

**LOVING THE LORD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER
FOR THE ORGANIC BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH
AS THE BODY OF CHRIST**

(Friday—First Morning Session)

Message One

**Loving the Lord and Loving One Another—
the Most Excellent Way for Us to Be Anything
and Do Anything for the Organic Building Up
of the Church as the Body of Christ**

MC Hymns 546, 547

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 8:1b; 12:31b; 13:1, 4-8, 13; 14:1, 3, 4b; John 21:15-17; Gal. 6:2-3

- 1 Cor 8:1b ... Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.
1 Cor 12:31b ... And moreover I show to you a most excellent way.
1 Cor 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
1 Cor 13:4 Love suffers long. Love is kind; it is not jealous. Love does not brag and is not puffed up;
1 Cor 13:5 It does not behave unbecomingly and does not seek its own things; it is not provoked and does not take account of evil;
1 Cor 13:6 It does not rejoice because of unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
1 Cor 13:7 It covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
1 Cor 13:8 Love never falls away. But whether prophecies, they will be rendered useless; or tongues, they will cease; or knowledge, it will be rendered useless.
1 Cor 13:13 Now there abide faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.
1 Cor 14:1 Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.
1 Cor 14:3 But he who prophesies speaks building up and encouragement and consolation to men.
1 Cor 14:4b ... but he who prophesies builds up the church.
John 21:15 Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.
John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep.
John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.
Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ completely.
Gal 6:3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

I. Paul commended the Thessalonians by telling them that “your faith grows exceedingly and the love of each one of you all to one another is increasing”—2 Thes. 1:3:

- A. To believe in the Lord is to receive Him as life, and to love the Lord is to enjoy the very person whom we have received; faith is given to us by God so that by it we may receive Christ as our life; love issues out of such a wonderful faith and enables us to live out all the riches of the Triune God in Christ as our life—2 Pet. 1:1; Heb. 12:1-2a; 2 Cor. 4:13; Gal. 5:6; John 1:12-13; 21:15-17; Col. 3:4.
2 Pet 1:1 Simon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have been allotted faith equally precious as ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ:
Heb 12:1 Therefore let us also, having so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, put away every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and run with endurance the race which is set before us,
Heb 12:2a Looking away unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, ...

- 2 Cor 4:13 And having the same spirit of faith according to that which is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore we also speak,
- Gal 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but faith avails, operating through love.
- John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name,
- John 1:13 Who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
- John 21:15 Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.
- John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep.
- John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.
- Col 3:4 When Christ our life is manifested, then you also will be manifested with Him in glory.
- B. To the apostle Paul the grace of the Lord "superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 1:14); through faith we receive the Lord (John 1:12), and through love we enjoy the Lord whom we have received (14:21, 23; 21:15-17).
- 1 Tim 1:14 And the grace of our Lord superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus.
- John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name,
- John 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him.
- John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him.
- John 21:15 Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.
- John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep.
- John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.
- C. In this wonderful faith and by this super-excellent love of the Triune God, we should love Him and all those who belong to Him; only in this way can we become, in the current of the church's degradation, the overcomers whom the Lord is calling and desiring to obtain in Revelation 2 and 3.
- Rev 2, 3 be omitted.

II. The Lord's recovery is a recovery of loving the Lord Jesus with the first love, the best love, and of loving one another for the building up of the organic Body of Christ, which is the building up of the New Jerusalem as the goal of God's eternal economy—Eph. 4:15-16; Rev. 2:4-5:

- 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.
- 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.
- A. The Christ whom we love is the church-loving Christ; when we love Him, we will love the church as He does—Eph. 5:25.
- Eph 5:25 Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her

- B. The degradation of the church begins with our leaving the first love toward the Lord; to love the Lord with the first love, the best love, is to give the Lord the preeminence, the first place, in all things, being constrained by His love to regard and take Him as everything in our life—Rev. 2:4-5; Col. 1:18b; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Mark 12:30; Psa. 73:25-26.

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.

Col 1:18b ... He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things;

2 Cor 5:14 For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died;

2 Cor 5:15 And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised.

Mark 12:30 And you shall love the Lord your God from your whole heart and from your whole soul and from your whole mind and from your whole strength."

Psa 73:25 Whom do I have in heaven but You? / And besides You there is nothing I desire on earth.

Psa 73:26 My flesh and my heart fail, / But God is the rock of my heart and my portion forever.

- C. The very life that we received when we believed in the Lord Jesus is a person, and the only way to apply and enjoy this person is by loving Him with the first love; since the Lord Jesus as our life is a person, we need a new contact with Him to enjoy His present presence at this very moment and day by day—John 11:25; 14:5-6; 1 Tim. 1:14; John 14:21, 23; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Rev. 2:4-7; Col. 1:18b; Rom. 6:4; 7:6; *Hymns*, #559.

John 11:25 Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes into Me, even if he should die, shall live;

John 14:5 Thomas said to Him, Lord, we do not know where You are going; how can we know the way?

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, I am the way and the reality and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.

1 Tim 1:14 And the grace of our Lord superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

John 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, he is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him.

John 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make an abode with him.

2 Cor 5:14 For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died;

2 Cor 5:15 And He died for all that those who live may no longer live to themselves but to Him who died for them and has been raised.

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.

Rev 2:6 But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Rev 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.

Col 1:18b ... He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things;

Rom 6:4 We have been buried therefore with Him through baptism into His death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life.

Rom 7:6 But now we have been discharged from the law, having died to that in which we were held, so that we serve in newness of spirit and not in oldness of letter.

Hymns #559

1	Savior, I by faith am touching	Thee, the source of every good;
	Virtue now, by faith am claiming,	Through the cleansing of Thy blood.

CHORUS

	Touching Thee, new life is glowing	By Thy Spirit's burning flame;
	Cleansing, purging, Spirit filling,	Glory to Thy Holy Name!
2	Touching Thee in faith, I take Thee	In Thy riches full and free;
	All I am I open to Thee,	All Thou art Thou giv'st to me.
3	Touching now Thine outstretched scepter,	O most mighty King of kings;
	Of Thy fulness now receiving,	High I mount on eagle wings.
4	Grace and virtue, strength and wisdom,	All my need, by Thee supplied;
	Keep me touching, keep me claiming,	Keep me ever at Thy side.

