

Excel Still More—Part 2

We are thankful to be together again this morning, and we are going to be continuing from what we shared a few weeks ago out of Thessalonians about excelling still more. I am very creative in my titles, so this is Excel Still More—Part 2.

Let's have a word of prayer:

Lord, we are rejoicing for the great salvation that You have brought us into. Thank You for those words that Paul gave to that church in Ephesus that speaks as loud today as they did those couple of thousand years ago. And Lord, we are thankful for the work You did at Calvary which is still just as effective. It has not lost any of its power, but it continues to cleanse us of our sins. It allows us to be in Your presence, and You have also given us that precious Holy Spirit to be Your life within. So we come beginning today as we would every day in a place of utter dependence upon You. And we look to You, Lord, to open Your Word to us and speak to our hearts. In Your wonderful name. Amen.

Review

I mentioned a few weeks ago sharing some verses out of Thessalonians and Hebrews and how they were connected, and I have always heard, and Jim Bogdanowicz always reminds us that a good teacher always reviews. So, I will try to review; I am not sure about the good teacher part, but I can do the review part now.

I Thessalonians 5:8-11: "But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on that breast plate of faith and love, and as helmet, the hope of salvation."

Paul is reminding these dear ones in Thessalonica that they are of the day; they are not of the night. And there is a newness of life that they are in, and they are to be walking in that light, not sleeping, but sober and watching. Then He continues reminding them: "But God has not destined us for wrath." "When He comes," which means they are expecting His return, but praise God, because of what the Lord has done for those dear ones and us also are not destined for wrath; we are destined for glory, having attained salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. We were reminded this morning, "who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we live together with Him." We mentioned how these dear ones in Thessalonica had a concern when they heard about the coming of the Lord: "What about ones that had passed away, what about the dead?" And Paul is reassuring them whether you are dead or whether you are alive, when He returns, we will be raised.

Loving One Another

So, as we come to the second exhortation, as we said this relates more of our relationship to one another, and it is found in that same chapter.

I Thessalonians 4:9-10: "Now as to the love of the brethren (this is the key issue, there is a love not only for Him but because of Him there is a love for the brethren. There is this great call of loving one another that we hear so much through our Apostle John.), you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;

(Praise God, they are commended again; they are loving one another.) for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.”

What a wonderful testimony they had there. If we just even stopped at that point, can you imagine getting a letter from somebody that you really respect and he says, “I am so thankful how you love one another, so thankful for all you are doing, showing your love for one another.” How would that make us feel? Well, for most of us, depending on who we are, it could make us feel pretty good for a little while. Praise God, there is encouragement in that.

Thank the Lord, our love for one another is being manifest, but then he said, and this is the exhortation part: “But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more.” Allow Christ’s life to come out in your relationships more and more. This is what he is calling us to. We can become so content. We think of this or that, and we have arrived. We see a little bit of this. We hear something of the heavenly vision and we say, “Oh, I have the heavenly vision now.” Praise God, we have been exposed to it, but I still think within the heavenly vision there is so much more He wants to show us. There is a fulness there, and I am not sure we will ever fully see the fulness of the heavenly vision until that day of glory. We will be touched by it, and it will motivate us, that will encourage us, but there is still so much more of Christ out there that He wants us to enter into, excelling still more in knowing Him.

Our Relationship With One Another Through Christ

As we said, the second exhortation relates more to our relationship with one another. Now we have to be clear here. The relationship we have with one another is based in the Lord; it is in Christ. We are not talking about natural relationships. Even though I used the word horizontal, actually my relationship with Ryan does not go this way. My relationship with Ryan goes up and down. It goes up to Christ and then it is down here. So do not get confused and talk about a horizontal relationship, because it is through Christ. It is so easy for us to have relationships based on our temperaments, based on what school you went to, based on an alumnus of this school or that school, based on sport teams or based on food.

Natural Relationships Are Secondary

I will show my age now. There was a word that was not around when I was growing up, but now it is foodies. There is a whole industry out there. There is a whole section of the internet that is related to foodies, and they have great fellowship sharing one with another, and they recommend this restaurant and that restaurant, try this and that. And ones will actually have destination places. We were in Indianapolis the other weekend, and sitting and waiting for the plane which was delayed four hours. The two guys next to us said, “Me and my friend are actually coming down from Boston to Richmond and camping out. I said, “You are coming from Boston to Richmond to camp out?” He said, “It is such a food destination.” They were coming from Boston to Richmond to go here. That was the basis of their fellowship. That is what they had. We are not talking about that. Those kind of relationship are okay, but they are secondary. Primary it is with Christ because He is the One that unifies us.

