

**PROPAGATING THE RESURRECTED,
ASCENDED, AND ALL-INCLUSIVE CHRIST
AS THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

(Friday—Evening Session)

Message Six

**Keeping Ourselves in the One Flow of the Lord's Work
for the Spreading of the Church, and Receiving the Lord's Mercy
to Be Saved from Satan's Schemes**

MC Hymns: 203

Scripture Reading: Acts 1:8; 5:20; 6:4, 7; 9:31; 12:24; 19:20

Acts 1:8	But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.
Acts 5:20	Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.
Acts 6:4	But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word.
Acts 6:7	And the word of God grew, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly; and a large number of the priests obeyed the faith.
Acts 9:31	So then the church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied.
Acts 12:24	But the word of God grew and multiplied.
Acts 19:20	Thus, the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

I. The flowing of the divine life, which started on the day of Pentecost and has been flowing throughout all generations to this day, is just one stream for God's goal to build up the church for His corporate expression—Matt. 16:18; cf. Ezek. 47:1-12:

Matt 16:18	And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
Ezek 47:1	Then He brought me back to the entrance of the house, and there was water flowing out from under the threshold of the house to the east (for the house faced east); and the water flowed down below the south side of the house, on the south of the altar.
Ezek 47:2	Then He brought me out by the way of the north gate and led me around on the way outside to the outer gate, on the way to the gate that faces east; and there the water was running out on the south side.
Ezek 47:3	When the man went out to the east with the line in His hand, He measured a thousand cubits; and He led me through the water, water that was to the ankles.
Ezek 47:4	Then He measured a thousand cubits and led me through the water, water that was to the knees. Then He measured a thousand cubits and led me through the water, water that was to the loins.
Ezek 47:5	Then He measured a thousand cubits, and it was a river that I could not pass through; for the water had risen, enough water to swim in, a river that could not be crossed.
Ezek 47:6	And He said to me, Son of man, have you seen this? Then He led me and brought me back along the bank of the river.
Ezek 47:7	And when I returned, there were very many trees on the bank of the river, on one side and on the other.
Ezek 47:8	Then said He to me, This water flows out toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah and goes to the sea; when it flows into the sea, the water of the sea is healed.
Ezek 47:9	And every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes shall live, and there will be very many fish when this water comes there. And the water of the sea shall be healed, and everything shall live wherever the river comes.
Ezek 47:10	And fishermen will stand beside the sea from En-gedi even to En-eghlaim; it will be a place for the spreading of nets. Their fish shall be according to their kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many.

- Ezek 47:11 But its swamps and its marshes will not be healed; they shall be left for salt.
- Ezek 47:12 And on the banks on both sides of the river will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail; but they will bring forth new fruit every month, because the water for them flows out of the sanctuary. And their fruit shall be for food, and their leaves for healing.
- A. When we give the Lord the preeminence in our entire being, making Him our first love, He becomes the divine stream to us, flowing within us and out of us as the first works; the first works are works that are motivated by, issue from, and express the Lord as our first love—John 4:14b; Rev. 22:1; 2:4-5.
- John 4:14b ... but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water springing up into eternal life.
- Rev 22:1 And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street.
- Rev 2:4 But I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love.
- Rev 2:5 Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.
- B. Only works that are motivated by the first love are gold, silver, and precious stones—1 Cor. 2:9; 3:12.
- 1 Cor 2:9 But as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not come up in man's heart; things which God has prepared for those who love Him."
- 1 Cor 3:12 But if anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble,

II. The basic principle of the church is that it is eternal and universal, so the church must constantly spread on the earth; the growth of the church and the building up of the church are based on spreading—Acts 1:8; 8:1; 9:31:

- Acts 1:8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth.
- Acts 8:1 And Saul approved of his killing. And there occurred in that day a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem; and all were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
- Acts 9:31 So then the church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied.
- A. The spreading of the church is brought about by the growth in the Lord's life and the flowing out of the Lord's life, the overflow of life—Eph. 4:16; John 7:37-39; Acts 2:42, 46-47; 5:20; 6:4, 7; 12:24; 19:20.
- Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.
- John 7:37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.
- John 7:38 He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.
- John 7:39 But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.
- Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the teaching and the fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.
- Acts 2:46 And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they partook of their food with exultation and simplicity of heart,
- Acts 2:47 Praising God and having grace with all the people. And the Lord added together day by day those who were being saved.

- Acts 5:20 Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.
 Acts 6:4 But we will continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the word.
 Acts 6:7 And the word of God grew, and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly; and a large number of the priests obeyed the faith.
 Acts 12:24 But the word of God grew and multiplied.
 Acts 19:20 Thus, the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.
- B. When the church begins to spread, erroneous concepts are shattered, regardless of whether the concepts are regional, racial, or mutually discriminatory; it is through spreading that all our close-mindedness is eliminated—cf. 1 Cor. 12:24; Col. 3:10-11.
 1 Cor 12:24 But our comely members have no need. But God has blended the body together, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacked,
 Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,
 Col 3:11 Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.
- C. Acts 8 shows that the first step in the church's spread was to Samaria (vv. 1-25), and the second step was to Ethiopia, to Africa (vv. 26-39); this shows that we must preach the gospel to every tribe and tongue and people and nation, because the church is universal and needs to spread (Rev. 5:9-10; 7:9).
- Acts 8 be omitted.
 Acts 8:1 And Saul approved of his killing. And there occurred in that day a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem; and all were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.
 Acts 8:2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial and made great lamentation over him.
 Acts 8:3 But Saul was devastating the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he delivered them to prison.
 Acts 8:4 Those therefore who were scattered went throughout the land announcing the word as the gospel.
 Acts 8:5 And Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ to them.
 Acts 8:6 And the crowds gave heed with one accord to the things said by Philip as they heard and saw the signs which he did.
 Acts 8:7 For with many of those who had unclean spirits, the spirits came out crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.
 Acts 8:8 And there was much joy in that city.
 Acts 8:9 And a certain man named Simon had previously been practicing magic in the city and had been amazing the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great.
 Acts 8:10 To him they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the power of God which is called Great.
 Acts 8:11 And they gave heed to him because for a considerable time he had amazed them with his magic.
 Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip, who announced the gospel of the kingdom of God and of the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.
 Acts 8:13 And even Simon himself believed, and once he had been baptized, he continued steadfastly with Philip. And as he beheld the signs and great works of power taking place, he was amazed.
 Acts 8:14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John,
 Acts 8:15 Who went down and prayed for them so that they might receive the Holy Spirit;
 Acts 8:16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them, but they had only been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.
 Acts 8:17 Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.
 Acts 8:18 But when Simon saw that through the laying on of the hands of the apostles the Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying,
 Acts 8:19 Give me also this authority that on whomever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Spirit.
 Acts 8:20 But Peter said to him, May your silver go with you into destruction, because you thought that you would acquire the gift of God through money.
 Acts 8:21 You have no part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not straight before God.