- D. We must be persons who are flooded with and carried away by the love of Christ; the divine love should be like the rushing tide of great waters toward us, impelling us to live to Him and love Him to the uttermost beyond our own control—2 Cor. 5:14.
2 Cor 5:14 For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died;
- E. In order to love the Lord to the uttermost, we need to be those who desire and seek to dwell in the house of God all the days of our life to behold His beauty (loveliness, pleasantness, delightfulness) and to inquire of God in His temple; to inquire of God is to check with God about everything in our daily life—Psa. 27:4.
Psa 27:4 One thing I have asked from Jehovah; / That do I seek: / To dwell in the house of Jehovah / All the days of my life, / To behold the beauty of Jehovah, / And to inquire in His temple.

III. Among the co-workers, the elders, the responsible ones, and everyone in the vital groups, love must prevail—1 Cor. 12:31b; 13:4-8, 13:

- 1 Cor 12:31b ... And moreover I show to you a most excellent way.
1 Cor 13:4 Love suffers long. Love is kind; it is not jealous. Love does not brag and is not puffed up;
1 Cor 13:5 It does not behave unbecomingly and does not seek its own things; it is not provoked and does not take account of evil;
1 Cor 13:6 It does not rejoice because of unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
1 Cor 13:7 It covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
1 Cor 13:8 Love never falls away. But whether prophecies, they will be rendered useless; or tongues, they will cease; or knowledge, it will be rendered useless.
1 Cor 13:13 Now there abide faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.
- A. We have been regenerated to be God's species, God's kind (John 1:12-13), and God is love (1 John 4:8, 16); since we become God in His life and nature but not in the Godhead, we also should be love; this means that we do not merely love others but that we are love itself.
John 1:12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe into His name,
John 1:13 Who were begotten not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
1 John 4:8 He who does not love has not known God, because God is love.
1 John 4:16 And we know and have believed the love which God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him.
- B. We must keep ourselves in the love of God and be constrained by the love of Christ to lay down our lives on behalf of the brothers—Jude 19-21; 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:14-16; 4:7-21.
Jude 19 These are those who make divisions, soulless, having no spirit.
Jude 20 But you, beloved, building up yourselves upon your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit,
Jude 21 Keep yourselves in the love of God, awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.
2 Cor 5:14 For the love of Christ constrains us because we have judged this, that One died for all, therefore all died;
1 Pet 1:22 Since you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned brotherly love, love one another from a pure heart fervently,
1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. He who does not love abides in death.

- 1 John 3:15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.
- 1 John 3:16 In this we know love, that He laid down His life on our behalf, and we ought to lay down our lives on behalf of the brothers.
- 1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God.
- 1 John 4:8 He who does not love has not known God, because God is love.
- 1 John 4:9 In this the love of God was manifested among us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might have life and live through Him.
- 1 John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as a propitiation for our sins.
- 1 John 4:11 Beloved, if God has loved us in this way, we also ought to love one another.
- 1 John 4:12 No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.
- 1 John 4:13 In this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, that He has given to us of His Spirit.
- 1 John 4:14 And we have beheld and testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world.
- 1 John 4:15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God.
- 1 John 4:16 And we know and have believed the love which God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him.
- 1 John 4:17 In this has love been perfected with us, that we have boldness in the day of the judgment because even as He is, so also are we in this world.
- 1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear because fear has punishment, and he who fears has not been perfected in love.
- 1 John 4:19 We love because He first loved us.
- 1 John 4:20 If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.
- 1 John 4:21 And this commandment we have from Him, that he who loves God love his brother also.

C. God first loved us in that He infused us with His love and generated within us the love with which we love Him and the brothers (vv. 19-21); to abide in God is to live a life in which we love others habitually with the love that is God Himself, that He may be expressed in us—vv. 16-17; *Hymns*, #546 and #547.

- 1 John 4:19 We love because He first loved us.
- 1 John 4:20 If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.
- 1 John 4:21 And this commandment we have from Him, that he who loves God love his brother also.
- 1 John 4:16 And we know and have believed the love which God has in us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him.
- 1 John 4:17 In this has love been perfected with us, that we have boldness in the day of the judgment because even as He is, so also are we in this world.

Hymns #546

- 1 I love my Lord, but with no love of mine,
 For I have none to give;
 I love Thee, Lord, but all the love is Thine,
 For by Thy love I live.
 I am as nothing, and rejoice to be
 Emptied, and lost, and swallowed up in Thee.
- 2 Thou, Lord, alone, art all Thy children need,
 And there is none beside;
 From Thee the streams of blessedness proceed,
 In Thee the bless'd abide.
 Fountain of life, and all-abounding grace,
 Our source, our center, and our dwelling-place.

Hymns #547

- 1 Something every heart is loving: If not Jesus, none can rest;
 Lord, my heart to Thee is given; Take it, for it loves Thee best.
- 2 Thus I cast the world behind me; Jesus most beloved shall be;
 Beauteous more than all things beauteous, He alone is joy to me.

3	Bright with all eternal radiance Thou art loving, sweet, and tender,	Is the glory of Thy face; Full of pity, full of grace.
4	When I hated, Thou didst love me, Still Thou lovest, lovest ever,	Shedd'st for me Thy precious blood; Shall I not love Thee, my God?
5	Keep my heart still faithful to Thee, But a shadow to that glory	That my earthly life may be Of my hidden life in Thee.

D. We need to beware of ambition and pride:

1. Whether or not we will be useful in the Lord's hands for the long run and whether or not we will bring in the blessing for a lasting time does not depend on what we can do but on how pure our heart is; we need to have a pure heart, purified from any form of subtle ambition in intention, purpose, motive, and action in the Lord's recovery—Matt. 5:8.

Matt 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

2. Pride means destruction, and to be proud is to be a top fool; humility saves us from all kinds of destruction and invites God's grace—James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5.

James 4:6 But He gives greater grace; therefore it says, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble."

1 Pet 5:5 In like manner, younger men, be subject to elders; and all of you gird yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

3. We should never hunt to be the first in any work for the Lord (3 John 9); rivalry in the Lord's work is not only a sign of ambition but also a sign of pride; referring to our capacity, success, perfection, and virtue is a careless form of pride (Luke 17:10; Phil. 1:15; Gal. 5:25-26).

