; and in virtue, knowledge; and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control, endurance; and in endurance, godliness; and in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love." This is diligence. Peter used the phrase and in six times. This shows that a diligent man always adds to what he has; he is not content with what he has. We should cultivate this character. We should always add to what we have and never stop. There must always be the "adding...and in." We must push ourselves all the time. This is the only way to see results. If we are idle and lazy by nature, we will not get anywhere. Some people do not sense any responsibility in God's work; they do not feel any burden on their shoulders. They have never thought of improving the work or expanding their work. They have never thought of gaining more men for the Lord or spreading the gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. They can tolerate everything. How can God use such men? If they do not see a single soul saved today, they accept it as a matter of course. If they do not see a soul saved tomorrow, they are not alarmed either. How can such ones work for God? How can the Lord's purpose be attained through workmen of this sort? God needs workers who will not give up, who always seek to add to what they have. Only such men can participate in the Lord's work. Read the words of 2 Peter 1:5-8 again: "Adding all diligence, supply bountifully in your faith virtue; and in virtue, knowledge; and in knowledge, self-control; and in self-control, endurance; and in endurance, godliness; and in godliness, brotherly love; and in brotherly love, love. For these things, existing in you and abounding, constitute you neither idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Peter said that we should be more diligent. How can we be diligent? We have to add to what we have. This is the way to be delivered from idleness. In other words, slothfulness can only be removed by diligence. How do we become diligent? We become diligent by always adding to what we have. We should always feel that we do not have enough, that we will not settle for what we have, and that we will not stop until we abound and are no longer idle or unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, we have to counter our laziness with "adding...and in." We should pay attention to Peter's word. If we only preach the doctrine of diligence, we only have to exhort others to be diligent, and we only need to say it once. But Peter repeated the

pattern in verses 5 through 7. He was showing us that one can only be diligent when he adds to what he has again and again until he has these things in abundance. This is the only way to not be idle or unfruitful. Brothers and sisters, we need to pray for God to change our character. We do not want to be slothful. We want to be those who are happy and willing to work and who constantly seek for an opportunity to serve the Lord.

Peter did not stop here; he went on. Please read verse 15: "Moreover I will also be diligent that you may be able, after my exodus, to bring these things to mind at all times." Here the word diligent is used once again. Peter charged them diligently to remember these things. Perhaps he had seen too many lazy ones. This is why he had to diligently remind them of these things. Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to serve our God diligently and conscientiously. We should seize every opportunity to serve Him. We should have a disposition and a character that are forever diligent. A good worker is one who is at work not only with his hands and feet, but with his mind and heart as well. If we are not diligent, we will not be of much use to the Lord's work. Those who are good at doctrines may be completely useless to the Lord if they are lazy by nature. All who are afraid of work and responsibility and who have no desire to do anything are not qualified to serve God. They are not fit for His work.

The two Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus are letters concerning the Lord's work. Second Timothy 4:9 says, "Be diligent to come to me quickly." If a man is diligent, he will come quickly. But if a man is slothful, he will come slowly. Paul said, "Be diligent to come to me quickly." Verse 21 says, "Be diligent to come before winter." Titus 3:12 also speaks of diligence. In these Epistles on work, diligence is very much emphasized.

Jude says the same thing in verse 3: "Beloved, while using all diligence to write to you concerning our common salvation..."

Paul spoke of diligence in other places as well. In pointing out the Corinthians' repentance, he said, "For behold this very thing, your being made sorrowful according to God, what earnestness it has worked out in you" (2 Cor. 7:11). The word earnestness in this verse is the same as diligence in Greek.

Brothers and sisters, if a man wants to learn to serve the Lord, he must be awakened to the weightiness of his responsibility, to the urgency of the need around him, and to the fleeting nature of time! Life is short. If such a consciousness is present within him, he will become diligent and unrelenting. If we do not feel the fleeting nature of our time, the urgency of the need around us, or the weightiness of our responsibility, we will not be able to accomplish much in God's work. If the burden is pressed upon us, we will have no option but to work, even if we have to deprive ourselves of food, sleep, and rest to achieve the goal. This is the only way to make progress in our work. If we consider rest as the most important thing in our life, we will not get too far with our work. Brothers and sisters, our time is almost gone; the need is ever so desperate, and our responsibility is ever so great. Let us, as dying men with fleeting breath and fading opportunity, give ourselves fully to preach the gospel to those who are dying around us. If we drag our feet and fail to see the needs around us, the responsibility that we bear, and the little time that we have, we will not get much of the Lord's work done. Today every servant of God has to serve with a dying urgency. Who can be slothful under such pressure? Brothers and sisters, we must arise and discipline our body in order to be diligent. As Paul said, we have to buffet our body and make it our slave. Just saying that we are eager to serve the Lord is not enough. If we are lazy, we will not be able to tackle any problem before us. Do not think that slothfulness is a small thing. Second Peter 1:8 says that slothfulness is laziness and idleness. We cannot be lazy, and we cannot be idle. We have to buffet our body again and again until we realize that a total, genuine, and daily sacrifice of our life is the only way to work and become useful. We cannot deceive ourselves. Some people say that they will gladly give up their lives for the Lord. Yet they live a lazy life. They try to spare themselves in everything. If they try to bring their character, habits, and disposition into the Lord's work, they will find that they are holding back the Lord's work! If Paul had waited every time for a Macedonian call

before he worked, the book of Acts might have recorded only one mission of Paul to Macedonia. The Macedonian call was only one among many in Paul's work. As for the rest of his work, Paul carried it out with a burden which he bore before the Lord. If we have to wait for the brothers to come to us before we will work, we may wait a lifetime for nothing. We work because we have a burden, because we know that the time is short, the need is great, and Satan's attack is fierce. We are forced to be diligent. Slothfulness can make an otherwise useful man useless. It can turn a man of riches into a man who works only to a third, a fifth, or merely a tenth of what he is capable of! Everyone who knows God and who is useful in His hand is diligent.

THREE

Let us return to the passage in Matthew 25:18-30. What does it say in that passage? In the parable we see two possible charges facing us at the judgment seat—the charge of "evil" and the charge of "slothful." The slave was evil because he harbored ill thoughts about the Lord. Perhaps not many people are this evil. But nine out of ten may have to admit that they are slothful slaves when they stand before the Lord. At that time the Lord Himself will pronounce the judgment: "Cast out the useless slave into the outer darkness" (v. 30). The Lord considers a slothful servant a "useless" one. Sometimes we ask why God uses a certain brother. He uses him because he gives himself to what he is doing day and night. The way is with the diligent ones; no lazy ones can take this way. We have to sacrifice our all before we can take this way. Brothers and sisters, if we do not deal with the problem of slothfulness, we cannot have any work at all. Once we become lazy, our worth is cut in half. If we allow ourselves to go on this way, we may end up with only a tenth of our worth. There are already too few people who know the Lord today. If we drag our feet and are slow in our endeavor, how can our work accomplish anything? Do not regard this matter lightly. Do not think that diligence is a small thing. Many people in the past have become useless and have fallen by the wayside, wasting themselves through their slothfulness. Let us take this solemn warning. From this very day let us look to the Lord to enable us to reverse our habit and character altogether. May the Lord remove slothfulness from us. We cannot be lazy and idle. If we are, our work will not have a future.

We should discipline our body in such a strict way that it will be fully obedient to us. We should be diligent, not slothful. The most common malady in our work is slothfulness. Perhaps nine out of ten persons are slothful. A servant of the Lord should have the stamina to always push himself forward. The Bible uses the ox instead of the horse as a symbol of our service. An ox plods on with the same work today, tomorrow, and the next day; it never gives up. If we work one day when we are up and rest the next day when we are down, or work when the weather is fair and rest when the weather is foul, we will never see any result to our work. But if we move on step by step, day by day, unrelentingly and steadily, we will see results sooner or later. May God deliver us from our flippant and foolish ways so that we can be like the ox, holding, gripping, steadying, and unrelentingly and diligently working all the time. If we do this, we will have a way to go on.

The book of Proverbs speaks of slothfulness more than any other book in the Old Testament. It gives a clear picture of what slothfulness is. The Hebrew word *atsel* is translated fourteen times, either as slothful or as sluggard (6:6, 9; 10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 20:4; 21:25; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). It is translated once as slothfulness (19:15). The Hebrew word *remiyah* is also translated as slothful twice (12:24, 27). Solomon made it clear what slothfulness is.

Since slothfulness is a habit that has been built up over the years, we cannot hope to correct it in a day or two. If we do not deal with it in a serious way, it may stay with us for the rest of our life. Do not think that hearing one message will solve the problem. It is not that simple. This habit has taken years to build up, and it has become part of our character. Unless we deal with it sternly before the Lord, we

cannot rid ourselves of it. We expect those who are accustomed to laziness to be all the more conscientious in dealing with their slothfulness. Unless they deal with this matter soberly, they cannot participate in the Lord's work. God's work cannot tolerate lazy ones. No slothful person can produce a proper work, because the disposition of a lazy man always tries to ignore or put off things. When things come his way, he wishes that they would disappear altogether. Those with a lazy habit are hopeless as far as God's work is concerned. Every servant of the Lord must be a busy person. He should always look for something to occupy himself with. He should put himself under every burden and delve into every problem; he should not avoid problems. Every servant of God should take all kinds of responsibilities upon himself; he should not be afraid of troubles. Brothers and sisters, we have to deal with our evil habit of avoiding work, trouble, and assignments. We must deal with this in a stern way. A man who is lazy can never serve God.

CHAPTER SIX

RESTRAINED IN SPEAKING

ONE

Many people could be very useful in the hand of God; they could be a powerful vessel to the Lord. Yet they remain useless to God, or they are used by Him in only a limited way. One of the main reasons for their failure is a lack of restraint in their speaking. We must remember that careless words are often the source of a leakage of power. Our words are like holes: They can be an outlet for God's power, or they can leak away His power. Our mouth can be the outlet through which God's power flows, or it can be a hole through which the divine power leaks away. Unfortunately, many people leak away God's power through their speaking.

James 3:11 says that a spring cannot "gush forth the sweet and the bitter" at the same time. A worker of the Lord should send forth sweet and living water; he should be a conveyer of God's word. A water bucket cannot be used both for carrying drinking water and for dumping sewage. If the bucket for sewage is used to carry drinking water, it will become hazardous to health and life. In the same way, if our lips are consecrated for the utterance of God's word, then a solemn obligation is upon us to guard our lips for His service alone. If we employ our lips in things other than God's word, we cannot employ them in the utterance of God's word. Many people cannot be used by God, or they can only be used by God in a limited way, simply because their spring produces two kinds of water, sweet and bitter. They speak God's word with their mouth, and they also say many things which have nothing to do with God.

Brothers and sisters, before the Lord we should realize that once we consecrate our mouth to be God's oracle, we have a great responsibility upon our shoulders. It is a grave responsibility for God to entrust His word to us. In Numbers 16 we are told how Korah and his associates banded together to oppose Moses and Aaron. They took their censers filled with fire and presented them to the Lord. They all perished for their sin, but the censers remained holy and were beaten into plates for a covering of the altar (vv. 16-18, 33, 38-39). Whatsoever has been offered to God and used by Him is set apart for Him and cannot be put to common use afterwards. Some brothers and sisters have a wrong concept; they think that they can speak God's word one minute and Satan's word (lies being of Satan) the next. Brothers and sisters, this cannot be our practice. Once a brother opens his mouth for the Lord, his mouth is forever the Lord's. Many people leak away their power through the words they speak. Some brothers could have been very useful in the hand of the Lord, but because they spoke many things that

were not for God, their inward power leaked out through their speaking. We must remember that a spring can bring forth only one kind of water. If our mouth has once spoken God's word, we have to realize that we have no right to speak just anything when we open our mouth again. Our mouth has been sanctified; it is separated already. Once something is consecrated to God, it becomes God's possession forever; we can never take back what we have given to Him. If we take it back, we become like Balaam's donkey; we are no longer God's prophet. We have to see the strong relationship between God's word and our word. Our mouth is separated; it belongs to God, and it can only speak God's word.

It is unfortunate that many otherwise useful men have become useless in the eyes of the Lord simply because their mouths have become a gaping hole through which God's power dissipates. Once a mouth speaks the wrong kind of words, power is gone from such a mouth. The trouble with many people is that they have too many words. In a multitude of words we can detect the voice of a fool (Eccl. 5:3). Many people lose their power through the multitude of words. They like to say such-and-such to So-and-so. They always have something to say about everything. Not only do they have much to say, they like to pass on what they have heard to others. Brothers and sisters, we have to pay attention to guarding our mouth. We have to guard it the same way we guard our heart. This is particularly true for those who serve as God's oracle. God is using them to be His mouthpiece and to convey His word. Their mouths are sanctified for His service; they are holy, and their mouth should be guarded as jealously as one guards his heart. The mouth cannot be loose.

TWO

There are several points connected with the matter of speaking, and we should take note of them.

First, let us note before the Lord the kind of talk we hear all the time. The kind of talk we hear determines the kind of person we are. Many people will not tell you some things because they know that you are not like them, and it would be useless to say that thing to you. If a person readily shares certain things with you, he does it because he knows that you are of the same kind, and that such things will produce a certain effect on you. You can know yourself by noting the things that people relate to you all the time.

Second, let us observe the kind of words we most readily believe. That which we are prone to credit reveals our own disposition. A certain kind of people will tend to believe certain kinds of words. We hear things wrongly and believe things lightly because we are blind; we are not in God's light. As soon as we are short of light or void of light, we fall into error. The direction of our ear and the degree of our gullibility often betrays our sick condition. Many people believe others' words even before they ever hear anything from them. Then when they hear something, they rejoice over what they have heard. The words may be incredible and ludicrous, yet a person can still be convinced that they are true. Hence, the kind of words that we believe show the kind of person that we are.

Third, next to listening and believing, there is also the matter of passing words on to others. This is similar in nature to the first two points. One may hear and believe a certain kind of words, but if he decides to pass them on to others, this indicates that he is not only the kind of person being portrayed by the words, that is, a person in darkness, but he is also willing to make others just like himself. His whole being is involved with the words he speaks. In listening, others are speaking; in believing, others' words are received; and in passing on words, one's whole being is put into the words. Many people love to speak and pass on words. Because of this, they lose all their power and are no longer able to be a proper minister of God's word.

Fourth, there are the inaccurate words. Some people are very inaccurate in the things they say. One minute they say one thing and the next minute they say something else. This type of person is "double-

tongued" (1 Tim. 3:8); they cannot serve as deacons. They say one thing to one person and another thing to another person. They say something to a man's face and turn around and say something else behind his back. Such ones are useless in the work of God. Brothers and sisters, if we cannot bridle our tongue, how can we control ourselves and how can we serve the Lord? A man must bridle himself and buffet his body before he can serve the Lord in a proper way. We have a terrible member in our body—our tongue, which always leads us into trouble. Inaccuracy in words, being double-tongued, and vacillation in our statements are marks of weakness in character. Those who have such habits have no standing, and they are powerless before God. They vacillate back and forth because they are too easy going and uncertain. Such behavior points to extreme weakness in one's character! In the Lord's work, inaccurate words are a very sobering matter, and we must deal with them.

Fifth, there are those who are intentionally double-tongued. Some are double-tongued in a way that is more serious than others; they are worse than those who are double-tongued through ignorance; they are intentionally double-tongued. Some are double-tongued because they are ignorant. They say one thing at one time and another thing at another time. To them "yes" and "no" mean more or less the same thing. They do not have a sense of right and wrong, and they are completely in the dark. If you ask them if an object is black, they may say yes. If you ask them if the same object is white, they may say yes again. They are not clear about anything. To them black and white are just about the same. They live a sloppy and foolish life. They are ignorantly double-tongued. But with others, there is a conscious effort to be double-tongued. They purposely say something on one occasion and another thing on another occasion. This is not only a weakness in character but a moral corruption. Matthew 21:23-27 records that the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the Lord and asked on whose authority He was acting. He replied with this question: "The baptism of John, from where did it come, from heaven or from men?" They reasoned among themselves: "If we say, From heaven, He will say to us, Why then did you not believe him? But if we say, From men, we fear the crowd, for all hold John as a prophet." They answered the Lord saying, "We do not know." Their answer was a deliberate lie. In Matthew 5:37 the Lord said, "But let your word be, Yes, yes; No, no; for anything more than these is of the evil one." If something is yes, we say yes. If it is no, we say no. This is to walk in the light and in honesty. But if we stop to reason about the possible effect of our words on others and consider how we can speak with diplomacy, our motive and attitude are unbecoming of a worker of the Lord. If our words are framed in craftiness, we are making such words instruments of deceit! We would rather follow our Lord's example. When people sought to lay a snare for Him by their questions, He resorted to silence. If we have to say something, we would rather have our words be "Yes, yes; No, no." Anything more than this is of the evil one. A clever person has no place here. Paul exhorted the Corinthians, saying, "If anyone thinks that he is wise among you in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise" (1 Cor. 3:18). Romans 16:19 says, "I want you to be...guileless as to what is evil." To be wise in these things gets us nowhere in the eyes of God. It is useless for us to maneuver. Our wisdom is in the Lord's hand. We cannot be double-tongued. This is the trouble with many people. Those whose words are untrustworthy have little use to God. If they give themselves to the work, sooner or later they will find themselves in trouble. If a man says one thing at one time and another thing at another time, wavering between right and wrong, yes and no, and vacillating between what can be done and what cannot be done, he is of little use to the work of God. Those with fluctuating and unreliable words are useless in God's work.

Sixth, we must deal with the very way we listen. A man may be somewhat gifted and talented. But as long as he is inaccurate with his words, there is a gaping hole in his character. This one flaw alone will cost him all of his power. How unfortunate that many of God's workers have become information centers! Brothers and sisters, as the Lord's workers we come into constant contact with people and have therefore many opportunities to hear others speak as well as to speak to others ourselves. If we are not disciplined and restricted in our words, it is very possible that while we are speaking God's word, we

are spreading rumors and gossip at the same time. If our words are not disciplined, we may be building up God's work with one hand and destroying it with the other. Hence, we have to look to God to apply strict discipline to our ears. Brothers and sisters often want to tell us their personal stories. We should do our best to listen to them. We should be a good listener, and we should realize their problem and render them the proper help. When others speak to us, we should listen to them to take care of their need and solve their problem. But we must discourage them from going into any further detail once we are inwardly clear about their need. We should tell them to stop. We can say, "That is enough. You can stop here." It is wrong to listen with curiosity to what others have to say and to treat their words as stories or tall tales. All we need to do is to realize their problem. As soon as we know and have some assurance about it, we should say, "Brother, that is enough." We should not have a lust for information. Human beings have a lust for knowing other people's business; they have a lust for listening. There is a lust for knowledge, a lust for listening. But we must listen with guarded caution. As soon as we reach the limit, we should stop. Our listening is for the purpose of taking care of our prayer and for solving problems. We should listen only to take care of our brothers' and sisters' problems. At a certain point, we should stop listening.

Seventh, we have to gain and maintain people's trust. If anyone shares his spiritual problems with us, that is a trust he has placed with us. We must not speak about these confidences carelessly. Unless the interests of the work make it necessary, we should not repeat these things loosely. If we have never been disciplined in our words, we cannot participate in God's work. God's servants are entrusted with many things. They need to treat such confidences as a sacred trust and guard them faithfully. These words are entrusted to us; they are not our possessions but are objects entrusted to us in our ministry and our divine service. We cannot release them at will. We must learn to safeguard and protect every spiritual confidence placed in us by the brothers and sisters. We cannot spread these things irresponsibly. If our responsibility or God's work or human needs calls for their divulgence, that is another story altogether. At any rate, a multitude of words always brings in a loss, a great loss. Those who are wordy and who pass on words easily cannot be entrusted with the Lord's work. We should receive warning from the Lord. May He restrict our words, and may we not open our mouth rashly or speak lightly. Whether or not a person is disciplined is most easily seen from the way he controls his tongue. If a man is disciplined, his tongue will always be restricted. We should pay particular attention to this matter.