Acts 8:22 Repent therefore from this wickedness of yours and beseech the Lord if perhaps the intent of your heart may be forgiven you;

Acts 8:23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of unrighteousness.

Acts 8:24 And Simon answered and said, You beseech the Lord on my behalf, so that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me.

Acts 8:25 They therefore, having solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem; and they announced the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

Acts 8:26 But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, Rise up and go south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is the desert route.

Acts 8:27 And he rose up and went. And behold, an Ethiopian man, a eunuch, a man in power under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was over all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship.

Acts 8:28 And he was returning and was sitting in his chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah.

Acts 8:29 And the Spirit said to Philip, Approach and join this chariot.

Acts 8:30 And when Philip ran up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, Do you really know the things that you are reading?

Acts 8:31 And he said, How could I unless someone guides me? And he entreated Philip to come up and sit with him.

Acts 8:32 Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "As a sheep He was led to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so He does not open His mouth.

Acts 8:33 In His humiliation His judgment was taken away. Who shall declare His generation? For His life is taken away from the earth."

Acts 8:34 And the eunuch answered Philip and said, I beseech you, Concerning whom does the prophet say this? Concerning himself or concerning someone else?

Acts 8:35 And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he announced Jesus as the gospel to him.

Acts 8:36 And as they were going along the road, they came upon some water, and the eunuch said, Look, water. What prevents me from being baptized?

Acts 8:37 And Philip said, If you believe from all your heart, you will be saved. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Acts 8:38 And he ordered the chariot to stand still, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Acts 8:39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away; and the eunuch did not see him anymore, for he went on his way rejoicing.

Rev 5:9 And they sing a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain and have purchased for God by Your blood men out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

Rev 5:10 And have made them a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth.

Rev 7:9 After these things I saw, and behold, there was a great multitude which no one could number, out of every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and palm branches in their hands.

D. Acts 9 shows God's choosing of Saul (later Paul), which is against the human concept; our narrow, erroneous human concept needs to be broken and shattered through the spreading of the church; we must believe that a person can be persecuting the church one hour and preaching the gospel the next hour—vv. 10-22.

Acts 9 be omitted.

Acts 9:10 And there was a certain disciple in Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

Acts 9:11 And the Lord said to him, Rise up and go to the lane called Straight, and seek in the house of Judas a man from Tarsus named Saul; for behold, he is praying;

Acts 9:12 And he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in and laying his hands on him so that he may receive his sight.

Acts 9:13 But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many concerning this man, how many evil things he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem;

Acts 9:14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Your name.

- Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, Go, for this man is a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;
- Acts 9:16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer on behalf of My name.
- Acts 9:17 And Ananias went away and entered into the house; and laying his hands on him, he said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent Me-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road on which you were coming—so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 9:18 And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight and rose up and was baptized.
- Acts 9:19 And once he had taken food, he was strengthened. And he was with the disciples in Damascus for some days.
- Acts 9:20 And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, that this One is the Son of God.
- Acts 9:21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is this not the one who ravaged those who call upon this name in Jerusalem and came here for this, that he might bring them bound before the chief priests?
- Acts 9:22 But Saul was all the more empowered, and he confounded the Jews dwelling in Damascus by proving that this One is the Christ.
- E. Acts 10 indicates that the Lord's evangelistic move on earth is under His administration on the throne in heaven and that the gospel needs to be spread to the four corners of the inhabited earth to collect all kinds of unclean (sinful) people, cleansing them with the redeeming blood of Christ and washing them with the renewing Holy Spirit—vv. 11-12, 15, 28; cf. Heb. 8:1; Acts 7:56.
- Acts 10 be omitted.
- Acts 10:11 And he beheld heaven opened, and a certain vessel like a great sheet descending, being let down by four corners onto the earth,
- Acts 10:12 In which were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and birds of heaven.
- Acts 10:15 And a voice came to him again a second time: The things that God has cleansed, do not make common.
- Acts 10:28 And he said to them, You understand that it is unlawful for a man who is a Jew to join himself to or come near one of another race; yet God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.
- Heb 8:1 Now in the things which are being said the chief point is this: We have such a High Priest, who sat down on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,
- Acts 7:56 And he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.
- F. Acts 13 reveals that in the church in Antioch, the five prophets and teachers who were ministering to the Lord were composed of Jews and Gentiles, each having a different background, education, and status; this indicates that the church is composed of all races and classes of people regardless of their background and that the spiritual gifts and functions given to the members of the Body are not based on their natural status—v. 1; 4:36; Rom. 16:21; Luke 9:7-9; Acts 22:3:
- Acts 13 be omitted.
- Acts 13:1 Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.
- Acts 4:36 And Joseph, who was surnamed Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a Cyprian by birth,
- Rom 16:21 Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you, as well as Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen.
- Luke 9:7 And Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening and was utterly perplexed, because it was said by some that John had been raised from the dead,
- Luke 9:8 And by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that a certain prophet of the ancients had risen up.
- Luke 9:9 And Herod said, John I beheaded, but who is this concerning whom I hear such things? And he sought to see Him.

