

A series of synopsis  
sermons on  
"Baptism"

by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.

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# The Meaning of Baptism

*1st in a series of synopsis sermons on "Baptism" by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.*

In this message we will consider some aspects of the meaning of baptism. The reason for this is that there are some people, who are contemplating baptism and they need to understand clearly what it means. There are also many Christians who have been baptized and yet they do not seem at all to understand what baptism means. And there are also some non-Christians who wonder what this matter of baptism is all about.

Those who have already gone through baptism can consider again what exactly you did in relation to the Lord. What happened to you on the day you were baptized? What does it mean for you today? Is it something in the past or does it still have meaning for you now? There is also the question: If you are not baptized are you really a Christian or not?

In speaking on baptism, I want to avoid any difficult or technical terms. I want to discuss it very simply in a way that everyone can easily understand. There have been people who have tried to read books on baptism and they found it difficult to understand that they gave up. I remember when I was in Bible college a fellow student asked me: "What the meaning of baptism? I've never been baptized but what does it mean? Why should I be baptized?" So here was somebody who had already committed himself to God's work and he still didn't know the significance of baptism so he had never been baptized. But after our discussion together he did go and get baptized although he'd been a Christian for many years.

I will give you the definition of baptism in one sentence, which I'll then have to elaborate. Baptism is the sacrament of union. You say to yourself, "Well, that definition doesn't seem to help me very much." But I just want you to bear in mind the word union. A sacrament is simply the outward expression of something that has already taken place inside you. In the Church we have two sacraments. We have the sacrament of union and the sacrament of communion. To put it in another way we can say that baptism is the covenant of union. But union with whom? It is union with Christ.

What is the best way to try and understand this? I would like to use the example of a wedding because a wedding is also a covenant of union. When two people get married they enter into a covenant of union with one another. When you enter into baptism you enter into a covenant of union with Christ.

What is the Biblical foundation for the comparison of baptism to a wedding? Well, there is much Scriptural evidence but I will limit it to one or two points. In 1Cor. 6:17 we read: "He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him". Think carefully on these words: He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. When were you joined to the Lord, if you have ever been joined to the Lord? You were joined to the Lord in baptism. The word "joined" is the same word that is used in Matthew 19:5. There you read about the husband and wife being joined together in marriage. That same word is used here in 1 Corinthians 6 to speak of the union of the disciple, of the Christian, with Christ.

We can go on to many such passages, for example Ephesians 5 where there is a whole section on marriage (vv. 22-33) which is often read at weddings. But interestingly, in the middle of this passage about marriage we suddenly find in v.26 a reference to baptism, where it says that, "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (vv. 25b, -26). And in verse 31 we have exactly the same verse as in Mt. 19:5: "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one."

Also the Bible often speaks about the Lord Jesus as the Bridegroom of the Church. In 2 Cor 11:2, Paul, speaking to the Corinthians says: "I betrothed you to Christ to present you as a pure bride to her one husband." And so we can see that this picture of the wedding, of the Christian being united with Christ, is used again and again. In Romans 6:3-5 we are said to be united with Christ in His death, and "in newness of life", through baptism.

But what then is the meaning of a wedding? Is such a ceremony really important? Can't two people become husband and wife without going through a marriage? The universal answer to this question is no. You cannot become husband and wife without marriage. Whether in the most primitive societies or the most advanced countries, it is always the same. Nowhere in the world will any two people be regarded as husband and wife who have not gone through a marriage. But why not? Why can't one just dispense with a marriage? The reason is that the marriage or wedding is not just a ceremony. It is a covenant. A covenant you might say is a contract with one another, a committal or commitment to one another. So where there is no such covenant or contract between two people, then their love has not become concrete, it has not materialized in a distinct transaction between them. So no matter how much they love one another they are not husband and wife.

When we speak of a covenant or contract we do not necessarily mean that the two people have to go to a church. For even the unbeliever knows that unless he has a covenant or contract together with his wife, they are not really and legally husband and wife. And even if they don't go to a church they still must go to the Registry Office to sign in a book that "this day we have become husband and wife". At the Registry Office they are required to have two or three witnesses present who also sign the marriage certificate. But why the witnesses? Because the witnesses are there to testify that this contract has been established in front of them.

