

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND THE CHURCH LIFE

(Saturday—First Morning Session)

Message Four

Living the Kingdom Life by Taking Care of Others according to the Spirit and by Realizing God's Forgiveness

Scripture Reading: Matt. 7:1-12; 18:1-35

- I. Matthew 7:1-12 concerns the principles of the kingdom people in dealing with others and reveals that the heavenly ruling over the kingdom people requires that they take care of others according to the spirit—cf. Judg. 9:8-9:**
- A. The kingdom people, living in a humble spirit under the heavenly ruling of the kingdom, always judge themselves, not others—Matt. 7:1:
 - 1. If we judge others with righteousness, we will be judged with righteousness by the Lord (v. 2); if we judge others with mercy, we will be judged with mercy by the Lord; mercy triumphs over judgment—James 2:13.
 - 2. For us to deal with others, we must reject ourselves and consider them, sympathize with them, and be merciful toward them; the splinter in our brother's eye must remind us of the beam in our own eye—Matt. 7:3.
 - 3. As long as the beam remains in our eye, our vision is blurred, and we cannot see clearly—vv. 4-5.
 - B. We should not give that which is holy to the dogs or cast our pearls before the hogs, lest they trample them with their feet and turn and tear us—v. 6:
 - 1. In Matthew 7:6 *that which is holy* must refer to the objective truth, which belongs to God; *your pearls* must refer to the subjective experiences, which are ours.
 - 2. Dogs do not have hoofs, nor do they chew the cud; hogs have divided hoofs but do not chew the cud; thus, both are unclean—Lev. 11:27, 7; cf. Acts 10:1-15, 28.
 - 3. According to the revelation in 2 Peter 2:12, 19-22, and Philippians 3:2, *dogs* and *hogs* in Matthew 7:6 refer to people who are religious but not clean.
 - 4. When we talk to others about the truth or about our precious experience of Christ, we must perceive and determine whether or not they have the capacity to receive what we intend to share.
 - C. As we are contacting people and dealing with them, we must ask, seek, and knock for the proper way to contact them—vv. 7-8; 1 Tim. 5:1-2:
 - 1. To ask is to pray in a common way, to seek is to supplicate in a specific way, and to knock is to demand in the most intimate and most earnest way.
 - 2. The best way for the kingdom people to contact others is according to the kingdom and according to the Spirit—Matt. 7:9-12; cf. Luke 11:13.
 - 3. We need to pray ourselves into God so that we may receive the riches embodied in His Spirit to feed ourselves and all those under our care—vv. 1-13.
 - 4. We must learn to do everything through the cross and by the Spirit in order to minister Christ into others for His Body—cf. 2 Chron. 1:10.

II. To live the kingdom life, the God-man life, the church life, we must be humble and not despise any believer but love our brother and forgive our brother—Matt. 18:1-35; 5:48; 7:13-14; Rom. 14:17:

- A. To live the kingdom life, we must humble ourselves and become like little children—Matt. 18:2-4.
- B. To live the kingdom life, we should not stumble others or set up any stumbling block—vv. 5-9; cf. 11:6.
- C. To live the kingdom life, we should not despise even a little believer—18:10-14.
- D. To live the kingdom life, we should forgive our brother without limit—vv. 21-35:
 - 1. We must forgive the offending brother even seventy times seven times—vv. 21-22.
 - 2. We must forgive others as the Lord has forgiven us:
 - a. Our debt to the Lord is impossible to pay off—vv. 23-26.
 - b. The Lord forgave our debts in our defeated Christian life for the restoration of our fellowship with Him—v. 27.
 - c. Another's debt to us is very small compared with our debt to the Lord—v. 28.
 - d. If we do not forgive the brother who sins against us, it will grieve the other brothers, and they may bring this matter to the Lord—vv. 28-31.
 - e. If we do not forgive a brother from our heart today, we will not be allowed to enter into the kingdom in the coming age—vv. 32-35; cf. Mark 11:25-26.