Eighth, we have to pay special attention to the matter of lies. The double-tongued person to whom we have referred is a close kinsman of the liar. All utterances that are made with an intent to give a false hope or a wrong impression fall into the category of lying. Sometimes a lie may not contain any false statement, but it is skillfully spoken to give others a false impression. This is in reality a lie. We have to remember that honesty in our speech is a matter of motive; it is not simply a matter of correctness in words. If a brother asks a question we do not wish to answer or are unable to answer, we should politely refuse to reply, but we should not deceive the brother. A false statement is a lie, and anything that gives others a wrong impression is also a lie. We want people to believe the truth; therefore, we dare not use words that are true in order to convey a false impression. For God's children, it should always be "Yes, yes; No, no." Anything more than this is of the evil one. The Lord once spoke very strongly to the Jews: "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father....When he speaks the lie, he speaks it out of his own possessions; for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). The devil is the author of lies. He was a liar from the beginning. Even today he is filled with lies. He is a liar and the father of it. It would be unthinkable for a child of God and, even more, for a worker of the Lord to lie. Yet some are indeed lying. This is too poor. There is no sickness more fundamental than this one. This is a very serious problem, very serious and very sobering! We must pay attention to the matter of lies. We should not think that everything we say is always accurate. The more careful we are, the more we will realize the difficulty of being accurate in everything that we say.

Sometimes our intention is to speak the truth, but with a little carelessness we find ourselves off the mark. If we can so easily veer off when we are trying to be accurate, how much more we will be off the mark if we are not consciously trying. It is hard enough for us to speak the truth by carefully watching over ourselves. It is harder still for us to speak the truth when we do not control ourselves. Hence, we must guard ourselves, pay attention to our words, and never be loose. Otherwise, we will not be able to serve our God. God cannot use a person who is His mouthpiece one minute and a mouthpiece of Satan the next minute. No, He can never use such a person.

Ninth, we should pay special attention to another point, which is to "not strive nor cry out." The Bible prophesied of the Lord: "He will not strive nor cry out, nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets" (Matt. 12:19; Isa. 42:2). Paul said, "A slave of the Lord ought not to contend" (2 Tim. 2:24). This means that no servant of the Lord can strive or make a loud noise. Making a loud noise is an expression of rudeness. The Lord's servant should be under such control that he will "not strive nor cry out." He should not quarrel with anyone. Loud speaking usually indicates a lack of power, at least the power of self-control. No servant of the Lord should be so loud that his neighbor can hear his voice next door. No one could hear the Lord's voice in the streets. This is the pattern He left for us. This means more than a rejection of lies. Many words are indeed correct and true, but we would rather not strive or cry out. "A slave of the Lord ought not to contend." We can keep our mouth shut about many things. A brother or a sister has to be extremely loose before he or she can shout at others. He or she must have been living an undisciplined life for many years before he or she could shout with little restraint. We should restrict ourselves and exercise discipline over our own voice, like the Lord, whose voice was not heard in the streets. Let us learn to muzzle our mouth from unwarranted noise, shouting, crying, and clamor. This does not mean that we should try to act in a sober and quiet way. We have to be spontaneous, and when we meet others, we have to speak with them in a proper and natural way. But the fact remains that those who have never been disciplined in their speaking will face difficult times in the work. We hope that all the workers of the Lord will learn to be finer and more tender and that no one will be rough and uncouth. Our Lord is very fine and tender. He did not strive or cry out, and no one heard His voice in the streets. God's servants should give others the impression that they are fine and tender persons before the Lord.

Tenth, we need to pay attention to the matter of motive and fact. What we say is one thing, but our motive is another thing. God's children should not only pay attention to accuracy in words but also to accuracy in the facts. We should rather be accurate in facts than accurate in words alone. Many people only pay attention to accuracy in their words; they do not care about accuracy in the facts. Actually, even when we are very careful and accurate about the things we say, we may still be in error. Before the Lord we have to pay attention to accuracy in facts. If we do not pay attention to accuracy in facts, we will be of little use to the Lord even if our words are correct. Some brothers and sisters pay much attention to their words, yet we cannot trust them, because even though we have never found a mistake in their words, we know that they are only concerned about the correctness of their words; they are not concerned about the correctness of their facts. Suppose you hate a brother in your heart. This is a fact. As far as the fact is concerned, you hate him. But when you see him in the streets, you nod at him and greet him just the same. When he visits you, you serve him food, and when he is sick, you visit him. When he is in need, you give him money and clothing. Another brother may come to you and ask you, "How do you feel about this brother?" Even though you have no love for him in your heart, you still answer, "Did I not nod at him and greet him? Did I not visit him when he was sick? Did I not take care of him when he was poor?" It is true that you have the arguments. The law may be on your side, and your words may all be correct. But you are still lying because what you say does not reflect the facts. Some brothers and sisters pay much attention to procedures. You cannot find any fault with their procedures, yet their heart says something absolutely different. This is wrong. It is wrong to be correct in words but incorrect in facts. When we speak to others, we should not just pay attention to correctness

in procedure and assume that we are telling the truth; we should instead pay attention to our motive before the Lord. This has to do with the fundamental issues that lie behind our words. Do not think that it is enough to use the correct words. Do not think that it is enough to be nice and cordial to others. You cannot say that just because you have these things, you do not hate your brother. We have to consider the facts. The proof is not in the words you speak. We should speak the truth, the things that are actual facts. If the facts are wrong, we are still lying even if we use all the right words. Unfortunately, this is the way many people live. In speaking, we should take care not only of the words themselves but should go deeper to our motive and care for the facts.

Eleventh, we should not speak any idle words. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks....Every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:34-36). Following this the Lord says, "For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned" (v. 37). When God's children come together, it is advisable for them to eliminate idle words. This does not mean that we should not greet each other or talk about the weather or gardens. Words of greeting have to do with maintaining human relationships, and it is proper to have them in our conversation. But idle words are gossip about this and that family; they have nothing to do with us directly. They are unnecessary. The Lord Jesus says, "Every idle word which men shall speak, they will render an account concerning it in the day of judgment." Idle words will not be spoken once, but twice. They are spoken once today, and when the day of judgment comes, they will be spoken once more. All idle words will be repeated; a person will have to render an account concerning them in the day of judgment. One day we will discover the many idle words that we have spoken, and God will justify us or condemn us based on these words. This is why we cannot speak any word in a light way.

Many jokes, light talks, and jestings have to be ruled out. It is of course a different story when some brothers and sisters make a few clever remarks once a while, or when they say a few amusing words to their children and grandchildren. Paul refers in his Epistle to the Ephesians to "obscenity and foolish talking or sly, filthy jesting" (5:4). These are frivolous words, and we should reject them and turn away from them.

Moreover, there should not be any scoffing among us. At the time the Lord was on the cross, men scoffed Him, saying, "Let Him be. Let us see if Elijah is coming to take Him down" (Mark 15:36). This is scoffing. Those who do not believe in the Lord's second coming scoff and say, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue in this way from the beginning of creation" (2 Pet. 3:4). Others may scoff and jest in all kinds of ways, but God's children should not allow these things to come out of their mouth.

There are many other kinds of unfitting words, such as words spoken behind others' backs or words of criticism. As for reviling words, they are sin and should be refused (Titus 3:10); they definitely should not come out of a Christian's mouth. We have to watch out for all these kinds of words and refrain from all of them.

THREE

A worker of the Lord must speak accurate words; he must not be careless with his tongue. He can only be a conveyer of God's word. If he is disciplined in his tongue, he will be spared of any entanglements. Our heart aches when we think of the lack of restraint among God's workers in the things they say. The brothers and sisters may be entertained by our gossip and interesting tales, but we will fail to command their respect when we speak for the Lord. Do not think that it is all right to joke and make fun with our brothers and sisters. There may be much fun in the joking and jesting, but when we turn around to speak God's word, they will consider our words to be of the same value as our stories, and our words

will lose their weight. Some brothers can gain others' ears when they say something, while others may say the same thing yet not command any attention. We should consider the reason some have an audience while others do not. Their words may be the same. Certainly God's word is the same, but the way they speak at ordinary times differs. Let us pay attention to this matter. We may be the same as far as speaking God's word is concerned, but if we are different with our other speakings, we will be different when it comes to the power behind God's word. If we are used to loose words and always indulge ourselves in unrestrained conversations, the impact of our words on those who listen will be the same when we speak for the Lord as it is when we speak in a loose way. There will be very little impact at all. Brothers and sisters, let us remember that a spring cannot send forth from the same opening sweet and bitter water. It cannot supply sweet water at one time and bitter water at another time. The bitter water is always bitter. Its bitterness may be moderated sometimes, but it is still bitter. When clean water and filthy water are mixed together, the filthy water does not become clean; rather, the clean water becomes filthy. Many brothers have no impact in their speaking, not because they are wrong in the words they preach, but because they are wrong in their other speakings, the ordinary speakings outside the platform. When they preach God's word, nobody listens to them. We must remember that the words we speak on the platform are governed by the words we speak off the platform. If we talk foolishly off the platform, our words on the platform will be completely spoiled. The sweet water will become bitter. There is no need for laborious preparations before we preach, but there is the need for constant precaution in our ordinary, everyday conversation. We cannot expect to have any power in our service to the Lord if we are not restricted in our daily living. If we are loose and inaccurate in our words, confuse truth for falsehood, joke and jest all the time, and even lie, we cannot have any power in our service. We must begin by controlling our tongue so that we can preach God's word.

Accurate words have much to do with one's reading of the Bible. The Bible is the most accurate book in the world. God's word is the only accurate word in the world. If we do not have a habit of speaking accurately, we cannot read the Bible, much less preach the Bible. Some brothers cannot read the Bible in the condition that they are in. It takes a certain character to be a gospel preacher. It also takes a certain character to read the Bible. A sloppy person cannot read the Bible because God's word is accurate. A sloppy person will miss everything in God's word. In fact, he will understand it in the wrong way.

Let us give an example to show the meaning of being accurate. According to Matthew 22, the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection. One day they came to the Lord and posed a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses said, If anyone dies and does not have children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife and raise up seed to his brother. Now there were seven brothers with us. And the first married and died, and having no seed, he left his wife to his brother; likewise also the second and the third until the seventh. And last of all the woman died. In the resurrection, then, whose wife will she be of the seven? For they all had her" (vv. 24-28). Resurrection was unthinkable to them. They thought that it would be better if there was no such thing as resurrection, because it would complicate things. They preferred to believe that there was no resurrection. They came and reasoned with the Lord, coming up with a seemingly unsolvable problem. Jesus answered, "You err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (vv. 29-32). The Sadducees certainly read the Scriptures, but the Lord said they did not know the Scriptures. They spoke so carelessly that it was impossible for them to appreciate the absolute accuracy of God's utterances. Our Lord only quoted a short passage from Exodus 3 to prove resurrection—God calls Himself the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. How does this short word prove resurrection? The Lord went on to explain, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." To the Sadducees Abraham was dead, Isaac was dead, and Jacob

was dead; all three were dead. Would this not make the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the God of the dead? Yet God is not the God of the dead. How can this be? Since God is not the God of the dead, Abraham must not remain dead forever. The same must be true of Isaac and Jacob. But how can dead men no longer be dead? They must be resurrected. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will all be resurrected because God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. The Lord Jesus answered the Sadducees this way. Our Lord was very accurate in the things He said. It exposed the inaccuracies of the Sadducees and their ignorance of the Bible.

If we are careless in our speaking, we will not appreciate how accurate God's word is. A sloppy character does not care for accuracy and is incapable of accuracy; it is not capable of holding and containing God's accurate word. The Bible is the most accurate book; it is accurate to the last iota and serif. The Lord said, "One iota or one serif shall by no means pass away from the law" (Matt. 5:18). God is purposeful in every iota and serif; He is never loose. Since God is so accurate in His words, His servants should also be accurate in their speaking. Brothers and sisters, God is never ambiguous in His speaking; He is never careless. His words are always firmly established; every one of them is sure and unshakable. The more we read His Word, the more we will realize that not a single word can be added or deleted. We must pay attention to this point: no one who is loose in his speaking can be a servant of God. A loose talker will have no impact among the brothers and will not even be able to handle God's word himself. Some brothers are suffering to others when they speak from the platform. One only has to listen to a message from such ones and he will realize how sloppy these ones are. A sloppy person can only speak sloppy words. Even when God's word is before him, he will speak in a sloppy way. If he is sloppy when he walks off the platform, how can he be anything but sloppy when he stands on the platform? No sloppy person can read the Bible, and no sloppy speakers can speak for the Lord. May God be merciful to us. May we receive mercy to have an accurate mouth. We should offer up a prayer to the Lord: "Give me the tongue of a learner so that I will not be loose, careless, or flawed in words. I do not want to lose many things. I do not want to lose my testimony." If we are careless in speaking, we cannot read and understand God's Word. In studying the Bible, we have to dig out the facts. But a sloppy person cannot find any facts. We have to learn to speak carefully and cautiously before we can appreciate the accuracy of God's every word.

FOUR

Every worker of the Lord has his specialty. He has his own special portion before the Lord, and God uses him by bringing out his special portion. Yet he should also have a balanced development in the other areas. A balanced development will eliminate any gaps or flaws in his ministry. If a brother is good at his specialty, yet fails in other areas, his ministry will be damaged by leaks. In the previous chapters, we covered various character traits such as listening to others, having a love for men, having a mind to suffer, buffeting the body, and being diligent. These are basic qualifications which we should have. No servant of God should be lacking in these character traits. The point of this chapter—being restrained in our speaking—is another basic qualification. A loose talker cannot convey God's word in an accurate way. Many brothers would have had a very bright and hopeful future had it not been for the fact that their tongues were too loose; they lost all their strength before God.

We have to guard our spiritual worth, our spiritual weight, and our spiritual usefulness before the Lord by every means. We cannot squander the special portion that God has given us. We should not deplete it a little here and a little there. In order to preserve our ministry, we have to plug all the leaking holes. The preservation of the ministry of the Lord's worker should be his most crucial concern. If we do not preserve our ministry, all the things and responsibilities God has given us will be lost little by little, and in the end they will all be gone. We cannot be careless with even a single word that we say. We have to receive the dealings, rebukes, and judgments from the Lord. Brothers and sisters, it is not enough just

to receive positive things. We also have to pay attention to preserving the positive things so that they will not become lost. If we do not deal with our speaking, we will surely lose the positive things that we already have.

When we stand before the judgment seat, we may discover that the damage done by frivolous, loose talk exceeds that which was done through many other things, because this kind of damage does not stop with us. It works great havoc in the lives of others as well. Words do not stop with us. Once a word is spoken, it continues to spread. Suppose some brothers have said something improper. Once the words escape their lips, they cannot be retracted. We can repent of our folly, and we can ask for forgiveness. We can even bury ourselves in ashes and repent, saying, "Lord, I have said something wrong." The Lord's blood will cleanse us, but it will not remove the words that have gone out. The words will continue to exist on the earth. We can confess our sins to the Lord and to the brothers, and both the Lord and the brothers can forgive us, but the words that we have spoken will remain and continue to spread. Some workers may be lacking in having a mind to suffer. Others may have a problem with listening to others or a weakness in being slothful. But the problem of unrestrained words may be more serious than slothfulness, a failure to listen, or the lack of having a mind to suffer. Careless words release a deadly stream that flows on and on and spreads death wherever it goes.

Brothers and sisters, in the face of such solemn facts, we need to be careful about our speaking. We should repent before the Lord for many words that have gone out of our mouth. These words do not produce good fruit. In fact, they harm in definite ways. Many of the words we uttered in the past were "idle words," but they are no longer "idle"; they are spreading all over the earth. At the time we spoke them, they were idle words, but after a while they have become very busy and are working great havoc. We need to seek God's mercy to be cleansed of our past, and for the present we need to ask Him to deal radically with us and to burn us with a burning coal (Psa. 120:3-4). If He will deal with us and burn our tongues so that we will no longer open our mouth rashly, we will be spared many regrets in the future. Many mistakes are irreparable once they are done. Lot could repent and return to his former position, but Moab and Ammon are still with us today. Abraham could beget Isaac after he repented, but by then Isaac had an enemy. Abraham could send Hagar away, but the trouble he created goes on. Once our words go out, they will not stop, and the trouble they create will not stop. We have to pray for the Lord to burn our tongues with a burning fire so that they will not utter any idle words or lies and will be unbridled no longer. We should pray that our tongue would become the tongue of the instructed. Only when the Lord puts our mouth under strict control and it ceases to say things carelessly can we expect Him to use us as His mouthpiece. Otherwise, the one spring will never produce two kinds of waters. We cannot serve others with sweet water as well as bitter water. We may say that we are burdened to serve God and to share in His work, but we cannot speak God's word one moment and the devil's word the next. We have to look to the Lord to grant us the grace to terminate our history of having a "runaway" mouth. We should say to the Lord, "Let all my words be acceptable to You, just as my heart is acceptable to You." May the Lord have mercy on us!

The Lord Jesus said, "For their sake I sanctify Myself" (John 17:19). Every servant of God who desires to serve Him has to learn to sanctify himself, wherever he is. In order to serve others, we have to sanctify ourselves in our speaking. Speaking is a great temptation. When three, five, eight, or ten people are talking together, it is a great temptation to join in and be part of them. We have to learn to sanctify ourselves, to set ourselves apart from others, and to not mix with them. We should not speak lightly. We have to have the words of the instructed, the tongue of the instructed. Our tongues have to pass through the fire. We must never expose ourselves to temptation. When other brothers and sisters are engaged in improper conversation, the first thing we have to do is to separate ourselves from them. As soon as we mingle with them and become one of them, we become fallen. We have to separate ourselves from them and be set apart from their midst. Every time something like this happens, we

must not give in to temptation and we must not associate ourselves with the others. We must always separate ourselves. I believe God will grant mercy to us and build us up with grace little by little.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STABLE

ONE

Stability is another character trait that must be found in the life of every Christian worker. Stability in character can be understood as stability in one's emotions. Some people are solid and unshakable before the Lord, but others are loose and shaky. They have no conviction in anything, and they turn with every turn in the environment. Many people are unreliable by nature, not because they want to be unreliable, but because their character is unreliable. As soon as something touches them, they change. They are not stable in their character. God requires a stable character of His servants, one that is solid, reliable, and unshakable.

In the Bible we find a man who was easily shaken, who is known to us as Simon Peter. Let us read some verses. Matthew 16:13-16 says, "Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of Man is? And they said, Some, John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. He said to them, But you, who do you say that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." First John 5:1 says, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God," and verse 13 says, "I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life, to you who believe into the name of the Son of God." When Peter said "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," he must have at least touched the life of God. He had to have touched God's life in order to have known this. Read again Matthew 16:17: "And Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens." Brothers and sisters, being with the Lord Jesus, following Him, and being beside Him do not guarantee one a knowledge of Him. One only knows Him through the revelation of the Father who is in the heavens. Our present attention is drawn to verse 18, which says, "And I also say to you that you are Peter [Petros], and upon this rock [petra] I will build My church." We must see that the church is something unshakable. The foundation of the church is unshakable, and the church itself is unshakable. This being the case, all the servants of the Lord should be unshakable as well. The Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church." The church is built upon this rock. We should pay attention to this rock.

In verse 18 the Lord seemed to be making a hidden reference to the words in Matthew 7, in which He spoke of those who build their houses upon the sand, and when rain and water and wind come, the houses totter to the ground. Then He said that we should build our house upon the rock so that it will not fall when the rain and water and wind come. The Lord said that the church is built upon the rock, which means that the church will never fall. The rain may come, and the water and wind may do their work, but the building will not fall. Even if the church is subject to the rain, water, and wind, it will never collapse, because it is firmly built upon the rock. It is stable, unshakable, and immovable. This is the underlying nature of the church. Paul told Timothy that the house of God, which is the church, is the pillar and base of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). The church is like a pillar; it can never be moved. A chair can be moved and shaken, but a house can never be moved from place to place. The underlying nature

of the church is a building that is upon a rock. Such a rock is stable and unshakable. God's children are little stones (lithos) upon the unique rock. In writing the second chapter of his first Epistle, Peter said that we are God's living stones, and that we are being built into a spiritual house (v. 5). Every brother and sister is a living stone that is built upon the rock. The superstructure of the church is of the same substance as the foundation. The material for the superstructure is the same as the material for the foundation. The church has no bricks; it only has stones. The tower of Babel was made of bricks, which are manmade imitations of stones. But in the church there is no brick, no manmade stability. The church is built upon the rock. Every one of us is a stone, and we are built together piece by piece into a spiritual house. Our eyes have to be opened to the intrinsic nature of the church. The Lord's church is something unshakable. In Matthew 16:18 the Lord continued, saying, "The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." This is something unshakable; this is what the church is all about. The foundation of the church is a rock, something unshakable, and the church itself is made of stones which are also unshakable. Can we then say that the ministers within the church are shakable? This is what we are talking about here. We are not here to talk about the church. We are here to talk about the very person of the ministers. The ministers must not be shaken, because they are the stones. The Lord said to Peter, "You are Peter." This means, "You are a stone." "And upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." Peter represents all the ministers of the church. A minister and servant of God must be a stone. Although the stone is not as big as the rock, it has the same nature as the rock, and it is equally unshakable.