So we can see that in personal relations, these relations do not become concrete, they have not been definitely established, until there is a covenant. Similarly you can have a person who says he believes in Christ, who says he loves the Lord Jesus and wants to follow Him, but so long as he has not entered into a covenant with Christ he is no Christian. Because in a covenant you commit yourselves to one another. Up to that point there was no clear committal, or there was a committal in the heart but it was not established in front of witnesses so as to make it concrete and real.

So we can see that baptism is not just any kind of ceremony but that it is a covenant. The word "covenant" is used again and again in the Bible. That's why you have the Old Covenant or the Old Testament. "Testament" was used to

translate the Greek word for covenant. You also have the New Testament or the New Covenant. I repeat once more so that no one is uncertain about it: What do we do in baptism? We enter into a union with Christ. But this union is not just a feeling, it is a definite commitment, a covenant with Christ. Now let's look a little more deeply into this and compare the union in a wedding with the union with Christ in baptism.

Firstly, just as in a wedding the two people commit themselves to one another because of their mutual love, so also in baptism we commit ourselves to Christ and we want to express our love to Him. You would not go and marry somebody you just happen to like. Such a wedding would be very unfortunate. No, you must really love the person to the extent that you are prepared to share your life with that person. So also for the Christian. We do not just commit ourselves to Jesus because we happen to like Him, but because we want to commit ourselves totally and unconditionally to Him. We want to share our life with Him.

Secondly, like the wedding, baptism is a proclamation, a declaration. That is to say, I show everybody by this action that I love this person. Therefore in baptism I am declaring before all these people, before all the spiritual powers in heaven and on earth, I am declaring before all these witnesses that I love the Lord Jesus and have committed myself to Him.

But thirdly, it also means that because I have declared my commitment to Him, I am also prepared to break all the ties of my old way of life. That is true even of a marriage. When you get married your life is, no longer the same as it used to be. You enter into a new kind of life, a life of partnership with someone else. It is not a self-centered life in which I am free to do as I please. No, now I have another person whom I am concerned about. My life is now completely changed because of this. And so, when I am baptized I have broken off completely from the way of life of sin and I enter into a life of union and communion with Christ.

Fourthly, when there is a true love between the two people, they will each put the interests of the other person ahead of their own interests. They think about the other person, not about themselves. There are devoted ones who have given their own professional training, their own interests, to go where their husband wants to go, to be where he is going to be. And so also, we as Christians say in baptism, "From now on His interests, the interests of the Lord Jesus, are in front of my interests. His interests are in front of my professional desires, in front of my social desires. He is the One whose interests are central to my heart." I hope that as I say this those who are Christians will be searching their hearts and asking: "Have I been true to my baptismal commitment?"

Fifthly, when two people have wedded they have become united. One of them doesn't just go off here, the other off there. Where one is the other will be. They will go together and share their interest together. What kind of a marriage would it be if one person were to live here, the other person there? No, you want to be together, to have fellowship with one another. And so it is for the Christian, that he is all the time with the Lord Jesus. The true Christian is one who is all the time in fellowship with the Lord Jesus. The Christian who does not pray, who does not delight to commune with Lord Jesus doesn't yet know what it means to be a Christian.

Sixthly, at the wedding, the devoted wife says to the husband, "I would like you to be the head of this household". In every administration there must be a head, and the family is a social unit and administration, and somebody has to run the family. Somebody has to take the responsibility to sign statements and documents, and so forth. "This does not mean there is any inequality between husband and wife, but in their love for one another they respect each other, and "want to give place of honour to each other. And so also, when we receive baptism, in our hearts we say, "the Lord Jesus is Lord of my life." The Christian wants to give the Lord Jesus the honour in his life. He wants to glorify Jesus. He is pleased to say: "Yes, Jesus is Lord of my life, and what a joy it is."

A seventh point of comparison is that at the wedding the husband and wife exchange a wedding gift, usually a ring, with one another. What does the ring signify? It is a pledge. And so also, when we are baptized, the Lord Jesus gives to us a present. He gives to us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's pledge to us (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1: 4), a kind of promise. And when the Lord Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit His pledge or promise to us is: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And so the symbol of the wedding ring is the same thing. It is a pledge, "I will never leave you nor forsake you. You can show me this ring as evidence of this pledge." The second thing the ring means is that what I have promised towards you, I will fulfil. And the Lord Jesus also promises us that He will fulfil all that He has granted to us: He's going to look after us; He's going to protect us; He's going to lead us. And this is what a wife expects from her husband, that he will protect her in times of danger, that he will provide for her needs, that he will instruct her or give her counsel when that is necessary. All of this the Lord Jesus also promises to fulfil towards us, but of course He goes far beyond that. He gives to us eternal life.