III. We must see and realize that in the kingdom of God there are five kinds of forgiveness:

- A. There is eternal forgiveness—this relates to life:
 - 1. The forgiveness that comes with our salvation is eternal forgiveness.
 - 2. Once we are forgiven, we are forgiven forever; we receive eternal life forever, and we are justified forever—Luke 24:47; Rom. 4:7-8; Psa. 103:12.
 - 3. The moment we believe into the Lord Jesus, we are forgiven of all our sins; the Lord removes all our sins, and we are left with no trace of sin before God—Acts 10:43; Heb. 8:12.
- B. There is instrumental forgiveness—this relates to the church:
 - 1. In sending the Holy Spirit to His church, the Lord charged the church to be His representative on the earth; forgiveness is now granted through the church—John 20:22-23.
 - 2. Instrumental forgiveness is God's proclamation of forgiveness through man; if a person is newly saved but does not know the meaning of forgiveness, it is good for a representative of the church to stand up and say to him, "You have accepted the Lord today; you can thank Him because He has forgiven you of your sins!"
- C. There is restorative forgiveness—this relates to fellowship:
 - 1. When we sin in our daily life, our conscience condemns us, and our fellowship with God is interrupted—Acts 24:16; 1 Tim. 1:5; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3.
 - 2. Our Father-son relationship with God in life can never be changed, but sin can damage our fellowship with God; we have to confess our sins and offenses to God before we can secure our forgiveness in fellowship—1 John 1:7, 9; 2:1-2.

3. If we have offended our brothers, we must confess to them as well—Matt. 5:23-24.
 4. We have to maintain ourselves in constant fellowship with God; when we come to God, we have to acknowledge our sinful acts honestly and ask Him for forgiveness; if we do this, our fellowship with God will be restored, and our heart will be filled with the joy of salvation—Psa. 51:12; Prov. 15:13a; 17:22a; 15:15b.
 5. The secret of the Christian life is maintaining ourselves in constant fellowship with God; if we fail, we must ask God for forgiveness, and we must recover the sweet fellowship that we had with God—1 John 1:9.
- D. There is governmental forgiveness—this relates to discipline:
1. This kind of forgiveness involves God’s arrangement, sovereignty, discipline, and hand; God’s government is His way of doing things; it is His administration.
 2. God’s governmental forgiveness is related to the way that God manages, rules over, and deals with us—Gal. 6:7.
 3. When we sin against God, He will forgive us when we confess our sins to Him; our fellowship with Him can be restored, but He may change His way with us.
 4. David confessed his sins and admitted his guilt in order to be forgiven by God (2 Sam. 12:13; Psa. 51), but God would cause the son born to Uriah’s wife to die and the sword to not depart from David’s house (2 Sam. 12:7-15).
 5. When we are under God’s governmental discipline, the only thing that we can do is learn to humble ourselves under His mighty hand (1 Pet. 5:5-7); the more we reject God’s governmental hand, the more problems we will encounter.
 6. After Moses struck the rock in Meribah (Num. 20:10-12, 24; 27:14), he fell under God’s governmental hand:
 - a. In being angry when God was not angry, Moses did not represent God rightly in His holy nature, and in striking the rock twice, he did not keep God’s word in His economy; thus, Moses offended both God’s holy nature and His divine economy.
 - b. Because of this, even though he was intimate with God and may be considered a companion of God (Exo. 33:11), Moses lost the right to enter into the good land.
 - c. In all that we say and do concerning God’s people, our attitude must be according to God’s holy nature, and our actions must be according to His divine economy; this is to sanctify Him.
 7. We must learn to be generous to others and learn always to forgive; if we criticize others lightly, condemn others easily, keep complaining about the conduct of others, and continue to count the ill-treatment that we receive from them, this will bring us under God’s governmental hand; if we are severe toward others, God will also be severe toward us—Matt. 6:15; 18:23-35:
 - a. We have to learn to fear God, to revere God, to respect God, to honor God, to be in awe of God—Psa. 2:11-12; 86:11; 2 Cor. 5:10-11; Isa. 11:2.
 - b. When others are in trouble, it is the time for us to help them, not the time for us to criticize them—cf. Gen. 14:14-16.

- c. There are many brothers who have fallen miserably today for one reason only—they have criticized others too severely in the past; many of their weaknesses today are the very weaknesses that they criticized in the past.
 - d. We must be generous toward others if we want to avoid God’s governmental hand; may we learn to love and forbear one another—Eph. 4:32.
- E. There is kingdom forgiveness—this relates to administration:
- 1. If we treat people too harshly or have an unforgiving spirit in this age, we will be disciplined in the kingdom age—Luke 6:37-38; Matt. 18:33-35.
 - 2. If we treat others in a mean way and criticize others mercilessly, God will deal with us in the same way in the future—7:1-2.
 - 3. May the Lord grant us the grace to be those who show mercy to others, who do not deal with others in meanness, sharpness, or severity, so that we can obtain mercy from God in that day—5:7; cf. 2 Tim. 1:16, 18.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

GOVERNMENTAL FORGIVENESS

There is another kind of forgiveness in the Bible, which we call governmental forgiveness. We can understand this kind of forgiveness from the following verses: Matthew 6:14-15; 9:2, 5-6; 18:21-35; James 5:15. We call the forgiveness that is spoken of in all these verses governmental forgiveness.

