Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

SAVED IN HIS LIFE — FROM DIVISIVENESS

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Romans 5:10 speaks of both the death of Christ and the life of Christ. Although we have already been redeemed, justified, and reconciled to God through the death of Christ, we still need to be saved in His life from many negative things. These negative things are not objective; they are subjective and are related to our inner being. There are many negative things from which we are saved in the life of Christ: the law of sin, which is the spontaneous power of sin in our flesh; worldliness, which includes everything worldly and common; naturalness, which includes our natural life, natural strength, natural wisdom, and natural disposition; and individualism, the attitude and practice of being individualistic. In this booklet we shall consider a fifth item—divisiveness.

THE ELEMENT OF DIVISIVENESS

In our natural makeup there is an element of divisiveness. Before we were saved, we probably

did not realize that such an element existed within our being, that in our natural life there is the tendency to be divisive. Divisiveness is worse than naturalness or individualism. If someone is individualistic, he prefers to be alone. He does not want others to bother him or to interfere with him. He simply wants to be whatever he is. But to be divisive is to cause division in an active way. In contrast to those who are individualistic, the divisive ones are aggressive to form parties. They contact the saints with the aim of dividing them. They may even travel from place to place with the intention of causing division.

Romans 8 says that the law of the Spirit of life sets us free from the law of sin, and Romans 6 tells us that the life of Christ is sanctifying us dispositionally. In Romans 12 we are told that we need to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. Romans 12 also says that we are one Body and members of one another. To be transformed is to be saved from naturalness, and to be built up into the Body is to be saved from individualism. In chapter twelve we have transformation and building, but when we come to chapters fourteen and fifteen, we see that Christ's life can save us from divisiveness.

RECEIVING THE SAINTS

In Romans 14 Paul covers the matter of receiving the saints. We need to be willing to receive all Christians. Even in the first century there were different kinds of Christians. Some ate only vegetables, and others ate all things. Some observed certain days above others, and others regarded every day the same. If you had lived at the time of the Apostle Paul, would you have been able to receive all these types of Christians? We need to receive all those who have the faith in Christ. If a person believes that Jesus is the Son of God incarnated to be a man, that He died on the cross for our sins, that He was resurrected physically and spiritually, and that He is now on the right hand of God, then we must receive him. In fact, we should have the attitude that we have already received him.

However, the problem is that Christians who eat only vegetables may not receive those who eat everything and that those who eat everything may not receive those who eat only vegetables. Likewise, those who regard every day the same may not receive those who observe certain special days, and those who observe certain days may not receive those who regard every day the same.

Nevertheless, as long as someone believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to receive him, no matter what he eats or whether he observes certain days.

CHRIST AS THE REALITY OF THE SHADOWS

All Christians believe in the Lord Jesus and in the Bible. However, we have different understandings or interpretations of many things in the Bible. In chapter fourteen Paul deals with two of these differences, eating and the observing of days. To eat something is to take it into us so that it becomes part of us, and to observe a day is to follow an outward ritual or regulation. The differences among today's Christians are related mainly to the things they take in and to the outward rituals and regulations they observe. According to Colossians 2:16 and 17, the regulations in the Bible regarding outward observances are types and shadows of Christ. In Colossians 2:16 Paul says, "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of Sabbaths." Here we see the two categories mentioned previously, eating and the outward observances. In the next verse Paul points out that all these "are a shadow of

things to come, but the body is of Christ." If I stand in the light, a shadow in the shape of my body will be cast behind me. My body is the reality of my shadow. In like manner, the matters of eating and drinking and of keeping certain days are shadows, but the body, the reality of these shadows, is Christ.

TYPES AND SHADOWS OF CHRIST

In the Old Testament God commanded His people to eat only that which was regarded as clean. They were not to eat anything that was unclean. However, most of God's people did not realize that these dietary regulations were related to Christ. All the clean things in Leviticus 11 signify various aspects of Christ. Christ is unsearchably rich and has innumerable aspects. Such a rich Christ requires thousands of items to typify Him. All the items suitable for God's people to eat, as recorded in Leviticus 11, are types of different aspects of Christ. Furthermore, the things God forbade His people to eat are types of things other than Christ. Anything of Christ is good for us to eat, but anything that is not Christ is not good for our eating. This brings us back to Genesis 2, where we see that the tree

of life is good for food but that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is not. God's concern, however, is not our physical eating; it is Christ. God only cares for Christ.

Regarding the keeping of days, in the eyes of God every day is the same. But in order to portray Christ, God uses certain days as shadows. For example, the Sabbath day is a shadow of Christ as our rest and satisfaction. Because Christ is the completion, the perfection, of everything God has done, Christ is our satisfaction and rest. Thus, Christ is our Sabbath. Likewise, Christ is our new moon, our new beginning. All the days that God's people in the Old Testament were commanded to observe were shadows of Christ. God, however, does not actually care for those days; He cares for Christ. Therefore, we should hold on to everything that is of Christ, but we should cast aside those things that are not of Christ.

According to natural law, our physical body should have one day of rest each week. By resting in this way we can work more effectively the other six days. However, it does not matter whether this day of rest is the seventh day or the first day of the week. If we apply this to Christ, we shall see that to Him every day is the same. This was Paul's realization in his Epistles.