And the blessed thing about our relationship with the Lord is that it is the visible testimony on this earth of our relationship to the Head, this is what people see. Believers throughout the world, such diverse ones, try to figure out what you have in common, what is going on here? That has been one of our prayers as we go down to William and Mary that as we show the love of Christ to one another and to others, people will say, "Who is this group? What is going on here?" There is something different, would there be a fragrance of Him coming forth.

That was actually the testimony in the Roman Empire as they were trying to persecute believers. Some of them were just baffled: "Look how they love one another." There was a genuine love; they were laying down their lives for one another. Their properties would be stolen and taken away, and they were persecuted, but there was still a love going forth one with another.

The Love of Many Will Grow Cold

The relationship we have with one another is based on Him, and there is a great challenge that we not become content or overconfident with what we have. I think a lot of the warnings in Paul's writings are always to press on as we find in Philippians instead of excel still more. The Lord even tells us: "Beware in the last days because the love of many will grow cold." And what He is talking about there is the love among the brethren. The love that we have for one another is going to wax cold. Things are going to come in because one of the things that the enemy loves to do, probably one of his prime targets is to divide brethren. If he can come in and bring some division and cause some offense, cause ones to have misunderstanding, maybe it was an actual offense, and there is no forgiveness there. The enemy can come in and do that. He counts everyone there as a victory. And sadly as we look around today there is so much division within the body of Christ.

We studied I Samue 11 Friday night in the Bible study. And there was a guy called Nahash who was an Ammonite, and he was coming in to attack the city of Jabesh-gilead. He said he wanted to do that to basically defile all of Israel. And if you think about that, when the enemy comes in and attacks any of the brethren, or if we have some division or people giving into the enemies' powers, it puts a stain on the testimony of Jesus. It puts a stain on Christianity. If you talk to unbelievers they are a little resistant. What is one of the first things they say? "You Christians, how about this guy? He left his wife and went off with another man." "How about this church, they divided over this money that somebody stole." The work of the enemy can be very effective in dividing brethren, and we need to be aware of it, and it is only going to intensify in these days. We have experienced it in this assembly some years ago, and it is a terrifying thing. So we need to be aware of it and awake. May we walk in that way, that we not be caught off guard because as the love of the brethren grows cold, you will see that manifested much in the Scripture. In Malachi, the Lord said that He loved them. They said, "How did you love us?" They were so disconnected from His love, they did not even realize it.

And Laodicea's love had become lukewarm; it was not hot or cold, but they thought everything was great.

Ephesus had this beautiful letter that was written to them by Paul who was pouring out to them everything of the love of Christ, the love for the church and the glorious vision that there is. Then they left their first love. Outwardly, everything was going along, but thank the Lord that He gives all these wonderful relationships and wonderful examples of things that we can learn from.

Vision of God's Heart and Purpose

In this relationship, as we just said, it is vital. One of the vital things that keeps us in relationship is vision. I know people get tired of that word. If we see what God's heart and purpose is, if we see, (as we said at the beginning) God's return is not about us; it is about Him. He wants a bride, and if we can see that, if that can be set before us, and we see how jealous God is for His Son to have a bride, it makes these little things that divide us so trivial; but they need to get settled. Actually, in the big picture of things it is normally the little trivial things that divide brethren. They are not willing to humble themselves. They are waiting for the other person to apologize; "As soon as they forgive me, I will forgive them." Thank the Lord, He did not wait on us; He took the initiative and went to that cross. We see how this heavenly vision, all of God's heart and purpose becomes very practical in our relationship with one another. We will touch a little more on that.

As I just mentioned we are also in a relationship that this is more of a testimony of Christ in the church. And that the Lord would continue to open our eyes to see the privilege that we have been brought into. It is a tremendous privilege of being brought into the house of God, being part of the family of God, being part of His church, part of this testimony. May that never become too familiar to us.