3 John 9 I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not receive us.

Luke 17:10 So also you, when you do all the things which are ordered you, say, We are unprofitable slaves; we have done what we ought to have done.

Phil 1:15 Some preach Christ even because of envy and strife, and some also because of good will,

Gal 5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Gal 5:26 Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another.

4. Thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think is another form of pride (Rom. 12:3); self-boasting, self-exaltation, self-glorification, self-will, self-justification, self-righteousness, and lusting after vainglory are all ugly and base expressions of pride (Gal. 5:25-26).

Rom 12:3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think so as to be sober-minded, as God has apportioned to each a measure of faith.

Gal 5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Gal 5:26 Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another.

5. Wanting to be great and not to be a servant and wanting to be the first and not to be a slave are also a sign of pride—Matt. 20:26-27.

Matt 20:26 It shall not be so among you; but whoever wants to become great among you shall be your servant,

Matt 20:27 And whoever wants to be first among you shall be your slave;

6. We should pray for one another, have an intimate concern for one another, cherish and nourish one another, and always cover one another, speak well of one another, and never expose one another's failures and defects (2 Cor. 7:2-3; Eph. 1:15-16; Philem. 4; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; cf. Matt. 24:49); we need to forgive one another and seek to be forgiven by one another (Col. 3:12-15).

2 Cor 7:2 Make room for us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.

2 Cor 7:3 I do not say this to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts

- for our dying together and our living together.
- Eph 1:15 Therefore I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you and your love to all the saints,
- Eph 1:16 Do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers,
- Philem 4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,
- 1 Cor 13:4 Love suffers long. Love is kind; it is not jealous. Love does not brag and is not puffed up;
- 1 Cor 13:5 It does not behave unbecomingly and does not seek its own things; it is not provoked and does not take account of evil;
- 1 Cor 13:6 It does not rejoice because of unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
- 1 Cor 13:7 It covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- Matt 24:49 And begins to beat his fellow slaves and eats and drinks with the drunken,
- Col 3:12 Put on therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, inward parts of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering;
- Col 3:13 Bearing one another and forgiving one another, if anyone should have a complaint against anyone; even as the Lord forgave you, so also should you forgive.
- Col 3:14 And over all these things put on love, which is the uniting bond of perfectness.
- Col 3:15 And let the peace of Christ arbitrate in your hearts, to which also you were called in one Body; and be thankful.
7. On the one hand, we should have a clear sight over the people for whom we care with much discernment, and on the other hand, we should be blind spiritually—Isa. 11:1-4a.
- Isa 11:1 Then a sprout will come forth from the stump of Jesse, / And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
- Isa 11:2 And the Spirit of Jehovah will rest upon Him, / The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, / The Spirit of counsel and might, / The Spirit of the knowledge and fear of Jehovah.
- Isa 11:3 He will delight in the fear of Jehovah: / He will neither judge by what His eyes see, / Nor decide by what His ears hear.
- Isa 11:4a But He will judge the poor in righteousness, / And decide with equity for the afflicted of the land. ...
8. We should not speak reviling words; to revile is to rebuke or criticize harshly or abusively; to revile is to assail someone with abusive language; to revile is not only to rebuke someone but also to sharply wound him and stamp him with open rudeness or contempt arising from arrogance—Gal. 5:14-15, 25-26:
- Gal 5:14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, in this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
- Gal 5:15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another.
- Gal 5:25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.
- Gal 5:26 Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another.
- a. Revilers are ones who beat their fellow slaves, which means that they habitually mistreat fellow believers; revilers will not inherit the kingdom of God—Matt. 24:45-51; 1 Cor. 6:9-10.
- Matt 24:45 Who then is the faithful and prudent slave, whom the master has set over his household to give them food at the proper time?
- Matt 24:46 Blessed is that slave whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.
- Matt 24:47 Truly I say to you that he will set him over all his possessions.
- Matt 24:48 But if that evil slave says in his heart, My master delays,
- Matt 24:49 And begins to beat his fellow slaves and eats and drinks with the drunken,
- Matt 24:50 The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know,
- Matt 24:51 And will cut him asunder and appoint his portion with the hypocrites. In that place there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.
- 1 Cor 6:9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be led astray; neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor effeminate nor homosexuals

- 1 Cor 6:10 Nor thieves nor the covetous, not drunkards, not revilers, not the rapacious will inherit the kingdom of God.
- b. Those who take in reviling words bear the same responsibility as those who speak reviling words; in order for the church to maintain the oneness, the brothers and sisters must withstand reviling words—v. 10; cf. Num. 6:6.
 - 1 Cor 6:10 Nor thieves nor the covetous, not drunkards, not revilers, not the rapacious will inherit the kingdom of God.
 - Num 6:6 All the days that he separates himself to Jehovah he shall not come near a dead person.
- c. The consciousness of sin comes from knowing God; in the same way, the consciousness of reviling words comes from the knowledge of the Body; reviling words are opposed to the testimony of the Body—1 Cor. 1:10.
 - 1 Cor 1:10 Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion.

IV. Love is the most excellent way for us to be anything or do anything for the building up of the church as the organic Body of Christ—12:31b—13:8a:

- 1 Cor 12:31b ... And moreover I show to you a most excellent way.
- 1 Cor 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
- 1 Cor 13:2 And if I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.
- 1 Cor 13:3 And if I dole out all my possessions to feed others, and if I deliver up my body that I may boast, but do not have love, I profit nothing.
- 1 Cor 13:4 Love suffers long. Love is kind; it is not jealous. Love does not brag and is not puffed up;
- 1 Cor 13:5 It does not behave unbecomingly and does not seek its own things; it is not provoked and does not take account of evil;
- 1 Cor 13:6 It does not rejoice because of unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
- 1 Cor 13:7 It covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- 1 Cor 13:8a Love never falls away. ...
- A. The love described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 is the expression of the divine life (vv. 4-8a); furthermore, the fact that love is the fruit of the Spirit indicates that the substance of love must be the Spirit (Gal. 5:22); if we do not have love, our speaking is like that of sounding brass and a clanging cymbal, which give sounds without life (1 Cor. 13:1; 14:1, 3, 4b, 12, 31; 2 Cor. 3:6).
 - 1 Cor 13 be omitted.
 - 1 Cor 13:4 Love suffers long. Love is kind; it is not jealous. Love does not brag and is not puffed up;
 - 1 Cor 13:5 It does not behave unbecomingly and does not seek its own things; it is not provoked and does not take account of evil;
 - 1 Cor 13:6 It does not rejoice because of unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
 - 1 Cor 13:7 It covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
 - 1 Cor 13:8a Love never falls away. ...
 - Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
 - 1 Cor 13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
 - 1 Cor 14:1 Pursue love, and desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.
 - 1 Cor 14:3 But he who prophesies speaks building up and encouragement and consolation to men.
 - 1 Cor 14:4b ... but he who prophesies builds up the church.
 - 1 Cor 14:12 So also you, since you are zealous of spirits, seek that you may excel for the building up of the church.
 - 1 Cor 14:31 For you can all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be encouraged.
 - 2 Cor 3:6 Who has also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

- B. Love is not jealous, is not provoked, does not take account of evil, covers all things, endures all things, survives everything, and is the greatest—1 Cor. 13:4-8, 13.
- 1 Cor 13:4 Love suffers long. Love is kind; it is not jealous. Love does not brag and is not puffed up;
- 1 Cor 13:5 It does not behave unbecomingly and does not seek its own things; it is not provoked and does not take account of evil;
- 1 Cor 13:6 It does not rejoice because of unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;
- 1 Cor 13:7 It covers all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
- 1 Cor 13:8 Love never falls away. But whether prophecies, they will be rendered useless; or tongues, they will cease; or knowledge, it will be rendered useless.
- 1 Cor 13:13 Now there abide faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.
- C. We should be like God in our love for others, loving people without any discrimination (Matt. 5:43-48); the first one saved by Christ through His crucifixion was not a gentleman, but a criminal, a robber, sentenced to death; this is very meaningful (27:38; Luke 23:42-43).
- Matt 5:43 You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."
- Matt 5:44 But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you,
- Matt 5:45 So that you may become sons of your Father who is in the heavens, because He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust.
- Matt 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?
- Matt 5:47 And if you greet only your brothers, what better thing are you doing? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?
- Matt 5:48 You therefore shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.
- Matt 27:38 At that time two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.
- Luke 23:42 And he said, Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.
- Luke 23:43 And He said to him, Truly I say to you, Today you shall be with Me in Paradise.
- D. The law of the Spirit of life is the law of Christ as the law of love—Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2-3.
- 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.
- Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ completely.
- Gal 6:3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.
- E. The law of love must be substantiated by the law of the Spirit of life so that we may be able to bear one another's burdens (v. 2; Rom. 8:2); but if we are filled with pride, we will be unable to bear others' burdens because we deceive ourselves by thinking that we are something when we are nothing (Gal. 6:3).
- Gal 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ completely.
- 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.
- Gal 6:3 For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.
- F. When the law of love is activated within us, we automatically and spontaneously will be shepherds who have the loving and forgiving heart of our Father God and the shepherding and seeking spirit of our Savior Christ—John 21:15-17; Luke 15:3-7.
- John 21:15 Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.
- John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep.
- John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.
- Luke 15:3 And He told them this parable, saying,
- Luke 15:4 Which man of you, who has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?
- Luke 15:5 And when he finds it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.
- Luke 15:6 And when he comes into his house, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.
- Luke 15:7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need of repentance.

- G. When the law of love is activated within us, our labor in the Lord is a labor of love (1 Cor. 15:58; 1 Thes. 1:3) in which we “support the weak” (Acts 20:35) and “sustain the weak” (1 Thes. 5:14); *the weak* refers to those who are weak either in their spirit or soul or body, or are weak in faith (Rom. 14:1; 15:1).
- 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 Thes 1:3 Remembering unceasingly your work of faith and labor of love and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father;
- Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you by example that toiling in this way we ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.
- 1 Thes 5:14 And we exhort you, brothers, Admonish the disorderly, console the fainthearted, sustain the weak, be long-suffering toward all.
- Rom 14:1 Now him who is weak in faith receive, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his considerations.
- Rom 15:1 But we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those who are weak and not to please ourselves.
- H. The church life is a life of brotherly love (1 John 4:7-8; 2 John 5-6; John 15:12, 17; Rev. 3:7; Eph. 5:2; cf. Jude 12a), and the Body builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:16).
- 1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God, and everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God.
- 1 John 4:8 He who does not love has not known God, because God is love.
- 2 John 5 And now I ask you, lady, not as writing a new commandment to you but that which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.
- 2 John 6 And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, even as you heard from the beginning, that you walk in love.
- John 15:12 This is My commandment, that you love one another even as I have loved you.
- John 15:17 These things I command you that you may love one another.
- Rev 3:7 And to the messenger of the church in Philadelphia write: These things says the Holy One, the true One, the One who has the key of David, the One who opens and no one will shut, and shuts and no one opens:
- Eph 5:2 And walk in love, even as Christ also loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.
- Jude 12a These are the hidden reefs in your love feasts, feasting together with you without fear, shepherding themselves; ...
- 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.
- I. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”; we may listen to the messages of the ministry and become puffed up with mere knowledge—1 Cor. 8:1b; cf. 2 Cor. 3:6.
- 2 Cor 3:6 Who has also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
- J. Our God-given, regenerated spirit is a spirit of love; we need a burning spirit of love to conquer the degradation of today’s church—2 Tim. 1:7.
- 2 Tim 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.
- K. As the branches of Christ, the true vine, we need to love one another in order to express the divine life in fruit-bearing—John 15:12-17.
- John 15:12 This is My commandment, that you love one another even as I have loved you.
- John 15:13 No one has greater love than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.
- John 15:14 You are My friends if you do what I command you.
- John 15:15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all the things which I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.
- John 15:16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and I set you that you should go forth and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He may give you.

John 15:17 These things I command you that you may love one another.

V. John 21, a chapter on shepherding, is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John; after His resurrection the Lord shepherded Peter and commissioned him to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep; this is to incorporate the apostolic ministry with Christ's heavenly ministry to take care of God's flock, the church, which issues in the Body of Christ—vv. 15-17:

John 21 be omitted.