What God’s Governmental Forgiveness Is

Some may ask, “What is God’s governmental forgiveness?” I have often thought that if a person were made aware of God’s government immediately upon becoming a Christian, he would spare himself many troubles and problems.

Let me...use the illustration of [a] little girl [who steals food from her mother’s kitchen]. Before such an incident...occurred, her mother would have left the doors of the rooms in the house open whenever she left the house. She would have left the door to the kitchen open and the kitchen cabinet doors unlocked. Even though there may have been considerable food in the cabinets, she would have left the door open. On that particular day, when she comes back to the house, she may discover that her daughter has stolen food from the cabinets. Since the mother has found out, the daughter has no choice but to confess her sins and ask for forgiveness. The mother forgives her and kisses her. She says, “I forgive you,” and the matter is over with and the fellowship restored. But from that time on, she begins to lock the doors whenever she leaves the house. She has changed her way! Fellowship is one thing, while government is another thing.

What is government? Government is the way of doing things. In our words, God’s government is His way of doing things; it is His administration. The mother forgives her child’s sin. She says, “Since you have eaten the food already, I will not pursue the matter any further.” She forgives her daughter, and the fellowship is restored. When the daughter sees her mother, she can be as happy and intimate as before. But the next time the mother leaves the house, the cabinets and the door to the kitchen will be locked. In other words, the way of handling things will be different. Fellowship can be restored, but the way of doing things cannot be easily restored. The mother is afraid that her child will do the same thing again. She will no longer grant her daughter the kind of freedom she had before. She will put on some kind of restrictions. The way is changed. Please bear in mind that God treats us according to the same principle. Forgiveness in fellowship is easy. Fellowship is easily restored for those who

confess with a true heart. Once they confess that they have sinned against God, God will recover the fellowship between Him and them. But God's way of dealing with these ones may immediately become different. God's discipline may be exercised upon them. He may no longer allow them to be as free or loose.

One day the disciplining hand of God may be lifted. At that time we will have governmental forgiveness. After a period of time, the mother may feel that her child can once again be trusted. She then leaves the kitchen door open once more. This is called governmental forgiveness.

Forgiveness of fellowship is one thing, while governmental forgiveness is another. A father may tell his sons to go outside to play at four o'clock and to come back for dinner at six o'clock. Suppose one day the children go out and fight with other children. When they come home, they confess their sin to their father. The father forgives them and lets them out again the next day, but they get into a fight with other children again. What should the father do? They may confess their sins day after day and the father may forgive them day after day, but the father will wonder whether his way of government is wrong. He may wonder if it is wrong to let them out every day. He may say, "Starting from tomorrow, you will stay at home and not go out, because you have been fighting outside." The father's hand has come in. When we sin against God, God will forgive us when we confess our sins to Him. However, we cannot stop Him from using other methods to discipline us. God will forgive us, and our fellowship with Him can be restored, but He may change His way with us. A man must realize that God's governmental hand is not easily removed. It is not easy for God to take away His governmental hand. God will remove His governmental hand only when He has full assurance that His children are doing the right things. When the father sees his children continuing to make trouble, he will tell them to stay at home and withhold their freedom. He will shut them up for days, weeks, or even months, until he is satisfied that they will no longer cause trouble, quarreling or fighting with people. At that time the father may say to his children, "You have behaved well during the past two months. You may go out for ten minutes tomorrow." The governmental hand is lifted. Have you seen this? We call these ten minutes a governmental forgiveness. The governmental way has changed. The father still has to observe how the children behave among others during those ten minutes. If the children do not engage in a fight, the father may allow them to go out again for half an hour the next day. After some time, he may extend the time to an hour. Perhaps after one or two months, they may play from four o'clock to six o'clock again. When that day comes, we can say that governmental forgiveness has been fully exercised in the children! Brothers, what does governmental forgiveness mean? Governmental forgiveness is absolutely different from eternal forgiveness, instrumental forgiveness, and forgiveness in fellowship. Governmental forgiveness is related to the way God manages, rules over, and deals with us.