CARING FOR WEAKER BELIEVERS

Nevertheless, Paul knew that we need to take care of the weaker believers. In Romans 14:1 and 2 he said, "Now him who is weak in faith receive, not with a view to passing judgment on reasonings. One believes that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables." Those who are strong must take care of the weaker ones. Although you may regard every day the same and believe that all things are good to eat, others who are weak in faith may observe certain days and eat only vegetables. On the one hand, we need to realize that so many physical things and special days are types and shadows of Christ. If we see this, we shall not be concerned about eating or the keeping of days. However, on the other hand, many genuine Christians are not strong in their faith concerning these matters. We must remain open to all of them. Otherwise, we shall be divisive.

THE DIVISIVENESS AMONG TODAY'S CHRISTIANS

Christians today are not only divisive but also divided. Instead of judging divisiveness in

others, we should judge our own divisive nature. We have seen that all Christians have the same saving faith, believing in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus. The faith by which we are saved is the same in all believers. But, as we have pointed out, it is difficult for Christians to agree in their understanding of many things in the Bible. Even we ourselves may change in our view concerning certain matters. Forty years ago, I interpreted a particular verse in one way, but today I interpret it in an altogether different way. How then can we expect all believers in Christ to agree in their interpretation of the Bible? This is impossible. For example, some say that the baptism spoken of by Paul in Romans 6 is spiritual baptism, not baptism in water. But others, just as strong in their conviction, believe that it refers to water baptism. Thus, over this matter there have been strong arguments because of differing opinions. Christians also have different opinions about praising the Lord, calling on the name of Jesus, and pray-reading the Word. We should not expect all Christians to agree in their understanding of all things in the Bible.

There is the strong natural tendency in all of us to insist that all believers be the same as we are. Such insisting does far more than expose our

lack of wisdom; it exposes the very element of divisiveness rooted deep within our natural being. Because of this element, we have the tendency to divide ourselves from others and to form our own kind of group.

An example of this occurred in Taipei in 1957. Certain independent Christian groups, claiming to be nondenominational, said that they were meeting in the name of the Lord Jesus. In the course of fellowship, the leaders of these groups became fully convinced that Christians should be one and that there was no reason to be divided. However, these leaders said that they still wanted to remain by themselves; they still wanted to hold on to their separate groups. They were not willing to be one in a practical way, but preferred to remain in a divisive position.

TAKING THE LORD'S WAY

What a mercy it is to be in the church life! Many say that it is impossible to have the oneness today and that it is idealistic to try to have the church life in genuine oneness. Apart from the Lord's mercy, we cannot be one with others. If the Lord were not merciful to us, we could not be brought into oneness and kept in oneness. But in His mercy the Lord has opened our eyes and

has shown us His way. In order to go on, we must take His way. According to God's economy, as human beings we must believe in the Lord Jesus and be Christians. If we are not Christians, life is vain. As Christians, we must take the Lord's way in the church life. If we do not take His way, we shall have no way to go on. We may argue outwardly, but inwardly we shall know that we are off the mark. We shall have no inward rest, no sense that we have found our home.

OUR STANDING

We all have the element of divisiveness within us. Nevertheless, we should never excuse divisiveness, and we should never take occasion to be divisive. Our destiny is to be one with all genuine Christians. This oneness is also our standing. Many are offended by our standing because they prefer a different standing. Some Christians even condemn us and accuse us of saying that we alone are the church and that others are not. In response to such an accusation, I have sometimes said, "Suppose a certain woman is married to a man named Jones. As the wife of Mr. Jones, she is Mrs. Jones. But instead of calling herself Mrs. Jones, she calls herself Mrs. Smith. When someone else claims to be Mrs. Jones, she is

offended and says, 'Why do you claim to be Mrs. Jones? How can you say that you are Mrs. Jones and that I am not?' If she is Mrs. Jones, why does she call herself Mrs. Smith? Actually, we do not say that we alone are the church. However, if you are the church, why do you take such names as Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, or Episcopalian? If you are the church here, then why do you call yourself something else? Since you call yourselves by these names, how can you be the church in this locality? If we are not the church in this city, then what are we?"

What a divisive spirit is found among believers today! The various denominations and groups are both divided and divisive. Nevertheless, they want others to be one with them. Certain groups, for example, accept only those who have been baptized by them. What divisiveness! Other groups forbid people to call on the name of the Lord Jesus or to praise the Lord with a loud voice. This also is divisive. If we require the believers to either drop or adopt certain practices in order to be accepted by us, we are divisive. We should not care about any practices, but about whether or not the ones who come to us are real Christians. The basis upon which we receive the saints is nothing less and nothing more than

Christ Himself. No matter what kind of background a believer may have, as long as he is a Christian, we must receive him as a brother in the Lord.

THE NEED FOR GROWTH IN LIFE

In order to be saved from divisiveness, we need the growth in life. It is not sufficient merely to understand the teaching concerning oneness. The more we grow in Christ's life, the more we shall be saved in His life. When I was a young Christian, I often asked other Christians what they believed concerning baptism or the rapture. But after I had a certain amount of the growth in life, I stopped questioning other believers in this way. Now when I contact the saints, I do not ask them doctrinal questions. Instead, I appreciate the measure of Christ that is within them. I simply do not care about outward things. If we want to be saved from divisiveness, we need to grow. The greater our measure of Christ, the less divisive we shall be. Because we are still in the old nature with its divisive element, we dare not say that we have been fully delivered from divisiveness. We need to be watchful concerning this divisive element within us. We also need to pray that the Lord will grant

us the genuine growth in life so that we may be saved from divisiveness.

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