Acts 22:3 I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city and trained at the feet of Gamaliel, according to the strictness of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as you all are today.

1. Through these five faithful and seeking members of the Body of Christ, the Lord took a great step to set apart Barnabas and Saul for His work and move to spread the gospel of the kingdom to the Gentile world.
2. It was absolutely a move by the Spirit, in the Spirit, and with the Spirit through the coordination of the faithful and seeking members of the Body of Christ on earth with the Head in the heavens—13:1-4.

Acts 13:1 Now there were in Antioch, in the local church, prophets and teachers: Barnabas and Simeon, who was called Niger, and Lucius the Cyrenian, and Manaen, the foster brother of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

Acts 13:2 And as they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.

Acts 13:3 Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Acts 13:4 They then, having been sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed away to Cyprus.

- G. On the apostle Paul's first trip to spread the gospel, he went to Cyprus and then to Asia Minor to establish many local churches—v. 1—14:28; Rev. 1:4.

Acts 13:1-14:28 be omitted.

Rev 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is coming, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,

- H. After Paul separated from Barnabas, he went out on his second ministry journey to Europe (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and returning through Ephesus back to Antioch)—Acts 15:35-40; 16:6-18:22.

Acts 15:35 And Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and announcing the word of the Lord as the gospel with many others also.

Acts 15:36 Now after some days Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return now and visit the brothers in every city in which we announced the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.

Acts 15:37 And Barnabas intended to take John, who is called Mark, along with them also;

Acts 15:38 But Paul did not consider it suitable to take with them this one who withdrew from them in Pamphylia and did not go with them to the work.

Acts 15:39 And there was a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other; and Barnabas, taking Mark along, sailed away to Cyprus.

Acts 15:40 But Paul chose Silas and went out, having been commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers.

Acts 16:6-18:22 be omitted.

- I. Paul's third journey was from Antioch to Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, and Greece to Jerusalem—v. 23—21:17.

Acts 18:23-21:17 be omitted.

- J. Paul's fourth journey was from Caesarea to Rome—27:1-28:31.

Acts 27:1- 28:31 be omitted.

III. We must receive the Lord's mercy to be saved from Satan's schemes to frustrate the spreading and building up of the church, keeping ourselves in the flow of the age for the building up of His Body—cf. Heb. 4:16; Lam. 3:22-25:

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come forward with boldness to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace for timely help.

Lam 3:22 It is Jehovah's lovingkindness that we are not consumed, / For His compassions do not fail;

Lam 3:23 They are new every morning; / Great is Your faithfulness.

Lam 3:24 Jehovah is my portion, says my soul; / Therefore I hope in Him.

Lam 3:25 Jehovah is good to those who wait on Him, / To the soul that seeks Him.

- A. We must be saved from outward and dead ordinances, human opinions, and the self with its old concepts; whoever receives mercy from the Lord will be saved in these matters; the degree to which we are saved is the degree to which the church can be built up—Rom. 5:10; Phil. 1:19-21a; 2:12-16; Acts 15:1-12; Gal. 2:21; 5:1; 2:4.

Rom 5:10 For if we, being enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled,

Phil 1:19 For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation through your petition and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

Phil 1:20 According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, even now Christ will be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death.

Phil 1:21a For to me, to live is Christ ...

Phil 2:12 So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only but now much rather in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

Phil 2:13 For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure.

Phil 2:14 Do all things without murmurings and reasonings

Phil 2:15 That you may be blameless and guileless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine as luminaries in the world,

Phil 2:16 Holding forth the word of life, so that I may have a boast in the day of Christ that I did not run in vain nor labor in vain.

Acts 15:1 And certain men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

Acts 15:2 And when no little dissension and discussion with them came about through Paul and Barnabas, the brothers directed Paul and Barnabas and certain others among them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this question.

Acts 15:3 They therefore, having been sent forward by the church, passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, telling in detail about the turning of the Gentiles; and they brought great joy to all the brothers.

Acts 15:4 And when they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared the things that God had done with them.

Acts 15:5 But certain men from the sect of the Pharisees who had believed rose up from among them, saying, It is necessary to circumcise them and to charge them to keep the law of Moses.

Acts 15:6 And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to see about this matter.

Acts 15:7 And when much discussion had taken place, Peter rose up and said to them, Men, brothers, you know that from the early days God chose from among you that through my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.

Acts 15:8 And God, the Knower of hearts, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit even as also to us;

Acts 15:9 And He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:10 Therefore why are you now testing God by placing a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Acts 15:11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are saved in the same way also as they are.

Acts 15:12 And all the multitude became silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul relating all the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

Gal 2:21 I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness is through law, then Christ has died for nothing.

Gal 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not be entangled with a yoke of slavery again.

Gal 2:4 And this, because of the false brothers, brought in secretly, who stole in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into slavery.

- B. We must learn from the lesson of Peter to be saved from the veils of our religious traditions and old background so that we may see and live under the vision of God's eternal economy to hold the truth of the gospel—Acts 10:9-16; Gal. 2:11-14.

Acts 10:9 And on the next day as they were journeying and drawing near to the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray around the sixth hour.