As we go along in this relationship together, what would happen is that we would gain a fuller and a greater revelation of God's heart and purpose. As we go through things together, we can see, wow! This is what it is about. This is what it is going to be about because one of the things that this revelation will do is that it impacts our life. Genuine revelation impacts our life. Genuine revelation, true revelation brings about a reformation within us. And we see how when we really see God's heart and purpose, again we decrease, but if we simply have a knowledge about it, it puffs us up, and we increase. We strut around; "Oh, you want to know about God's eternal purpose? Let me tell you all about it. I have written thirty-two books on it." That is the easy part to write about it or read about it, but has it become real?

Paul Decreasing and Christ Increasing

When it touches us, there is a humbling that goes on within our life. We can see this beautiful example of Christ increasing and Paul decreasing if you look at his life. As you look at Paul's progression and life of the revelation that he had, the more he went on, the more that he saw the fulness of this heavenly vision that he said he was not disobedient to, of what he was caught by. The more he saw of this it was a progressive thing. When he saw on the road to Damascus, that was like an outline. All the parts were not filled in, but as he walked along, as he went through some sufferings, greater revelation came. Generally, most people divide Paul's life into three sections.— his earlier letters, his prison letters, and the latter one right before he was

martyred. In the early letters you have Corinthians, and Paul describes himself there as the least of the apostles, and we are familiar with this progression. We would say, "Okay, that is good. Of all the apostles out there you say that you are the least. You are not greater than Peter, you are not greater than John; you are being very humble.

But then as he goes on, and he sees Christ more and more of His heart and His purpose, as Christ increases Paul decreases, and he says that he is the least of all the saints. Paul was not just making poetic phrases that we could remember, but this was a reality. When he saw the Lord, he saw who the Lord was, it put him in a proper perspective of who he was. He was the very least of all the saints. Now this is where he said, "Oh wretched man that I am!" We will hear about that eventually. As this revelation goes on, and even before his martyrdom, he ends up in Timothy saying that he is the chief of sinners. Paul is not just trying to be humble there; he genuinely sees, and the more he sees of Christ, he sees what a sinner he was. Sometimes we do not know what sinners we were at times because we do not see enough of Christ. The more glory we see of Him, the more we see that we are the chief of sinners, but praise God He died for us. That is not anything to condemn us for, but it is putting things in a proper perspective.

Is God in His Proper Place in Our Heart?

I remember a brother said when he defined worship: "It is God in His proper place and us in our proper place." That was worship. As this vision that was upon God's heart grew, Paul continued to decrease more and more. As you look through the Scriptures, you see ones that really saw the Lord, and this impacted them. As David was getting ready to build the temple, and he saw all the riches that were coming in, what did David say to the Lord? He said, "Who am I?" David was the king. He had won all these victories, but he said, "Who am I?" He had God in His proper place and he was in his proper place.

Solomon said the same thing: "Who am I?" Isaiah saw the Lord when he was a prophet. He had been serving for years, and he saw the Lord. And he said, "I am a man of unclean lips among a people of unclean lips." But God lifted him up. The focus of putting Him in His place and us in our place is a testimony of the grace of God that has been lavished upon us that we who were down here as chief of sinners can serve the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is only Him that qualifies us to enter into the fulness of this. How thankful we are!

That is why as we are going to this conference, and because it is so close it is on my heart and mind. As we go to this family conference and I mentioned the teaching has been shared, why are we going? You know, I have been to a lot of conferences, and we can have a lot of motives. But sometimes you want to go to a conference, and you are just going because you want to be exhilarated. "Wow! I am so happy to be there." That is okay, but it cannot be our main motive. I want to go because I like so and so's teaching. That is good too, but if we really go, do we go with a heart prepared to receive from Him, a heart prepared in one way to be slain in the Spirit, not to be increasing but a heart that would flatten us out, removing the pride in any of our lives, bringing us down that we could be at His feet, and we would see Him. He would be so exalted that we would sit there, "Ah, I am the chief of sinners." That releases the fulness of the power of Christ, the fulness of the power of the Holy Spirit to work among His people.

Caught and Kept by Love

We talk about being caught and kept. That describes a prisoner. Isn't that what Paul said he was? He was a prisoner of Christ.

When you are talking about "caught and kept," I was thinking about something else. What catches you and keeps you? Love has kept me fifty-three years. Praise God! Isn't it love that really captures us as we see what is upon God's heart for that bride—a bride of relationship, a marriage, a bride full of love

In Ephesians agape is used in more than any other letter that Paul writes because it is so intertwined with God's purpose and His heart. And we see how this is the love that captures us, and we cannot let it go.