In verse 19 the Lord said, "I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in the heavens." The Lord's promise to Peter was also a promise to the church. This promise became the church's possession in Matthew 18. But the Lord first gave it to Peter. This shows us clearly that the Lord considered Peter as one of the ministers. The Lord gave him the keys of the kingdom of the heavens so that he could open the doors. On the day of Pentecost, Peter opened one door, and at the house of Cornelius, he opened another door. He opened the door to the Jews, and he opened the door to the Gentiles. This is what one stone has done. Before Simon became Peter (a stone), he could not exercise the keys. Today not all who are called Peter are Peters, in the same way that not all who are called by the name of Israel are men of strength. A man can be called Israel yet be a weak person. Here was a person whose name was Peter. The Lord put the keys in his hand. But he could exercise the keys only after he truly became a Peter, a stone. When that day came, whatever he bound was bound, and whatever he loosed was loosed.

The effectiveness of a minister has much to do with the stability of his character. This is a basic requirement. If a man is shaky before God, he cannot be a minister, and the church cannot follow him. A fundamental problem with some brothers and sisters is the lack of a stable character. They are constantly changing. They sway back and forth and are never steady and firm before the Lord. They cannot serve the church, because they cannot stand firm and upright, and the gates of Hades easily prevail over them.

Thank the Lord that Peter was chosen as a pattern. God is looking for a man whose nature is the same as the nature of the foundation under him and the superstructure of the building around him. A minister must be a stable stone. Thank God that Peter was chosen as a pattern, because his case shows us that God can make anyone stable. Here was a man named Peter, yet he was not always a "Peter." His name referred to a stone, but his character was like water. He was not reliable. He was one thing at one time and another thing another time. One minute Peter was bold and the next minute he was very weak. This was the kind of person he was. The Lord put such a person before us to show us how unstable a person's nature can be before he is dealt with by the Lord. Before such a person becomes a stone, he cannot use the keys and cannot be useful to God in any particular way. God can only use him after his

wobbly nature has been dealt with by the Lord. We thank the Lord that a man's character can change; it is not unchangeable. Peter was a wavering person, yet he could be changed into a stable person. When the light of the Lord burns our tongue, our talkativeness will disappear. When a lazy man is rebuked, his laziness wilts away. The Lord cursed the fig tree, and the tree dried up. The Lord's rebuke brings in His curse, and where His curse is, there is wilting and death. If we have never touched Him, we can go on in our merry way. But as soon as we touch Him, our frivolity wilts away. As soon as God's light touches us, either through a message or through a brother's direct rebuke, something in us wilts away. The Lord's rebuke results in an immediate wilting away. Here we are talking about a reconstitution or a remake of our character. Many people have a character that cannot listen to others. Or they may have a character that is too cold, lazy, or weak. But as soon as God touches them, or a brother comes along and points out their insensitivity in listening or their weakness, they will receive the light, and something in them will wilt away. It is God's grace that Peter was chosen. Had it not been for Peter, all those who are weak and unstable would have no hope. But the Lord chose one man and called him Peter, and after He made him a "Peter," He gave him the keys to bring men into the church.

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TWO

The Bible tells us that after Peter recognized the Lord as the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord said, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in the heavens" (Matt. 16:17). This was entirely God's work. Peter did not deserve any merit, but the Father's revelation enabled him to see the Lord as the Christ and the Son of God. Peter received a revelation from the Father, a revelation from God. Such a revelation is unknown to flesh and blood, even to Peter's own flesh and blood. Let us go on with the same passage: "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You! But He turned and said to Peter, Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men" (vv. 21-23). In the previous passage Peter saw the vision, while in this passage Peter became an instrument of Satan. In the previous verses Peter touched God the Father; here he touched Satan. In the first instance he was able to say, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." In the second instance he said, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" The two statements are as far apart as the north pole is from the south pole. If we are not wrong in our understanding, we can safely say that no revelation in the four Gospels reached the height of Peter's revelation. It was the Father who had given Peter the revelation; he knew the Lord as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then the Lord proclaimed that the church was to be built upon this knowledge, this rock. Peter indeed received a great revelation, one unseen by other followers and friends of the Lord. Perhaps the revelation that Peter received and saw should be considered the ultimate revelation. But in the same chapter, he fell to the lowest depth. He was speaking not only according to the flesh, but by Satan. One minute he was speaking according to the Father; the next minute he turned around and was speaking according to Satan. What an extreme turn this was! If the

church is built upon such a minister, the gates of Hades surely will prevail against it. No, the church cannot be built upon such a wavering one; it needs to be built up by men of stone. The ministers of the church must be as stable as stones. They cannot be God's mouthpiece in one instance, and Satan's mouthpiece in another instance. This is a serious matter. Not long after Peter received the highest revelation, he fell to the lowest abyss. He was keeping the Lord from going to the cross. He was not setting his mind on the things of God. He was utilized by Satan. Whenever Satan's word is released, the gates of Hades are opened. If Satan prevails and the gates of Hades prevail, the church is defeated. Had the Lord not turned Peter into a stable stone, the church would be hopeless. Today we need ministers as stable as stones. They have to be firm and unshakable. They cannot be one way one day and another way the next day, saying one thing one moment and another thing another moment. If we are solid and firm before the Lord, we will see what the church really is, and we will see blessing and victory over the gates of Hades. But if we are weak and wavering, Satan will open his mouth immediately, and the gates of Hades will be opened. In Peter we see an extreme contrast; there were great discrepancies in his character. This is a picture of the old, unchanged nature of Peter.

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After the last supper the Lord Jesus said to the disciples, "You will all be stumbled because of Me this night, for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." Peter said, "If all will be stumbled because of You, I will never be stumbled" (26:31, 33). Peter's word was based on his disposition. He was saying the right thing; he was not lying, no, not at all. But we must remember that we do not know anything about many of the things that we say to the Lord at the time of our consecration and revival. Peter was a person who was rich in emotion. He said, "I will never be stumbled." But this conviction was merely in his emotion; he was not this kind of person at all. Many people who are rich in emotion have to learn to separate their emotion from their person. Sooner or later they discover that their emotion does not represent them. Some people live by their mind too much. They are always in their mind. When they pray, and others say to them, "You are praying only with your mind; your heart is not in your prayer," they answer, "What do you mean my heart is not in my prayer?" A man can be in his mind so much that when his heart is not into what he is doing, he can be deceived to think that his mind actually is his heart. One day when the light shines on him, he will see that his mind is not his heart. Some people feel a burning within their heart; they think that they love the Lord. They proudly proclaim, "I love the Lord." If another brother says, "You may think that you are loving the Lord, but actually you are not," they will argue, "If I do not love the Lord, who does?" When their emotion is dealt with by the Lord, they will realize that their heart and emotion are two different things. Their person is not the same as their emotion; there is a great difference between the two. In the same way there is a great difference between their mind and their person. Peter was speaking from his emotion. He thought that he was the one who was speaking. He boasted that even if all the others would be stumbled because of the Lord, he would never be stumbled. He did not realize that the "I" he was speaking of was not his person but his emotion. He did not realize how much his outward man was at work. He did not realize how much he was living in his outward man. He did not know what he was saying, and he was not clear about himself at all. Then the Lord said to him, "Truly I say to you that in this night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (v. 34). But Peter

still did not know himself. He told the Lord, "Even if I must die with You, I will by no means deny You" (v. 35). Here were another two extremes. Peter said that he would never be stumbled, but he denied the Lord three times. He boasted that he would die with the Lord, but long before there was any call to die with the Lord, he failed and became fearful when the crowd pointed out that he had been with Jesus.

These two extremes show us that Peter was a very unstable person. Although his name indicated that he was a stone, his character was like water; it flowed one way one moment and another way the next moment. It constantly changed in shape, being rectangular one minute and circular the next minute. He was completely governed by his environment. He became a certain kind of person when he faced a certain kind of environment. In the garden of Gethsemane, he dozed off with the other disciples. During the heat of his boast, he claimed that he would never be stumbled, even if the others were stumbled. But in the garden of Gethsemane, he fell sleep just like everyone else. Here was a person who was so sure in his speaking and who felt the same way in himself, but who did everything just the opposite. He was living according to his feeling; he was not living according to his true self. A man can live in his feeling so much that he no longer knows what his true self is. He thinks that his feelings are himself. This was Peter. He said he would never be stumbled, and according to his feeling, he sincerely believed that he would never be stumbled. But even before he met any opposition from men, he fell asleep in the garden of Gethsemane. His spirit was willing, but his flesh was weak (26:41). A while later, he gathered up his energy, drew up his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and took off his ear (v. 51). He was bold to do this. He loved the Lord so much that he cast aside his personal considerations and stood at this height. Yet in a little while he slid back again. This was Peter.

Mark 14 also provides us with a record of Peter's denial of the Lord. At the beginning, "Peter followed Him at a distance until he was within the courtyard of the high priest. And he was there sitting with the attendants and warming himself in the light of the fire" (v. 54). A servant girl of the high priest came and said to Peter, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus" (v. 67). Peter denied this and answered, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you are talking about" (v. 68). Here was a man who had followed the Lord for three and a half years. Did he not know who the Lord was? One moment he could draw out his sword and cut someone, yet in the next moment he lost his boldness altogether. The Lord was being tried, and everyone was mocking Him. Under these circumstances, Peter's boldness was nowhere to be found. A little earlier, he was genuinely ready to die for the Lord. Now he was genuinely loving himself and shrinking from death. He turned from one extreme to the other. The second time the slave girl spoke, Mark tells us that she did not address Peter, but instead she spoke to those standing by, saying, "This man is one of them!" After the slave girl first spoke to Peter about being with Jesus the Nazarene, Peter denied it and went outside into the forecourt. But the slave girl saw him again, and she told those who were standing by that he was one of them. Then Peter made his second denial (vv. 69-70). Matthew 26:72 says, "And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man!" After a little while, those standing by again said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean as well" (Mark 14:70). Peter began to curse and to swear, "I do not know this man of whom you speak!" (v. 71). He began to curse and to swear! A little earlier he denied with an oath. Now he denied with cursing and swearing. When the slave girl first talked to him, he denied the Lord and moved to the forecourt because he could no longer remain in the same place. There he heard the slave girl telling those standing around that he was with Jesus of Nazareth. He denied the Lord again with an oath that he did not know Him. By the time those who were standing around echoed the words that he had been with Jesus, he did not just make an oath; he cursed and swore. In the original Greek, three different words are used to describe his denial. One was used during his second denial, and the other two were used in his third denial. He exhausted every means of swearing and cursing. In his second denial he made an oath by God's name and by heaven and earth. In his third denial, he simply cursed and swore. He not only invoked God's name to assure others that he did not know Jesus; he even cursed

that he would be damned if he knew the Lord! His vocabulary was vulgar. Peter had degraded and fallen to the uttermost. Here was a man who was just the opposite of a "Peter," that is, one who should be solid as a rock. Instead, he was one way one minute and another way the next minute. One minute he was high in the heavens. The next minute he was Satan's instrument. One minute he could boast that he would never be stumbled even if others were stumbled. The next minute he fell asleep. One minute he was bold to draw his sword to cut off the ear of Malchus. The next minute he was even afraid of a slave girl. He denied the Lord with an oath. He even cursed and swore in his denial. Such a person surely had a serious flaw in his character.

THREE

Why was Peter so unstable? Generally speaking, a man is unstable for three reasons. First, he is governed by his emotions. Second, he is afraid of loss; that is, in seeking for his own happiness, he is afraid of the cross and of pain. Third, he is afraid of men in general; that is, he is afraid of offending men. He wants to please men and to please the environment. These are the basic reasons for instability in man.

Peter was this kind of person. He was tainted by his own emotions. If a man lives according to his emotions, at times he is carried to the loftiest heights, and at other times he is carried into the snare of Satan. Emotions are very unstable. We have never seen a person who can remain on the same emotional plane for a long time. If a man lives according to his emotions, he is conducting his life by the impulse of his emotions, by what capriciously drives him to be hot or cold within. Such ones can receive God's mercy and revelation. But they can also be driven by the impulse of their heart to exclaim, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You." Peter hindered the Lord. It seemed as if he was clearer than the Lord about what needed to be done. He "took Him aside and began to rebuke Him." All who are emotional like to be the Lord's counselor; they like to make proposals to the Lord. They have a plan for everything. An emotional person can act by the impulse of his emotion and turn around suddenly to rebuke the Lord, saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" He is quick to feel, quick to speak, and quick to act. But in reality his speaking is Satan's speaking!

We must learn to receive some basic dealings. We are by nature emotional persons. We should not think that we are very much different from Peter. This weakness in character is the greatest hindrance to our work. If this obstacle is not removed, our Pentecost will not come. We cannot live our life according to our emotions or by the impulse of our feelings. We should not live by stimulus; rather, we should deny our own feelings. Our feelings will guide us to the left one minute and then to the right the next minute, to the east one minute and then to the west the next minute, and up one minute and then down the next minute. These feelings are not from the Lord but from the corrupted man within us. If such feelings occupy a central place in our life, we will be of little use to God's work. Only the weakest ones live according to their feelings. It is not a sign of strength to live according to one's feelings, but a sign of weakness. A strong man is one who can control himself, whose eyes are opened, and who puts no trust in his own feelings. Only those who do not trust in their own feelings, but rather deny them, will be able to learn what it means to live not by feelings. Otherwise, they will always regard their feelings as being themselves. Peter had a forthright character. He said what he thought was true. He said what he saw and what he felt. To others he was upright, honest, and not given to diplomacy or double dealings. But he was actually living by his emotions, and he was useless in the spiritual pathway. There was no alternative except for him to go through his dealings. Brothers and sisters, we may feel that we love the Lord, but actually there is no love for the Lord within our being. We may feel that we are for the Lord, but actually there is nothing for the Lord within our being. Our being is much deeper than our feelings; it is buried beneath our feelings, far, far beneath them. We may feel that we are willing to die for the

Lord, but do we really know the kind of persons that we are? When we say that we are for the Lord, we do not know the very "we" to whom we are referring. We do not know the "we" that boasts of dying for the Lord or living for Him. Our real person is beyond and much deeper than our feelings. Peter thought that his outer man was his person. But the one who boasted of dying for the Lord was just the emotion of Peter's outer man. It only took a little time for his real condition to be exposed. Before a man is broken by the Lord in his emotions, he invariably lives by his emotions. He is prone to fluctuate back and forth. Although he may feel that he is very genuine, he is in fact being controlled by his emotions. We know that lying is detestable, and that it is pitiful when someone does not know that he is lying. In the same way, our fickle emotions are detestable, and it is pitiful when we do not know that our emotions are fickle. Those who are convinced that their feelings are an accurate reflection of who they are, are most foolish. They will have to experience what Peter experienced, a total and utter failure, before they know that their feelings are different from themselves. They feel one way at "the last supper," and they feel another way at the "garden of Gethsemane." They feel one way when they come out of "Gethsemane," and they feel another way when they enter the "courtyard." Blessed is he who can separate his feelings from himself. Only a foolish one assumes that his feelings are himself. Everyone who is taught by God knows that his feelings are not himself. Our feelings are something totally different from ourselves. Brothers and sisters, have we seen this? When our emotional impulses point one way, we are not necessarily the person our impulse portrays. As far as Peter's impulse was concerned, he was a heavenly man, one who would never fail. He was willing to cut off the ear of Malchus for the Lord's sake. But spiritually speaking, Peter's feelings could not be considered to be Peter's very person. He was bold according to his feelings, but he was fearful according to his own self. He loved the Lord as far as his feelings were concerned, but he loved himself more than the Lord as far as his person was concerned. He was willing to lay aside himself as far as his feelings were concerned, but he wanted to protect himself as far as his person was concerned. If this is the way the church's ministers are, and if the church follows the footsteps of such ones, surely the church will be as shaky as they are, and the gates of Hades will surely prevail against the church. God can never use such persons.

This was not all. Peter was very afraid of suffering. One of the reasons that a man is not stable is because he is afraid of suffering. Many people are bold before they encounter the cross or before they experience trials or tribulations. But when the day comes for them to give up their lives and everything, they shrink back. At other times they seem to love the Lord and to be willing to bear the cross. But when the critical moment comes, they cannot hold out, because they are afraid of suffering and because they love themselves. This is where Peter's problem lay. What Peter felt compelled to do in the courtyard was the same as what he had done in Caesarea Philippi in front of the Lord. His fear of suffering and self-love did not appear suddenly in the courtyard. When the Lord spoke to him face to face about the cross, he recoiled by saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" He believed his words, and his statement revealed the kind of person he was. This was why he rebuked the Lord the way he did. He was afraid of loss and death. He did not want this to happen to the Lord. He was so hardheaded that he even took the Lord by the hand to rebuke Him. Brothers and sisters, only one kind of person is stable --those who will be faithful even unto death for the Lord. Satan can do nothing to those who do not love their own life. The weakest ones are those who love their own life. Once a man loves his own life, he will be stumbled as soon as something touches his life. This was what happened to Peter. He rebuked the Lord saying, "God be merciful to You, Lord! This shall by no means happen to You!" In other words, he was saying, "Lord, You can never go to the cross!" Later he tried various ways to escape the cross himself. He even resorted to cursing and swearing! A mind to suffer is a big thing. Later in his life, he spoke of having a mind to suffer. He knew that he was short in this matter, and he learned some good lessons. He began to arm himself with this mind to suffer. This attitude was unknown to him in the earlier part of his life. No one who is fearful of something is strong. We have to be brought on to the point where we can say, "Lord, I am happy and

willing to bear Your cross. I am happy and willing to suffer any loss, to not seek after my own gain or my own pleasure." If a man stands on this ground, Satan will not be able to do anything to him. If you are not afraid of loss and pain, if you can be like Job, who said he would trust in God even if God were to kill him, or Madam Guyon, who said that she would kiss the whip that chastised her, your absoluteness will make you a strong man. If the cross cannot shake a person, nothing will shake him, for there is no greater requirement than the cross. If you can satisfy the greatest demand, you will have no trouble with lesser demands. If you cannot meet the demand of the cross, and instead shrink back from it, you will fail in the face of any test. You will be unsteady and unstable. You have to believe in the fact of the cross, and you have to enter the experience of the cross. You have to accept and submit to all God-given trials, tribulations, and pains. If you do, no trial or tribulation in this world will appear big. You are troubled because you do not know the cross. If you have never encountered a big test, you will be stumbled at a small one. But if you have passed through a big test, you will not be shaken by a small one. Peter was shaken because he was afraid of suffering and because he loved himself.

Another reason for Peter's unsteadiness was his desire to go along with the environment. He wanted to please those in the environment. He was afraid of men. We may not realize how much we are influenced by men's affections and displeasure. As soon as we try to please men and to avoid their displeasure, our way is no longer straight. We have to say this or that to meet others' expectations. We have too many ears to listen to what others have to say. Peter was afraid of the slave girl, and he was afraid of many other people. He was bound by his weaknesses. Brothers and sisters, are you trying to please men, or are you trying to please God? This question should be settled the first day you consecrate yourself to God's service. If you are here to please men, will you still experience persecution? Will you still experience trouble? If you are here to please men, the stumbling block of the cross will be annulled (Gal. 5:11). Brothers and sisters, if the problem of your fear of men is not resolved, you cannot run a straight course before the Lord. Those who have a fear of men change their course as soon as something affects them one way or another. They can never be stable and strong before the Lord.