John 21:15 Then when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Feed My lambs.

John 21:16 He said to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? He said to Him, Yes, Lord, You know that I love You. He said to him, Shepherd My sheep.

John 21:17 He said to him the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love Me? Peter was grieved that He said to him the third time, Do you love Me? And he said to Him, Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You. Jesus said to him, Feed My sheep.

A. Peter was so impressed with this commission of the Lord that in his first book he tells the believers that they were like sheep being led astray, but they have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer (Christ) of their souls—1 Pet. 2:25.

1 Pet 2:25 For you were like sheep being led astray, but you have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

B. He exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock of God among them so that when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, they will receive the unfading crown of glory (5:1-4); Peter's word indicates that the heavenly ministry of Christ is mainly to shepherd the church of God as His flock, which issues in His Body.

1 Pet 5:1 Therefore the elders among you I exhort, who am a fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory to be revealed:

1 Pet 5:2 Shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not under compulsion but willingly, according to God; not by seeking gain through base means but eagerly;

1 Pet 5:3 Nor as lording it over your allotments but by becoming patterns of the flock.

1 Pet 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

C. The main purpose and goal of the apostolic ministry incorporated with Christ's heavenly ministry are to build up the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem for the accomplishment of the eternal economy of God.

VI. Psalms 22—24 are a group of psalms revealing Christ from His crucifixion to His kingship in the coming age; in Psalm 22 we see Christ's death, His resurrection, and His many brothers produced in His resurrection to form His church; in Psalm 23 we see Christ as the Shepherd in His resurrection; and in Psalm 24 we see Christ as the coming King in His kingdom:

Psa 22:1 My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? / Why are You so far from saving me, / From the words of my groaning?

Psa 22:2 O my God, I call out in the day, but You do not answer; / And in the night, but there is no rest for me.

Psa 22:3 But You are holy, You who sit enthroned / Upon the praises of Israel.

Psa 22:4 In You our fathers trusted; / They trusted and You rescued them.

Psa 22:5 To You they cried out and were delivered; / In You they trusted and were not put to shame.

Psa 22:6 But I am a worm and not a man, / A reproach of men and one despised by the people.

Psa 22:7 All who see me deride me; / They sneer at me; they shake their heads, saying,

Psa 22:8 He committed himself to Jehovah; let Him rescue him; / Let Him deliver him since He takes pleasure in him.

Psa 22:9 But You are the One who drew me forth from the womb, / Who made me trust while at my mother's breasts.

Psa 22:10 I was cast upon You from birth; / From my mother's womb You have been my God.
 Psa 22:11 Do not be far from me, / For trouble is near, / For there is none to help me.
 Psa 22:12 Many bulls surround me; / The mighty bulls of Bashan encompass me.
 Psa 22:13 They open their mouth at me, / Like a ravening and roaring lion.
 Psa 22:14 I am poured out like water, / And all my bones are out of joint. / My heart is like wax; / It is melted within me.
 Psa 22:15 My strength is dried up like a shard, / And my tongue is stuck to my jaws; / You have put me in the dust of death.
 Psa 22:16 For dogs surround me; / A company of evildoers encloses me; / They pierce my hands and feet.
 Psa 22:17 I count all my bones; / They look, they stare at me.
 Psa 22:18 They divide my garments to themselves, / And for my clothing they cast lots.
 Psa 22:19 But You, O Jehovah, be not far off; / O my help, hasten to aid me.
 Psa 22:20 Deliver my soul from the sword, / My precious life from the power of the dog;
 Psa 22:21 Save me from the mouth of the lion; / Indeed while I am in the horns of wild oxen, answer me.
 Psa 22:22 I will declare Your name to my brothers; / In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.
 Psa 22:23 You who fear Jehovah, praise Him! / All you seed of Jacob, glorify Him! / And stand in awe of Him, all you seed of Israel!
 Psa 22:24 For He has not despised nor detested / The affliction of him who is afflicted; / And He has not hidden His face from him; / But when he cried out to Him, He heard.
 Psa 22:25 From You comes my praise in the great assembly; / My vows will I pay before those who fear Him.
 Psa 22:26 The lowly will eat and be satisfied; / Those who seek after Jehovah will praise Him
 Psa 22:27 All the ends of the earth / Will remember and return to Jehovah, / And all families of the nations / Will worship before You;
 Psa 22:28 For the kingdom is Jehovah's, / And He rules among the nations.
 Psa 22:29 All the flourishing of the earth / Will eat and worship. / All who go down into the dust will bow down before Him, / Even he who does not keep his soul alive.
 Psa 22:30 A seed will serve Him; / That which concerns the Lord will be told to a coming generation.
 Psa 22:31 They will come and declare His righteousness / To a people yet to be born, that He has done this.
 Psa 23:1 Jehovah is my Shepherd; I will lack nothing.
 Psa 23:2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; / He leads me beside waters of rest.
 Psa 23:3 He restores my soul; He guides me on the paths of righteousness / For His name's sake.
 Psa 23:4 Even though I walk / Through the valley of the shadow of death, / I do not fear evil, / For You are with me; / Your rod and Your staff, / They comfort me.
 Psa 23:5 You spread a table before me / In the presence of my adversaries; / You anoint my head with oil; / My cup runs over.
 Psa 23:6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me / All the days of my life, / And I will dwell in the house of Jehovah / For the length of my days.
 Psa 24:1 The earth is Jehovah's, and its fullness, / The habitable land and those who dwell in it.
 Psa 24:2 For it is He who founded it upon the seas / And established it upon the streams.
 Psa 24:3 Who may ascend the mountain of Jehovah, / And who may stand in His holy place?
 Psa 24:4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, / Who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood / Or sworn deceitfully.
 Psa 24:5 He will receive blessing from Jehovah, / And righteousness from the God of his salvation.
 Psa 24:6 This is the generation of those who seek Him, / Those who seek Your face, even Jacob. Selah.
 Psa 24:7 Lift up your heads, O gates; / And be lifted up, O long enduring doors; / And the King of glory will come in.
 Psa 24:8 Who is the King of glory? / Jehovah strong and mighty! / Jehovah mighty in battle!
 Psa 24:9 Lift up your heads, O gates; / And lift up, O long enduring doors; / And the King of glory will come in.
 Psa 24:10 Who is this King of glory? / Jehovah of hosts

- A. These three psalms show that between Christ's death and resurrection in the past and Christ's coming again as the King in His kingdom in the future is the enjoyment, experience, and expression of Christ as our pneumatic Shepherd in the present.
- B. This reveals that shepherding is the bridge between Christ's first coming and His second coming; in His heavenly ministry Christ is presently shepherding people, and if we participate in His wonderful shepherding, there will be a big revival, a new revival, in the Lord's recovery to bring Christ back.