That is what in the Old Testament there is the term called the bondslaves. What was a bondslave? A bondslave was a loveslave. That gets misused in today's society, and you have to be careful how you say it. The love of the master had caught this one so that when he was set free, he said, "No! I do not want to go. I love my master and his house. I want to stay. I am captured by the love of my master. I want to be kept by him." He submitted himself to that master his whole life, not in a demanding, legalistic way, but out of a heart of love. Are we motivate by that love as we go forth in this day?

We can have many mountain top experiences. I know at times, somebody prayed Wednesday night that as we go to the conference different ones would have a mountain top experience. And that is great, but where does the reality of the mountain top experience get worked out? The reality of the mountain top experience gets worked out in the valleys along those crooked paths getting made straight and the valleys being filled up, and the barriers being overcome. That is what you hear and it starts to become reality. It goes from our mind into our heart, and then we are seeing more of Christ in every situation. Praise God for it!

Fellowship – Sharing of His Life

The living reality of a relationship with Him changes our whole perspective of fellowship. It impacts the choices we make. It impacts our love and our care for one another. Fellowship, as we mentioned earlier, is the sharing of His life. That is what we have. It is a sharing of His life. It is somewhat familiar to Acts 2. We know how in Acts 2 there were thousands who were being saved. They spontaneously came together in fellowship, prayer, breaking of bread, teaching of the apostles, and they were continuing day to day going from house to house, and ones were being added to their midst. As you look at that event in Acts chapter 2, what do you see? What is the thing that pops out to you? What we see in Acts 2 is a life expressed. We see Christ's life expressed in these new believers. They did not have a book of church order. What we saw was fellowship. Fellowship is misunderstood at times or misused, but fellowship is a very active thing. If you look in the Scriptures, there is not a fellowship; it is more of a verb. It gets used as a noun occasionally, but it is predominantly a verb. Even when it is used as a noun, it is a very active thing. I do not know if you have active nouns, but that is the way I like to look at it. We can unconsciously think, "Well, I went to fellowship today." There is a fellowship in New Jersey.

There is this and that. But what is that word that we are using that is so familiar? It is just the sharing of His life. It is a life together.

It is interesting too in looking through Darby, King James, New American Standard, out of respect for everybody, all the different main versions of the better translations, there is one word that I could not find in the New Testament related to the church, and it was the word “meetings.” It is always gathering or assembling together. Don’t anybody take that wrong. I love the meetings; I love to be here, but meeting has a formality to it whereas gathering or assembling together has more of a heart to it. Maybe I am just playing with words to make a point, I don’t know.

In Acts 2, we can see in the Scripture what God is trying to convey to us, that there is far more going on in our lives together than just the meetings. They are very precious, and we should try to be at everyone of them as we can. But there is so much more of Christ to get expressed. To me one of the things I love is the way we kind of operate is the groups, and I love workday. We call them workday, but what is getting worked out? What is getting worked out is our relationship to one another. It is the reality of us being one. All of a sudden there is the reality of us being kind to somebody when something just said something so stupid. Or being forgiving to somebody who did not like anything you said. It is in that interaction with one another and praying for one another is where reality is established. I know some brothers that get together for breakfast. That is precious what goes on during that time. I know they are on the north side, west end. Maybe you guys on the south side could start a breakfast; it is a real blessing. But there is so much more than just the time we have categorized as meetings. But we want to keep pressing on. Any time those two or three can be together in the Lord, what a wonderful time! We just had some folks from Brazil in, and some saints came over, and we had some time together. It was rich fellowship, rich sharing, redeeming the time that we have, making the most of these opportunities.

The Impact of Our Choices

Also, what does it impact? Our perspective of fellowship, yes it impacts that. But it impacts the choices we make. When we see God’s heart, we see the relationship that He wants us to be having in Christ. It starts to impact the choices we make because the choices we make reflect what is important to us. It really does not matter what you talk about, share about, preach about, or whatever. If your life does not reflect it, it is just vanity of vanities. There is a reality that has to be there because the choices we make show what is really important to us and the desires we have.