Acts 10:10 And he became very hungry and wanted to eat. And while they were preparing, a trance came upon him;

Acts 10:11 And he beheld heaven opened, and a certain vessel like a great sheet descending, being let down by four corners onto the earth,

Acts 10:12 In which were all the four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and birds of heaven.

Acts 10:13 And a voice came to him: Rise up, Peter; slay and eat!

Acts 10:14 But Peter said, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything common and unclean.

Acts 10:15 And a voice came to him again a second time: The things that God has cleansed, do not make common.

Acts 10:16 And this occurred three times; and immediately the vessel was taken up into heaven.

Gal 2:11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.

Gal 2:12 For before some came from James, he continually ate with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to shrink back and separate himself, fearing those of the circumcision.

Gal 2:13 And the rest of the Jews also joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was carried away in their hypocrisy.

Gal 2:14 But when I saw that they were not walking in a straightforward way in relation to the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like the Jews?

C. We must learn from the lesson of Barnabas to be saved from human opinions and natural relationships—disputes that arise among the co-workers because of personal relationships are terrible; remember this well—Acts 13:13; 15:35-40; Col. 4:10.

Acts 13:13 And putting out to sea from Paphos, Paul and his companions came to Perga of Pamphylia; and John departed from them and returned to Jerusalem.

Acts 15:35 And Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and announcing the word of the Lord as the gospel with many others also.

Acts 15:36 Now after some days Paul said to Barnabas, Let us return now and visit the brothers in every city in which we announced the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.

Acts 15:37 And Barnabas intended to take John, who is called Mark, along with them also;

Acts 15:38 But Paul did not consider it suitable to take with them this one who withdrew from them in Pamphylia and did not go with them to the work.

Acts 15:39 And there was a sharp contention, so that they separated from each other; and Barnabas, taking Mark along, sailed away to Cyprus.

Acts 15:40 But Paul chose Silas and went out, having been commended to the grace of the Lord by the brothers.

Col 4:10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you, as well as Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, (concerning whom you received commandments, If he comes to you, receive him),

D. We must learn from the lesson of Apollos to be saved from a ministry that lacks a complete revelation of God's New Testament economy and from not being fully one with the ministry of the age—Acts 18:24-19:2; 1 Cor. 1:12; 16:10-12.

Acts 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, an eloquent man, arrived at Ephesus, and he was powerful in the Scriptures.

Acts 18:25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.

Acts 18:26 And this man began to speak boldly in the synagogue. And when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him to themselves and expounded the way of God to him more accurately.

Acts 18:27 And when he intended to pass through into Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he arrived there, he helped much through grace those who had believed;

Acts 18:28 For he vigorously confuted the Jews publicly, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

- Acts 19:1 Now while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul, having passed through the upper districts, came down to Ephesus and found some disciples.
- Acts 19:2 And he said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said to him, On the contrary, we did not even hear whether there is a Holy Spirit.
- 1 Cor 1:12 Now I mean this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.
- 1 Cor 16:10 Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without fear; for he is working the work of the Lord, even as I am.
- 1 Cor 16:11 Let no one therefore despise him, but send him forward in peace that he may come to me; for I am awaiting him with the brothers.
- 1 Cor 16:12 And concerning our brother Apollos, I urged him many times to come to you with the brothers; yet it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity.
- E. We must learn from the lesson of Paul in Acts 16:6-12; these verses indicate the problem of workers coming to a place and tending to become set and settled down, not wanting to move; old relationships, old affections, old inclinations, and old concepts keep us from following the inner leading of the indwelling Spirit:
- Acts 16:6 And they passed through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.
- Acts 16:7 And when they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, yet the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.
- Acts 16:8 And bypassing Mysia, they came down to Troas.
- Acts 16:9 And a vision appeared to Paul during the night: A certain man, a Macedonian, was standing and entreating him and saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us.
- Acts 16:10 And when he had seen the vision, we immediately endeavored to go forth into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to announce the gospel to them.
- Acts 16:11 And putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and on the following day to Neapolis,
- Acts 16:12 And from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of that part of Macedonia, a Roman colony; and we spent some days in this city.
1. The Holy Spirit forbade Paul and his co-workers, and the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; the Holy Spirit's forbidding separates us, sanctifies us, and the Spirit of Jesus either allows us or does not allow us.
 2. The Holy Spirit says "no" to sanctify us, and the Spirit of Jesus says "go" to send us out in the humanity of Jesus to accomplish the will of God under the cross.
- F. We must learn from the lesson of Paul to practice the Body life and to take the word of the Spirit through the members of the Body, obeying it as a word from the Head—20:23; 21:4, 7-8, 11-14.
- Acts 20:23 Except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in city after city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.
- Acts 21:4 And when we had sought out the disciples, we remained there seven days. These told Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.
- Acts 21:7 And when we finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the brothers and remained with them one day.
- Acts 21:8 And on the next day we went forth and came to Caesarea; and entering into the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we remained with him.
- Acts 21:11 And he came to us and took Paul's belt; and having bound his own feet and hands, he said, Thus says the Holy Spirit, In this way will the Jews in Jerusalem bind the man whose belt this is and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.
- Acts 21:12 And when we heard these things, both we and those in that place entreated him not to go up to Jerusalem.
- Acts 21:13 Then Paul answered, What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.
- Acts 21:14 And since he would not be persuaded, we became silent, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

G. We must learn from the lesson of the mistake of James and the devastating mixture of the church in Jerusalem—vv. 18-26; Matt. 22:7; 24:1-2:

- Acts 21:18 And on the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.
- Acts 21:19 And having greeted them, he related one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry.
- Acts 21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified God and said to him, You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed; and all are zealous for the law.
- Acts 21:21 And they have been informed concerning you that you are teaching all the Jews throughout the nations apostasy from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs.
- Acts 21:22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.
- Acts 21:23 Therefore do this that we tell you: We have four men who have a vow on themselves;
- Acts 21:24 Take these and be purified with them, and pay their expenses that they may shave their heads. And all will know that there is nothing to the things that they have been informed of concerning you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law.
- Acts 21:25 But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we have already written, having decided that they should keep themselves from idol sacrifices and blood and anything strangled and fornication.
- Acts 21:26 Then Paul took the men and on the following day, being purified with them, entered into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of the purification, until the offering was offered for each one of them.
- Matt 22:7 And the king became angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.
- Matt 24:1 And Jesus came out from the temple and was going away, and His disciples came to Him to show Him the buildings of the temple.
- Matt 24:2 But He answered and said to them, Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, There shall by no means be left here a stone upon a stone, which shall not be thrown down.