VII. In taking care of the churches and in shepherding the saints, what is needed is the intimate concern of a ministering life—2 Cor. 7:2-7; 12:15; Philem. 7, 12:

- 2 Cor 7:2 Make room for us; we have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.
- 2 Cor 7:3 I do not say this to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts for our dying together and our living together.
- 2 Cor 7:4 Great is my boldness toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf; I am filled with comfort, I overflow with joy in all our affliction.
- 2 Cor 7:5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted in everything; without were fightings, within were fears.
- 2 Cor 7:6 But He who comforts those who are downcast, that is, God, comforted us by the coming of Titus;
- 2 Cor 7:7 And not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted because of you, declaring to us your longing, your lamentation, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced the more.
- 2 Cor 12:15 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?
- Philem 7 For I had much joy and encouragement over your love, because the inward parts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.
- Philem 12 Him I have sent back to you-him, that is, my very heart-

- A. In shepherding the saints, it is possible that we may kill others; the reason for this killing, this fruitlessness, is the lack of intimate concern—cf. 2 Cor. 3:6:
- 2 Cor 3:6 Who has also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, ministers not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
1. The milk of the word of God, the life supply of Christ, should be used to nourish the new believers in Christ, not to “boil” them—1 Pet. 2:2; Exo. 23:19b.
1 Pet 2:2 As newborn babes, long for the guileless milk of the word in order that by it you may grow unto salvation,
Exo 23:19b ... You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.
 2. If we have the ability to carry on a work but lack an intimate concern, our work will be fruitless; our heart must be enlarged to embrace all believers regardless of their condition—2 Cor. 6:10-11.
2 Cor 6:10 As made sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing and yet possessing all things.
2 Cor 6:11 Our mouth is opened to you, Corinthians; our heart is enlarged.
- B. How fruitful we are, how much fruit we bear, does not depend on what we are able to do; it depends on whether we have an intimate concern.
- C. A ministering life is a life that warms up others; if we would minister life to the saints, we must have a genuine concern for them, a concern that is emotional, deep, and intimate.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

FOLLOWING THE STEPS OF THE PROCESSED TRIUNE GOD IN SEEKING AND GAINING THE FALLEN PEOPLE

My burden in this chapter is that we have to learn of the apostles, the elders, and even the Triune God. We have to follow the steps of the processed Triune God in His seeking and gaining fallen people. Luke 15 records that the Pharisees and scribes criticized the Lord by saying, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (v. 2). Then the Lord told three wonderful parables, which unveil the saving love of the Triune God toward sinners.

The Son as the Shepherd Seeking the One Lost Sheep

The Son as the shepherd would leave the ninety-nine to seek the one lost sheep (vv. 3-7).

The Spirit as the Woman Seeking the Lost Coin

The second parable is that of a woman seeking a lost coin (vv. 8-10). This signifies the Spirit seeking a lost sinner. The Son's finding took place outside the sinner and was completed at the cross through His redemptive death. The Spirit's seeking is inward and is carried out by His working within the repenting sinner.

The Father as the Father of the Prodigal Son

Because of the Son's step of seeking the sinner by dying on the cross and the Spirit's step of sanctifying by searching and cleansing the sinner's inward parts, the sinner comes to his senses. This is shown by the prodigal son's coming to himself and desiring to return to his father (vv. 17-18). First Peter 1:2 reveals that before we received the sprinkling of Christ's blood, the Holy Spirit sanctified us. This is His seeking sanctification. The sinner is awakened by the Spirit's seeking to cause him to return to the Father. When the prodigal son returned, his father saw him while he was still a long way off. This indicates that the father was expectantly waiting and watching day by day for his son to return. When his father saw him, he ran to receive his returning son (Luke 15:20). This shows that God the Father runs to receive the returning sinners.

I hope that there will be a genuine revival among us by our receiving this burden of shepherding. If all the churches receive this teaching to participate in Christ's wonderful shepherding, there will be a big revival in the recovery. In the past we did much speaking and teaching with very little shepherding. Shepherding and teaching should be like two feet for our move with the Lord. Our shepherding should always be with teaching, and our teaching should always be with shepherding.

We have seen from our crystallization-study of the Gospel of John that its last chapter, John 21, reveals the apostolic ministry in cooperation with Christ's heavenly ministry. In His heavenly ministry Christ is shepherding people, and we need to cooperate with Him by shepherding people. Without shepherding, our work for the Lord cannot be effective. We must learn all the truths so that we may have something to speak and go to contact people to shepherd them.

Shepherding is something divine. In order to be a shepherd, we must be a witness of Christ, a member of Christ, and a brother of Christ, sharing His sonship. Then we will participate in the oracle of the sonship to become a prophet. As a prophet for God's oracle, we will speak for the Lord. Meanwhile, we need to shepherd people. This is the way to be fruitful, to have the multiplication and the increase. If this kind of fellowship is received by us, I believe there will be a big revival on the earth, not by a few spiritual giants but by the many members of Christ's Body being shepherds who follow the steps of the processed Triune God in seeking and gaining fallen people. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997*, vol. 5, "The Vital Groups," pp. 91-93)

LOVE PREVAILS

OUTLINE

- I. God is love; we love because He first loved us—1 John 4:8, 19.
- II. God's predestination of us unto the divine sonship was motivated by the divine love—Eph. 1:4-5.
- III. God's giving of His only begotten Son to us that we may be saved from perdition judicially through His death and have the eternal life organically in His resurrection was motivated by the divine love—John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10.
- IV. God's love is the source of the grace of Christ dispensed to us through the fellowship of the Spirit—2 Cor. 13:14.
- V. God's love motivates us, His children, to love our enemies that we may be perfect as He is; He loves the fallen human race, who became His enemies, by causing His sun (signifying Christ) to rise on the evil and the good indiscriminately and sending rain (signifying the