As we travel at times, we will stay in different homes, and a lot of times we end up staying in the kids’ room. They are probably used to being kicked out of their room when guests come. We are one of those people who kick you out, but you can look in a room, and you know what is important by the things they put on the wall. You can see whether they are Dodger’s or Red Sox’ fans. You can see certain basketball players they like or certain types of music which is the choice they make. You hang around Tim and you know that he likes cars and trains, that is our Tim guy. It is the choice he makes; he loves those things. And the choices we make send a

message, and that is why we need to be aware of the reality of these choices. Are they coming from our hearts and our lives of what God is really after?

There is a quote that one brother gave. I thought it was kind of hard at first, but the more I thought about it, it is the choices and it reflects much in our lives. It says, "To follow all the teaching, methods, etc. about the house of God without His presence is to substitute an empty shell for a living reality." "To follow all the teaching methods etc. about the house of God without His presence is to substitute an empty shell for living reality." Sadly, today throughout much of Christianity there is a lot of empty shells, not only just corporately but individually too. And we need to stand jealous for His presence to be with us because if His presence is not with us, there is no use to go ahead.

Will Our Choices Help or Hinder in Our Life Together

There is a couple of questions related to the choices we make which we need to ask ourselves. Will the choices I make help me or hinder me from excelling still more in our life together? That is His expression of His life on earth. That is what we are talking about, which include the jobs we are looking for. I know there is a young brother here, Vinnie, who is looking for a job, and praise God, he wants to stay here which is one of his priorities. And we have different ones who are captured by the Lord in such a way that even the house they buy, where they live, the big choices they make, you can see there is something about Christ that has captured them so that they can enter into that relationship with brethren and have more and more of that life together. Praise the Lord, they were not thinking about themselves.

How Will the choices I Make Impact Our Beloved Brethren?

Another question that we can ask, and these are not all the questions. How will the choices I make impact or influence my beloved brethren, especially the younger ones?

The choices I make, where I go, what I do, what occupies my life, how are they going to impact my brethren? I choose to do this; I choose to do that. Do we ever stop and think, "If I do that, and I am talking about things we do out in the open, and ones will see and know, how is that going to impact the brothers and sisters, particularly the younger ones?" We influence one another from generation to generation whether we are cognizant of it or not, we send a message with every choice we make. Ah, look at that choice they made; look how important that is. Look at the university they chose to go to because there was an assembly there, and they had a choice between two universities and they knew one of them was a better university than university number two. But they knew there was an assembly in the city where university number two was, and they chose to go there to stay in fellowship. That is a young person with vision making a choice. Do these things enter our mind to consider? Not only with this reality impact our perspective of fellowship, choices we make, but it impacts our love and our care for one another. When we see what we have been brought into, it impacts our care and love for one another in everything, and we see this in some verses in Hebrew.

Stimulate One Another to Love and Good Deeds

Hebrews 10:24: “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,”

How do we stimulate one another, encouraging one another to love and good deeds? “Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

As that day is drawing near, what was happening in Hebrews? They had gone through some suffering, and they had gone through some persecution (Hebrews 10). Some of them were shrinking back into Judaism. Even though they had suffered a lot and had experienced the faithfulness of the Lord, there came a point where they started to shrink back. (I am saying Paul wrote Hebrews) As Paul was encouraging them, he said, “No, wake up, remember what He has done for you.” He says later in this chapter, “the just shall live by faith.” Press on! Don’t bring your sail in, put your sail out, and sail on, and go into the fulness of all He has for you.

Consider How to Stimulate One Another

There are many one anothers that we could look at, but I am going to just look at this one. “Consider how to stimulate one another.” This word “consider” means take careful note, observe fully or discover. Each one of us is so different. Each one of us is very unique. Each one of us is very valuable and very precious. Christ died for each and every one of us, but there is a great diversity within the body of Christ. There is a great unity within the body of Christ, but there is also a great diversity. Sometimes the diversity can cause us trouble. People that are a little more introverted or those people that are extraverted, they are just all in the flesh. People that are extraverted look at the introverts and say, “They are just so mental. They just sit there.” No! We are all fearfully and wonderfully made. I do not want to hurt anybody’s feelings, but in the state we were born in none of us were made perfect. John has a favorite saying of J. Verno McGee’s who said, “Why are you celebrating a new child being born? That is just another sinner coming into the world.” It is true. Praise God, we have another sinner.

