

The Way of the Sanctified Life

I John 3:1-3—See what love the Father has given to us, that we should be called [the] children of God. For this reason the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and what we shall be has not yet been manifested; we know that if it is manifested we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure.

Let us have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, as we are gathered here this morning, our hearts are full of gratitude. We want to thank Thee for having loved us and loved us to the uttermost. We thank Thee that Thou art willing to give Thyself to us in such a way that we may be delivered from ourselves and be delivered unto Thee. Oh dear Lord, how can we tell the love that Thou hast bestowed upon each and every one of us? As we continue in Thy presence, we pray that Thy Spirit will bring Thy Word to us. Open our understanding, and bring us into the very thought that Thou hast for us. Enable us to follow Thee in such a way that will fulfill all that Thou hast ordained for each and every one of us. We commit this time into Thy hands and trust Thy Holy Spirit to reveal Thy mind to us and enable us to enter into Thy fullness to the praise of Thy glory. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

We are Children of God

We thank God for giving us another time together. As the apostle John said, “See what love the Father has bestowed to us that we should be called the children of God.” Have we considered what the Father has given to us that we should be called the children of God? This is a tremendous statement! We who were once in sins and transgressions, we who had no hope whatsoever, yet by the grace of God today we are called the children of God. *We are children of God.* What a thought that is! We who were His enemies, we who were destined to eternal death, yet by the grace of God, we are today called the children of God. You and I, all of us, are being called the children of God. What a thought that is! To be children of God means we belong to Him. He is our heavenly Father, and He has given His life to us. He considers us to be His own children. Can you imagine the wonderful grace that has been bestowed upon each and every one of us? We should be ever thankful

that people such as we, who were destined to eternal death, are now called the children of God.

Brothers and sisters, I just cannot get over it. What mercy, what love God has bestowed upon each and every one of us. I think all of us have such a grateful heart towards God for what He has done for us. If God should do only this much to us, surely it is more than enough, but God has something more for us. He does not simply want us to be His children, He has something far more for us than that. He wants us to be like Him, so He has more work to do in our lives.

God Wants Grown-up Sons and Daughters

Sometimes we think that because we are now children of God, we will just sit back and say, "Lord, that is enough for me. As long as I am Thy child I am satisfied. Now I can relax and just wait for the time when You will call me back to Yourself." However, that is our thought, not God's. His thought concerning us is much higher than our thought. He not only saves us, He wants to save us to the uttermost. That is to say, He wants us to be like Him. We are not only saved by Him, but we are to be like Him. That is a tremendous grace and mercy that God has bestowed upon us.

Are we satisfied knowing that we, the greatest sinners, are now the children of God? So far as our human thought is concerned, I think that should be quite enough, but God's thought is always higher than man's. God not only wants us to be called His children, He wants us to actually be His sons and His daughters. God wants us to be like Him, as He is. That is the purpose of God.

God Wants Us to be Like Him

We should be satisfied by just being called the children of God. Think of that! We who are sinners were destined to eternal death, but God in His mercy has come upon us through the redemption of His Son Jesus Christ that He may call us His children. What mercy and grace this is! I think we should be ever thankful for that. But so far as God is concerned, He is not satisfied by just calling us to be His children. He wants something more for us; He wants us to be like Him. As He is, so He wants us to be like Him. This is God's thought concerning every one of us.

Are you like Him? Not only of Him, but like Him? Are you what He is? We are not only to be like Him but joined to Him, one with Him. That is the tremendous God every one of us has!

So the apostle John tells us that we are now called the children of God. What we shall be has not been manifested, but one thing we do know, and that is when He shall be manifested, we will be like Him because we shall see Him as He is. Do you have this hope in you? Or are you just satisfied by being called the children of God? Do you just sit back and say, "Now I can enjoy my life and do whatever I like because I am a child of God? My destination is certain." If we have that kind of thought, then we really do not understand God's love for us. But He wants us to be like Him. As He is so shall we be. Do you think this is possible? Humanly speaking, this seems to be beyond our understanding. How can we, who once were the chief of sinners, be like Him as He is? But this is exactly what God wants us to be.

Now we would like to go a step further. We would like to see how we can be like Him; not only of Him, belong to Him, but to be like Him. As He is, so shall we be. That is God's will for each and every one of us, and we would like to see how He is going to do that.

When Sin Entered into Man his Spirit Died to God

Thank God, when we believed in the Lord Jesus, something happened in our lives. Because of sin our spirit was dead to God. God created man with a spirit, and with that human spirit he was able to contact God. But as you know, when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, their spirits became dead to God. It does not mean they did not have a spirit because they still had an organ called the spirit. How do we know that? We know that because of sin man had no contact with God, but he still had contact with spirits. I think this is easily understood by the Chinese because in China, even though we did not know God, we had contact with evil spirits.