Now I have used these comparisons and made them very short because of the lack of time. We have compared baptism to a wedding, but we are not saying that baptism is a wedding. The parallel lies in this: both are covenants of union. But I have to mention briefly one or two points of difference.

You will notice when you go to a baptism that the actual sign is different from that of a wedding. What you see is a person being immersed in the water and then being lifted up out of the water again. And so you wonder to yourself, "What's going on here? What does all this mean?" You see, both a wedding and a baptism are sacraments of union, but one point of difference is this: our union with Christ is far more complicated than the union between two people. That is to say, it is more difficult because of the existence of sin. Sin is that which stands between God and us and makes this union and this communion so difficult. Not only difficult but impossible. Such a difficulty doesn't usually exist between two people. If you love one another you get married and that settles the matter. But this difficulty can be understood more clearly if it is compared to the situation of two people who marry one another but who actually come from families that are enemies of each other. You can see the great problem of such a union. And so too, sin is the obstacle which blocks our being united with the Lord and this obstruction must first be removed. And this is what the Lord Jesus had to do on the cross. Because He loves us He wants to join us to Himself. But in order to achieve this He first had to remove the barrier of sin, and that barrier He had to remove by His death. In baptism, when you are being immersed into the water,

you express the fact that you on your part are prepared to die to sin, that is, to turn your back on sin so that your whole old way of life is now over. And when you rise up from the water it is a symbol that you are being raised up to a new life of righteousness given to us in Christ.

And so baptism is not to be understood in the sense that we have now joined a religion. No, we are not interested in religion. It is important that we understand that in baptism we have turned away from sin to righteousness, from darkness to light.

We have gone through the meaning of baptism very simply and I hope clearly enough for everyone now to understand what it means. And for those who are soon to take the step of baptism, think over carefully what it means. It is a big step just as the union at a wedding is also a big step. And for those of us who already belong to Christ, who have been united with Him, let us always remember what this means. Let us always remember what our privileges and responsibilities are. When you are in difficulties and in problems, always remember this, that Jesus loves you and you have been united to Him. He is going to care for you. Trust Him. Never be doubtful of His care. He sees your tears, He knows your sorrows, and He cares for you in every detail. So bring your cares to Him. You will find out just how much He loves you. And also learn to live to glorify Him so that He will truly have joy in us and we in Him.

# The Gift of the Holy Spirit

*2nd in a series of synopsis sermons on "Baptism" by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.*

What connection is there between the gift of the Holy Spirit and baptism? The other day a brother asked me the question: When do we receive the Holy Spirit? Is it **before** baptism? Is it **after** baptism? Or is it **at** baptism? I am grateful to him for raising this question and although I answered him briefly at the time, later when I pondered the matter I thought that that is a very important question to which every one should know the answer. Therefore I would like to expound it more fully to you.

## **What Makes You A True Christian?**

Why is this question so important? The reason is that it hinges on another question: What is a Christian? Is a Christian someone who simply believes all the doctrines of the Church? Because you genuinely believe these doctrines does that make you a Christian? Or is it going to church every Sunday that makes you a Christian? Just what is Christian? A Christian is a nice person who believes in smiling with a Colgate or Pepsodent smile, and he smiles most of the time. Is that what makes a Christian? Or is it a combination of all of these things?

What is it that makes you a Christian? Paul's answer is this: Having the Holy Spirit is what makes you a Christian. That is why Paul says in Rom. 8:9, "He that does not have the Spirit of Christ is none of His." If you have not got the Spirit of Christ you are not a Christian. That is Paul's answer. You may believe all the creed says. You may accept the Bible as the Word of God. You may go to church very regularly. You may even be very active in church. But that doesn't make you a Christian. None of these things, as such, make you a Christian. The Scriptural answer is this: You are a Christian when, and only when, you have the Holy Spirit of God in you. If you don't have the Holy Spirit, though you may have all of those other things, you do not belong to Christ, you are none of His. So that shows you that we are dealing with an exceedingly important matter. Since whether or not you have received the promise of the Spirit determines whether or not you are a Christian in the Biblical sense of the word, then it becomes a crucial question to know when you do receive the Holy Spirit. Everything depends on this.