1. Jeremiah spoke of the law of life that could be written upon our hearts (Jer. 31:31-34), and Paul spoke of the law of the Spirit of life in our spirit (Rom. 8:2, 4, 6), but James treasured and uplifted the law of letters (Acts 21:20).

- Jer 31:31 Indeed, days are coming, declares Jehovah, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,
- Jer 31:32 Not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by their hand to bring them out from the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was their Husband, declares Jehovah.
- Jer 31:33 But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares Jehovah: I will put My law in their inward parts and write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.
- Jer 31:34 And they will no longer teach, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah; for all of them will know Me, from the little one among them even to the great one among them, declares Jehovah, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.
- Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life has freed me in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and of death.
- Rom 8:4 That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the spirit.
- Rom 8:6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace.
- Acts 21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified God and said to him, You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed; and all are zealous for the law.

2. Paul spoke of being crucified with Christ and being conformed to the death of Christ by the power of Christ's resurrection; it is this life that produces the Body life that consummates in the New Jerusalem—Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10.

- Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives

- in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.
- Phil 3:10 To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
3. In the light of the divine revelation, the greatest lack of James is the cross of Christ; self-cultivation does not carry out God's economy, but self-denial does.
 4. James boasted that there were thousands of believing Jews in the church in Jerusalem who were zealous for the law, but Paul was zealous to gain Christ, be found in Christ, know Christ, lay hold of Christ, pursue Christ, and uplift only Christ for the fullest enjoyment of Christ—Acts 21:20; Phil. 3:6-14; Col. 1:18b.
 - Acts 21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified God and said to him, You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed; and all are zealous for the law.
 - Phil 3:6 As to zeal, persecuting the church; as to the righteousness which is in the law, become blameless.
 - Phil 3:7 But what things were gains to me, these I have counted as loss on account of Christ.
 - Phil 3:8 But moreover I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ
 - Phil 3:9 And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness which is out of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is out of God and based on faith,
 - Phil 3:10 To know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
 - Phil 3:11 If perhaps I may attain to the out-resurrection from the dead.
 - Phil 3:12 Not that I have already obtained or am already perfected, but I pursue, if even I may lay hold of that for which I also have been laid hold of by Christ Jesus.
 - Phil 3:13 Brothers, I do not account of myself to have laid hold; but one thing I do: Forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before,
 - Phil 3:14 I pursue toward the goal for the prize to which God in Christ Jesus has called me upward.
 - Col 1:18b ... He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things;
- H. We must learn from the lesson of Paul to be saved from the mixing of Judaic practices with God's New Testament economy, which is not only erroneous but also abominable in the eyes of God—Acts 21:18-27, 31, 36; Heb. 10:29.
- Acts 21:18 And on the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.
 - Acts 21:19 And having greeted them, he related one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry.
 - Acts 21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified God and said to him, You observe, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews who have believed; and all are zealous for the law.
 - Acts 21:21 And they have been informed concerning you that you are teaching all the Jews throughout the nations apostasy from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs.
 - Acts 21:22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.
 - Acts 21:23 Therefore do this that we tell you: We have four men who have a vow on themselves;
 - Acts 21:24 Take these and be purified with them, and pay their expenses that they may shave their heads. And all will know that there is nothing to the things that they have been informed of concerning you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law.
 - Acts 21:25 But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we have already written, having decided that they should keep themselves from idol sacrifices and blood and anything strangled and fornication.
 - Acts 21:26 Then Paul took the men and on the following day, being purified with them, entered into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of the purification, until the offering was offered for each one of them.

Acts 21:27 And when the seven days were about to be concluded, the Jews from Asia saw him in the temple and threw all the crowd into confusion; and they laid their hands on him,
 Acts 21:31 And as they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.
 Acts 21:36 For the multitude of the people were following and crying out, Away with him!
 Heb 10:29 By how much do you think he will be thought worthy of worse punishment who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has considered the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

I. We must learn from the lesson of Paul's appealing to Caesar, utilizing his Roman citizenship to save himself from his persecutors so that he might fulfill the course of his ministry—Acts 22:25-29; 23:10-11; 25:8-12; 26:32:

Acts 22:25 But as they stretched him out with the thongs, Paul said to the centurion standing by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?
 Acts 22:26 And when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported, saying, What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.
 Acts 22:27 And the commander came and said to him, Tell me, are you a Roman? And he said, Yes.
 Acts 22:28 And the commander answered, With a large sum of money I acquired this citizenship. And Paul said, But I was even born a Roman.
 Acts 22:29 Immediately therefore those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander also was afraid, realizing that he was a Roman and that he had bound him.
 Acts 23:10 And when much dissension had taken place, the commander, fearing that Paul might be torn to pieces by them, ordered the detachment of soldiers to go down and seize him from their midst and bring him into the barracks.
 Acts 23:11 But in the night following, the Lord stood by him and said, Take courage, for as you have solemnly testified to the things concerning Me in Jerusalem, so also you must testify in Rome.
 Acts 25:8 While Paul said in his defense, Neither against the law of the Jews nor against the temple nor against Caesar have I sinned in anything.
 Acts 25:9 But Festus, wanting to gain favor with the Jews, answered Paul and said, Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and be judged there before me concerning these things?
 Acts 25:10 And Paul said, I am standing before Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. I have done nothing wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know.
 Acts 25:11 If therefore I am doing wrong and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if there is nothing to the things which these accuse me of, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.
 Acts 25:12 Then when Festus had conferred with the council, he answered, To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go.
 Acts 26:32 And Agrippa said to Festus, This man could have been released, had he not appealed to Caesar.