I originally came from a heathen family, but thank God, one after another of us got saved. But before we were saved, we contacted evil spirits. I remember that my grandfather was a very kind person. He did so much for other people that someone insisted that he give his daughter to my grandfather as a concubine. But she was not a believer because at that time my grandfather had not really come to the Lord.

In China it was a practice to contact their dead family members, so after my grandfather died, his concubine wanted to contact him. But she could only do that through a necromancer, an evil spirit, who could contact the dead one. You could really hear the voice of the dead person. Usually, the dead one would require you to burn some more incense because it was so lacking in Hades.

Now we had been praying for our grandfather for years. I was the grandson whom he loved the most, and I was very close to him. After I was saved, I talked to him about the Lord, but he always told me that he was too old to change. However, we did not give up and continued to pray for him. I was in Hong Kong when he died, and I wondered before God whether our years of prayers for our grandfather had been answered. There were some indications, but we were not sure. After my grandfather died his concubine wanted to talk with him because she was not a believer. So she asked a necromancer to come, and through some kind of magic she could literally hear the voice of my grandfather. That is how people in China were deceived because it was actually an evil spirit and not the dead person. Thank God, after she called the necromancer to talk to my grandfather, the voice came, and it said, "Do not call me; I do not belong to you."

Oh, what great comfort that gave us after years of prayer for my grandfather. We got the proof that he no longer belonged to the evil one; he belonged to God.

It is the will of God that we are not only saved as children, but He wants us to grow up to be like Him. This is the purpose of God for every one of us. Thus, we know what it means to be saved. To be saved means not only that our sins have been forgiven, it means that our dead spirits have been renewed into life. That is the reason why after you are saved, you can begin to have real contact with God.

I was brought up in a Christian family, and my father loved the Lord. We had a family meeting every evening before supper when he would gather all seven of the children in the living room and read from the big Bible on the table. Then he would ask us to kneel down and he would lead us in prayer. But strangely, he never asked any of us to pray; he would always pray himself. But after I was saved, he began to ask me to pray also because he knew I belonged to the Lord; I had been saved.

The Meaning of being Saved

What do you mean by being saved? It not only means your sins have been forgiven, but it also means that your dead spirit has been renewed into life. Because of sin your spirit was dead to God but alive to the evil spirits. It had no contact with God. But when you are saved, a wonderful thing happens; your spirit begins to be in contact with God.

I was brought up in a Christian family, and I received much Christian teaching. Outwardly I believed, but inwardly I did not. Even though I prayed, I had no contact with God; He was far away from me. But thank God, the moment He saved me, immediately my contact with God was made. I knew I was saved because I had

contact with God. Before I was saved, when I read the Bible, it was a dead book to me. After I was saved, I remember going into my room, opening the Bible, and reading I John, and every verse spoke to my heart because my contact with God had been made.

My spirit was brought into new life, and with my new spirit, I was in contact with God. So every one of us who have believed in the Lord Jesus, our dead spirit was brought into new life; our contact with God had begun. That is why when Christians pray, it is not a formality; it is real. When you pray, your spirit is in contact with God, and that is the secret of Christian life.

Is it Possible to be Like Christ?

How can we be like Christ? It is through the working of God in our spirit. When you were saved, Christ came to dwell in your new spirit to be your life. Remember, you who have been saved have a new life. You no longer live your old life; you have a new life to live by. But how? How does that new life in you live? Thank God, when your spirit was renewed into life, Christ came into your spirit to be the life of your spirit. But that does not mean your whole being had been changed. No, this was just the beginning. When you were saved, only your spirit was changed; your soul had not changed nor your body. Only your spirit had been changed, but that was the beginning.

The Conflict between the Spirit and Soul

In your renewed spirit you are now in contact with God. Christ has become the life of your spirit. But unfortunately, when that happened, your old man was still the life of your soul. This began the Christian conflict. Christ is the life in your spirit, and now His Spirit dwells in you. What is the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit? The only work of the indwelling Holy Spirit is to bring you deeper into Christ. The Holy Spirit who dwells in you is to be your life guide after you have believed in the Lord Jesus. Before you believed in the Lord Jesus, how did you live? You lived by your soul; whatever you felt like doing, you did it. What you wanted to do, you did because your spirit was dead. But now that your spirit has become alive, the Holy Spirit in your spirit has now become your life guide. He will guide you in following the Lord Jesus.