- Spirit) on the just and the unjust equally; thus, we may become the sons of the heavenly Father who are sanctified from the tax collectors and the Gentiles—Matt. 5:43-48.
- VI. Love builds up—1 Cor. 8:1b.
 - VII. Love is not jealous, is not provoked, does not take account of evil, covers all things, endures all things, never falls away, and is the greatest—13:4-8, 13.
 - VIII. Love is the conclusion of all spiritual virtues and the factor of fruit-bearing that supplies us bountifully with the rich entrance into the kingdom of Christ—2 Pet. 1:5-11.
 - IX. The Body of Christ builds itself up in love—Eph. 4:16.
 - X. The spirit that God gives us is of love; hence, it is of power and of sobermindedness—2 Tim. 1:7.
 - XI. He who does not love abides in death—1 John 3:14b.
 - XII. Pursue love while you desire spiritual gifts—1 Cor. 14:1.
 - XIII. To overcome the degradation of the church we need to pursue love with those who seek the Lord out of a pure heart—2 Tim. 2:22.
 - XIV. Loving one another is a sign that we belong to Christ—John 13:34-35.
 - XV. The love of God makes us more than conquerors over our circumstantial situations—Rom. 8:35-39.
 - XVI. Love is the most excellent way—1 Cor. 12:31b.

In the previous two chapters we saw that shepherding and teaching are the obligation of the vital groups. In this chapter we want to see that love prevails. Regardless of how much we shepherd and teach others, without love everything is in vain. First Corinthians 13 is a chapter covering one unique thing, that is, love. This chapter tells us that even if we prophesy in the highest way and give everything for others, without love they mean nothing (vv. 2-3). Both shepherding and teaching need love, not our natural love but His divine love.

GOD BEING LOVE

We are God's species because we have been born of Him to have His life and nature (John 1:12-13). We have been regenerated to be God's species, God's kind, and God is love. Since we become God in His life and nature, we also should be love. This means that we do not merely love others but that we are love itself. As His species, we should be love because He is love. Whoever is love is God's species, God's kind.

God is love; we love because He first loved us (1 John 4:8, 19). God does not want us to love with our natural love but with Him as our love. God created man in His image (Gen. 1:26), which means that He created man according to what He is. God's image is what God is, and His attributes are what He is. According to the revelation in the Holy Scriptures, God's first attribute is love. God created man according to His attributes, the first of which is love. Although created man does not have the reality of love, there is something in his created being that wants to love others. Even fallen man has the desire within him to love. But that is just a human virtue, the very expression of the divine attribute of love. When we were regenerated, God infused us with Himself as love. We love Him because He first loved us. He initiated this love.

GOD'S PREDESTINATION OF US UNTO THE DIVINE SONSHIP

God's predestination of us unto the divine sonship was motivated by the divine love. Ephesians 1:4-5 says that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world "to be holy and without blemish before Him in love, predestinating us unto sonship." The phrase *in love* can be joined with the phrase *predestinating us unto sonship*. God predestinated us unto sonship in love. John 3:16 says that God so loved the world. He loved us before the foundation of the world.

GOD'S GIVING OF HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON TO US

BEING MOTIVATED BY THE DIVINE LOVE

God's giving of His only begotten Son to us that we may be saved from perdition judicially through His death and have the eternal life organically in His resurrection was motivated by the divine love (3:16; 1 John 4:9-10). John 3:16 is strengthened by two verses from John's first Epistle—4:9 and 10. First John 4:10 says that God sent His Son to us as a propitiation for our sins. This is judicial through His death. Verse 9 says that God sent His Son to us that we may have life and live through Him. This is organic in His resurrection. John 3:16 should be read with 1 John 4:9-10.

GOD'S LOVE BEING THE SOURCE

God's love is the source of the grace of Christ dispensed to us through the fellowship of the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). This is for us to enjoy the processed and consummated Triune God.

GOD'S LOVE MOTIVATING US TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES

God's love motivates us, His children, to love our enemies that we may be perfect as He is; He loves the fallen human race, who became His enemies, by causing His sun (signifying Christ) to rise on the evil and the good indiscriminately and sending rain (signifying the Spirit) on the just and the unjust equally; thus, we may become the sons of the heavenly Father who are sanctified from the tax collectors and the Gentiles (Matt. 5:43-48). The entire human race became His enemies, but God still loves the human race. If God sent Christ to us with discrimination, we would be disqualified from receiving His salvation. He causes His sun to rise first on the evil and then on the good without discrimination.

We should be like God in our love for others. The tax collectors love only those who love them. The Lord said, "If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?" (v. 46). If we love only those who love us, we are of the same species as the tax collectors. But we are of the super, divine species, so we love the evil ones, our enemies, as well as the good ones. This shows how God as love prevails.

The vital groups should be groups that are prevailing. A proof that our vital group is prevailing is that we love people without any discrimination. Some Christian co-workers may feel that we should let certain persons suffer eternal perdition. They may say that they would not love certain persons, such as bank robbers. But while Christ was being crucified on the cross, two robbers were crucified with Him (27:38). One of them said, "Jesus, remember me when *You* come into *Your* kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (v. 43). The first one saved by Christ through His crucifixion was not a gentleman but a criminal, a robber, sentenced to death. This is very meaningful.

LOVE BUILDS UP

First Corinthians 8:1b says, "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." Teaching without love may puff us up. We may listen to the messages of the ministry and become puffed up with mere knowledge. This does not build up. Love builds up.

LOVE BEING THE GREATEST

Love is not jealous, is not provoked, does not take account of evil, covers all things, endures all things, never falls away, and is the greatest (13:4-8, 13). Jealousy is in our nature. When a new child is born in a family, the other child may become jealous. Jealousy is also present in the church life. One sister may be jealous of another sister because she receives many Amens from the saints when she prays or prophesies. Some brothers may be jealous when they see that another brother has been appointed into the eldership. After being in the church life for over sixty years, I can testify that one of the hardest things is to appoint the elders. We realize that if we appoint a certain brother, another brother whom we do not feel to appoint may be stumbled because of jealousy. If a certain sister is asked to take the lead in a sisters' house, the others may become jealous, but love is not jealous.