But we are all fearfully and wonderfully made, and the Lord has a great plan for each and every one of us if we can see that. That is where this word “consider” has to come in because when you start to consider things, you think about parents. Each child that you have is very unique. I speak like a fool now since I do not have any children, but you have the first child and that goes well. Then you have a second child, and that goes along pretty well, and you begin to think, “We have this down pat.” Then the third one comes along, and it is like a ball out of left field. All of your parenting skills are for naught because they do not work on this one. They are so different, but praise God, even when they look exactly alike, like Joe and Josh, they are totally different. You have to motivate Josh in one way, so you do this. If you want to motivate Joe, you do it in another way. Sally just slaps them both up side their heads. But we see that the parenting skill is really learning how to consider, getting to know and seeing what is it that motivates this child. Because there are some children, if that parent just gives that child the eye. And all parents have this eye, and kids know what *this* eye is. They just have to look a certain way, and some kids will straighten right up: boom that’s it. Others say, “Well, and they keep

going.” You must extend the right hand of fellowship to those at times to straighten them out a little bit.

There are different things that motivate different ones, and it is not only in parenting but also with the best coaches and teachers. Jim cannot use the same teaching technique on every child. There are certain things that motivate ones and certain things that motivate the other. For example, in the news this week, one of the greatest coaches, players, administrators in basketball history passed away, Jerry West. Actually, I remember seeing Jerry West play which will show you how old I am. He played for West Virginia, and they were part of the Southern Conference, and they would play in the arena back in the sixties. If you remember the arena, you are an old Richmonder. He had a great playing career, and he got into coaching. And one of the greatest things he could do was to watch ones play, and he could see that everyone was different. Even though other people could not see what was going on, he saw the potential in ones. One day, he saw this high school kid playing basketball, and he called him in for a try out. He was just a high school kid, and everybody else was laughing at him saying, “Why are you wasting time with this guy?” But he saw something in him, and he was considering this one. As he continued to look into him, he brought him into play with the pros, and he ended up being Coby Bryant, one of the greatest players who ever played. Nobody else paid any attention to Coby Bryant, but Jerry West saw a jewel there.

Stimulate One Another to Love and to Good Deeds

And as we look around at our brothers and sisters, I am not talking about introverted, maybe trying to examine everyone, but would we learn how to stimulate one another. We talk about serving. Okay, everybody serve in the house of God. But what is it that really motivates ones to step forward and be willing to serve within the house of God? And would that we had that insight. This is not just talking about older ones; it is for everyone, the younger ones in here, the ones sitting next to you. What does it take to stimulate them a little more to press on in the Lord, to know the Lord in a greater way?

Issac Watts and His Father

There is one in church history that I like the most, and that is the father of hymnology, Issac Watts. His father was a pastor and he himself had been studying to be a pastor. When he was about the age of eighteen, he moved back home and for a couple of years he lived with his parents and was going to the church there. His father was outside of the Church of England and was getting persecuted at times, but they would sing. They called it the “metrical psalms.” They tried to take all the psalms and put them to music and make them rhyme, and they did a horrible job. It sounded horrible. There are some that sing the Psalms today.

At the age of twenty he talked to his father one afternoon after the Sunday morning service, and he actually used some pretty blunt words. He said, “Those songs are just so ugly and horrible and terrible. You cannot even sing them, it is like garling your mouth, and nobody understands any of them. At first his father got offended because his father was a deacon in the church. And it was like he was taking it personally; “You are attacking my church, what are you doing?” His son shared his heart, and his father said, “Okay, why don’t you see if you can do

better.” So Issac Watts went to his room, and he had already been writing some poems, and he put this hymn together, the very first hymn, and they went to the next service. Some biographies say it was Sunday night; some say it was the next Sunday morning. We will not get into the when, but it was the next meeting. They agreed to sing this hymn of his. Now his first hymn was written at the age of twenty, and it was, “Behold the Glories of the Lamb.” It is not in Christ in Song; it is not in the Chinese hymn book either. But this is a twenty-year old writing this hymn.

“Behold the glories of the Lamb amidst His Father’s throne,
Prepare new honors for His name in songs before unknown.
Eternal Father, who shall look into Thy secret will,
Who but the Son should take that Book and open every seal?”