After you were saved, have you experienced the working of the Holy Spirit in your spirit? Have you experienced the conflict in your life? Before you were saved,

you would go one way, and that is the way you feel. After you believed in the Lord Jesus, you cannot go the old way anymore because there is a conflict in you. We call it the conflict of the spirit and your soul.

In your spirit the Holy Spirit is leading you to God, but your soul is still trying to keep you in the old man. So every believer begins in a conflict with the spirit and the soul. If you have not experienced this conflict between the spirit and the soul, it shows that you have not yet been saved. If you have been saved, this conflict between your spirit and your soul must come, and you begin to see.

Spiritual Exercise

We are told by Paul that physical exercise is profitable, and I think especially in our days the young people begin to realize how important physical exercise is. I remember when I was young, we did not care much about physical exercise, but young people today are very careful about this because it is profitable. It not only helps our body, but it even helps our mind and makes us more alert to things.

The Bible tells us that physical exercise is profitable for a little because it is limited. Its profit is mainly for today and for the body. It may affect your mind, but it does not affect your whole being. It is temporary, not eternal. However, spiritual exercise is eternal and will help you now and forever.

So today we, who are the Lord's, need spiritual exercise every day. The Holy Spirit who dwells in our spirit is leading us every day; He never gives us this responsibility. So far as the Holy Spirit is concerned, He is always faithful in trying to lead you in God's way every moment. So I believe you all sense within your spirit when the Holy Spirit is leading you, but in your soul you can still feel the desires of your old man.

For instance, before you believed in the Lord Jesus, you liked to be boastful because that seemed to lift you up and make you feel great. But after you believed in the Lord Jesus and you continued to boast of yourself and tell things beyond what you really experienced, what happened? You began to feel that while you are boasting there is Someone within your spirit telling you this is not true and you should not say it. Formerly, when you boasted, you felt happy about it, because the more you boasted the more elated you were. But now when you begin to boast about something beyond what you really are, you will feel bad about it. I believe we all have experienced that. When you try to pray before bed, you cannot pray until you confess your sin and ask for the precious blood to cleanse you from your boasting. Otherwise you will not have peace in your heart.

Listening to the Still Small Voice

Thank God, He has provided the means for each and every one of us to be sanctified. He wants every one of us to be sanctified because He is sanctified. It is very important that we do not neglect the inward still small voice. If you neglect that still small voice, your Christian life will be a defeat. But if you pay attention to the still small voice and are willing to pay the cost for listening to it, your spiritual life will grow.

How can we grow in our spiritual life? How can we be like Christ? The process is in our daily life as we learn to listen to the still small voice.

For instance, before you believed in the Lord Jesus, you went to a certain place quite often to enjoy yourself, but after you believed in the Lord Jesus, something happened. When you went to the place you usually frequented, there was a still small voice within your spirit saying you are now a Christian. Do you think it is right for you to go there?

I knew a brother who loved the Lord, and he was a mechanic. When he was in Shanghai, he was sent by his company frequently to the theaters to fix their problems. This became a problem for him because he was afraid that people would assume that he was watching the movies, but actually he was a mechanic doing his work. However, we all thought the same thing.

Deliverance from the things of this World

Don't think because I am a pastor's son, I was free of the world. If it were not for the grace of God, I would be a movie star. Even though I was a pastor's son, I usually spent my Saturdays in movie theaters. I had a friend whose family owned a movie theater so we could see the best movies without paying anything. But it was the mercy of God that saved me, and the Holy Spirit who had begun to work in my life. And when the Holy Spirit began to work in my life, He asked me: "Is this the place you are supposed to go?" "Well," I said, "if I go to see good movies, what is wrong with that?" But I dared not say, "I will not go to the theater."

So I tried to keep from going to the theater, and for a while it was a great success. For several months, I did not go, but sadly the enemy knew what he was doing. A so-called Christian movie came to Shanghai called Noah's Ark, and people sent tickets to my family. Then I argued with myself: "What is wrong with seeing a Christian movie? I have not been to a movie for several months now, but the temptation was too great, and I finally went. I sat there in the movie theater looking

at the movie hoping that the movie would quickly be over so I could get out. But strangely I did not get out, and I stayed and continued looking at it. It was called Noah's Ark, but it was the dirtiest movie I had ever seen. For two hours I sat there debating whether I should leave, but I did not; I remained to the end of it. Thank God, when I went out, no longer did I go to a movie theater. The Lord delivered me.