## **Are You Living Supernaturally?**

But first we must ask why is it so important to receive the Holy Spirit? Well, any one who has even a passing acquaintance with the Bible would understand that you only have life when you have the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life. You only have spiritual power, the power to live the Christian life, when you have the Holy Spirit. And if you are failing to live the Christian life then it is precisely because you do not have the power of the Spirit.

We have never been called upon to live the Christian life, to live the high spiritual ideals of the Sermon on the Mount, in our own strength. Little wonder that every scholar writing on the Sermon on the Mount says it is impossible! "We can't do this. We can't live this Christian life." Of course you can't. Who ever suggested you



could? That is why God gave us the Holy Spirit, to enable us to live according to that high calling. He never suggested that we could pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and make ourselves the kind of Christian that the Lord Jesus is speaking about.

A Christian is a supernatural person. Remarkably, Paul says to the Corinthians, "Because you behave in this way (having jealousy and strife) are you not natural men?" (cf. 1 Cor. 3:3). Well, you say, which of us is not natural? We are not natural; we are supernatural, *if* we are Christians in the Biblical sense of the word. That is why Paul rebukes the Corinthians by saying, "Are you not merely men? Are you not just natural?" Well, you wonder, where is the rebuke in that? The rebuke is that you are still not living as Christians should live, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

That is why the Corinthian letters are all concerned with the Holy Spirit. The first letter of the Corinthians is especially dealing with this. The Corinthians did have a concern about the Spirit, but they were concerned about the *gifts* of the Spirit rather than the *indwelling power* of the Spirit. They were interested in the external manifestations of the Spirit rather than the inner power of the Holy Spirit. That's another mistake that so many Christians make. They go for the external things. That is the mark of the natural man.

The spiritual man is not interested in the purely external behaviour, the external performances. Whether or not you speak in tongues is a matter that is external. But whether or not you have the fruit of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit in you, *that* is internal, that is what matters.

So then, we are dealing with an important question: Do you have the Holy Spirit or not? One could have asked the question: Are you a Christian or not? But that is a very vague question, because you might not know what I mean. You might say, "By asking me whether I am a Christian, do you mean, do I go to church? Do I accept the creed of the Church? Do I behave in a certain way that might be regarded as religious? What are you asking me?"

I am asking you, to rephrase the question, "Do you have the Holy Spirit?" Do you know the answer to this? Because if you are not certain on that question then of course you are not certain whether or not you are a Christian in the Biblical sense of the word "Christian"; you are not certain whether or not you are a disciple of Christ.

### **How And When Do You Receive The Holy Spirit?**

In order to answer this we have to know *how* we receive the Holy Spirit, and *when* we receive the Holy Spirit? Clearly these are two related questions. You may tell me that you have been a Christian for 10 years, 15 years, but that doesn't interest me, because 10 years, 15 years from what point? Is it from the point when you knelt down and received Jesus as your Saviour as it is often said? Or is it from the point when you were baptized? From what point do you measure this? Many people are baptized years after they made some sort of profession and they would usually like to count from the point when they made their profession. When do you start counting that you are a Christian?

The Biblical response to this question would be: "When did you receive the Holy Spirit?" That is the only question that needs answering. I am not concerned whether you raised your hand at some meeting. You might have done this and done it in all sincerity. Does it automatically mean that you have the Holy Spirit? Is that the Biblical teaching? Presumably that's what you think happened to you, and that is why you count your conversion from the day you raised your hand. But that is precisely the question that we need to investigate, not to know what is my answer, but to know what the Scripture says. My answer doesn't count for anything. The Scriptural answer is what matters.

How and when do we receive the Holy Spirit? What is the Biblical reply? Let me point you first to Acts 2:38 and I shall use this verse as the basis for our study in the Word of God.