What a Man Sows, That He Reaps

Many portions in the Bible point out similar things. For example, Galatians 6:7 says, "Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap." This speaks of God's governmental hand. If a father spoils his children, his children will not grow up in a proper way. A father who does not care for his own family will end up with a tragedy. This is the only possible result. A person who always argues and fights with others and who holds different opinions will have no friends. What a man sows, that he reaps. This is God's government, God's ordained law. No one can change such a law. God's children must be careful not to provoke His governmental hand. It is not easy for God to remove His hand once it is provoked.

The Lord's Healing of a Paralytic Being a Governmental Forgiveness

A certain paralytic was carried to the Lord in the presence of the scribes. The Lord Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, child; your sins are forgiven" (Matt. 9:2). If we do not understand governmental forgiveness, it will be hard to understand what the Lord Jesus was saying. The paralytic did not express his belief; it was others who bore him on a bed to the Lord. Yet the Lord said to him, "Take courage, child; your sins are forgiven." Does this mean that the paralytic was saved when he was carried to the Lord? If he were, salvation would have been too easy. One would only have to be carried to the Lord, and his sins would be forgiven. No, this certainly does not refer to eternal forgiveness. It has nothing to do with instrumental forgiveness or even forgiveness in fellowship. This is another kind of forgiveness. The Lord shows us two things here. On the one hand, the paralytic's sins were forgiven. On the other hand, he had to rise and pick up his mat and walk. Please bear in mind that many sicknesses are the result of God's governmental hand. In order for the paralytic to be healed and to rise again, he first needed to receive governmental forgiveness. Such forgiveness is related to God's government. It is related to sicknesses, not to eternal life. When others carried the paralytic to the Lord Jesus, His forgiveness clearly related to the sickness of paralysis. This man came to the Lord to be healed, and the Lord Jesus said that his sins were forgiven. In other words, his sickness would be healed once his sins were forgiven. His sickness was related to his sins. The Lord Jesus said such a word because the sickness was the result of the man's sins before God. He was sick because he had not settled the issue of his sins yet. When this issue was settled, his sickness was gone. This is governmental forgiveness. Sickness goes away when governmental forgiveness comes. Such a sin clearly involved a governmental offense. The man was sick because he had done something that had offended God's government. Once the Lord forgave him of his sins, he could rise, pick up his mat, and go home. This forgiveness is different from the other kinds of forgiveness. It is the forgiveness that enables one to pick up his mat and go home. This is governmental forgiveness.

The Elders of the Church Anointing the Sick and Praying for Them to Receive Governmental Forgiveness

James 5:14-15 says, "Is anyone among you ill? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him." This seems to be a very special kind of forgiveness. Here was a brother who was sick. The elders of the church were invited to anoint him with oil and pray for him, and the prayer of faith would cause the sick to rise up. If he had committed any sin, it would be forgiven him. We have seen that sickness may be caused by many factors. Some sicknesses may not be the result of sin, but some are. The sin here is not forgiven through the confession of the sick one; it is forgiven through the prayer of the elders of the church. Why are his sins forgiven after the elders of the church pray for him and apply the anointing to him? What sins are spoken of in this verse? One cannot apply such a method to eternal forgiveness, instrumental forgiveness, or forgiveness in fellowship. I believe that this is related to God's government. Suppose a brother is sick because of God's governmental hand. He has sinned and has fallen, and God is disciplining him. Although he has confessed his sins and has been forgiven and restored to fellowship, God's disciplining hand has not been lifted. He has to wait for the elders of the church to come to him and make petition on his behalf, saying, "The brothers have forgiven his sins. We expect to see him rise up again. The church would like to see such a brother being recovered to the flow of life. Therefore, we anoint his body with oil that the ointment of the Head may flow to him once more." When the church does this to the sick one, he will be restored. In many cases, a person may have

sinned and offended God's government. As soon as God removes His governmental hand from such a person, his sickness will be healed. When God removes His governmental hand, we have the fulfillment of the word, "If he has committed sins, it will be forgiven him." This sin is different from other ordinary sins. In our reading of the Bible, we must realize that James 5 is a chapter on governmental forgiveness. If we fall under God's governmental hand, He will not let us go until we are fully forgiven.