FOUR

Brothers and sisters, the church of God has the nature of a stone. The nature of the ministers should also be of stone. The foundation of the church is of stone, the building up of the church is of stone, and the service of the church should be of stone. Everything should be rock-solid, unshakable, and without any shadow of change. God cannot use anything flippant, shaky, or unstable in His divine work within the church. When something is stable, it is solid and trustworthy. When one stone is laid upon another, any unstable piece will endanger the whole structure. If one rock on a stone wall is unsteady, the whole wall will be in danger of collapsing. In the church of God, we are not the last stones; many more will be built upon us. The church is not composed of thousands of isolated stones; it is composed of stones that are built one upon the other. The many stones are built up together to become a spiritual house. When the stones are not on top of one another, there is no church. When the temple was destroyed, no stone was upon another. In order for the temple to be built, every stone has to be upon other stones. Today God is still building; He is still building up many spiritual things, piece after piece. If one piece shakes, the whole building will be in jeopardy; many lives will be at risk, and God's church will not be able to go on. This is why our character must be as solid as stone; it must be stable. If our character is shakable and unreliable, everything that is built upon us will be shakable, and sooner or later everything will collapse. First Corinthians 15:58 says, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." We can go on positively only if we are steadfast and immovable. If our character wavers, being up at times and down at other times, being one way one minute and another way the next, God's work will be damaged.

Some brothers and sisters cannot participate in the Lord's work because they are too unreliable. If you build upon something that is unreliable, you may build a little only to find that it has to be torn down. In addition to being a waste of labor, it is also a waste of time. The amount of building and tearing down may neutralize one another, but the time wasted is irreparable. If a man is reliable, whatever is built upon him will be reliable, and no time will be wasted. Any collapse or damage in the work may be remedied by reconstruction, but five, ten, or twenty years may be lost in the process. This loss cannot be remedied. We have to pray that God would make us reliable men. We may not climb as high as Peter did, because such heights take time to attain. But at least we can be trustworthy and reliable, not building something that has to be torn down. Without such a reliable character, we cannot participate in God's work. When we are stable and trustworthy, we can meet the challenge of any responsibility that falls upon our shoulders. Otherwise, we will fall asleep when we are called upon to be vigilant. If a man is unreliable, always being up and down, he will fail in the Lord's call for watchfulness and go to sleep. When he is tired, he will fall asleep, not caring whether there is a need for watchfulness. He will want eight hours of sleep and will settle for nothing less, no matter how much he is called upon to be watchful. He may get his sleep, but he will not realize the loss he has suffered through his sleep. Suppose you fall asleep when the Lord calls upon you to be watchful. What will you do when the Lord calls you to work? You will not have any sense of responsibility. If a man is not stable before the Lord, he is not reliable, and if he is not reliable, he will not have a sense of responsibility. When he feels good, he will work more. When he feels bad, he will go to sleep. He will have no sense of responsibility. Hence, stability in our character is a fundamental need in the work; only stable ones can work for the Lord. They work when they feel like it, and they work when they do not feel like it. They work when the sun shines, and they work when it rains. They work when they are very happy, and they work when they are very sad. These are the stable ones. Unstable ones are affected by everything; even the weather affects them. If our work is affected by our environment, we have failed the Lord. Before Him we must have a strong spirit.

Brothers and sisters, are you reliable? Are you stable? Are you unwavering? When you have learned all that God wants you to learn, you will have the keys. These keys first opened the door to the Jews, and then the door to the Gentiles, and the church is built up this way. We must remember the principle that God secures ministers before He builds the church. God first looks for ministers, and then He builds the church. The doors in many places can only be opened when God finds suitable and usable ministers. If His ministers and servants are not stable and reliable, these doors will not be opened.

Thank God that Peter saw his weakness through his failure. His fall was severe and his failure great. He went away and wept. He knew that he could not make it by himself. Many brothers and sisters are likewise fully conscious of their own weakness, instability, and frailty. Let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, I cannot make it!" Many people pray for light, yet very often great failures are a source of great light. These failures can provide as much a light as a severe rebuke or a seething message. A man should prostrate himself before God's word. He should prostrate himself before a severe rebuke. Likewise, he should prostrate himself before a serious failure. Such a failure is a light in itself. God shows through failures the kind of person one is. Peter wept bitterly. But God's mercy was upon him, and he became a real "Peter." He was changed from a weak and shaking person to a solid and stable person, and the door of Pentecost was opened through him. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we will witness a change in our character. Our character has to be changed, and the Lord can change our character. A lazy man can be changed into a diligent man; a talkative man can be changed into a man of few words; an insensitive man can be changed into a man who listens; a man who is afraid of sufferings can be changed into one who is fearless in the face of sufferings; a man who cannot control his body can be changed into one who is a master of his body. In the same way, a weak, shaky, and wobbly man can be changed into a strong, stable, and unwavering man. May the Lord have mercy on us.

CHAPTER EIGHT

NOT SUBJECTIVE

ONE

Subjectivity is another defect in the character of some of God's children, and in particular, of some workers for the Lord. If a person is subjective, he cannot do a good work.

What is the meaning of being subjective? Being subjective means to insist on one's own opinions and to refuse others' opinions. It means to have a preconceived idea before listening to others and to hold on to the idea even after hearing from others. Subjectivity means a reluctance to accept or to be corrected. It means to have one's own opinion from the very beginning and to always insist on this opinion. A subjective person arrives at his own judgment before he hears anything from the Lord, before the facts are unfolded, and before others present their opinions. He insists on his judgment even after hearing something from the Lord, after the facts are unfolded, and after others have presented their side of the matter. This is the meaning of being subjective. The root cause of subjectivity is a self that has never been broken. When a man's self is not broken, he has a stubborn view of things, and these opinions are hard to break and correct.

TWO

What are the problems resulting from subjectivity? What losses does it bring to a man? If a brother or a sister is subjective, he or she will not be able to listen to others. We can learn to not be subjective by listening to others. We must be empty within before we can take in the Lord's word or others' words. If we are subjective, it is difficult for us to take in anything. It is essential for every Christian worker to cultivate the ability to hear what people have to say; he has to know others' affairs and to understand others' problems. We have previously said that a great problem with God's workers is that they cannot listen to others. The chief reason behind not being able to listen to others is subjectivity. When a person is subjective, he is filled up with all sorts of things. His opinions become an impregnable fortress, and his ideas are unchangeable. He is always filled with his own arguments and preoccupations. When a brother or a sister comes to him and tries to share a frustration with him or to unload a burden to him, he simply cannot understand what they are saying, even after listening for half a day. He cannot listen to others. This is one problem associated with subjectivity.

THREE

Another damaging effect of subjectivity is an inability to learn. A subjective person is very confident and clear about everything. He has made up his mind about everything already. He has formed an opinion about everything, and he is confident about everything. It is difficult for him to learn anything. When some young people first join the work, it is more difficult to teach them than it is to feed a child medicine. It seems that some things almost have to be forced down their throat. They are full of ideas, proposals, and ways. They fancy that they know all there is to know. Although they dare not claim to be omniscient, they act as if they are omniscient. It is harder to teach them something than it is to feed them bitter medicine. If a man needs to be spoon-fed every meal, how long can he survive? When we meet some brothers, we cannot help but sigh in our heart, "My brother, how many things can a person

like you learn from the Lord?" The biggest problem with a subjective person is his inability to learn. This one thing alone can cost him dearly. Every time you want such a one to learn something, it seems as if you almost have to fight with him. You may beat him down, and he may learn a little. But the next time you want him to learn something, you have to struggle with him all over again. This is a great frustration. One basic requirement of the Lord's worker is being able to remain objective; he has to be so objective that he can readily receive help from others. Brothers and sisters, our help comes from everywhere. There are so many things that we have to learn. Suppose we only learn one lesson a month, or one lesson every half a year, or one lesson a year. How long can we live? How many things can we learn in our lifetime? A subjective person finds it harder to learn as the years go by. His subjectivity increases as time goes by. Indeed, subjectivity is a big problem among us.

It is true that God's worker should be stable; his pathway should be straight and unwavering. But if his opinions, views, and judgments are also set and unyielding, he will have very little chance of learning any lesson, and his usefulness will be very limited. On the one hand, we need to be stable and unwavering before the Lord. On the other hand, we cannot be subjective. God's children should learn to not be subjective; they should learn to be flexible for God's move. Otherwise, it will be impossible for them to learn. In order to know whether or not a person is subjective, one only needs to find out whether he learns quickly or slowly, or if he can learn at all. One can tell if a person is subjective by the amount of spiritual things he learns and how often he learns them. The obstacle to learning anything is subjectivity. Subjectivity affects a person's ability to learn; it even stops him from learning anything.

The basic requirement for spiritual advance is openness to God. Our heart, mind, and spirit must be wide open to Him. Being open to Him means that we are not subjective. The primary meaning of being open is not being subjective. Of course, in order for our spirit to be open to God, something deeper than not being subjective is involved. But not being subjective is the first condition. As soon as we are subjective, our gates are closed. Not being subjective means that we are sensitive to God, that we can learn, and that we can receive impressions. It is hard for many people to receive any impression from God. God has to use a rod or a whip or even a hammer to hit such ones before they receive any impressions from Him. We should learn to understand God's will as soon as His eyes turn. Many people are like horses and mules, who do not understand anything unless they are led by the bit and bridle. This is what it means to be subjective. A subjective person cannot pick up any signal from God. God may wrestle with him and allow him to come to a blind alley or a closed door, yet he is still arguing with God. He cannot quiet himself down to learn what he should learn. Many people are not meek and pliable enough before God. They are too hard and stubborn. They become a stumbling block to the work because they have not learned much or received much supply from the Lord all their life. They become a problem and a loss to the work.

FOUR

Another big problem of a subjective person is that he cannot receive any guidance from God. He has no way to know God's guidance, and he is completely ignorant of His leading. Every subjective person is as far from God's will as the north pole is from the south pole. It is impossible for him to know God's will, because he does not match the qualifications of those who are God's followers. It takes a pliable and diligent man with a listening ear to receive guidance from God. When God's word comes to such a man, he acts upon it immediately without any subjective views of his own. Balaam's heart erred because it was inclined towards riches. He became subjective in his judgment, and he insisted on his judgment. This is why Balaam prayed to God again and again until God told him to go. When a man's mind is set, it is hard for him to understand God's will. We must learn to walk in God's will. We must realize that God's will often requires that we stop immediately, or it may require that we march immediately. We often have planned out the whole journey, only to find that the Lord wants us to stop

immediately. What should we do? If the Spirit of the Lord tells us to stop, are we willing to stop? A subjective man will not stop. A person who has learned to listen to God is not subjective in any way: He will go forward when God commands him to go forward, and stop when God tells him to stop. Do not think that this is a simple thing. A subjective man cannot readily go forward when God tells him to go forward. However, once he has picked up momentum, it is hard for God to stop him. This is where our problem lies. A strenuous effort must be made to push forward those who are subjective, and once they start moving, no one can stop them. This is not the way of the instructed, who are pliable in the hands of God. When God tells them to move, they move. When God tells them to stop, they stop. These are the only ones who will receive guidance from God. Many people will not move until they receive harsh chastisement, and once they move, they never stop. They go on in the same direction continually. God has to stop them forcefully with His strong hand before they will stop. Their subjectivity prevents them from knowing God's will, much less carrying out His will.

In Abraham's offering up of Isaac we get a beautiful picture of a man who was not subjective. If Abraham had been a subjective man when God asked him to offer up Isaac, it would have been difficult for him to obey. He would have had many things to say. He would have reasoned after this fashion: "I had no son before. The possibility of having one never even occurred to me. I thought that Eliezer was enough. It was God who wanted me to have a son. I did not have a thought of a son and neither did Sarah. It was all God's idea. Now that He has given me a son, why would He want me to offer him for a burnt offering?" Brothers and sisters, a subjective man would have had every reason to reject this demand! But Abraham was so simple. Even such a demand presented no problem to him. He believed that God could raise his son from the dead. As he stood by the altar and raised the knife to slay his son, God prepared a ram which he could offer instead of his son (Gen. 22:10, 13). If Abraham had been subjective, such a demand would have presented a new problem to him. He would doubtless have been bewildered and would have wondered how he could be told to do one thing at one moment and just the opposite the next moment. But Abraham did not think this way. He was not subjective. With some people, it is difficult for them to get on the altar, and once they are on the altar, it is more difficult for them to get down. They spend years getting on the altar, and once they are on it, they insist on remaining there until they die. A subjective man will act according to his own will even when he is trying to obey God. Even God cannot stop him. A subjective man is forced into obedience, and his obedience is many times the result of self-effort. He cannot be turned around no matter how hard others try. God's will and commandment may direct him to take back what he has given, but he cannot.

It is interesting to note that when we identify our will with God's will, there often comes a time when God's will changes. If our own will cannot change accordingly, it will be hard for us to act simply according to His word. This is where our biggest problem lies. Do you know how a man tames a horse? A wild horse will refuse any rider on its back. It is difficult to break a horse. In order to break it, a trained rider has to jump on its back and allow it to kick and struggle until it tires itself out. The rider has to use his skills to remain on the horse's back. He has to let the horse run, perhaps for miles, or hundreds of miles. When the horse realizes that it cannot get rid of its master, it will yield to his command. Such horse trainers can turn a wild horse into a fine show horse. The horse can trot around in a small circle with a rope tied to a pole in the center. It can balance itself so well that it will not go so far away as to break the rope nor so close as to allow slack in the rope. It can run around hundreds of times, always keeping the same radius. The trainer trains the horse until it can be maneuvered in this way. When he is done with his training, the horse can be directed to go anywhere. It can go through a small entrance or a big gate; it will always be obedient. Brothers and sisters, we are like wild horses, and it is a big thing for the Lord to train us. He needs to do much work before we can be tamed. After a horse is trained, it will no longer be subjective. It will be so trained that as soon as its rider tugs a little on the reins, it will know whether its master wants it to run or walk. It will go as its master directs, not only one or ten times around the corral, but hundreds of times.

Psalm 32:8-9 says, "I will instruct you and teach you concerning the way you should go;/I will counsel you; my eye is upon you./Do not be like a horse or like a mule, without understanding;/Whose trappings consist of bit and bridle to constrain them,/Else they do not come near you." This is very meaningful. We should be different from the horse or the mule. A dumb mule can be so trained that it can go wherever its master directs. It should be easier for God's children to be taught in the matter of divine guidance than it is to tame a horse. A horse, even when trained, is considered by God as a beast "without understanding." This is because it only knows the will of the master when it is kicked, pushed, or reined. As for us, we should look to the counsel of the Lord's eyes. This is something the horse and the mule cannot do. David said in this psalm, "I will counsel you; my eye is upon you" (v. 8). As soon as the Lord's eyes turn, we should know what He is saying. We should know even before His hand moves; we should know when His eyes turn only a little. Let us pay special attention to the eyes spoken of in this verse. A subjective man has no place here. Brothers and sisters, do not think that our person and our character are small things. Please remember that if we are subjective, we cannot be objective with God. Without training, we will be subjective all our life long. We cannot expect to suddenly know what God wants us to do. We may be satisfied being a tamed horse, but God says that a horse and mule, even when tamed, are without understanding. This means that it is not enough to be tamed. We have to move as fast as the Lord's eyes move. As soon as we know our Master's wish, we should act upon it. Whenever He gives the signal, we should stop. If we are filled with our own ideas, views, and subjective notions, it will be impossible for us to wait on the Spirit of the Lord and to move when He moves and stop when He stops. The Lord often wants us to stop, but we do not stop. We cannot stop because our very self has become involved in the endeavor. Those who seek after God's will must keep their self at bay. Those who do God's will must also keep their self at bay. We should move when the Lord wants us to move, and stop when He wants us to stop. Our self should be kept at bay. As soon as we become subjective, the self becomes involved, and we are unable to stop when the Lord wants us to stop. The problem with many people is twofold: In the beginning they cannot move, and once they start they cannot stop. These are serious problems. The biggest trouble we have is our subjectivity. This is what keeps God's will from being manifested through us.

Understanding God's will has nothing to do with methods; it is a matter of the character of the person. A person will not understand God's will simply because someone else has told him the way to know His will. This is not possible. Only a right person armed with the right method can know God's will. If the person is wrong, he will not know God's will even if he has the right method. The understanding of God's will has to do with the person. Method alone cannot help us understand His will. This does not mean that understanding His will does not involve the use of any method. It means that the crucial factor in understanding God's will is our person. If our person is wrong, nothing will work even if we have the right methods. We must not be subjective. Before we can catch God's every move, we must be touched by the Lord and have our subjectivity dealt with to the extent that we have lost all of our self-opinions. If we cannot be flexible to move and stop at God's will, we cannot understand His will and cannot be His servant. God's servants must be quick to turn with God's will. We should ignore loud demands or clamorous voices from without; they are not our concern. Flexibility and openness to God's changes, haltings, and leadings are basic requirements of a worker of the Lord. This is the only way God can guide us to His pathway.

FIVE

In regard to subjectivity, a further point should be noted: Our subjectivity must be dealt with by God before we will be fit to deal with others. God will lead us to deal with other men only when we ourselves are first dealt with. He will not commit anything to a subjective man. God cannot trust such a man. A subjective person cannot do God's will, and he has no way to lead others to do His will. If a

subjective person is put into God's work to instruct others in the way of God, his own will comes out ten times stronger than does the Lord's. A subjective person wants everyone to listen to him. Unless a person is brought to the point where he has lost all interest in gaining a following, he cannot be used by the Lord. We should allow ourselves to be broken and smashed to the degree that we no longer crave obedience from others. We should not interfere with others' freedom, personal lives, or personal judgments. We have no interest in other people's life or affairs. As servants of the Lord, we must be dealt with by the Lord to such an extent. Only then can we be used by Him to speak as His deputy authority. Otherwise, there is a real threat of our usurping God's authority to carry out our own will, through which we would become a ruler, teacher, or father over God's children. The Lord said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...It shall not be so among you" (Matt. 20:25-26). If a man has never been broken by the Lord, if he secretly cherishes his own ideas, demands, and hobbies, God cannot use him because he is untrustworthy. If God entrusts His flock to such a person, he will lead the flock to his own house. Many people are not worthy of God's trust; God cannot entrust anyone into their hands. If a man is interested only in his own ways, he cannot lead others into God's way. Our brother Paul was very pliable. He was single, and he knew that it was better to remain single than to be married. Yet he never criticized marriage. Brothers and sisters, how exercised was our brother before the Lord. If a man is subjective and if his subjectivity is never broken, he will surely insist on everyone being a virgin and remaining unmarried. He will surely condemn every marriage. A subjective man can easily do this. But here was a man who was different. He could stand for what he did; he knew the value of what he was doing. Yet at the same time, he gave others the freedom to make their own choice. He wished that others would be spared of all sufferings of the flesh, yet he agreed that others should be married. Here was a man who was firm in the Lord, yet at the same time, he was soft and tender. In discussing the matter of marriage, he was still able to declare that the teaching of abstinence was a teaching of demons, even though he was a single man.

Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to take such a stand. We can never overemphasize a truth just because we feel that way, nor can we shut our mouth to a truth just because we feel differently. Once we give up trying to influence God's truth according to our feelings, we are qualified to work and to lead others according to the Lord's leading. A basic requirement for us to be in the work is to be broken and to have our subjectivity dealt with. If our subjectivity still dominates us, we will lead God's work astray as soon as it is put into our hands. This is terrible. It is a terrible thing for a person to act rashly and speak carelessly. We should learn to stop interfering with other people's business. We should never dictate the lives or affairs of others with our own subjectivity. God does not interfere with man's free will. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was placed in the garden of Eden. God told man not to eat of it, but He did not keep man away from it with a fiery sword. If the fiery sword in chapter three had been used in chapter two to guard the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, man would never have sinned. It would have been easy for God to do this. But He did not do this. Instead, He said, "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). If man insisted on eating it, that was his own business.