There is a preciousness there, and everybody loved it so much they said, “Okay, we want you to write one hymn a week that we can sing, and we will learn it. He wrote a new hymn for two hundred and twenty-two straight weeks, a little over four years. We sit here and we have all these Isacc Watts’ hymns in our hymn books, and they are sung everywhere all because his father considered how to stimulate him to love and good deeds. He said there was something within his son that was causing this, the uncomfortableness of having to sing these old psalms. But praise God, he just kept pressing on. That is the call that the Lord has on us if we could really in Christ consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Not just saying, “Okay, you are going to serve here, you are going to serve there.” We go to a lot of conferences, and as we talk to some young people, it is one of the things that bug them the most. I am thankful that it does not go on at CFC so I can say it. But in some conferences it is like you talk to the young people, and they never had a choice of where they were serving. It is like, “Okay, you guys are the baggage crew, you guys are doing this.” “And you guys are doing this.” And it kind of takes the whole heart out of free will serving.

Thank the Lord, we can offer ourselves to Him, and He will put us where He wants us. But we still in all of this we are thankful for the relationships we have, we are thankful for how He is building us together, but we want to excel still more. We want more of Him. We want more of Christ, His life formed in one another that we could really show the love and care and encouragement. There are so many things of the one-anothers. It is good to do a word study on one-another. You will find that it even tells Christians to be kind to one another which is so apropos really. But it sounds so strange. Why are you having to tell Christians to love one another? Why do you tell Christians to be kind to one another? Because the Lord knows us, and He knows our inner being. That is where we see how He can really work within us. As I start to close I did want to say that this was not just a message of Paul’s to excel still more or to press on. In Peter’s Epistle he addresses this also. I am going to just touch on it briefly.

Fervently Love One Another from the Heart

I Peter 1:22 he says, “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,”

The word “Fervently” there is a straining, a stretching, it is continuing with intensity. It is to keep going on. Thank the Lord, you are showing a sincere love for the brethren, but fervently continue on. I love in the original language it talks about how it is a strain, and it actually stretches you. And I think we know what that means because to love some people it does stretch us. It really stretches us beyond ourselves, that it is only by the grace of God and Christ in us to love the unlovely. I am thankful there is no unlovelies in here, but we can see how this is the same message that John writes about loving one another, continually being faithful all the way to the end. Let that love continue.

As I was looking at this verse in I Peter, one of the translations I like to look at when I am studying is the Wuest Translation, and I looked at verse 22. If you have a Wuest Bible look at I Peter 1:22, and he takes this little verse and he expands it very much. I was not going to copy the whole verse down, but I wanted to come to the part about fervently loving one another. This one line, “fervently loving one another” Wuest puts in five lines. But look at the power of the insight of what he has. It is long but I thought it was worth to share it because I appreciate it. It says, “from the heart love each other with an intense reciprocal love that springs from your hearts because of your estimation of the preciousness of the brethren, and which is divinely self-sacrificial in its essence,” Wow! What a beautiful picture. What a beautiful description of loving one another, getting to the heart of it here, like excelling still more. Would we come into that!

Conclusion

As we excel still more, as we mentioned we have been considering it in our personal relationships and our relationships with one another. And may we become more aware of the vital necessity of our relationship with Him in these days and more aware of being in the body of Christ, the impact, the responsibility we have to one another within the body of Christ. And would we become more aware of seeing of what we are to be. We are to be a joint of supply according to the proper working of each individual part which causes the growth of the body, for the building up of itself again in love. This is the call that He has upon us, and may we yield to Him, allowing Him to prepare us to be that testimony He has called us to be. He is returning soon. While we have today, and praise God, it is still called today, let’s redeem the time. And let’s really allow Him to have greater control of our lives, allowing Him to increase within us, with Christ excelling within us in such a way that we would be decreasing and really allowing and waiting for that wonderful testimony: “The bride has made herself ready.” May we excel still more and more and press on to the fulness that He has for us.

Let’s pray:

Lord, we do thank You for Your mercies, Your goodness to us, and Lord, as we have touched this matter of excelling still more, we feel we have only touched the surface because there is so much more of Christ that You want us to see and to behold. And Lord, we offer ourselves to You as a living sacrifice that we would not be content in this life, but You would create within us as You have lavished us with Your grace, there would be that desire within our hearts for You to increase and us to decrease. In the why of that is that You would receive all the glory and honor, and that that bride would be made ready and the Father’s heart and purpose would be coming

about to fulfillment in these days ahead. We do pray, "Come Lord Jesus." We know it is on Your heart to come, but Lord, we want to be those who are cooperating with You that we could be hastening Your return as Your life is working in us. In Thy name we pray. Amen.