David under God's Governmental Hand

To understand the significance of governmental forgiveness, we must consider the example of David in the Old Testament. No portion of the Bible speaks of God's governmental forgiveness as clearly as the story of David with Uriah's wife. David committed two sins: adultery and murder. His adultery was a sin against Uriah's wife, and his murder was a sin against Uriah himself. If you read Psalm 51 and a few other psalms, you will see how David confessed his sins after his mistakes. He felt the shame, the defilement, and the offense that he had committed against God. He was sincere in his confession to God. This shows us clearly that his fellowship with God was restored after his confession in Psalm 51. This restoration of fellowship is analogous to that which is spoken of in 1 John 1.

What did God say to David? He sent Nathan to speak to David. I want you to pay special attention to what Nathan said in 2 Samuel 12:13 after David said, "I have sinned against Jehovah." Nathan said to David, "Jehovah has also put away your sin; you will not die." David said, "I have sinned against Jehovah." He confessed his sins and admitted his guilt. He confessed that he was defiled and had sinned against Jehovah. In return God said through Nathan, "Jehovah has also put away your sin; you will not die." Clearly, David's sins were forgiven; God had put away his sins. What did God say to David after that? He said, "Nevertheless, because you have given the enemies of Jehovah much occasion to blaspheme Him because of this thing, the son who is born to you shall also surely die" (v. 14). He also said, "Now therefore the sword will not depart from your house forever because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife" (v. 10). Finally, He said, "I will now raise up trouble against you from within your house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and will give them to your companion, and he will lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did this secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and even before the sun" (vv. 11-12). God had already put away David's sins, but He would cause the son born to Uriah's wife to die and the sword not to depart from his house. God had already put away David's sins, but He would allow Absalom to rebel and defile David's wives. In other words, sins may be forgiven, but the discipline does not go away immediately.

Let me say a frank word to you. You may go to God and ask for forgiveness for any sin, and God will forgive you. The restoring of fellowship can be quick. David restored his fellowship with God very quickly, but God's discipline continued even after his death. God's government would not depart from him as long as His discipline was upon him. Not long after this episode, his son became sick. Even though David fasted and laid on the floor the whole night, it was useless. God's disciplinary hand fell upon David, and his son died. Following this, his eldest son Amnon was murdered, and then Absalom rebelled. The sword never departed from David's house! Yet God said to David, "I have forgiven your sins"! Brothers, God may have forgiven your sins, but even though He has forgiven you, you cannot stop His chastisement on you and His governmental hand upon you.

Learning to Humble Oneself under God's Mighty Hand

Our God is a God of government. He will not move His governmental hand immediately

away from those who have sinned against Him. Often, God does not do anything; He lets you go. But as soon as He stretches forth His governmental hand, you can do nothing except humble yourself under His mighty hand. You have no escape! God is not like man; He is not sloppy and will not let you go! A sin which damages one's fellowship with God can easily be forgiven, and a person can easily be recovered. But no one can run away from God's discipline in the environment, the home, one's career, and his physical body. The only thing we can do is to learn to humble ourselves under His mighty hand. The more we humble ourselves under His mighty hand and give up all resistance, the easier it is for God to lift His governmental hand. The more we refuse to humble ourselves, and the more angry, vocal, or indignant we become, the more difficult it is for God to lift His governmental hand. This is a very serious matter! Twenty years ago we might have done something according to our own will. Today we still have to face the same thing. We still have to suffer the consequences. It will come back to haunt us. When such a thing catches up with us, we should bow our head and say, "Lord, it is all my fault!" We must humble ourselves under God's hand. Do not resist. The more we resist, the heavier God's hand will become. Let me repeat: Let us humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. The more we reject God's governmental hand, the more problems we will encounter. When God's governmental hand is upon us, we must humble ourselves and say, "Lord, You have done no wrong! I deserve this." We must humble ourselves. We must not only remove all rebellious thoughts but also take away all reasonings and murmurings.

It is not easy to be rebellious and to try to escape God's hand. Who can escape His hand? You must realize that you have fallen into your present state through what you did before. Suppose a brother loved sugar too much as a youth, and his teeth have decayed from the overconsumption of sweets. One day he feels that he has eaten too many sweets. These sweets have brought about his toothaches. He asks God to forgive his sin of indulgence in eating. God can easily forgive such a sin. But it does not mean that his teeth will recover from their decay. His teeth will still be bad; that is God's government. If you eat sweets, your teeth will decay. If you confess your weakness, the fellowship will be restored, but it does not mean that good teeth will grow back after your confession. Once you recognize God's government, you have to learn to humble yourself under it. One can never recover a tooth from decay, but there are matters concerning God's governmental hand that can be removed, and the person involved can be recovered.