We have to learn to not dominate others with our own thought. When others do not want to hear our word, we should turn away; we should not force them to listen to it. If we have a burden before the Lord, we should tell the brothers and sisters about it. It is good if they take our word. But if they do not take it, we should be happy to turn away. We should never impose our thought upon others. God has never done this, and neither should we. If a man chooses to rebel against God, He allows him to take his way. If others do not want to take our way, why should we insist? We have to learn to give up our insistence. We have to allow others to turn away from our advice. If we have learned the proper lessons before the Lord, we will gladly allow others to take their own way. We should not force others to listen to us or to take our way. We should not force others to receive our help. We may be clear about our function, but we should not force others to accept our function. God never forces anyone, and we

should not force anyone either. None of us can be subjective in the work of God. None of us should try to make others listen to us. Let us learn to be attentive before Him. The more others listen to us, the greater is our responsibility before the Lord. How great a responsibility we have to bear if we say a wrong word to others! Do not rejoice at others taking our word. We have to remember the tremendous responsibility that is upon our shoulders. It is too great a thing for others to listen to us. If others listen to us when our way is crooked and we are not clear about God's will, we are truly the blind leading the blind. Not only will the blind who follow us fall into the pit, but both who are blind, ourselves and our followers, will fall into the pit (Luke 6:39). Never think that only followers fall and that leaders perhaps can escape the fall. When the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit. We should not think that it is easy to speak, easy to teach, and easy to advise others. We should not think that it is a simple thing to say, "You should do this," or "You should do that." If we become teachers to many, instructing them to do this and that, there is the danger that both we and they will end up in the pit. Hence, we have to learn to fear God. We should realize that the more others listen to us, the more we should hear God's word in fear and trembling. Even when we are one hundred twenty percent sure of something, we should only say it with seventy to eighty percent assurance. We should be afraid of making mistakes. The easier it is for a man to speak weighty words, the less weighty he is before the Lord. The more confidence a person has, the less trustworthy he is. We should never think that as long as others listen to us, everything will be fine. Everything is not fine when others listen to us. What will we do to these obedient ones? Where will we lead them? We have to realize the seriousness of our responsibility. This is why we have to learn to not be subjective. One problem with subjectivity is a craving for others' ears. A subjective person likes to have others listen to him. He wants his ideas to be a source of direction for others and his opinions to be a source of light for others. But we have to realize that our opinions are not a source of light and our ideas are not a source of direction. We must learn to not lead others by the hand, learn to not force others to go our way, and learn to not impose obedience to God upon others. If the brothers and sisters are happy to go along with us, we should thank the Lord. If they want to choose their own ways, let them make their own choices. We should not try to drag others along with us. We should allow others to come and go as they wish. One characteristic of a man who knows God is a hesitation to force anyone to listen to him.

A subjective man can never do this. He cannot listen to what others have to say, and he cannot receive guidance from the Lord. He does not feel that he has to learn anything from anyone; therefore, God cannot trust him with any work. If we have made all the decisions already before we come to God, we will not find out God's decision. Only a pliable person can find out God's decision. We must drop many things before we can sense God's will. If a man has never learned to deny his subjectivity, and if he is full of his own opinions, ways, ideas, and reasons, the church will be split as soon as God's work is placed into his hands. Division in the church results from man's subjectivity. Many people can only work individually; they cannot participate in the work of the church. They can only have individual service, not Body service. Many people have never touched the matter of authority. As a result, they can never be an authority. From the first day that many people began to work, they have never submitted to anyone. Surely God cannot make them an authority over others. Brothers and sisters, we should pay special attention to this matter. When a young brother joins the work, we must first test him. A subjective person always considers himself to be the head, and he always wants to assume leadership over others. He always tries to impose his idea upon others. A man who is dealt with by the Lord is always faithful and always willing to speak, yet he will never try to impose his will upon others. He will never try to subject others to his will. On the one hand, he becomes stable through God. On the other hand, he is not subjective and does not impose anything upon others unilaterally. Everyone is free to obey God or disobey Him. We cannot force anyone to do anything. A man bears his own responsibility before God. We should always allow others to have the opportunity to choose for themselves. May we all be pliable, always giving others the freedom to choose and always asking

others what they would like to do. Our work is just to present the ways before men. What they choose is up to them. In everything we should give others the freedom to make their own choice. We should try our best not to make a choice for them.

SIX

Subjectivity can be expressed through the smallest things in our life. It is a nature, a habit. If a man's subjectivity is dealt with by the Lord, he will show a marked difference in the numerous small actions of his daily life. A subjective man is subjective in everything. He likes to control others. He likes to give his opinions, issue orders, and tell one to do this and another to do that. A subjective man has a solution for every problem. When a young worker of the Lord is put together with a few other brothers, you will immediately know whether or not he is a subjective person. If he is by himself, you cannot tell anything. But as soon as there are two persons, you will see that the one who is subjective always will try to be on top of the other. He will want to have a say in what to eat and what not to eat, what to wear and what not to wear, where to sleep and where not to sleep. He will always insist on this and that. He is omniscient and omnipotent. When two sisters are put in a room, we can tell immediately if one of them is subjective. If both of them are subjective, they will not get along with each other at all. If one is subjective, perhaps they can get along with each other. If both are subjective, neither one will be able to get along with the other. This does not mean that we should keep our mouth shut from now on. If difficulties arise in the work or problems arise with the workers, we have to be faithful. What I am saying is that after we have spoken and others have chosen to ignore our word, we should not force anything upon them. We should not feel hurt when others will not take our word. Many people treasure their own ideas too much. When others will not take their word, they feel hurt. This is the reaction of a subjective person. In order to be faithful, we have to say many things. But we do not say them because we are interested in meddling with others' affairs. We do not say them because our temperament or habit compels us to talk. We do not have to speak every time the opportunity arises. We can speak when there is a need, but we do not have to make a rule that we must speak all the time, nor do we have to make a habit of speaking. It is wrong to speak whenever an opportunity arises. It is wrong to speak with an undisciplined tongue. God has not appointed us to be the teacher of all. Some people are used to speaking and teaching others. This clearly shows that they are very subjective. If a man's subjectivity is not broken, it is hard for him to work for the Lord.

A subjective man is not necessarily a faithful man. A faithful man speaks because he has to speak. He does not speak because he likes to speak or because he has a lust for speaking. A faithful man speaks because he does not want others to fall into error. He does not speak out of a lust for speaking. If a faithful man finds that his words are rejected, he does not feel dejected; he can turn away. But a subjective man is different. He has a lust to speak, and if he does not speak, he feels unhappy. He has a habit of opening his mouth every time he sees something. Do you see the difference? A subjective man speaks because he likes to speak; he likes to impose his will upon others. He likes to dominate others with his ideas and have others listen to his words. A subjective person finds it difficult to accept the rejection of his will. Brothers and sisters, a subjective man is totally different from a faithful man. We should be faithful. Many times, it is wrong if we do not open our mouth. But we must differentiate between faithfulness and subjectivity. A subjective person likes to meddle with others' affairs. He likes others to listen to his words. He likes to control others in everything. He gives orders to this person and directions to that person. He considers his methods the first and the best, and his ways the most perfect. He wants everybody to take his way. Many subjective persons cannot stand differences in others. Brothers and sisters, a subjective person is the narrowest kind of person in this world. A man can only be broad and generous after he has been dealt with by the Lord and his subjectivity has been removed. Only a broad person can tolerate those who are different from themselves. Subjectivity demands

uniformity; it demands sameness. It cannot tolerate differences in others. If two subjective persons are put in a room, there will not be peace in the room. One wants to do one thing and the other wants to do another thing, and the room will be filled with arguments. One will think that he is bearing the cross, and the other will also think that he is bearing the cross. Both are having problems with the other, and both think that they are bearing the cross. This is what happens when two subjective heads are put together. A subjective person always tries to take things in his hand; he wants to establish himself as the leader among God's people. He makes instant decisions on how things should be done. A subjective person likes to meddle in the smallest affair. He likes to interfere, to control. This is a basic problem with a subjective person. We know that God will not entrust things to such persons. I have never seen God entrusting things to a subjective person. God cannot use such ones. I have never seen a subjective person who has traveled any considerable length spiritually. His disposition blocks him from receiving any instruction. A disposition that refuses to be instructed is unteachable and useless.

A subjective person likes to take over and make proposals. If a person is subjective, he creates problems in God's work. Not only is he dull to learning and unfit for God's commissioning; his total energy is spent on his own subjectivity. As a result, he has no energy for God's work. When a man interferes with others' affairs, he becomes negligent of his own work, because other things fully occupy him. If a man keeps an eye on others' vineyards, his own vineyard surely will be neglected. Brothers and sisters, we do not have the time to indulge in subjectivity. God has entrusted enough ministry, responsibility, and work to us. We do not have the time to meddle with others' affairs. We have to focus our time and energy on the works that we should do. We are busy enough. Only those who are negligent in God's work and who give up their own responsibility before God have the energy to deal with the miscellaneous affairs of the other brothers and sisters. It is clear that all subjective persons have abandoned the work that God has assigned to them. They have allowed their own work to go unattended while busying themselves with others' business. If a worker always gives up his own work to take care of others' work, his own work will surely be poor. A subjective person can never be effective in the Lord's work. God cannot trust him, and even if He entrusts anything to him, it will not be properly carried out. It is difficult to remove a person's subjectivity, because his subjectivity is a matter of disposition. He is subjective in everything, not only in God's work, but in his personal life as well. He is subjective towards others' affairs. A subjective person is a very busy person in this world. He wants to be involved in everything. As a result, he cannot run a straight course before the Lord. He has his opinion, view, and way for everything. This presents a real spiritual problem and a real spiritual barrier. We have to pray, "Lord, be gracious to me. Make me a pliable person before You. I want to be pliable and soft, not only before You, but before all the brothers and sisters." Paul was such a person. His letters were "weighty and strong." When it came to the matter of his testimony before God, he was weighty and strong. But when he came face to face with the Corinthians he was "weak and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor. 10:10). Paul was uncompromising in the testimony he bore. This is the reason his words were "weighty and strong." But when he talked with others, he was meek, not harsh. Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to differentiate between the two. In our ministry we have to be strong and weighty, but in ourselves we should not be subjective. "Some preach Christ even because of envy and strife, and some also because of good will, these out of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. But the others announce Christ out of selfish ambition, not purely, thinking to raise up affliction in my bonds. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truthfulness, Christ is announced; and in this I rejoice; yes, and I will rejoice" (Phil. 1:15-18). Do you see the balance here? When others take the same way as we do, we thank the Lord for it. If others will not take the same way, but take a different way, we are still their brothers and sisters. We are not bothered by it. We have to maintain this balance. On the one hand, we have to be faithful to our testimony. On the other hand, we should not be subjective in ourselves. A faithful man is never subjective, and a subjective man is not necessarily faithful. We have to draw the line clearly between the two.

In summary, subjectivity is simply an unbroken self. Brothers and sisters, we have to pray for God's breaking work, praying that we will not be subjective in any way, whether towards others or towards our own affairs. The Lord has to crush us completely before we will be soft and meek. Without such a crushing, we will always be somewhat subjective. Some people may be sharper than others, but a subjective person is always opinionated, full of methods, and ready to take control of others. We have to allow the Lord to deal with us in a severe way at least once so that we can be crushed to the ground and never rise again. When a test comes again, we then will be faithful to our testimony. We will allow others the freedom to choose to follow or to not follow us. We will not have the compulsion to speak. We are not here to be a teacher to many. We should not be so eager to speak, propose, make decisions, teach, or control the work. Brothers and sisters, we should be strong in our ministry, but at the same time, we should learn to be meek and not subjective before the Lord.

CHAPTER NINE

TOWARDS MONEY

What should be the attitude of a Christian worker, a servant of God, towards money? This is quite a serious question, and unless a worker has a definite breakthrough in this matter, he cannot work for the Lord. If a worker has a problem towards money, he cannot go very far. A worker finds frequent occasions to touch money. What is at stake, therefore, is a very fundamental question.

Mammon stands in opposition to God, and we should reject its influence. This is the proper Christian view towards money. We must be on the alert lest we come under its power. No worker who is bound by the power of mammon can persuade others to be freed from its power. This is not possible. If we are bound and controlled by mammon, it will be impossible for us to help the brothers and sisters to be free of its control and bondage. A worker should hate laziness, and he should also loathe the power of mammon. Otherwise, he will be useless in God's work. Money is a great matter. Let us look at a few things related to money.

ONE

In the first place, let us note the relationship between money and a worker's pathway and teaching. In the Old Testament there is the history of Balaam, and in the New Testament there is the way and teaching of Balaam. Balaam is referred to in 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. This shows us the amount of attention God pays to Balaam. Balaam was a prophet who worked for profit. In other words, he commercialized the prophetic ministry. He was not ignorant of his position. He was fully aware of it. He also was not ignorant of God's will. When Balak, the king of Moab, was set to destroy the people of God, Balaam was fully aware that God's people should not be cursed; he knew that they were a people blessed by Jehovah. But because he coveted Balak's promise, a promise to satisfy all of his wants, he went to God again and again to ask for permission. Eventually, God granted him the permission. Many people erroneously think that this episode is an example of waiting on God. As a matter of fact, Balaam would never have inquired of God at all had it not been for Balak's promise. He knew quite well that such a trip was not according to the Lord. God's thought was of blessing and gracious care; His thought was not of cursing. But Balaam inquired of God again and again because he had received a promise from Balak. Later, God told him to go. But it was not God's will for him to go; it was God's permission for him to go. To God, if Balak's offer could generate so much prayer in Balaam, He would simply tell Balaam to go. Balaam undoubtedly was a prophet, but he allowed money to affect his pathway and lead

him far astray.

Any Christian worker who has not resolved the issue of money within himself and who is still bound by the power of money is certain to relate his field of work to money. When he has to decide where he will work, his decision will surely be influenced by financial support. He will go where there is financial support, and he will not go where there is no financial support. His support becomes his guidance. If he only goes where there is support, surely he will not go to a poor place, or, if he goes at all, he will leave that place after a short period of time. If another place is rich in support, he will spontaneously be drawn to their support, and he will think that God is leading him there. Some prayers and guidance follow monetary support. This support becomes the focus of attention. Profit and money drove Balaam to bother God again and again. He kept bothering God about whether or not he should go. Over ten years ago, an elderly brother commented on the lamentable state of Christian affairs, saying, "See how many servants of God are after money! So many poor places are short of care, yet so many workers are frequenting big places which are already crowded with people. Is there something wrong with the guidance they have received?" This was a strong word. If a brother has not dealt with the problem of money, it will not be a surprise at all that his footsteps inevitably will be like those of Balaam. His pathway will be determined by the amount of his support. The amount of his support will become the direction for his pathway. If a place is poor, he will not visit it or will seldom visit it. Even if he visits the place, he will leave quickly. If a place is rich in support, he will visit more or will stay there permanently. Money will become the source of his guidance. To such ones God can only say, "Go as you wish." A worker who is not free from the influence of money is useless. If a worker cannot boast as Paul boasted with regard to money, he is useless. If a worker cannot be freed from money and its influence, he cannot be a minister of God; his way will surely be Balaam's way. Some people are easily touched by money; their pathway is easily affected by money. As a result, their way is the way of Balaam. The way of Balaam is simply a way that is dictated by money. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we will all be delivered from money. We do not wish to see any of us becoming a beggar. May the location of our work not become the spot where we beg. Once it does, we become a slave to money. It is a pity and shame for God's servant to be led and controlled by money! It is a shame to seek for guidance not by prostrating at God's feet but by following the direction of money! If a man is not fully delivered from money, he may be deep in money's bondage when he says that he is under God's leading. This is too shameful! Of course, the matter of money is a very superficial matter. If the God we believe in is living, we should be able to go anywhere. But if He is not living, we might as well retreat quickly and do nothing at all. It is a shameful thing to preach a living God and yet have our pathway governed by money. This is a great shame!

In the New Testament Peter spoke of the way of Balaam. He showed us what it is: "Having eyes full of adultery and not ceasing from sin; enticing unstable souls, having a heart exercised for covetousness, children of curse" (2 Pet. 2:14). Here the emphasis is on the habitual exercise of covetousness. Covetousness is a matter of the heart, yet it can become a habit. When a man is taken over by covetousness once, twice, or many times, his covetousness becomes his habit. "Forsaking the straight way, they have gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (v. 15). What happens when a person falls into habitual covetousness? He forsakes the straight way, goes astray, and follows the way of Balaam, the son of Beor! Brothers and sisters, God has set before us "the straight way." Which way should we go? Some have forsaken the straight way, gone astray, and followed the way of Balaam. What is "the way of Balaam"? He was a prophet who loved the wages of unrighteousness. This shows us clearly that the way of Balaam is a way that involves the selling of one's prophetic ministry for a profit. But the gospel is not sold, and the prophetic ministry is not sold. We can neither sell God's gospel nor the ministry of the prophets. Yet here was a person who sold his prophetic ministry. His way was wrong. His heart was filled with covetousness. This is the reason he went astray as soon as temptation came. Balaam did not accept Balak's offer as a

result of one thought of covetousness; it was the result of habitual coveting. Brothers and sisters, have you seen this point? It was a habit. This was the reason he went astray as soon as Balak offered him the money. If the power of mammon is not eradicated from us, our feet will run after it as soon as its bait is dangled before us, and we will sacrifice our usefulness. If we want to run a straight course, we have to deny mammon absolutely. Otherwise, we outwardly may be seeking for leading, praying for guidance, and pursuing God's will while our feet remain on the wrong path. Balaam prayed, pursued God's will, and waited on God. Yet he still took the wrong way. Please remember that as long as money occupies a place in our heart and covetousness becomes a habit, we can pray all we want for God to stop us from going to a certain place, but money will eventually direct our footsteps. We will be unable to run a straight course.

Jude also speaks of Balaam. Verse 11 says, "For they have...rushed out in the error of Balaam for reward." These are strong words. Some have rushed out for reward. To rush means to run quickly, speedily, and hurriedly. Some have rushed out in the error of Balaam. God's children have to be fully delivered from the enticement of reward. Otherwise, they will have no choice but the way of error.

In addition to making reference to Balaam, 2 Peter 2:3 describes another condition: "In covetousness, with fabricated words, they will make merchandise of you, for whom the judgment of old is not idle, and their destruction does not slumber." Second Peter 2 deals with false prophets. What do false prophets do? In covetousness they fabricate words to make merchandise of the believers. They are covetous, and they seek profit. Hence, they fabricate lies. If a man's way is directed by money, sooner or later his teaching will also be directed by money. We can be certain of this. Such a person will say one thing to the poor and another thing to the rich. He will tell the poor men one kind of demand of the Lord, and when the rich men come around, he will tell them a different kind of demand of the Lord. His words are affected by his desire for profit. In other words, his teaching goes where the money is. God's Word is frank and strong. We are afraid that some have gone after the example of the false prophets and the false teachers. If a man's course of action is swayed and turned by the power of money, this man is a false prophet and a false teacher. No prophet, instructor, or teacher who is a faithful servant of God can be swayed by the power of money. If a man can be bought with money, if he can be affected by money, and if money can change the course of his direction, he should cover himself with ashes and confess that he is a false prophet and a false teacher. He is a false servant, not a genuine servant of God. This is a very serious thing. We must be totally delivered from mammon. Those who are governed by the supply of money in their pathway and their speaking should be cut off from God's work.

Peter and Jude were not the only ones who spoke on this subject. Paul said the same thing to Timothy when he underscored this peril. First Timothy 6:3 says, "If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness." What is to become of the one who teaches different things, who teaches strange doctrines, and who does not consent to the healthy words of our Lord Jesus Christ? Verses 4 and 5 say, "He is blinded with pride, understanding nothing, but is diseased with questionings and contentions of words, out of which come envy, strife, slanders, evil suspicions, perpetual wranglings of men corrupted in mind and deprived of the truth, supposing godliness to be a means of gain." It is interesting to note that in church history all the heretical teachers, those who taught differently, took godliness as a means of gain. None of them were spent as much as Paul. They calculated how much they could get out for what they put in. May none of us try to gain anything from anyone through the gospel! Nothing in this world is more condemned by God than the pursuit for gain through godliness. Nothing can be more base than to engage in Christian work as a source of profit. This is most repugnant. Using godliness as a means of gain is most repugnant. Every worker must be completely free from all thoughts of profit before he can engage himself in the work. Brothers and sisters, if you want to work for the Lord, your mind must be

completely free from the influence of money. Death and starvation should be more preferable than working for gain. Every worker of the Lord has to be very strong in this matter. If anyone entices us to take a compromising course in this matter, we should not give him an inch of ground. We have to follow our Lord in an absolute way. Brothers and sisters, we can sell our clothing and our possessions, but we can never sell our truth and our godliness. Unless we die to mammon and our mind is completely free from it, it is better not to touch the Lord's work at all. Verse 6 says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." This is where the real gain lies: Where there is godliness, there is contentment. When we have godliness, we ask for nothing more, we expect nothing more, and we are satisfied with what we have. This is gain, great gain. It is a shame for godliness to become a means for monetary gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. Verses 7 through 10 are particularly important to workers of the Lord: "For we have brought nothing into the world, because neither can we carry anything out. But having food and covering, with these we will be content. But those who intend to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge men into destruction and ruin. For the love of money is a root of all evils, because of which some, aspiring after money, have been led away from the faith and pierced themselves through with many pains." Brothers and sisters, we should never make godliness a means of gain. We must be completely free from the influence of money. If we have trouble overcoming this, it would be better to look for another profession. We can never be so fallen as to follow money in our speaking and in our work. It would be better to take up another profession and serve the Lord in that way. There is nothing wrong in serving the Lord with other professions. No one can be careless in the matter of money, and no one can bring shame to the Lord's name through money. A worker must be clean with money. His heart must be fully delivered from it. He has to be absolute, because God's Word condemns most severely any uncleanness towards money.