1. Paul was willing to sacrifice his life for the Lord, but he still endeavored to live longer that he might carry out the Lord's ministry as much as possible—20:24.

Acts 20:24 But I consider my life of no account as if precious to myself, in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to solemnly testify of the gospel of the grace of God.

2. God in His sovereignty rescued Paul so that He might separate him from all the dangerous situations and entrapments and sent him to a quiet prison; this was to afford him a quiet environment and give him time, whether in Caesarea (24:27) or in Rome (28:16, 23, 30), so that through his last Epistles he might release exhaustively to the church throughout the generations the revelation of the mystery of God's New Testament economy that he received from the Lord.

Acts 24:27 And when two years were completed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and wanting to gain favor with the Jews, Felix left Paul bound.

Acts 28:16 And when we entered into Rome, Paul was permitted to remain by himself with the soldier who was guarding him.

- Acts 28:23 And once they had appointed a day for him, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he expounded these matters, solemnly testifying of the kingdom of God and persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning until evening.
- Acts 28:30 And he remained two whole years in his own rented dwelling and welcomed all those who came to him,
3. The benefit and profit that the church throughout the generations has received from these Epistles will take eternity to measure (see Acts 25:11, footnote 1).
- Acts 25:11 If therefore I am doing wrong and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if there is nothing to the things which these accuse me of, no one can hand me over to them. I ¹ appeal to Caesar.
- note 1 For his defense Paul wanted to appeal to Caesar (see notes ¹ in ch. 22 and ² in ch. 26). This would allow him to fulfill his desire to see Rome for the furtherance of the Lord's testimony (19:21) and was according to the Lord's indication to him (23:11). Without this appeal he would have been killed by the Jews who plotted against him (cf. 23:12-15; 25:1-3, 9) and would not have been able to write his last eight Epistles. Before his appeal to Rome, he had written only six Epistles: 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, and 1 and 2 Corinthians. During his first imprisonment in Rome he wrote Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. After that imprisonment he wrote 1 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews. Then, during his second imprisonment he wrote 2 Timothy. Without these last eight Epistles, what a lack the divine revelation would have and what a loss the church would have suffered! His appeal did render great profit and benefit to the Lord's interest.

IV. All of us should follow the pattern of the apostle Paul to do the same one work universally for the unique Body—1 Cor. 3:12; 15:58; 16:10; Eph. 4:11-16:

- 1 Cor 3:12 But if anyone builds upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, grass, stubble,
- 1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.
- 1 Cor 16:10 Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without fear; for he is working the work of the Lord, even as I am.
- Eph 4:11 And He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers,
- Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ,
- Eph 4:13 Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,
- Eph 4:14 That we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error,
- Eph 4:15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,
- Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.
- A. The work in the Lord's recovery is for the building up of the local churches unto the building up of the universal Body of Christ—2:21-22; 1 Cor. 16:10.
- Eph 2:21 In whom all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord;
- Eph 2:22 In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit.
- 1 Cor 16:10 Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without fear; for he is working the work of the Lord, even as I am.
- B. Today there are four kinds of workers:
1. The first kind is the co-workers who match the need of the ministry of God in the present age; this is a small group of people who have been dealt with by the Lord and who are in one accord.
 2. The second kind is the younger co-workers; they are willing to receive the direction and to come under the coordination of the older co-workers, and they are willing to

- follow and to learn in humility.
3. The third kind is those who are unwilling to submit to the senior co-workers, who do not belong to the denominations, yet who are happy to remain in fellowship with us.
 4. The fourth kind is the preachers and free evangelists among the denominations.
- C. What we need today are the first and second kind of co-workers; concerning the third and fourth kind of co-workers, we can only let them choose their own pathway; with some people God has not assigned them to take the same way as we do, and we dare not say anything to them.
- D. Whatever the situation may be, we are here to do the work that God has committed to us; we cannot interfere with others' work, and we are not here tearing down others' work.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE FIRST LOVE AND THE FIRST WORKS

Revelation 2:4

Verse 4: "But I have one thing against you, that you have left your first love."

The one thing I fear the most is that we would often forget about the Lord in our work; we would not know why we are working, laboring, and enduring. Although many works are of the Lord, for whom are we working? I am afraid that many times we work randomly and have not remembered the Lord. The Lord wants us to ask ourselves for whom the works are. It is a pity that we would work out of our habit or out of an intention to retain our fame, rather than out of the prompting of the Lord's love! In that day, when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we will surely not be praised for the greatness or volume of our work. His flaming eyes will not be after those things. What He will investigate is how much of what we do is out of our love to Him. Only those works that are motivated by love are the gold, the silver, and the precious stones. No matter how great and numerous are the other works, and no matter how zealously and diligently one applies himself to them, they are but the wood, grass, and stubble. They have no use except to be burned. May all our works be done as if they were done before the judgment seat. May the degree of the Lord's judgment on us shine brighter day by day, and may it expose our intention.