Falling under God's Governmental Hand Being a Serious Matter

Let us consider one portion of the Word. After Moses smote the rock in Meribah (Num. 20:10-12), both he and Aaron fell under God's governmental hand. After Aaron failed, God still allowed him to remain a priest and restored his fellowship with God. Even though he wore the priestly robe, God nevertheless told him that he would not be able to live. Moses also did not honor Jehovah as the Holy One when he was by the rock. God wanted him to command water to flow out from the rock, but he smote the rock with his rod and lost his composure. He did not honor Jehovah as the Holy One. God's hand was upon his servants, and Aaron and Moses could not enter Canaan. Do you see the basic principle here? This is God's government! We cannot pin down our God. We cannot guarantee that God will always treat us the same way as before. At a certain point, God may change His way with us. He may change even what we consider to be the best way.

The Bible is full of such stories. For example, when the Israelites reached Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran, spies went up to spy out the land (chs. 13—14). When they saw that it would take two people to carry a cluster of grapes, they realized that the land was a land flowing with milk and honey. But they became afraid and refused to enter into that land,

because they saw that the people who dwelt in that land were of great stature. In their own sight the Israelites were as grasshoppers. As a result, all but two of them died in the wilderness. Joshua and Caleb were the only two persons who would go into the good land. Later, the people confessed their sins and wanted to go in. God still treated them as His people and was gracious to them. However, they could no longer have a part in the land of Canaan. God's government had changed! Brothers, the very day that you begin your Christian life, you should set a hope before you that you will stay on the course that God has measured to you, all the way to the end. Do not live loosely. Do not sin. Please bear in mind that even though God may be merciful, He can change His way! God's governmental hand will never let you go.

God's governmental hand is indeed a serious matter! I know of a brother who was clearly called by the Lord to set aside his career to serve the Lord. He went home for a visit but could not bring himself to quit his occupation. He wanted to be a good Christian, but he did not want to set aside his career or spend his life for the gospel. Since then he is sometimes weak and sometimes strong. But it is impossible for him to turn back to this way! Please bear in mind that our greatest fear is God's disciplining hand; we do not know when His hand will come upon us! God may let us go, even if we rebel ten times, but He may not let us go the eleventh time. However, God will not let some people go the first time they rebel. We do not know when God will catch up with us! Brothers, please bear in mind that God's government is not something under our control! He does things according to His will.

I know of a sister who at one time wanted to consecrate herself to serve the Lord. Later she married, and her marriage was not a very good one. As soon as she made such a move, the light ceased to shine in her. There is no way to ask her to return to this way now. God's governmental hand is upon her. Today we cannot turn her back no matter how hard we try. Light is shut off from her; it is invisible. It is as if a veil is hanging in front of her. There is no way for her to see the light again.

Trying Our Best to Be Obedient to the Lord and to Ask for His Mercy

Therefore, brothers, the first thing we should do is to try our best to obey the Lord. May the Lord be merciful and gracious to us, and may He keep us from falling into His governmental hand. However, if we should fall into His governmental hand, we should not try to get out hastily. Do not resist, and do not flee. Do not give up on one basic principle—to obey God at any cost. I am not asking you to obey by yourself, because you cannot obey by yourself. We must ask the Lord to have mercy on us and to enable us to obey. Only when the Lord has mercy on us will we be able to get through in this matter. "Lord, have mercy on me, or I will not be able to get through in this." We must always ask the Lord to grant us mercy to get through and to not fall into His governmental hand. If God's governmental hand is already upon us, and we are already sick or in the midst of some dire experiences or difficulties, we must remember to not resist God's government with our fleshly hand. As soon as His governmental hand is upon us, we should learn to humble ourselves under His mighty hand. We must say, "Lord, this is Your work! This is Your arrangement! I gladly yield myself to it. I am willing, and I accept it!" When God's governmental hand was upon Job (whom God could easily have spared), the more that Job accepted it, the better it was for him. The more he talked about his own righteousness, the worse his condition became.