Jude 16 says, "These are murmurers, complainers, going on according to their own lusts; and their mouth speaks great swelling things, flattering persons for the sake of advantage." Many people speak great swelling things. They boast of the number of times their prayers are answered and of the number of times they have performed amazing miracles and works of wonders. They say these things "for the sake of advantage." Many people speak what others like to hear in order to flatter them for the sake of advantage. We have to deal with all motives that are driven by the thought of profit. This is a basic character trait of a worker of the Lord. A person who has compromised in the matter of money will compromise in all things. Towards money we must be tough, very tough, and must not give in to any corruption. As workers of the Lord, we have to be absolutely clean in the matter of money.

TWO

Let us now consider how the Lord Jesus trained His disciples. Luke 9 records His sending forth of the twelve disciples, and chapter ten records His sending forth of the seventy. Of the four Gospels, only Luke records the sending forth of the seventy. In sending forth the twelve, the Lord said, "Take nothing for the journey, neither a staff nor a bag nor bread nor money, nor have two tunics apiece" (9:3). The Lord told them to leave behind many things. When He commissioned the seventy, He said, "Do not carry a purse, nor a bag, nor sandals" (10:4). A common point in both cases is money. In other words, money should be a non-issue for a worker who sets out for his work. Later the Lord asked, "When I sent you without purse and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you? And they said, Nothing" (22:35). Following this the Lord said, "But now, let him who has a purse take it, likewise also a bag; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (v. 36). This is because the dispensation had changed. By that time the Lord Jesus had been rejected. While there was a chance for the Israelites to receive the Lord, there was no need for these things. The point to emphasize is that in carrying out his commission for the Lord, a worker should not pay attention to his wallet. His whole

being should be given to the message, not to his wallet. We go out to testify that Jesus of Nazareth is God's appointed Lord. Our being is in the message, not in the purse. In other words, we are qualified to work only if we are completely free from money. If we go to every city and town to preach the gospel of the kingdom, we must not be like a camel. We cannot be a camel, stuck at the eye of the needle and barred from the kingdom, while telling others of the need to enter the kingdom by violence (Matt. 11:12). This is impossible.

What do the words do not carry mean? They tell us that the gospel principle contradicts the principle of the purse and the two tunics. When a man sets out to preach the gospel, he cannot set his mind on these things. For an ordinary journey, one needs a purse to hold his money, a staff for walking, and two tunics to change his clothes. All these things are necessary. This is the reason the Lord told His disciples to carry them in Luke 22. Why did He say that these are unnecessary when He sent out the twelve disciples in chapter nine and the seventy in chapter ten? He forbade these things because a gospel preacher should not set his mind on these things. When he is sent, he should go. He should go if there are two tunics, and he should go if there is only one tunic. He should go with or without a staff, with or without money, and with or without a purse to carry his money. This is what it means to be a gospel preacher. This is the basic training the Lord gave the disciples when He sent out the twelve and then the seventy for their work. Brothers and sisters, we have to be clear. If a man's heart is on the gospel, these minor things will not be an issue to him at all. If these things become an issue to him, it is better that he not go out at all. In order to preach the gospel, our clothing, our purse, and our staff must not be a concern to us. If they are, we cannot preach the gospel. The gospel requires that we focus absolutely on the gospel; it requires so much of our attention that these things should become inconsequential to us. The gospel is the only thing that should occupy our hearts. When we set out for our work, we should be happy with or without the availability of hospitality. We have to stand on God's side, and we should bear a glorious testimony for the Lord. This is why the Lord said, "Into whatever house you enter, first say, Peace to this house" (10:5). How dignified this is. A worker is one who dispenses peace to others. He should honor his own position before the Lord. He can be poor, but he can never lose his dignity. No worker can be so wrong as to give up his dignity. If we go to a place and the people there do not receive us, what should we do? The Lord said, "As many as do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake off the dust from your feet for a testimony against them" (9:5). Do you see the dignity of the servants of God? When they are turned away, they do not feel shamed and do not complain, saying, "What bad luck. We came to the wrong house." Instead, they shake off the dust from their feet. They do not even take a speck of dust from that city. God's servants must maintain their dignity. They can be poor, but they cannot lose their dignity. If our mind is not fully settled about this, we cannot have a share in God's work. As workers, we have to deal with the Lord properly regarding the matter of money. Otherwise, we cannot touch God's work, because mammon is a crucial matter.

We can find out more about the Lord's training of His disciples in the feeding of the five thousand and then the four thousand. On one of these occasions, He took His disciples with Him and preached to a large crowd of five thousand, not including women and children. Toward the close of the day the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is deserted and the hour is already late. Send the crowds away that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves. But Jesus said to them, They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat" (Matt. 14:15-16). The disciples had hoped that the Lord would send the crowds away to get their own food. But the Lord said, "You give them something to eat." When one disciple heard this, he was shocked, and said, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that each one may take a little" (John 6:7). While they were counting the two hundred denarii, the Lord said, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see" (Mark 6:38). When they brought Him five loaves and two fishes, the Lord performed a miracle and fed them all. Brothers and sisters, all those who are counting their two hundred denarii are not qualified to work for the Lord. If money means so much to us, we cannot touch God's work. The Lord shows us in these

verses that every worker should be glad to give away what he has. If money means a great deal to us, we will always calculate profit. A worker should be delivered from the power of mammon. Money should not exert any power or influence upon a worker of the Lord. During the three and a half years the Lord was with the twelve disciples, He gave Himself to them. This was the way He trained the twelve disciples. He showed them that what should be spent should be spent. God's work has nothing to do with profitability. It is wrong to view God's work with a commercial eye. Those who are always counting their money are not God's slaves; they are mammon's slaves. We have to learn to rescue ourselves from the power of mammon.

The disciples did not learn this lesson immediately. In Matthew 15, we see another occasion with four thousand people, excluding women and children. This time the condition was more serious. The crowd had been there for three days. What could the disciples do under such circumstances? The Lord told them, "I am moved with compassion for the crowd, because for three days now they have remained with Me and they do not have anything to eat" (v. 32). The word "and" means that the Lord Himself was also without food for those three days. He went on, "And I am not willing to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way." But the disciples had not learned the lesson. They wondered how they could get enough food to feed the people. Man's concern is always where food will come from. But the Lord asked them, "How many loaves do you have? And they said, Seven, and a few small fish" (v. 34). They brought Him the seven loaves and the few fish, and the Lord performed another miracle and fed the four thousand.

The Lord repeated this miracle because the twelve disciples needed to be trained twice. Had the Lord not fed the five thousand and four thousand, the disciples probably would not have been able to handle the situation at Pentecost. If a man has never experienced the feeding of five thousand and four thousand in the Gospels, he could never know about caring for the three thousand and five thousand in Acts. Those who run away at the sight of bears and lions will surely run away at the sight of Goliath. Those who cannot shepherd sheep will surely not be able to shepherd Israel. Here was a group of people who learned the lesson of feeding the five thousand and the four thousand. As a consequence, they had no problem at Pentecost when they were called upon to take care of the poor. Brothers and sisters, we have to go through the same training. Our hearts have to be enlarged. We can hold back what we spend, but God does not want us to hold back His miracles. Many people are too concerned about money. They do not give others the impression that they are servants of God. They do not resemble those who have been trained by God. A trained person will not make money an issue; he will not be that concerned about the money in his hand. Brothers and sisters, the more we count, the more we deviate from God's mark, and the poorer we become. This is not God's principle towards money. We need the training that the twelve and the seventy disciples received. One of the twelve eventually became a thief, a robber; he stole money. He did not learn his lesson, and money became a major issue to him. When he saw Mary pouring the pure nard out of the alabaster flask on the Lord, he considered it a waste. He said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" (John 12:5). To a calculating person, a flask of ointment can be sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor. But the Lord did not go along with this calculation. Instead, He said, "Truly I say to you, 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). The consummate result of the gospel is the breaking of the alabaster flask and the anointing of the Lord Jesus with the ointment worth three hundred denarii. In other words, when a man receives the gospel and for Christ's sake does not count the cost of wasting everything on Him, it is a good thing in the Lord's sight. It is right even when he "wastes" himself on the Lord. Those who do not understand the gospel are always counting their money, but those who understand the gospel realize that it is right and proper to waste themselves on Him. It is right for the Lord to receive our "wasteful" sacrifice. Who was the one who considered it a waste? Judas. He was a man who never learned his lesson. His words were very reasonable. To man, there was no profit in spending three

hundred denarii in this way! To Judas, three hundred denarii was enough to betray a man—he sold the Lord Jesus for a price of three hundred denarii. However, to him, the pouring out of the ointment was a waste, and he grieved over it. He wanted to gain something from it; he was a very calculating man. But those who have genuinely received the gospel and who are absolute for the Lord will sacrifice everything. Even if the sacrifice is too much in others' eyes, this sacrifice is made towards the Lord's gospel. Where the gospel is proclaimed, no one should bargain with the Lord. He said, "For the poor you have with you always, but you do not always have Me" (v. 11). The Lord was saying that there is nothing wrong about caring for the poor, but we cannot hold back anything when it comes to sacrificing for the Lord. Even if we overdo and go to the extreme, it is still not a waste to the Lord. A brother once said, "If a new believer tries to take the moderate way once he believes, he will have no spiritual future at all." Brothers and sisters, considerations of moderation can wait ten or twenty years, but when one first believes, he should waste himself on Him. If you are a new believer, you should offer everything you have to Him. You should pour out the entire alabaster flask of pure nard on the Lord. You have to sacrifice everything this way before you will have a way to go on. This was the training the disciples received. We have to learn to take up a little more suffering ourselves and waste more on the Lord and on others. As God's servants, we should be very generous towards money. We should go on, with or without money. Those who always count their money are not the right persons for the work.

In Acts 3:6 Peter said to the crippled man, "Silver and gold I do not possess." The Lord brought Peter and John to the point where they could claim, "Silver and gold I do not possess." Although we see much money being handled in chapter two, we find a testimony in chapter three: "Silver and gold I do not possess." What did Peter say to the crippled man? "What I have, this I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene rise up and walk." They were so trained that even though so much money passed through their hand, they could still say, "Silver and gold I do not possess." Brothers and sisters, if we engage ourselves in the work at all, we have to be firm with regard to money. Once we are weak in this matter, we will be weak in other matters as well. An underlying factor for strong and steady workers is our trustworthiness before God in the matter of money. God can entrust such persons.

THREE

Let us come to the third point—Paul's attitude towards money. His own word on this subject is very clear. In Acts 20 he said to the Ephesians, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing" (v. 33). This is a matter of motive. He did not covet anything. In his work for the Lord, he was able to boast that he never coveted anyone's possessions. He had no thought concerning anyone's gold, silver, or clothing. This is the first statement. Then he said, "You yourselves know that these hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me" (v. 34). This should be the common attitude of all servants of God. We must covet no man's silver or gold or clothing. Others' possessions are their own, and we have no desire for them. They can keep what they have. At the same time, we work to supply our own need and those of our co-workers. This does not mean that a worker of the Lord has no right to exercise his right in the gospel (1 Cor. 9:18). But it does mean that a worker of the Lord should view the gospel as such a serious and immense responsibility that he would rather offer his hands and his money to the work. This should be his desire before the Lord. If at all possible, his hands should be working. Of course Paul accepted gifts from others, but that had to do with another subject—the responsibility of the giver. We will come to that in a minute.

Paul's word to the Corinthians was very sweet. In 2 Corinthians 11:7 he said, "Or did I commit a sin, abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I announced the gospel of God to you free of charge?" He continued in verses 9 through 12: "And when I was present with you and lacked, I was not a burden to anyone; for the brothers who came from Macedonia filled up my lack, and in everything I

kept myself from being burdensome to you, and will keep myself. The truthfulness of Christ is in me, that this boasting shall not be stopped as it regards me in the regions of Achaia. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows. But what I do, I also will do, that I may cut off the opportunity of those desiring an opportunity, that in the thing in which they boast, they may be found even as we." Paul did not categorically deny all gifts, but in Achaia it was a matter of testimony. Some were criticizing, looking for opportunity, and boasting as if they were different from others. Paul did not want to give them an occasion for criticism. He said that he announced the gospel of God to them free of charge, that he was not a burden to them, not even when he lacked. He kept himself from being burdensome to them, and would continue to keep himself in this way. He would not allow himself to become a burden to them. This does not mean that he did not love them, because what he did, he would continue to do. But he acted in this way to cut off the opportunity of those desiring an opportunity, and to shut their mouths. This is the attitude of a worker towards money. Wherever we go, as soon as we sense any reluctance, we should cut off any opportunity for criticism. God's children must maintain their dignity in His work. The more a person loves money, the more we should give the gospel to him free of charge. The more a person holds on to his money, the less we should receive any gift from him. We should realize our position as servants of God. If we find anyone like the Achaians, who were reluctant and who were looking for opportunity to criticize, we should say to them as Paul seemingly said, "I will not be a burden to any one of you. If you want to send something to the poor in Jerusalem, I can take it to them. If Timothy comes, you can send him forth in his journey in peace. But as for myself, I must maintain my dignity as a worker of the Lord." If we are criticized for receiving any gift from anyone, we have lost our dignity as servants of the Lord altogether. We have to maintain our dignity as servants of God. In our service to the Lord, we cannot be careless with money. We have to be very strict in this matter; otherwise, we will not be able to do much for God.

Paul told us not only how he maintained his integrity, but also how he worked with his two hands to supply the needs of his co-workers. This shows us the principle of giving. Paul said, "These hands have ministered to my needs and to those who are with me" (Acts 20:34). No worker will be depleted by giving. If we keep all that we have received and only make provisions for ourselves, we do not know the meaning of the work of a minister. If there is little offering from the purses of the co-workers, something is wrong. If a worker can only receive, that is, if his faith is exercised only to the point of his receiving, but does not extend to his giving, his function is limited. Brothers and sisters, our spiritual future has much to do with our attitude towards money. The worst attitude we can take is to gather only for ourselves and to do everything for ourselves. It seems a hard task to ask the Levites to offer. Yet the Levites have just as much responsibility to tithe as everyone else. It is true that the Levites had no inheritance in all the cities; they sojourned among the twelve tribes and lived by the altar. Some Levites might have been tempted to say, "I live by the altar. What do I have to give?" But God said that all the Levites should receive tithing and should also tithe. This stops all the servants of God from saying, "I have given up everything. Do I still have to offer from the meager income I receive?" If our eyes are always on our own needs, we will end up in financial straits and will not be able to supply the needs of our co-workers. We have to learn to give. We must be able to supply all of our brothers and sisters. If we keep money in our hands, no matter how little it may be, and if, at the same time, we expect God to constantly work on the other brothers and sisters, we will find that God does just the opposite; He will not entrust His money to our hands.

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 6:10 are wonderful: "As poor yet enriching many." Here was a brother who really knew God. Seemingly he was poor, yet surprisingly he enriched many. Brothers and sisters, this is our way. When we work in a place and the brothers and sisters there have something to say about us, or if they have a wrong attitude towards us, we should maintain our dignity as workers. We should never accept their gifts. Instead, we should tell them plainly, "I cannot take your money. I am a servant of God. You have things to say about me, and I cannot use your money. As a servant of the Lord, I have

to maintain God's glory. I cannot use your money." Even in extreme poverty we have to learn to give. If we want to receive more, we have to give more. The more we are able to give, the more we are able to receive. This is a spiritual principle. Often when we are in lack, we should give more, for as soon as the money that we have goes, the Lord's supply comes. Some brothers and sisters have many such experiences. They can testify that the more they give, the more they receive. We should not count how much is left in our hands. The Lord said, "Give, and it will be given to you" (Luke 6:38). This is God's law. We cannot annul God's law. The Christian way of stewardship is different from that of the world. The world gains by saving; we gain by giving. We may be poor, but we can enrich others.

In 2 Corinthians 12:14 Paul said, "Behold, this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden." This was Paul's attitude. How stern he was toward himself! Some had spoken against Paul and had a problem with Paul. Therefore, when Paul was ready to go to them the third time, he was not a burden to them. In verse 14 he continued, saying, "For I do not seek what is yours but you." Was he being narrow-minded and mean? No. He continued in the same verse, saying, "For the children ought not to store up for the parents, but the parents for the children." Brothers and sisters, do you see how sweet Paul's attitude before God was? The Corinthians heard many rumors and said many things about Paul. Therefore, Paul was forced to decline their gifts, but even though he declined their gifts, he did not shrink from the responsibility of teaching them about money. Second Corinthians may be the book that touches the matter of money the most. Had Paul refrained from any speaking of money, some could have construed that Paul was offended by the matter. But he was not offended, because money had so little influence over him. He went on to teach the Corinthians about money. He told them to send the money to Jerusalem. He did not advise them not to send it. He was above money; therefore, he was above the Corinthians' attitude towards him personally. He refused their gift because he wanted to maintain his dignity. Yet he boasted to the Macedonians that the Corinthians were well prepared. At the same time, he entreated the brothers to make their promised blessing ready beforehand, lest they be put to shame by their unpreparedness when the Macedonians came to them (9:2, 4-5). His personal feelings were completely set aside. God's servants must be delivered from the influence of money. Had Paul not been delivered from money, the Corinthians would never have heard such a message. Paul would still have spoken to the Ephesians or the Philippians, but he would not have spoken to the Corinthians. But Paul still went after the Corinthians; he would not give up. He continued to talk to the Corinthians about money. He showed them that God could use their money, but that he himself would not; he did not want anything from them. In this matter, he did not become burdensome to them. However, he still expected them to have a way to go on in this matter.

Brothers and sisters, can we differentiate between them and theirs whenever we communicate with others in the church? When we see the brothers, are we after them or after theirs? If they have a problem with us and we cannot gain their hearts, will we still support them, edify them, and pray for their growth? Paul had plenty of reasons to turn away from the Corinthians, but he came to them again and again, and even a third time. Yet he was not after their possessions. This is a great temptation to God's servants. We have to learn to do what our brother Paul did.

In 2 Corinthians 12:15-18 he continued, saying, "But I, I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent on behalf of your souls. If I love you more abundantly, am I loved less? But let it be so! I did not burden you; but, as some of you say, being crafty, I took you by guile. Did I take advantage of you through anyone whom I have sent to you? I entreated Titus and sent with him the brother. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not walk in the same spirit? In the same steps?" Brothers and sisters, think of Paul's attitude: He most gladly spent and was utterly spent on their behalf. In preaching the gospel, it is not enough for us just to be spent. We have to spend; we have to give everything we have. It is always wrong to receive money in exchange for our preaching of the gospel. Rather, we have to be prepared to willingly spend our money for the gospel. If our money does not go into our preaching,

something is wrong. If our money does go into our preaching, we are doing the right thing and are putting our money into a worthy cause. This is what Paul did. He was willing to be spent, and he was willing also to spend. He was willing to spend and be spent for their souls. When he was among them he was not a burden to anyone. Nor was Titus or the other brother a burden to anyone. He would not take advantage of anyone. The gospel is true—this is why we can spend our money on it. Brothers and sisters, we have to be like our brother Paul. We should not be a burden to anyone. On the contrary, we should be utterly spent for the gospel's sake. Because the gospel is true, it is right for us to spend and be utterly spent. Our gospel must be one which carries our money along with it. This is the proper way to go.