Those who have tasted the Lord's love are in greater danger. When the saints are filled with the first love of the Lord, everything they do originates from their love for the Lord. They have no intention other than this motive. At such times, they feel that they can almost touch the Lord. They are willing to sacrifice their eyes and even their hearts for the Lord. However, when circumstances change, the enticement of the beauty of the world and the urge of the inner cravings subconsciously cool down the former zeal of love! We may still be able to do what we did yesterday, but the motive has changed. Although we are still able to continue with many works, there is no more stirring of the Lord's love in us. In many peoples' experience, they have not totally left the love of Christ. They still know that Christ loves them and that they love Christ. Yet this matter seems to be very hazy. It is like looking through a veil. The Lord's love is no longer as fresh and constraining as before. They only remember the Lord's former love in their memory. The Lord's love is no longer a present attraction. All of a sudden, the clear sky and the bright sun are instead covered by dark clouds! Of course, I do not mean that we should feel the love of the Lord in our emotion every day. This is impossible. But it is another matter if we do not care for the love of the Lord or for loving Him. The Lord's demand for us to hold on to the first love means that we should consider His love to be forever fresh. Although it pleases Him for us to love Him and to taste of His love once, this will not satisfy Him. In the same way a couple begins their marriage with love, the Lord wants us to continue in this kind of love. To borrow a human expression, the Lord wants us to have an eternal "honeymoon" with Him. The many works, labor, and endurance will not satisfy Him. Even perfect works, labor, and endurance, unless they are done in His love, will not be approved by Him either.

Verse Five

Verse 5: “Remember therefore where you have fallen from and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.”

The Lord did not abandon them and leave them to desolation. He wanted them to remember from where they had fallen. He wanted them to remember their former condition and weep for their present situation. He wanted them to lament saying, “I wish I could be like I was!” or “I wish I could return to the condition of a few months ago!” The remembrance of one’s former condition will stir up in him repentance and aspiration. This is the first step towards revival. The remembrance of one’s former experience will recover one’s former position. A fallen saint cannot skip the step of “remembering.”

“Remember therefore where you have fallen from.” A perfect church in man’s view is but a “fallen” church in the Lord’s evaluation! Although the Lord praised their many activities, He could not help but call them the fallen ones! Our position before the Lord does not depend on how much we labor but on how much we have loved. Of course, when we have the love, we will have the labor also. No matter how much we work, if we have lost the love to the Lord, we are a fallen one. Adam had fallen. Israel had also fallen. It is a pity that even the church that has received God’s grace and blessing has also fallen! However, God still gave them the chance. Hence, we should “remember therefore where [we] have fallen from.”

The most important thing for a fallen Christian to do is to examine under God’s light from where he has fallen. If we have not recovered the lost ground, even though our outward work may continue to be the same, our spiritual condition has already suffered a great blow. If a failure is not confessed before the Lord and cleansed by the blood, we may make further outward progress, but our years will be spent in vain. From where we have fallen, there we should return and should renew our onward journey. Our life after the fall is a journey in vain and is not reckoned by God unless we return back to the point of the fall and resume our walk from there. From where we fall, to there we must return. The unfortunate thing is that after the saints have fallen, they still carry on with their activities. They do not realize that the foundation of their love to the Lord has been shaken already! In recalling the nature of our fall and the line from where we have backslidden, we should return to the starting point. This is the most important teaching in the Bible. This is true with individuals; it is also true with the church. If we want to know the true condition of the church today, we have to compare it with the apostolic church at the time of Pentecost. By this we will see if the church has degraded or advanced. As Ephesus had to remember from where it had fallen, in the same way the church today and the saints in it should not skip this step.

“And repent!” Amazing word! Does the church need to repent? There is a big difference between the repentance of the world and the repentance of the church. The latter has been washed by the blood and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. It does not need to repent of its dead works like the worldly people do. For the church, it is a matter of defilement in life and a loss in the love to the Lord. For this it has to return to its former position. Among the seven churches, the Lord charged five to repent! Repentance is a common need among the saints. It is easy to work busily and have enduring labor, but repentance is the most difficult thing for us to have. It is also the thing that we dislike the most. Although works of beating the air are exhausting, nevertheless, they do not require one to humble himself. It is therefore still bearable to the flesh. In addition, it wins a good name for a man. To confess one’s mistakes and to repent of one’s sin, on the other hand, will rob the flesh of its ground for exercise and will strip it of its glory. It even requires that one lay aside his own face and others’ praises. How difficult this is! It is not that we are reluctant to serve the Lord, but we would much rather serve the Lord in a way that would not require us to do something that is too humiliating for us and which would sacrifice the achievements that we boast in. This kind of repentance is too embarrassing for us! It is alright for the sinners to do this, but for a saint to do this is too unsettling to his self-righteous heart! But then, the cross is not something up to our choice. Our duty is to be

children of submission and slaves of obedience. Empty works may gain for us some adulation from man, but if they do not please the Lord, what profit is there? If the heart of our beloved Lord is not satisfied, even though we may have absolute contentment, we should relinquish it. If the saints were willing to have the same view as the Lord, there would not be so little repentance as there is today! If the heart of the Lord in the Holy Place is not satisfied, even if there are works that please others and oneself, we must ask for whom are these works done? If by the grace of God we understand the Lord's view and look at our present work from the view of eternity, we will realize the emptiness of our work and will esteem the value of pleasing the Lord. Of course, when we realize our lack in this way, we cannot help but be sorrowful in heart and repentant in spirit. However, the price of this self-humiliation and renunciation of glory is not small!