The Secret of Christian Growth

This is the way that the Spirit of God leads us to a sanctified life. We have a conflict within us; the spirit is willing but the soul is not. The conflict between the spirit and the soul is a constant daily experience. It is either the growth of your spiritual life or the failure of your spiritual life. Where are you today? Are you listening to the still small voice in the spirit? Or are you still following the loud cry of your soul-life? How much failure have you experienced in your Christian life? How much success have you experienced by the spirit overcoming the soul? The conflict between spirit and the soul is the secret of our Christian growth.

When the still small voice speaks to you over the loud voice of your soul, and you are willing to lay down your self-life and accept the dealing of the Holy Spirit, you will discover that your spiritual life begins to grow. On the contrary, if you listen to the loud voice of your soul and reject the still small voice of the spirit, then you will find that your Christian life is going backwards. This will be the criteria of your Christian life.

Therefore, do not look for great things. It is the small things of our Christian life that will reveal where we really are. Where are you today? Are you listening to the still small voice of the Holy Spirit in your spirit? Or are you just following the loud voice of your soul? This marks our Christian living.

A Thousand Years Reigning or A Thousand Years in Outer Darkness?

In a sense it is very simple. Before the coming of the Lord—and we do believe the Lord is coming soon—those who are ready for Him will be taken by Him and will reign as kings during the millennial time. But those who listen to the voice of their soul and try to live what they call a better life on this earth, during the thousand years of the millennial time they will be cast into outer darkness. The Bible says there will be gnashing of teeth. In other words, they will be repenting of what they have done.

Thank God, the way of victory is shown to us in the Bible. But it is not so much the big things that will affect your life; no, it is the daily small things that make up your life. If you are faithful to the Lord in small things, you may suffer a little bit today, but eventually you will reign with Christ for a thousand years. On the contrary, if you cater to the voice of your soul and try to please yourself today, during the millennium you will be cast into outer darkness repenting for what you have done. Christian life is really very simple. Do not look for great things; Christian life is made up of everyday life. Faithful in small things means victory in life; unfaithful in small things means defeat in life. Thus, our daily life is very important.

Again, I want to repeat: life is not composed of big things; life is composed of small things. It is the daily small things that make up the life that you should live. If you neglect this, may I warn you that you will regret it. During the millennial time when other Christians are reigning with Christ, you will be cast into outer darkness with gnashing of teeth, meaning that you will be repenting for what you have done. Is it worth it? So this morning I want to put this thing before you dear brothers and sisters.

You know, sometimes I have thought: why is it that the Lord should leave me on earth so long and not take me to be with Him? How good it would be if immediately when I was saved, He took me to Himself? That would save me from a lot of problems. But that is human thinking. God wants grown-up sons and daughters; He does not want little babies who may be good to look at, but they are not dependable. Thank God, He has not yet come. If He had come already and we are all here, we have all lost out. But thank God, He is coming. He does not tell us when, so He can come at any moment.

I do sense very strongly that we are living in the last days. Two thousand years have passed, and we do believe these are the last days. He may come at any moment, so this is our opportunity. Let's not lose this opportunity; let us all press on towards the goal so that at His return, you will be raptured and reign with Him during the millennial time. But woe to the people who have to be cast outside in outer darkness, repenting and regretting.

The Mercy of God Brings All God's People Together after the Millennial Kingdom

But God is merciful; He will never leave any of His people out forever. The Bible clearly tells us that sooner or later we shall all be gathered together with Him in the kingdom in eternity ruling and reigning with Christ forever. But a thousand years in darkness will not be something easy to go through. If you think it is hard to be

faithful to the Lord in giving up your soul-life, think of a thousand years in outer darkness with the gnashing of teeth repenting. Which do you prefer?

So I just want to put this thing before all you dear brothers and sisters. It is my urgent prayer that for the sake of eternity we will be willing to lay down our self-life and let Him have His will in each and every one of us so that at His coming we will all be gathered together with Him. Hopefully, brothers and sisters, we will not meet again on earth, but we will meet again in heaven. May the Lord bless you. Amen.

Shall we pray:

Dear Lord, how we praise and thank Thee that Thy heart is always perfect towards us. Thou dost not want us to be barely saved; Thou wants to save us to the uttermost. Lord, even though in this world there will be some little problems, some little things that we have to give up, yet it is for our eternal good. So we just pray that after we have heard such a message Thou would enable every one of us to give ourselves totally over to Thee and say, Lord, have Thy way. We want Thy best. We want to be what Thou wants us to be. We do not want to be just babes in Christ; we want to be grown-up sons and daughters of God. Have mercy upon each and every one of us. In Thy name we pray. Amen.