In spite of what we have said, Paul accepted the gift of the Macedonians and the Philippians. Under normal circumstances, it is right for a gospel preacher to receive gifts. Paul accepted gifts from some places and refused gifts from other places. He was not bound in the matter of receiving gifts. He accepted the gift from the Macedonians. But when some criticized him and looked for opportunity to slander him in Achaia and Corinth, he refused their gift. This was Paul's way. We should be the same today. We can accept gifts from some places like Macedonia, and we should refuse gifts from other places that say things about us. Brothers and sisters, we have to maintain this stand before the Lord. We should not think that we can accept any kind of money. If someone is speaking behind our backs or if someone is seeking for an opportunity to criticize us, we simply cannot accept their gifts. In other places we may accept the gift, but not in that place.

Let us turn to Paul's letter to the Philippians to see his attitude in receiving offerings from the saints there. Philippians 4:15-17 says, "You yourselves also know, Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the account of giving and receiving except you only; for even in Thessalonica you sent both once and again to my need. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit which increases to your account." This was Paul's attitude. It seems as if the Philippians were the only ones who supplied him. When he was in Corinth and Thessalonica, it was the Philippians who supplied him. Yet to the Philippians he said, "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit which increases to your account." He knew that God would make entries in the Philippians' account for the money they had spent. God would take note of the Philippians' money. This is why he did not ask for their money. Here was a man who had such an attitude towards the only ones who were supplying him. He did not seek the gift, but the fruit which increased to their account. The Macedonians had given again and again. But Paul's eyes were not on the money. We may not accept some gifts, but even when we do accept, we should speak like Paul did to the Philippians. We should pray for their fruit to increase to their account. It is altogether wrong for God's servants to be bound by money. We must be delivered from money.

Let us go on to see what Paul said in verse 18: "But I have received in full all things and abound; I have been filled." This was no ordinary financial report. An ordinary report usually highlights a lack so that others will be motivated to give. But to the only church that was supporting him, our brother Paul said, "I have received in full all things and abound; I have been filled." Paul's words were seldom repetitious, but here he said, "I have received in full all things and abound; I have been filled." Brothers and sisters, please pay attention to our brother's attitude. He told the only church that was supporting him that he was full, that he was abounding, and that he was filled. He had enough; his only hope was that their gift would become "a sweet-smelling savor, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (v. 18). Here is a person with a beautiful spirit. He did not have any consciousness of money. Money did not touch him in any way.

Let us go on to verse 19, which is a very precious verse: "And my God will fill your every need according to His riches, in glory, in Christ Jesus." He was grateful for their support, but he did not lose

his dignity. They offered up the money as a sacrifice to God; it was not for Paul personally, and it had nothing to do with him. At the same time, he blessed them: "My God will fill your every need according to His riches, in glory, in Christ Jesus." We cannot help but say, "To our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

FOUR

Finally, let us consider Paul's attitude in relation to funds that the church passed through his hands and which others wanted him to manage. In 2 Corinthians 8:1-4 he wrote, "Furthermore we make known to you, brothers, the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in much proving of affliction the abundance of their joy and the depth of their poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality; that according to their power, I testify, and beyond their power, of their own accord, with much entreaty they besought of us the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints." God's children must be strict in this matter. When a worker goes to a place to work for the Lord, this must be his attitude whenever he touches money. The brothers in Macedonia offered financial assistance to the brothers suffering from famine in Jerusalem. First, Paul informed them of the calamity. After they heard it, they went beyond their ability in the depth of their poverty and affliction to care for the brothers in Jerusalem. What did they do? Paul said that with much entreaty they sought the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints. This was the attitude of the Macedonians in offering financial aid for the care of the saints' needs. They wanted to have a share in this grace. They did not care if they were in poverty and affliction themselves; they still wanted to have a share in this work. Because of this, they entreated Paul again and again. In other words, Paul did not allow them to give the first time. This shows a proper attitude. A worker of the Lord should not accept just any money that comes his way, even when it is not for his own use. It was true that the brothers in Jerusalem were in need, but it was not simply a matter of getting money and forwarding it to the saints. The Macedonian brothers were in dire need themselves, and Paul told them to take back their offering. But they came again and again; they pleaded with Paul again and again, with much entreaty, to be allowed to share in the grace of ministering to the saints. Both sides acted beautifully. This is the proper Christian way. On the one hand, the giver says, "Though I am poor and in need myself, I still will give. Though it is beyond my strength to give, I will still give." On the other hand, the worker says, "You should not give." This is beautiful! Eventually, the worker says, "If you really want to give, I have no way to stop you." This is the proper attitude of a worker. Paul was taking care of the affairs of the church. Although he saw the need in Jerusalem and wanted to take care of the brothers' need, his attitude was different from that of many workers today. He allowed the Macedonian churches to participate in the grace of ministering to the saints only after they had pleaded with him again and again.

In 2 Corinthians 8:16-22 Paul said, "But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus, because he not only received the entreaty, but being more earnest, he also went forth of his own accord to you. And we sent together with him the brother whose praise in the gospel is throughout all the churches, and not only this, but who has also been selected by the churches as our fellow traveler in this grace which is being ministered by us, to the glory of the Lord Himself and to demonstrate our eagerness; avoiding this, that anyone should find fault with us in this abundance which is being ministered by us. For we exercise foresight for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men. And we sent with them our brother..." Here we see Paul's arrangement. In forwarding others' money to Jerusalem, he was very upright in his procedure. No servant of God can ever be careless in the matter of money. What did Paul say? He said, "Avoiding this, that anyone should find fault with us in this abundance which is being ministered by us." Paul asked one, two, even three brothers to manage the money; he did not manage it himself. What did the three

brothers do? He said, "For we exercise foresight for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men." In the administration of funds, the only way to avoid a problem is to let two or three persons be in charge.

Because money is such a serious matter, Paul, writing both to Timothy and Titus, declared that no covetous person should be allowed to hold the position of an elder (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7). In 1 Timothy 3:8 the same stipulation was made regarding the office of a deacon. No man is qualified to be an elder or a deacon who has not overcome money. A basic qualification for being an elder or a deacon is to not be covetous of money. We must deal solemnly with the matter of money. Peter wrote in the same strain as Paul. He said, "Shepherd the flock of God among you...not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly" (1 Pet. 5:2). No one who is covetous can shepherd the flock of God.

May the Lord be gracious to us so that we would deal thoroughly with the matter of money. Unless we settle the issue of covetousness, we will find ourselves in difficulties sooner or later. In fact, we will become useless in the way. If we do not settle this issue, we cannot deal with other issues, and we will surely face problems and troubles down the road. We must not be influenced by money in any way. Whenever we hear anyone criticizing us, we have to learn to reject their gift. At the same time, we have to learn to bear others' burdens. We should not only take care of our own needs and the needs of our co-workers, but we should take care of the needs of all the brothers and sisters as well. If we can handle the matter of money in a proper way, we will have done a great thing. Those who have not settled the basic issue of money can never work in a good way.

CHAPTER TEN

A FEW OTHER MATTERS

In this chapter we will speak of a few other matters, namely: (1) upholding the absoluteness of the truth, (2) taking care of our physical health, (3) daily habits, and (4) marriage and virginity.

ONE

Every worker of the Lord must uphold the absoluteness of the truth. This is possible only when a man is delivered from himself. Many brothers and sisters are not absolute to the truth; they are affected by people, things, and personal feelings. If a man is not absolute to the truth, he will, in the course of his work, sacrifice God's truth for man, himself, or his own desires. A basic requirement for being a servant of the Lord is to not sacrifice the truth. We can sacrifice ourselves and our desires, but we can never sacrifice the truth. The problems with many workers stem from the relationship with their friends, intimate acquaintances, and family. The truth is compromised by their friends, immediate family, or relatives. God cannot use such people. If the truth is the truth, it should not be compromised, whether by our own brothers, our relatives, or our intimate friends. Suppose the son of a Christian worker expresses a desire to be baptized. If his father realizes that this matter relates to the truth, he will pass this matter on to the leading brothers in the church and leave it to them to decide whether or not he is ready for baptism. But the problem is that the co-worker presumes that his son is qualified for baptism, and in so doing, he sacrifices the absoluteness of the truth. He has been influenced by the father-son relationship, and he is no longer absolute to the truth. If he is absolute to the truth, he will go along with the direction of the truth as it is laid out in the church; he will not bring his personal relationships into the situation. Consider another illustration: In a certain place a controversy arises. A number of the saints may be favorably disposed toward a particular group of brothers and side with them, whereas a

number of others may have a preference for another group of people and line up on their side. Instead of sitting down and counting the cost of being absolute for the truth and of following the truth, they are influenced and directed by their own emotions. This does not mean that the brothers are not speaking about the truth. It only means that they are not absolute to the truth. They have not brushed the truth completely aside; they still have some care for the truth. But they are not absolute to the truth. Being absolute to the truth means that no personal feelings or family relationships are allowed to stand in the way of the truth. In spiritual matters, the truth is compromised as soon as human relationships are taken into account. As soon as human relationships become involved, God's word and His commandments are discounted through human factors, and the truth is compromised.

The Bible contains many ordinances and commandments. These ordinances and commandments are from God, and God's servants need to preach and announce them. On the one hand, it is tiresome to consider those who are only speakers but not doers. On the other hand, we cannot be a servant of God if we cannot preach beyond what we can practice. This is because the truth is absolute. The standard of the divine Word must not be lowered to the level of our personal attainment. We cannot tamper with the truth in any way in order to justify our own deficiencies. This is what it means to be absolute to the truth. We have to transcend ourselves, our own feelings, and our own personal interest in our speaking. This is a high requirement for the servants of the Lord. We must beware of doing things one way as they affect other brothers and sisters but doing them another way as they are applied to our spouse or our children. The truth is always absolute. God wants us to uphold the absoluteness of the truth. If God's Word says something, it is so, no matter who is involved. We cannot make exceptions just because of some special relationships. If we do, we are lowering the standard of God's truth. I am not talking about speaking untruths; I am talking about sacrificing the absoluteness of the truth. We have to learn to uphold the absoluteness of the truth. We cannot forfeit its absoluteness just because someone is our relative. We are here to follow the truth, not man, and we are here to maintain the absoluteness of the truth.

Many difficulties arise in the church today because God's children sacrifice the truth. A local church became divided after a brother said, "I had no intention to be separated from you, but last night something happened in the church, and I was not informed of it. Today I will no longer meet with you." The truth is absolute. If the brother's separation of himself was right, he should have done so even if he had been informed of the matter. Likewise, if the brother's separation of himself was wrong, he should not have done so even when he was not informed of the matter. If he is absolute for the truth, the act of informing him bears no significance. If his separation is based on a lack of informing, man has been elevated above the truth. Another place wanted to have separate tables and to break bread separately because a brother was offended when he asked a question in the meeting and did not receive an answer. If it was right for him to separate himself, he should have started another table much sooner. If it was wrong for him to separate himself, he should not make an excuse of not receiving an answer to his question. This is what it means to be absolute to the truth. If having separate tables is according to the truth, there should be separate tables, even if the brothers are attached to one another. If having separate tables is not according to the truth, there should not be separate tables, even if there are offenses. Brothers and sisters, have you seen this? We must deny all forms of self before we can serve the Lord. If there is any pride, selfishness, or thought of receiving respectable treatment as a condition for upholding God's word, we are putting ourselves above God's truth; we are saying that we are more important than His truth. This disqualifies us from His service. In our service to the Lord, we have to deny ourselves absolutely. Whether or not we like what is happening and whether or not we feel hurt about something have nothing to do with the issue. If something must be done one way, it must be done that way no matter how we feel. Even if we suffer greatly by doing so, we still have to do it. Even if others mistreat us, despise us, or count us worthless, we still have to do it. We cannot force God's truth to go our way just because we want to go that way. Man is too bold; he always forces God's truth to

follow him.

We have to see the glory of God's truth. We cannot project our own feelings into His truth. When we stand beside God's truth, we should not just consider ourselves to be smaller than it; we should consider ourselves to be non-existent. If we involve the self even a little, we will end up with trouble immediately. A brother, who had been criticized in some quarters, came to the church and felt quite happy about the contacts he made. He felt that he had been unjustly criticized where he had been, but he did not really touch the truth before the Lord. He was merely impressed by a few of the brothers. Such a brother was very undisciplined in his conduct. Some time later another brother said to him, "Brother, you have been too loose," and he proceeded to point out some of the things that the new brother had done. This was a speaking of truth in love. But when the new brother heard this, he left, remarking in anger, "No wonder so many people are against this church. It should be criticized." Brothers and sisters, this brother was not absolute to the truth. If he had been absolute to the truth, he would not have said this when he was rebuked by others. Because he was not absolute to the truth, he changed his tone as soon as he was rebuked.

What does it mean to be absolute to the truth? It means to set aside feelings, to ignore personal relationships, and to not stand for the self. The truth is absolute. Our personal feelings, relationships, experiences, and encounters should not be mixed up with it. Since truth is absolute, what is right is right and what is wrong is wrong. There is a brother who is a leader in many places. He has taken our way and has decided to stand for the testimony of the church. If the way we take is right, it is always right; it does not become right because this brother is taking this way. If the way we take is wrong, it cannot be made right simply because this brother is taking this way. Whether or not the way is right has nothing to do with this brother. Even if this brother becomes fallen, the way is still right because truth is absolute. However, many people have their eyes set only on this brother. They think that if this brother is right, the way he has chosen must be right as well, and if the brother is wrong, the way he has chosen also must be wrong. Are their eyes on the truth, or are they on the person? This does not mean that we can be careless. We should never be careless; we should uphold God's testimony. This is a fact. Yet at the same time, whether or not this way is the right way is based on truth, not on men. Does this mean that when other Christians sin we are no longer Christians? Does this mean that when other children of God fall, we are no longer children of God? Does this mean that when many children of God lose their testimonies, we are no longer believers? No, brothers and sisters, truth is absolute. Even if many Christians have failed, the Lord is still worthy of our trust, and we must still trust in Him. Even if many of God's children have sinned, we remain children of God; there should be no change. This does not mean that God's children have license to sin or that Christians have license to fail. It does mean, however, that the truth is absolute. If it is right to believe in the Lord, we should believe in Him even when others do not believe. If it is right to be a Christian, we should be a Christian even if all others have fallen. The issue is not what others are doing. The issue is whether or not something is the truth. Many divisions in the church, many problems in the work, and many disputes among workers will cease when personal relationships, feelings, and problems are set aside.

It is not a small thing to be absolute to the truth. We cannot be indifferent about this. If we are loose in this, we will be loose in everything. In order to uphold the truth, we have to abandon ourselves completely. If we do not have such a heart and habit for the truth, we will have problems sooner or later. Some brothers say, "I thank God for bringing me to this meeting. I have received much help." This does not mean that this brother is absolute for the truth. He may only be emotionally attached to this place. When something unpleasant happens to him, he may change his mind and decide that he is in the wrong place. Truth, however, is absolute. If this place is right, it is right. If it is wrong, it is wrong. It cannot be right just because it is good to him, and wrong because it is not good to him. If the

justification of a place is dependent on its treatment of him, he must be the most important thing in the whole world! Truth is not important to him; he is important! He is not absolute for the truth. This is where many problems come from. God demands that we be dealt with to the extent that we set ourselves and our feelings aside in everything. It matters little whether we feel happy or hurt. Our direction should never be affected by our own personal feelings. If God says it is right, it is right. If God says it is wrong, it is wrong. If God says this way is right, we have to take this way even if everyone refuses to take it. We do not take this way because it is exciting or because a certain brother has taken it. If this way is right, we should take it, even if none of the brothers take it. Truth is absolute, and no human being should influence us in any way. If we bring in the element of human consideration, we have made man greater than the truth.

All judgments are based on truth, not on individuals. Whenever the basis of judgment is shifted to an individual, we have compromised God's way and His truth. The basis of judgment is the Word of God; its foundation is the truth. We should act the same way, whether or not others treat us well. When we confront a situation, we should ask what God's truth is, not what our feelings are. Personal judgments and feelings should never come into play in God's work. If truth tells us that we should totally separate ourselves, we should sever ties with even our best friends. We may have been eating together and living together every day in the past. But when the absoluteness of truth calls for a separation, we should obey. Human affection should not have a place. If truth dictates that we should not separate, we cannot separate even if we are arguing with each other and irritating each other every day. If we are together merely because of personal reasons, we do not know what the truth is, and we cannot go on.

Brothers and sisters, this is a very fundamental issue. The way ahead of us is very much related to the dealings we receive from the Lord. If we focus on how great and important we are, the truth will be sacrificed. In order to uphold God's truth, our self must go; we must keep the self at bay. We all have our own temperament and feelings. We cannot alter God's truth because of our temperament and feelings. No minister of God can sacrifice or compromise His truth for his own comfort. If we consider God's truth to be so low, we do not have a spiritual future with God. When a judge presides in court, he must be absolute to the law. A crime must be pronounced a crime, and an innocent man must be pronounced innocent. The judge cannot pronounce a criminal not guilty just because the criminal is his brother or friend. If he does this, there will be disorder. The law is absolute, and personal sentiments cannot be taken into consideration. It would be terrible if a defendant were judged guilty just because the judge happened to be his enemy. A judge must uphold the law. We must believe in God, serve Him, and maintain His truth. Our personal feelings cannot come in. I hope that we will remember that all of our personal feelings have to be denied. We must all be dealt with by the Lord. We must all say to Him, "Lord, I am nothing, but Your truth is absolute." If we do this, there will be no more disputes or problems in the work. One great advantage for the co-workers to uphold the absoluteness of God's truth is the great freedom they will have among themselves in speaking and working. Things will be done as they should be done, and there will be no need to worry about the reactions of others. If we all see the absoluteness of the truth, we will care for one thing only—whether or not something is according to God's will and decision. If it is according to God's will and decision, we will have no fear. But if we are not absolute for the truth, it will be hard for us to go on. When something comes up, we will consider Brother Wang's reaction, Brother Chow's thought, and Brother Liu's action. Since all three have different temperaments, we will have to compromise a little here and there. This is terrible. The truth will be sacrificed. If this is how we do things, we will not be able to say much or make many decisions for fear of offending men. Problems will develop among us. If a company of men would only care for God's truth and would reject human methods altogether, that would be a blessed body of men indeed. If they would firmly reject human manipulation and diplomacy, not compromising or mitigating anything through human hands but doing things strictly according to God's will, we can be assured that this group would be full of God's blessing. If we are able to take the absolute way of truth among the co-

workers, we will be able to say what we should say and do what we should do. If not, there will be much consideration, diplomacy, and change, and the church will cease to be the church.

Let us deal with this matter conscientiously before the Lord. It is a very crucial and serious matter. Let us remember that there is no place whatsoever for personal feelings and sentiments in the work of the Lord. Even if our personal sentiments can positively influence others to receive the truth, we should still keep them out of the work. We may influence a person to receive the truth by inviting him for dinner, but this is wrong. Truth is absolute. Out of the goodness of our hearts we may want to do something to uphold the truth, but truth requires no human hand to uphold it. It has its own standing, its own authority, and its own power, and it needs no human hand to uphold it. We do not have to lend truth a helping hand. We should not be afraid of anyone's rejection of the truth. We only need to learn to honor God's truth, to take the way of the truth, and to not compromise the truth in any way.

TWO

A worker of the Lord also has to pay attention to his own body. We know that Paul was a very gifted brother, and he prayed many times for others' healings. Yet he spoke of three persons who were never healed—Trophimus, Timothy, and himself. When Trophimus became ill, Paul did not pray for his healing, nor did he exercise his healing gift. Instead he said, "Trophimus I left at Miletus sick" (2 Tim. 4:20). As for Timothy, his stomach pain and his frequent illnesses never left him (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul did not exercise his gift or pray for Timothy's healing. He healed many people. It would be reasonable to assume that since so many had been healed, he should have healed Timothy as well. Timothy was a successor to Paul's work, and he was indispensable. Yet Paul did not heal Timothy. His sickness was in God's hand; it was not in Paul's hand. What did he say? He said, "No longer drink water only, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent illnesses" (1 Tim. 5:23). In other words, Timothy needed to take care of his health. He needed to exercise care—eating what was good for him and refraining from what was not good for him, taking things that would relieve his stomach pain and abstaining from things that would upset it. This was Paul's word to Timothy. As for Paul himself, he spoke of a thorn in his flesh, concerning which he prayed to the Lord three times. Yet the Lord did not heal him. Instead He said, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9). Trophimus's illness did not go away, Timothy's illness did not go away, and the thorn in Paul's flesh remained; their illnesses were not healed. With Paul, we do not see the "wrecking rock" being removed. Yet we see his vessel still sailing on. Although the rock—his sickness—was still present, God raised the water level, and his vessel was able to glide over the obstructing rock without suffering any damage. This was Paul's testimony.