You remember that this is after the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, and as a result large crowds had gathered and there was a great stir. The apostle Peter was addressing these crowds and what does he say to them? His concluding words are in verse 34:

"For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Thy enemies a footstool for Thy feet.'" Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

Peter had no cheap Gospel to preach. Notice that Peter's preaching immediately spoke about the Lordship of Christ. "Christ" is the word for the anointed, the promised King of Israel. "God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Interesting. He speaks about Jesus as Lord. It is this preaching of Jesus as Lord that cuts the hearers to their hearts. They say, "What shall we do?" (v.37)

And what is Peter's reply?

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to Him.'" (vv.38,39)

The promise is God's promise. What is the promise? All God's promises are wrapped up in the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you don't have the Holy Spirit you've got not one of the promises. The promises come to us through faith. The gift of the Spirit is given to us through faith. That is to say, when you have faith God gives you the Spirit, and all His promises are there. There are no promises outside the Spirit of God. God doesn't promise us anything that you can have without having the Holy Spirit.

### **What Must I Do To Be Saved?**

Note carefully what the apostle Peter says here. What must we do? The answer is very plain. **Repent!** Repentance means a **complete** change in the direction of your life. It is a complete change of mind as I have expounded before. The Greek word

"metanoia" means a complete change of mind, a complete change of attitude, a complete change in the direction of your life. Repentance is not just saying, "Okay, I'm sorry for my sins, I'm sorry." **Sorry is not good enough.**

Repentance means I am finished with sin. I'm not just sorry but I'm through with it. I am through with my old life. I am sorry enough to break with it completely. I am so sorry that I am going to do something about it: I am going to change the entire direction of my life. That is repentance.

But now that you repent, what happens? "Repent and be baptized." He didn't say repentance is enough. He said, "Repent **and** be baptized." The Church today has done whatever it likes with baptism. It does whatever it pleases. It treats baptism in much the same way as it treats everything that comes from God, and in much the same way John the Baptist was treated in his day. As the Lord Jesus says, "John the Baptist came and you did with him whatever you pleased" (cf. Mt. 17:12,13). Today we do with God's Word, we do with baptism, we do with anything, whatever we please. We say, "Oh. Baptism is not very important; it's just external. Whether you're baptized or not really doesn't matter." Who says it doesn't matter? "Repent and be baptized." That is God's Word, not mine. If God's Word says it doesn't matter whether you be baptized I would tell you it doesn't matter, but God's word doesn't say that.

To be baptized alone is not enough. To repent alone is not enough. Doesn't it say that here? You need to repent **and** be baptized. You need the internal repentance and the external confession of that repentance before all men at baptism. **You need to have what is within, and you must express or confess what is within.** That is why the Lord Jesus says, "If any man confesses Me before men, I will confess him before My Father." (Mt. 10:32). He didn't just say it's enough to believe in Me. He says, "Believe in Me and confess Me before men. If you confess Me before men, I will confess you before My Father." But the Church tells us that as long as you believe it is enough. If you don't confess it doesn't matter. You can be some sort of a secret disciple, whatever that is. Oh no! It is most important that you confess Him. You must confess Him if you want to be confessed before the Father.

But why is it so important to be baptized? Why is it so important to repent and be baptized? Is it because this is a Church ceremony? Is it because this is something every religious person ought to do? Not at all! Read on what it says. "And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." That is the whole point. How do I receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Well, here you've got the answer. The Bible doesn't leave us with vague statements that we can't figure out. It is plain. It is clear. Repent. Be baptized, that is, confess your repentance. And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Repent - let your direction of life be completely changed. Then, wash away your sins in baptism. You say, "Wow, that sounds almost like a Catholic statement." Oh, yes, a very Scriptural statement as I shall show you in a moment. Then, when you have done this you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### **So, When Do You Receive The Holy Spirit?**

Let us now come back to our original question. When do you receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? Does the Church tell you it is when you raise your hand at a

meeting? Does the Bible tell you that? When do you receive the Holy Spirit? Is it when you believe in Him or when you kneel down and make a confession? Or is it when you repent that you receive the Holy Spirit? Is that what it says here? You certainly need to repent. But is not the Scripture very plain? "Repent **and** be baptized **and** you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." So when is it?