Thank God! God's governmental hand often does not remain upon a person all the time. Personally, I believe that when God's governmental hand is upon a person, it can easily be removed by the prayer of the church. This is the precious lesson we find in James 5, which tells us that the elders of the church can lift God's governmental hand. James said that the

prayer of faith can cause a person to rise up. If he has committed any sin, his sin can be forgiven. If a brother is enlightened concerning this matter, and the church prays for him, very often God will lift His governmental and disciplining hand.

Once when I was talking to Miss M. E. Barber, she related an interesting story to me. A brother had done something terrible. Later, he repented and came to Miss Barber. She said to the man, "You have repented and have turned back, have you not? Now you must go to the Lord and tell Him, 'I was once a vessel in the hand of the potter. Now the vessel is broken.' Do not force the Lord to do anything by saying, 'Lord, You must make me another kind of vessel.' You must humble yourself and pray, 'Lord, be merciful to me. Let me be a vessel again! I can no longer insist on being a vessel by myself.' The Lord can make you a vessel unto honor, or He can make you a vessel unto dishonor." Many people still want to be the same kind of vessel. They insist that the Lord make them glorious all the time, but sometimes blessing can come out of a curse. However, I can tell you this: We have all passed through many dealings. I have fallen into God's hand many times; God's governmental hand has been upon me. We must admit that we often get to know God's will even more through His governmental hand. There is no way to dodge it; we can only humble ourselves. We can do nothing except humble ourselves. As time goes by, we will see that it is impossible to avoid or dodge any issue. We have to humble ourselves under God's will. We can only say, "Lord! What You have arranged for me is always the best. I can only humble my heart before You!"

We must not be careless or loose about these matters. I know of a sister who came to see me about marrying a certain man. I told her that as far as I knew, she should not marry him, because he did not seem to be a trustworthy Christian. She said that she was confident that the marriage would work. Seven or eight months after her marriage, she wrote a very long letter to me and said, "I know now I was wrong. I did not listen to your word. I know now that it was a great mistake! What should I do?" I replied, "From now on, you have only one way—humble yourself under God's mighty hand. Even though you tell me about your problem, I cannot help you. No one can help you. You have already fallen into God's governmental hand. If you struggle and rebel, your vessel will only break, and you will only sacrifice your own future." I warned her in a strong way in the letter that she should not even try to write another letter to me. We must remember that God's government is most serious!

A thought often comes to me: What can I compare the present condition of the church to? The church is like a potter's house with many broken vessels, broken tubs, and broken vases strewn everywhere. One finds broken vessels everywhere. This is the situation among Christians today. This is a very serious matter. I say again, we must learn to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand.

FEARING GOD AND BEING GENEROUS TO OTHERS

Two other portions of the Word speak about God's governmental hand: Matthew 6:15 and 18:23-35. One very important thing can be found in these verses—do not condemn others easily. This is a very serious matter! If you criticize others lightly, the same criticism will fall back upon you. In whatever matter you do not forgive or excuse others, the same matter will come back to haunt you! This surely has to do with God's governmental hand. The Lord said that if you do not forgive others of their sins, God will also not forgive you of your sins. This refers to governmental forgiveness. This forgiveness is different from other kinds of forgiveness. Matthew 18:35 uses the phrase *My heavenly Father*. The fact that a person can call God "Father" proves that the matter of eternal forgiveness with him has long been settled. If a brother offends such a one, and that one does not forgive his brother, God will not forgive him either. His governmental hand will come. Learn to be a generous and

forgiving person! Learn to be generous to others, and learn always to forgive. If you keep complaining about the conduct of others and continue to count the ill treatment you receive from them, please bear in mind that this will bring you into God's governmental hand and it will not be easy to come out! God will put you deeper into the hole. If you are severe toward others, God will also be severe toward you. When the slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, he seized him and took him by the throat. When his master found out about this, he was unhappy with the slave. He delivered the slave to the torturers until the slave paid all that he owed (vv. 23-35). He would not be released until he paid all that he owed. God disciplined the unforgiving slave. God's governmental hand was upon him, and he could not easily get away.

We should not only be generous in forgiving others but also avoid criticizing or speaking about others in a light way. Please bear in mind that our criticism and careless comments about others often become a judgment upon ourselves. Then what will we do? When a brother deals harshly with others, we often find the Lord's discipline swiftly catching up with him. Perhaps he easily becomes sick. Sometimes a person may make a remark about someone's troublesome children, saying, "See how God's hand is always on this person." But after some time, the same thing happens to the one who criticized. What do we do when this happens? Brothers, I hope that we will learn to fear God's governmental hand. We have to learn to fear God. We have to be careful with our words, for many things can happen to us as a result of our careless words.