Also, love is not provoked. People are easily provoked because of the shortage of love. Regardless of how much we are rebuked, we will not be provoked if we are filled with the divine love. Love does not take account of evil. We have to confess that we have taken account of other people's evil. Some wives have a record, an account, of their husband's failures and defects. This record may not be written, but it is in their mind. They are taking account of their husband's evil.

The elders need to realize that in their shepherding, they have to cover others' sins, to not take account of others' evils. Love covers all things, not only the good things but also the bad things. Whoever uncovers the defects, shortcomings, and sins of the members of the church is disqualified from the eldership. Our uncovering of the members under our eldership, our shepherding, annuls our qualification. Love also endures all things and never falls away. First Corinthians 13 concludes by saying, "Now there abide faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love" (v. 13).

LOVE BEING THE CONCLUSION OF ALL SPIRITUAL VIRTUES AND THE FACTOR OF FRUIT-BEARING

Love is the conclusion of all spiritual virtues and the factor of fruit-bearing that supplies us bountifully with the rich entrance into the kingdom of Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

THE BODY BUILDING ITSELF UP IN LOVE

The Body of Christ builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:16). The phrase *in love* is used repeatedly in the book of Ephesians (1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2). God predestinated us unto sonship before the foundation of the world in love, and the Body of Christ builds itself up in love. The growth in life is in love. In the last few years we have appreciated the Lord's showing us the high peak of the divine revelation. My concern is that although we may talk about the truths of the high peak, love is absent among us. If this is the case, we are puffed up, not built up. The Body of Christ builds itself up in love.

THE SPIRIT THAT GOD GIVES US BEING OF LOVE

The spirit that God has given us is our human spirit regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. This spirit is a spirit of love; hence, it is of power and of sobermindedness (2 Tim. 1:7). We may think that we are very powerful and sober, but our spirit is not of love. We talk to people in a way that is full of power and sobermindedness, but our talk threatens them.

Paul says that we need to fan our gift into flame (v. 6). The main gift that God has given us is our regenerated human spirit with His Spirit, His life, and His nature. We must fan this gift into flame. This means that we have to stir up our spirit so that our spirit will be burning. Romans 12:11 says that we should be burning in spirit. If our spirit is not a spirit of love, our fanning it into flame will burn the whole recovery in a negative way. We must have a burning spirit of love, not a burning spirit of authority, which damages. Whatever is mentioned in 2 Timothy is a requirement for us to face the degradation of the church. How can we overcome the degradation of the church? We must have a burning human spirit of love. Under today's degradation of the church, we all need a spirit of love fanned into flame to be burning in spirit. Love prevails in this way.

According to my observation throughout the years, most of the co-workers have a human spirit of "power" but not of love. We need a spirit of love to conquer the degradation of today's church. We should not say or do anything to threaten people. Instead, we should always say and do things with a spirit of love, which has been fanned into flame. This is what the recovery needs.

THE ONE WHO DOES NOT LOVE ABIDING IN DEATH

First John 3:14b says that he who does not love abides in death. We may think that we are living, but we are dead because we do not love. If we do not love our brother, we abide in death and are dead, but if we do love him, we abide in life and are living.

PURSUING LOVE

First Corinthians 13 speaks of love, and then chapter 14 begins by saying that we are to pursue love while we desire spiritual gifts (v. 1). Our desiring of gifts must go along with the pursuing of love. Otherwise, the gifts will puff us up.

PURSUING LOVE WITH THOSE WHO SEEK THE LORD OUT OF A PURE HEART

To overcome the degradation of the church we need to pursue love with those who seek the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22). We have to pursue love with a group of seekers of the Lord. This is a vital group.

A SIGN THAT WE BELONG TO CHRIST

Loving one another is a sign that we belong to Christ (John 13:34-35). We do not need to bear an outward sign that we are of Christ. If all the saints in the Lord's recovery love one another, the whole world will say that these people are of Christ.

THE LOVE OF GOD MAKING US MORE THAN CONQUERORS

The love of God makes us more than conquerors over our circumstantial situations (Rom. 8:35-39). If we are to be more than conquerors, we need the love of Christ and of God.

LOVE BEING THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

The end of 1 Corinthians 12 reveals that love is the most excellent way (v. 31b). How can one be an elder? Love is the most excellent way. How can one be a co-worker? Love is the most excellent way. How do we shepherd people? Love is the most excellent way. Love is the most excellent way for us to prophesy and to teach others. Love is the most excellent way for us to be anything or do anything.

Love prevails. We should love everybody, even our enemies. If the co-workers and elders do not love the bad ones, eventually, they will have nothing to do. We must be perfect as our Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48) by loving the evil ones and the good ones without any discrimination. We must be perfect as our Father because we are His sons, His species. This is most crucial. How can we be a co-worker and an elder? It is by love in every way. We must love any kind of person. The Lord Jesus said that He came to be a Physician, not for the healthy ones but for the sick ones. The Lord said, "Those who are strong have no need of a physician, but those who are ill" (9:12).

The church is not a police station to arrest people or a law court to judge people but a home to raise up the believers. Parents know that the worse their children are, the more they need their raising up. If our children were angels, they would not need our parenting to raise them up. The church is a loving home to raise up the children. The church is also a hospital to heal and to recover the sick ones. Finally, the church is a school to teach and edify the unlearned ones who do not have much understanding. Because the church is a home, a hospital, and a school, the co-workers and elders should be one with the Lord to raise up, to heal, to recover, and to teach others in love.

Some of the churches, however, are police stations to arrest the sinful ones and law courts to judge them. Paul's attitude was different. He said, "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" (2 Cor. 11:29a). When the scribes and Pharisees brought an adulterous woman to the Lord, He said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). After all of them left, the Lord asked the sinful woman, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you" (vv. 10-11). Who is without sin? Who is perfect? Paul said, "To the weak I became weak that I might gain the weak" (1 Cor. 9:22). That is love. We should not consider that others are weak but we are not. That is not love. Love covers and builds up, so love is the most excellent way for us to be anything and to do anything for the building up of the Body of Christ. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1994-1997, vol. 5, pp. 117-127*)