

**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**

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

- 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:**
  - 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.
  - B. Only works that are motivated by the first love are gold, silver, and precious stones—1 Cor. 2:9; 3:12.
  
- 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:**
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - 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).
  - 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.
  - 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.

- 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:
  - 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- I. Paul's third journey was from Antioch to Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Macedonia, and Greece to Jerusalem—v. 23—21:17.
- J. Paul's fourth journey was from Caesarea to Rome—27:1—28:31.

**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:**

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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:

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.
- 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:
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).
  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.
  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.
- 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.
- 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:
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.
  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.
  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).

**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:**

- 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.
- 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 vain-glory 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)