I can tell you today that the Christian life is a life of learning God's government. As Christians, we may live many years on earth. During these years God puts us under His training and teaches us the lesson of His discipline. We must not call ourselves children of God yet refuse to yield ourselves to His discipline. Please bear in mind that no one should criticize or speak about anything in a light way. I hope we will pick up the habit of shunning idle things and idle talk. Learn to be godly persons. It is not wise to incur God's governmental judgment. It is very serious and sobering. We should be careful not to take other people's affairs upon ourselves. Whatever we lightly condemn about others will soon become a condemnation upon us. We reap what we sow. This is something very real among God's children. I hope that we will learn to be generous persons in the eyes of God. The wise ones are the generous ones. The more generous we are to others, the more generous God will be to us. I know what I am talking about. If we are mean and severe to our brothers, God will also be mean and severe to us. You must learn to be kind, loving, and generous to your brothers. Give others liberty in many things. Stop all idle talk and criticism. When others are in trouble, it is the time for us to help them, not the time for us to criticize them.

Please bear in mind that the Jews will be tormented and imprisoned during the end time. They will have no clothes and nothing to eat. The sheep will be the ones who will visit them in prison, who will give them clothes when they are naked, and who will give them food when they hunger. These charitable acts will give them the ground to receive grace. We must not say that since God has ordained that they go through persecution and suffering, we will do our part by adding suffering to them. God indeed has ordained the suffering, but we must be generous to them. We cannot say that we will add more sufferings to them because God has ordained their persecution and affliction. Governmental discipline is God's concern. God's children in this age must learn to always treat people generously and compassionately. If we do this, the Lord will forgive us in many things.

There are many brothers who have fallen miserably today for one reason only—they have criticized others too severely in the past. Many of their weaknesses today are the very weaknesses they criticized in the past. God will not let such matters go easily! We must be

generous toward others if we want to avoid God's governmental hand! May we learn to love and forbear one another. We must always ask God for mercy in dealing with our foolishness and weakness, both in our walk and in everything we do. We do not want to fall into His governmental hand! We must look to God's mercy again and again. We must learn to realize that we live by God's wisdom! We must say to God, "I am a foolish man. Everything I do results in nothing but foolishness. I can do nothing. If I fall into Your governmental hand, I will not be able to bear it. Be merciful to me!" The more pliable and humble we are, the easier it will be for us to be delivered from our afflictions. The more arrogant, stubborn, and self-assured we are, the harder it will be for us to come out of them. Therefore, we must learn to humble ourselves.

**BEING HUMBLE AND OBEDIENT,
AND "IN DUE TIME,"
GOD'S GOVERNMENTAL HAND BEING WITHDRAWN**

Should we fall into God's governmental hand, for any reason great or small, the last thing we should do is rebel. Rebellion is foolishness! There is only one principle we can act upon when we fall into God's hand, that is, to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. If we truly humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, He will relieve and release us "in due time." When God feels that events have run their course, He will let us go. I would like to draw attention to the words *in due time*. First Peter 5:6 says, "Therefore be humbled under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time." The emphasis here is *in due time*. God will open a way for us in due time. He will direct us to a straight path in due time. He will release us in due time, and He will exalt us in due time.

The mighty hand of God in this verse specifically refers to the matter of discipline. His hand here is not for protection. If it were for protection, the verse would say, "The eternal arm of God." Here we are the ones who humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. This implies obedience. Here is God's mighty hand. We cannot shake off such a hand! We cannot resist it. Instead, we must learn to humble ourselves under it by saying, "Lord! I am willing to obey. I will not resist You no matter where You put me. I accept everything, and I accept it willingly! I have nothing to say about the way You are treating me. I am willing to obey Your word! No matter how long You keep me in this condition, I am willing to obey!" Then we will see that there is a "due time." We do not know how long it will be. But at a certain time, the Lord will let us go, and He will move the church to pray for us and release us.

May we all know God's government from the very beginning. Many problems develop because men are ignorant of God's government. I hope that God's children will know His government from the first day, the first year, of their Christian life. If they do, they will be able to go on in a very proper way. (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, vol. 50, "Governmental Forgiveness," pp. 672-687)