Does it mean then that we receive the Holy Spirit after baptism? If so, how long after baptism? Is it three days after baptism? Is it five days, a week? No. It is **at** baptism that you receive the Holy Spirit. That is a remarkable thing. That is what the Word of God says. That is why baptism was so important in the Early Church. But what have we done today? We have decided that we know the Bible better, or that we can do what we please with the Bible. It doesn't matter whether you are baptized or not. I must say the daring of some churches never ceases to surprise me. The daring of certain pastors and preachers sometimes also never ceases to amaze me. How dare we speak in this fashion when the Word of God tells us differently?

### **The Holy Spirit - A Seal, An Anointing And A Pledge**

But that is not all the evidence, of course. We need to look much further than that. Let us consider then that the Holy Spirit is spoken of as three things. He is referred to particularly in three ways.

He is given to us first as a **seal**, the seal of the Holy Spirit. When do we receive the seal of the Holy Spirit? **Have you been sealed with the Spirit of God?** Today there is utter vagueness on the teaching concerning these questions and because of this most Christians don't know whether or not they are sealed by the Spirit of God, or when they were sealed. When were you sealed, if you were sealed with the Spirit? Not only do we want to know when we are sealed by the Spirit, we also want to look at what does it mean to be sealed with the Spirit.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit is referred to as an **anointing**, that we are anointed with the Holy Spirit. The question is, when were you anointed with the Spirit? That's very important for you to know because if you don't know you can't even be sure whether you've been anointed or not.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit is spoken of as an earnest, as a **pledge**, as a down payment, and on this point I have spoken before so I will not expound it again here. It is sufficient to ask the question, when did you receive the pledge of the Holy Spirit? When was He given to you as an earnest, as a first down payment?

Let us look at 2 Cor. 1:21,22 because in this passage the words "**anointed**", "**seal**", and "**guarantee**" (or "pledge", "down payment", "earnest") all occur, although the RSV translation has replaced the word "anointed" with another word so that you wouldn't even know that it was there in the original Greek. 2 Cor. 1:21,22 reads like this:

"But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has commissioned (**anointed** in Greek) us; He has put His **seal** upon us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a **guarantee**."

So God has anointed us and put His seal upon us and this seal is the Holy Spirit whom He has given to us as a guarantee, a down payment. So we have all three words put together in these two verses. God has done three things to us when He gave us the Holy Spirit. He sealed us. He anointed us, and He gave us what is translated as a guarantee, or much better, a down payment, a first instalment. For example, when you buy a house you don't pay the entire sum at once, you put down a down payment. That is the Greek word here. The down payment is a guarantee that you will pay all the rest of the money that has yet to be paid. So the first instalment is in some sense a guarantee, it is a pledge that you will pay up the rest. Now that is the: whole point.

The Holy Spirit is given to us as a gift of life, as a pledge that God will give to us the fullness of eternal life on that day when we see Him face to face. We don't have the fullness of eternal life yet. But we have the pledge, we have life now, the gift of life which is in itself a pledge of that fullness yet to come. If you are given seed, that seed is a pledge, that when it is nourished and when it grows you will have the full plant.

### **The Seal - Belonging To God**

We are sealed with the Holy Spirit who is given to us as a down payment and this sealing of the Holy Spirit is also mentioned in Eph. 1:13, 4:30 and in Rev. 7:3. In the latter verse we read that the servants of God, or more correctly, the slaves of God (the word "servant" is in fact the Greek word for "slave"), are sealed by God.

What is a slave? A slave is somebody who is bought with a price. How do you get a slave? In those days you would go to the market and seeing a slave you would buy that person. That person becomes your property, your slave. He belongs to you. And when you buy that person what do you do? Well, in those days you could put a seal on the slave. You could seal the slave rather in the way that today you might seal oxen or cows. You know that the farmers in Alberta and elsewhere put their stamp on their cows. The farmer burns in his brand on the cow, and that is his seal that says, "This cow, or steer, belongs to me. Here is my seal upon it." That's the way we understand the seal. ***The seal means that you belong to God.*** You were bought with a price. You belong to Him. You are identified as His possession. As Paul says to the Corinthians, "You were bought with a price; you are not your own." (1 Cor. 6:19,20) What happens therefore when you receive the Holy Spirit? What does it mean? It means that you belong to God, you bear His seal upon you. You are His possession.