Brothers and sisters, it takes ten or twenty years of training in God's hand before a man can become somewhat useful to Him. If we want to run a good race and be somewhat mature in the Lord, we need at least ten or twenty years of training. Yet some who do not take proper care of their own health may die before they reach that point. This is most unfortunate. Some do not start running until they have been in the Lord for twenty or thirty years. Then they touch the right way, and their usefulness begins to blossom. The church should not only have children and young men, but fathers as well. All those who desire to serve the Lord should consider it to be a great waste for a brother or a sister to die prematurely after spending many years and much effort to learn his or her lessons! We know that some vessels are broken and damaged halfway through the process. This is a pity. This is like Jeremiah's speaking concerning the vessels in the hand of the potter being spoiled (Jer. 18:4). When a potter turns his wheel and molds his vessels, some become damaged before they even reach the fire. They do not even pass the formative stage. This is a loss. The church has already suffered the loss of many who failed the test of trials and temptations. If the Lord is merciful to us, we can be spared from such damage, breakage, and wreckage. The Lord may have more crosses for us, and His intention may be for us to become more useful in our latter years. It takes much time for the Lord to complete a trial in us.

Some trials take a year or even a few years to complete. A child of God may not have the chance to go through too many trials in his lifetime. We can only experience a few trials. Many are crushed as soon as a trial comes. It is sad, as well as a loss, when a trial does not produce the desired result in them. With the passing of time, year after year and decade after decade, how many of God's children are safely preserved to reach the other side of their trials? We have to say that not too many are preserved. Do not think that this is a simple thing. Too many have fallen by the wayside! Of the six hundred thousand souls among the Israelites, only two entered Canaan alive [Joshua and Caleb], and two others entered Canaan dead [Jacob and Joseph]. So few were the ones who survived and who made it. What a pity that by the time the trials were almost over, they had died one by one! If it is the Lord's will that we die early, we have nothing to say. But if we die through our own neglect of our health, it is God's work that suffers. If the church is to be rich, it must have brothers who are in their seventies, eighties, and even nineties. If the Lord ordains that one or two of them go to Him early, we have nothing to say. But if we want to be useful in the work, we have to spend some time to take care of our body. We cannot be careless. It is a big problem if a worker has reached the end of his days by the time he is well trained! It is most unfortunate when a man falls just as he is about finished with his training. If all the workers of the Lord are this way, the work cannot go on. What a pity it is when the body becomes corrupt before the work ever begins, or when a person dies before he has ever become useful!

Brothers and sisters, we should not have the concept that we should neglect our body. It is true that we need a mind to suffer and that we need to reign over our body and put it under subjection. But we also should take care of our health if at all possible. It is easy to be loose, and it is hard to exercise care. We have to learn to eat healthy foods and to take care of our bodies in every possible way. When the Lord has a commission and there is a need in the work, we have to sacrifice ourselves. There is nothing we can say about this. But at the same time, we have to employ every means available to us to take care of our body. We have to remember that the loss of one person is the loss of ten to twenty years of the Lord's training. There are not many periods of ten to twenty years in our lives. Many people start out somewhat useful and gifted in their service to the Lord, yet it is hard to say that they will have any usefulness in the ministry. It takes at least ten to twenty years before a person can become useful in the ministry. A person often has to wait ten or twenty years before he can become valuable and useful. Being truly useful is something that happens ten or twenty years later, and we are talking only about those people who are running a straight course. If the course is not straight, even ten or twenty years may not yield any fruit. It is not a simple thing to raise up a person in twenty years. God has to smite him and do a carving work on him many times before he can pass the test. He has to go through sufferings year after year, not just a few years, but twenty years, bearing the cross for twenty years, being dealt with for twenty years, being smitten for twenty years, and suffering under God's heavy hand for twenty years, before he can start to be useful to God. How difficult a task this is! Yet if a man does not take good care of his body, he may be gone by the time he is beginning to be useful. That would be very unfortunate and a great loss.

Once an elderly brother was asked, "What do you think was the most productive period of your life?" He thought for a while and then answered, "Between seventy and eighty years old." Indeed, spiritual usefulness grows with years. The longer we remain in the way of God's service, the more useful we become. We have seen many people who have been ruined, wrecked, damaged, or proven to be of little use along this way. We have seen some whose function blossomed only a little. A few will prove to be useful after twenty or thirty years. But by then they may be ready to depart from the world! It is a pity when a man dies just at the point when he is beginning to become useful! The more lessons a man learns before the Lord, the more useful he is. It is a great loss for such ones to pass away. In taking care of our health, there are many necessary precautions we have to take, many necessary things we have to pay attention to. We agree that we need a mind to suffer, and that such a mind is indispensable. Many times when we are put in a difficult situation, we have to be flexible. But, if at all possible, we should

learn to take care of our bodies and should not be loose or careless about our own health.

Workers of the Lord should not eat for taste, but for nutrition. We should eat foods that have a high nutritional value and should eat less or nothing at all of those that have little nutritional value. When it is time for rest, we should learn to rest. We have enough strain upon us already. If we do not know how to rest, our bodies will not be relieved of its tension. If our stress cannot be relieved when we lay on our bed, what is the use of our sleep? It is useless. Many times our sitting down should be a kind of resting. But many people are not restful when they sit down, because they continue to be stressful and tense. A worker of the Lord should be strong enough to bear strain when circumstances make it necessary. At times strain can be as intense as fire. But when we find some time for respite, we should rest. It is impossible for anyone to be tense all the time. We have to learn to relax.

Brothers and sisters, when we are free, we have to learn to relax our muscles. While we are sleeping, all of our limbs should be relaxed. We should be able to stretch our capacity when there is the need for it, and when we do, we should be able to handle more stress than the strongest men. Our body has to obey us. But we cannot be under stress all the time. Our muscles and nerves often need relaxation and rest; we have to find opportunity to allow our body to rest. This is one way the body balances itself. If we do not find time to rest, we will push ourselves beyond the limit and go to an extreme. We are not men of extremes. Brothers and sisters, we have to learn to trust in the Lord regarding our body, yet at the same time we have to follow natural laws and rest. This is a very basic lesson. We have to learn to let go. If we learn to let go, we will find it easier to rest and sleep. Experienced ones have told us that counting the number of times one breathes can help a person to go to sleep. When we are asleep, our breathing is deep. It may not be that easy to control our sleep, but it is easy to control our breathing. We can count the number of times we breathe, and we should not breathe quickly, but slowly. We can learn to adjust our breathing to the sleeping mode. Our mind should be set not on sleeping but on breathing, on counting the number of breaths. First, we control our breathing to the speed we would breathe in our sleep. After a while, we will go to sleep. Many people are able to go to sleep with this method. In our sleep we breathe slowly and deeply. By controlling our breathing, making it slow and deep, we can induce sleep for ourselves. We often need to count only up to a few hundred and then we are asleep. We have to believe that the body God has created for us is good enough to go to sleep. We have to trust in God, and we also have to trust in God's law in His creation. God has created a head for us that will go to sleep, and we should be able to go to sleep. We should try to relax our whole body. This will give us rest. If we are not able to rest, we will be constantly under tension, day and night. Such a condition will not sustain us to accomplish many things. We may be sick; we may be bound by more than one illness, but if we take care of our body a little more, we will save ourselves from many worries.

The same can be said about our eating. We should not overeat, and we should not be too restricted in the variety of food we eat. We should learn to eat all kinds of food. Some brothers and sisters cannot eat this and that and many other things. There are not too many things that they can eat; this is not a healthy habit. We have to learn to eat a wide variety of food. Many things can provide nourishment to our body. If we will only eat a few things, we are not doing our body any good. We may not feel that we are short in nutrition now, but when we become thirty or forty years old, our lack of certain nutrients will be manifested. Our health will be damaged, and our life will be shortened. Our life is governed by the things we eat. This is why we have to learn to eat a wide variety of food. Another advantage for having a wide variety in our diet is that we are not inconvenienced in any way when we are sent out in the work. Those who cannot accommodate a wide variety of food will not be able to tolerate many things when they are in the field. They cannot eat things that are too cold or too hot. They will encounter much trouble. It is a different story if we are sick; we have to take care of our health. But under ordinary circumstances, we have to learn to eat as many different kinds of food as possible. The Lord Jesus said, "Eat what is set before you" (Luke 10:8). This is a good guiding

principle. Once a believer asked another believer on a ship, "Why did the Lord Jesus give loaves and fishes to the multitude?" The other replied, "The riches of the sea plus the riches of the land." This is a very good answer. God's children should learn to take all the riches of the sea and all the riches of the land. The range of food we eat should be wide; the variety should be great. Brothers and sisters, do not think that this is a small thing. If we do not control and discipline ourselves in this matter, our body will suffer. We have to make our body our slave. At the beginning we may find this difficult; we may find some food unpalatable to our taste. But we have to discipline ourselves by forcing ourselves to eat those things. On the one hand, we have to have a mind to suffer. On the other hand, we have to learn to take care of our body. We have to be able to suffer hardship. When hardship comes our way, we have to be ready to sacrifice our whole being. Some brothers are afraid of hardship; they cannot take this and that and many other things. Such ones are useless in the hand of God. Similarly, we have no sympathy for those brothers who do not exercise care for their own body. Brothers and sisters, it is harder to be health conscious than to not be health conscious. Do not think that it is easy to talk about health. In order to take care of our body, we have to learn to control ourselves. A person must exercise self-control before he can be healthy. We have to learn to eat things that are beneficial to our body. Our eating cannot be dictated by our taste; it should be dictated by what our body needs. We have to learn to take good care of our body and to use it properly. We cannot allow our body to break down easily. The Lord has spent many years working on us; we cannot deal with our body lightly. We have to take care of all precautions against disease. If at all possible, and if the Lord so arranges, we should do our best to fulfill the requirements of good health and to eat things that are beneficial to our body. We should not expose our body to risks unnecessarily. Timothy was advised to take some wine, because that was beneficial to his health. Do not drink anything that is harmful to the body. Always take things that are beneficial to the body. This is a matter of principle. On the one hand, we have to deny self-love and be faithful unto death. On the other hand, when we do not have a specific charge from the Lord, we should take good care of our own body. When we go to a place to work, we should try our best to take care of our hygiene. But we should not burden the local brothers and sisters. When the environment is not up to the proper standard of hygiene, we have to learn to trust in God. But when circumstances allow, we should try our best to take care of hygiene. This will spare our body of much unnecessary damage.

THREE

A worker of the Lord has to pay attention to yet another thing—being flexible in his daily living. God's servants cannot have a set standard for themselves, insisting on their own ways and views. If we want to serve the Lord properly, we have to maintain one principle: We do everything according to the Scripture and in a way that will not stumble anyone. In 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 Paul said, "For though I am free from all, I have enslaved myself to all that I might gain the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew in order that I might gain Jews; to those under law, as under law (though I myself am not under law), that I might gain those under law. To those without law, as without law (though I am not without law to God but within law to Christ), that I might gain those without law. To the weak I became weak that I might gain the weak. To all men I have become all things that I might by all means save some." For the sake of the gospel, Paul was all things to all men. This is a necessary character trait of one who serves the Lord.

Philippians 4:12 says, "I know also how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be filled and to hunger, both to abound and to lack." Man is prone to swing from one extreme to the other; he is prone to go to extremes. Some Christians think that the only right thing to do is to abound and to be filled. Others are just the opposite; they think that a man must suffer abasement, lack, and hunger. But Paul said that he had learned to be abased, and he had learned to abound. He had learned to be filled and to be in hunger. He had learned to abound and to

lack. He had learned the secret in all these things. He said, "I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me" (v. 13). Paul was flexible in the outward things of his daily life. Whether it was this or that, he could accept everything.

Unfortunately, many brothers and sisters are very stubborn. Their daily habits are untouchable and unchangeable. Some people have to take a hot bath every day. Some people have to shave every day. If they are put in a situation where they cannot live according to their habitual ways, they will not be able to function. These may be very minor things, but they can become obstacles to the Lord's work. Those who are set in their habitual ways cannot be God's servants. A worker of the Lord cannot be lopsided. He can go on with or without a hot bath, with or without shaving for a few days, with or without the opportunity to change his shirt for many days. He can sleep on a hard bed or a soft bed. He should be at ease in any environment he is put into.

Not only should daily habits not be an issue to a worker, but other things such as personality and age should not be a hindrance to him either. Suppose in one place the people are very warm, while in another place the people are very cold. God's servant should function equally well in both places. If he is a cold person and he can only work among cold ones rather than among warm ones, he is disqualified from the work. Some people can only work with warm ones; they cannot work among cold people. Some people can only work among serious people; they cannot work among carefree ones. All such restrictions represent limitations to God's work. Some brothers can only minister to older ones; they have nothing to say when they are among children or younger ones. Such a lopsided personality hinders God's work. Our Lord received the old and blessed the young. God wants us to be like our Lord, receiving the old and blessing the young. Madam Guyon once said that a man in total union with God is able to be a counsel to the old man and a friend to a child. This is one lesson we have to learn.

Brothers and sisters, this again is related to the dealing of our self. The self has to be rubbed away to such an extent that we can allow God to put us in any situation. In this way we will no longer be inflexible and will no longer be partial to any way. Paul was able to be all things to all men because he was fully trained by the Lord. May we all learn to be dealt with by the Lord so that our daily habits and personality will not become rigid and unchangeable. May we not go to an extreme and may we not hinder or frustrate the Lord's work in any way.

FOUR

A worker of the Lord must also have a proper view and suitable resolution concerning the matter of virginity and marriage. Many people avoid talking about this. But this is an important issue with the Lord's worker, and we have to say something about it based on the teaching of the Bible.

Paul had a clear word about the matter of virginity in 1 Corinthians 7:25-35: "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who has been shown mercy by the Lord to be faithful. I consider then that this is good because of the present necessity, that it is good for a man to be as he is. Have you been bound to a wife? Do not seek a release. Have you been released from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if the virgin marries, she has not sinned; but such ones will have affliction in the flesh, and I am trying to spare you. But this I say, brothers, the time is shortened. Henceforth both those who have wives should be as though they had none, and those who weep as though they did not weep, and those who rejoice as though they did not rejoice, and those who buy as though they did not possess, and those who use the world as though they did not abuse it; for the fashion of this world is passing away. But I desire you to be without care. The unmarried cares for the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but he who has married cares for the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and is distracted. Both the unmarried woman and the virgin care for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit;

but she who has married cares for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. But this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a noose upon you but that you may be comely and may wait on the Lord without distraction." This shows us the advantage of remaining single. One can serve the Lord with more diligence, less distraction, and greater concentration to the work. A married person cannot match an unmarried person in this respect.

But not everyone is able to receive this word. We should pay attention to verses 36 through 40: "But if anyone thinks that he is behaving unbecomingly to his virgin daughter, if she is past the bloom of youth and thus it must be so, let him do what he wishes, he does not sin; let them marry. But he who stands firm in his heart, being under no constraint, and has authority with respect to his own will and has decided this in his own heart, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better. A wife is bound for so long a time as her husband lives; but should the husband fall asleep, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only to one in the Lord. But she is more blessed if she so remains, according to my opinion; but I think that I also have the Spirit of God." This is clear enough. If a man thinks that it is wrong to remain a virgin, and that the bloom of youth is past, and it must be so, he can act as he pleases. It is one's own decision whether or not he wants to remain single; others cannot make the decision for him. Of course, in order to remain single, in addition to having the resolve in the heart, one must be "under no constraint, and [have] authority with respect to his own will." The main thing is what one resolves to do in his own heart.

Let us read again Matthew 19:10-12: "His disciples said to Him, If the case of the man with his wife is like this, it is not profitable to marry. And He said to them, Not all men can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born so from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs because of the kingdom of the heavens. He who can accept it, let him accept it." If we join the last part of verse 11 to the last part of verse 12, "Only to those to whom it has been given....He who can accept it, let him accept it," it will become clear to us that virginity is given to those who can accept it.

In order to avoid distraction and have adequate time to serve the Lord with diligence, it is better to remain single. Among the Lord's disciples, John remained single. Later Paul also remained single. But if one needs to be married, he can do so. It is not a sin to marry. The difference between being single and being married has nothing to do with sin. It is a matter of time, diligence, and distraction.

Marriage is holy, because the body is created by God, as well as all of the needs of the body. This is why marriage is holy. But any demand that man has outside marriage is sin. Why does a man have to be married? It is to avoid having relationships outside marriage. Hence, marriage is not a sin. On the contrary, it prevents sin. Marriage is not a fall. On the contrary, it is instituted to prevent falling.

Paul made this very clear in 1 Corinthians 7:1-9: "Now concerning the things of which you wrote: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of fornication, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife that which is due, and likewise also the wife to the husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise the husband also does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive each other, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and then be together again, that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. But this I say by way of concession, not by way of command. Yet I wish all men to be even as I am myself; but each has his own gift from God, one in this way, the other in that. But I say to the unmarried and to the widows, It is good for them if they remain even as I am. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with desire." This passage shows us that one reason for marriage is to prevent fornication. At the same time, it points out that God has given some the special gift of remaining single. But it is better for those who have not received this gift to

marry in order to avoid falling into fornication.

We should not go at length into the subject of virginity. We know that Paul was a virgin. Yet he told Timothy that in later times teachings of deceiving spirits would come and forbid marriage. He said that this is a teaching of demons (1 Tim. 4:1, 3). On the one hand, we believe that it is a good thing to remain single. On the other hand, we have to maintain the balance in God's Word; we cannot say that marriage is something unclean. We must be clear that marriage is holy; it is something that God has ordained in His creation. The forbidding of marriage is a teaching of demons.

If a worker of the Lord is married, he should do his best to settle his family matters in such a way that he will have the least distraction. In this way he will be able to better give himself to the Lord's work. But he must take note of the clear separating line between his work and his family. He should never allow members of his family to touch his work. Of course, if some of them are also co-workers, that is a different story. He should never bring home the things pertaining to the work. A worker cannot be influenced by his family members concerning the work that he is doing. A brother once said that he went to a certain place to work because his wife had promised that he would go. This is astounding! How can a wife promise something for her husband, and how can the husband go because of the wife's promise? We cannot act on our family members' promise, and actually, we cannot even act on our co-workers' promise. Our family must be clearly separated from our work. A worker of the Lord cannot lightly pass on the spiritual problems of other brothers and sisters to his family. If his family members want to know anything, they should find out the same way that all the other brothers and sisters find out. Many problems in the work arise through the loose talk of workers within their family.

Another point we should take note of is to maintain a proper relationship in our contact between the brothers and the sisters. If a brother has a preference to work among the sisters, he should be kept away from the work. Likewise, if a young sister has a preference to work among the brothers, she should also be kept away from the work. We have to be very strict with this principle. Under ordinary circumstances, brothers should work mostly with brothers and sisters with sisters. The Son of God left us such a pattern when He worked on earth. John 3—4 shows us a clear separating line in this matter. In chapter three the Lord received Nicodemus at night, while in chapter four He met the Samaritan woman during the day. In chapter three the Lord received Nicodemus in a house, and in chapter four He met the woman at the public well. If the settings of chapters three and four were switched, we would have very inappropriate settings. It is clear that the Lord spoke with Nicodemus under very different circumstances than those under which He spoke to the Samaritan woman. This leaves us with a good pattern.

We are not saying that brothers and sisters should not contact each other or have fellowship with one another. We are saying that a brother or a sister who has a preference and desire to be among the opposite sex should be discouraged from making such contact. Of course, in Christ there is no difference between male and female, and there is no separating wall between the brothers and the sisters among God's children. Between the two there should be good fellowship. But if a brother has a habit or preference to talk to sisters, or vice versa, we should deal with this situation immediately. I hope that the brothers and sisters will exercise a spontaneous restriction and limitation when they contact each other. If anyone goes beyond the proper boundary and engages in abnormal fellowship, we should deal with the situation in a strict way. May the Lord be gracious to us so that we will maintain a good testimony in this matter.

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