"Do the first works." This is the result of repentance. Without repentance there will not be a self-condemning heart. Without a self-condemning heart, we will remain in oldness and will not be renewed. If there is repentance, there must not only be the recovery of the first feeling but the doing of the first works. What is it to do the first works? It must not be merely outward "works," for the Ephesians had that already. Neither must it be "labor," for the Ephesians had that also. It is not "endurance" either, because they also had this. It is not being zealous to oppose sin. It is not being bold to try the falsehood. Neither is it suffering untiringly for Christ's name sake. All these are excellent in God's eyes and are acceptable, and the Ephesians had all these already. But the Lord Jesus went on to say that He had something against them, which was that they had left their first love. Hence, what is it to "do the first works"? Why did the Lord ask them to do the first works? Were not their works acceptable and praised already? If they were not the works the Lord praised, what then were the "first works"? Outwardly speaking, the first works are not much different from the former works of the Ephesians, but there is a difference in the motivating power and the goal. The works are the same, but the power that motivates the works is different. The "first love" is the same work with different motives. The "first works" are works that issue from the "first love." Although a saint's work may be exactly the same now as before, a difference in the inward motive will result in God's rebuke or praise. A work that issues from a heart filled with the zeal of the Lord's love is precious in the Lord's eyes. Concerning this He has no rebuke. Although a work that only satisfies the eyes presents no difference to others outwardly, it is not pleasing to the Lord who searches the heart of man. God's eyes are on our motive, and He judges accordingly. In the future at the judgment seat, many saints will be surprised at the amount of wood, grass, and stubble they possess. To them, all these works are important and valuable. How is your motive? This is the standard of God's judgment. All works that are not done out of love to the Lord, though they may be as numerous, perfect, and great as that of the Ephesians, are bound to be condemned. All other works are naturally even worse.

After we have read the book of Ephesians, we will see the relationship between "the first love" and "the first works": "But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ, out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love" (4:15-16). These are the "first works" that parallel the "first love." The "first works" are not what man praises or sees. They are works in secret, like the works done by the "joints." The works considered precious by the Lord are not those that are outwardly great or important but those that actually build up the Body of Christ "in love." This is the truly effective work. Without the intention of love there is no work of love. Because there is the love of the Lord Jesus, all the works become works for the building up of the church, and there will be the fitting and the knitting in harmony, and no dissension of opinions will be brought in. Although the church has now left its first love and has not done its first works, we can still be joined to the Head and can grow into Him in all things, from whom we will receive the supply and the strength. All those who have received the power of love from the Head can do the "first works." At present, we see the desolation of the church. Both the first love and the first works are all gone. This is the time for us to

bow down before God, to humble ourselves, and to confess our sins. The Lord calls us to repentance. The door of grace is still wide open. We should come quickly. Thank the Lord. He has shown us that many saints are willing to leave all organizations and are willing not only to hold fast to the first love but to revive the first works. How sad a thing it is that the church, including the saints, has left the first love and must now repent! Of course, the sadder thing is that some would not even repent after their fall. How did the church fall to such an extent? Paul saw the danger among the Ephesians from the very beginning. Hence, he had the prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19. It is easy for a Christian to love the Lord in an instant. In the real church most people have the experience of the first love, but how many are there that continue daily to be burning? I am afraid that many who loved the Lord a few years ago have now gradually become cold. Why is this the case? Paul's prayer gives the reason for this fall: "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love" (v. 17). Anything that does not have a foundation will not last forever. If our love is like the tree that has roots or the house on the ground, this love will be the "first love" all the time. What is this root and ground? It is Christ making "His home in your hearts." This is the source for the love to be rooted and grounded. Our greatest danger is to have much spiritual knowledge without the experience of Christ living in our hearts. Paul prayed for the Ephesians this way because they did not have this experience. They had received God's love (1:5-8), but this love had not been rooted and grounded in their hearts. Hence, Paul prayed for them. Is Christ really making home in our hearts? We should not answer this question rashly. We must not conjecture or assume that we have it already. This question should drive us to pray in the closet. How can Christ make home in our heart? The Bible is not silent concerning this. "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith" (3:17). When we receive the Lord Jesus Christ with a definite faith and allow Him to make home in our heart, our love will be rooted and grounded, and we will "be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are" (v. 18). When the Lord of love makes home in us, we will realize the measure of love. "And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ" (v. 19). The passing of time only manifests the unchanging love of the Lord. Christ's making home in our heart is not a temporary thing. Therefore, when we have this, we will not leave the love. I believe we have tasted and touched the Lord's love, but does not our heart hope for a more stable and steady spiritual condition? Is not a life of abiding in the Lord's house a wonderful one? May Christ become our satisfaction and our protection.

Thank and praise the Lord. This kind of blessing is not only reserved for those Christians who have reached the far end or the finishing line of their journey. Rather, it was there from the beginning. This love is the "first" love. These works are the "first" works. A young believer can just as easily obtain this grace. Other than Christ making home in our hearts, there is no other thing that can satisfy our hearts. "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever" (John 4:13-14). The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life are all of this world. Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but the fact that it will make man thirst again makes more drinkers come back. The world binds people with its vexations, but God is to be blessed because when we drink by faith of the water that the Lord gives, He fully satisfies us.

How good it would be if we have never left the Lord's love! If we have, we must remember where we "have fallen from and repent and do the first works." If we see that the Lord loves us deeply, we will surely humble ourselves in ashes and confess our failures. But there is something to rejoice for: He is gracious. Surely we feel remorseful when we consider our failures; our testimony for Him is weak and shaky. However, in Him we can still rejoice because in Him there is no failure. If we trust in His love, come near to Him, and confess our sins in a penitent way, He will not turn us back empty-handed but will grant us His strength and blessing. A vain reminiscence of our failure will not give us the strength to do the first works, but if we call on the Lord who delivers us, our victory will be assured. Humility is what we should have. However, it is the Lord who can revive us.

After this, there were the Lord's warnings. Because the church had left its first love and was no longer doing its first works, the Lord had to say, "But if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place" (Rev. 2:5). How severe this is! If the Lord's own words of encouragement and rebuke cannot cause you to repent, nothing will change your failure and degradation anymore! Other than judgment, there will not be any further way left for love. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 4, pp. 294-301)