Furthermore, what is the point of putting that seal on a slave? It not only marks him as the owner's property but it also means that anything you do against that slave you will do against his master. In other words, if you hurt that slave you will be in trouble, not with the slave, but with the master. ***The seal in fact becomes a protection.*** And in the Bible this is the point in Rev. 7:3 that the servants, the slaves of God are sealed to be protected from the power of the Evil One and from the judgments of God. We read this further on in Revelation 9:4 where the judgments of God do not affect those who are sealed. Those who carry God's seal upon them will not be touched by the judgments of God. This is important to notice.

In summary on this point, the seal means simply this: it is **God's protective mark for those who belong to Him**. It is protective. If you don't have the seal you don't belong to Him and therefore if you come under God's judgment, or if you come under; the power of the Enemy, it has nothing to do with God, you don't belong to Him. If Satan wants to possess you or he wants to knock you down, you are a free person, which means that Satan can do with you whatever he pleases because you are not under God's protection, since you don't belong to Him.

### **When Are You Sealed?**

Now, once we understand the meaning and significance of this seal it is important that we know whether or not we have been sealed. Are you sealed or not? When were you sealed? In this connection it is very important to notice that the Lord Jesus Himself is also sealed by God. Isn't that remarkable? The Son of God came into this world not to be a son. He came to be a slave. That's the whole point of Philippians 2. He humbled Himself and became a slave, and in John 6:27 the Lord Jesus tells us that He Himself is sealed by God.

To answer then the question, "When were you sealed?" we can ask the question, "When was the Lord Jesus sealed?" At what point was He sealed? Was the Lord Jesus sealed at His birth? Was He sealed in some way at the beginning of His ministry? When was He sealed?

### **When Was The Lord Jesus Sealed?**

We can answer this in a number of ways. First of all we see that the word "sealed" is tied up with the word "anointed", and it is tied up with the word "guarantee". Therefore we can also ask the question, "When was Jesus anointed?" To that we shall come in a moment. But it is clear that the seal is connected with the Holy Spirit. When did the Lord Jesus receive the Holy Spirit? Think back to His baptism. What happened at His baptism? The Holy Spirit descended upon the Lord Jesus bodily as a dove (Lk. 3:21,22). And then we notice in the next chapter that it says, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan..." (Lk. 4:1).

### **Jesus Came To Us As Man, Not As God**

Do not be confused by this matter. Perhaps you are saying to yourself, "But Jesus is God." Yes, but **He didn't come as God**. Always remember this. **He came as man to be our Saviour**. And therefore He Himself became the pioneer, the author of faith, as well as the completer of faith. **As God, of course, He doesn't need to receive the Holy Spirit**. But He didn't come as God. As God He wouldn't be starving in the wilderness when He was tempted by Satan. No, it is as man that He is hungry, not as God. It is as man that He came into the world to redeem men. That is the whole point of Hebrews 2. And therefore He came as man to learn the things which as God He need not learn. Hebrews 5:8 says, "Therefore He learned obedience through the things that He suffered." Does God have to learn anything? No, but Jesus didn't come as God; He came as man. Therefore He learned obedience through the things that He suffered.

### **The Seal Of Circumcision**

Let us look at another way of expounding this matter concerning when we receive the seal of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 4:11, we see that the word "seal" is applied to circumcision. In what way was Abraham sealed? He received a different kind of seal. He received the seal of circumcision as we read in Romans 4:11.

"He received circumcision as a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."

So circumcision is a seal. This is very interesting because we also are circumcised. We also have this seal. But we were not circumcised in the flesh. 'We were **circumcised in heart** and this we read in Colossians 2:11:

"In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by the putting off of the body of flesh in the **circumcision of Christ**."

But you ask, "What is the circumcision of Christ?" The answer is in v.12.

"And you were buried with Him in **baptism**, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Christ from the dead."

### **When Are We Circumcised?**

Notice that the apostle Paul passes from circumcision to baptism. We didn't receive any physical circumcision as Abraham did, but we were circumcised in heart. And what is the sign of this circumcision of heart? It is baptism. That is the connection between verses 11 and 12, is it not? Therefore when did we receive the seal of this inner circumcision of heart? Paul tells us in v.12 that it is in baptism, through baptism. And what is this circumcision of heart? How does it come to us? We saw earlier that the seal is the Holy Spirit. So then we have a kind of equation. The Spirit is the seal, is the circumcision of heart, is baptism.

What are we saying? Are we saying then that we are somehow saved by baptism? Oh, not at all! We saw that there must be repentance **and** baptism. It is not baptism that saves, but what baptism expresses, the circumcision of your heart that saves. That's very important. Just to be dipped in water doesn't save anybody. It is the transformation which baptism expresses that matters. It must be present. That is why every one of those who is to be baptized is carefully questioned as to their total commitment to Christ, their repentance, their complete and total change. Repentance does not mean just being a little bit sorry, but a complete change, a total turning away from the old life, the putting off of the body of flesh, as Paul puts it in this passage, in order that they may put on Christ.

### **The Link Between Baptism And The Spirit**

Let us now see a further connection of baptism with the Spirit. In 1 Cor. 6:11 we read:

"And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

And in Titus 3:5 we read this:

"God saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit."

God saved us in His mercy, not because of our efforts by any means. How then did He save us? By the washing of regeneration and renewal from the Holy Spirit. Once more you find this connection of the washing and the regeneration, the washing and the Holy Spirit. Baptism and the Spirit are constantly linked. This washing is not just any kind of washing; it is the baptism which, as we have seen, has to do with the circumcision of heart. ***Anyone who is not transformed in heart, who has not utterly repented, should not be baptized.*** But he who has truly turned away totally from his old life and is baptized, he receives circumcision of heart. He has the washing of regeneration. It is a *descriptive genitive* in Greek which means it describes *the kind* of washing; it is a washing that has to do with regeneration. It is a washing that has to do with the new life. But how do you get the new life? It has to come from the Holy Spirit - the renewal in the Holy Spirit.

### **Noah And The Ark: A Picture Of Baptism**

This is why we read in 1 Pet. 3:20,21, these words:

"...who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. <sup>21</sup>Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

(I am giving you all these references even if it is sometimes a little tedious for you to have to look through them all so that you know that I'm not telling you what I think. It is important that you know what the Bible says. What I say doesn't matter).

Look at what it says in this passage, "Baptism, which corresponds to this (that is, to the going into the ark in the days of Noah), now saves you." What saves you? Baptism saves you. "Wow!", you say, "that is an amazing statement!" Baptism saves? Yes. Not as a removal of dirt from the body. Not because by going into the water you wash off some of the dust from yourself, but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience. How do you appeal to God for a clear conscience? Through repentance, of course. Through a deep repentance of heart through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In this passage you know that Peter is speaking about Noah and the ark as a picture. How were the people saved? It rained for forty days and forty nights and the waters also arose from below as "the fountains of the great deep burst forth." (Gen. 7:11,12). So you see here is the picture of baptism. Do you see the beauty of it? You have the water coming from underneath and the water pouring down from above and he says there you have a picture of baptism. How were Noah and all eight people in the ark saved? They were saved in the ark through this baptism that came from above and below. And he says, today we are also saved through baptism but not because we get our body washed.



Noah was saved. When he was in this ark, he was baptized. Why? Because unlike the other people, he repented of his sins. He turned away from the sinful life. Notice these words, "Noah obeyed God." (cf. Gen. 6:22). That's very important. He obeyed God. When God said, "Noah, make an ark", he made an ark. When God said to Noah, "Go into the ark", he went into the ark. He **expressed his repentance through obedience** and that is how he entered into this baptism in the ark. He was baptized; the waters poured down. All eight of them were saved through the floodwaters.

And Peter is saying here in verse 21, that in the same way you are saved. How? Through that repentance that is finished with the life of sin; that is, Noah was finished with that world of sin. He repented of sin; he turned his back completely upon it and he obeyed God. He went into the ark. In the same way, baptism saves. That is very important to understand.

### **The Holy Spirit - The Outpouring Cleanses Our Hearts**

So then, baptism and the Holy Spirit are constantly linked together because the Holy Spirit is often spoken of as an **outpouring**, as showers of blessing, the water being poured out upon us. Very interesting! Joel chapter 2 is in fact the passage that is quoted in Acts 2, when Peter was explaining to the crowd about what had happened to them.

He said, "What you see is precisely the fulfillment of Joel. The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us." The baptism of the Holy Spirit, that is what happened. Baptism and the Spirit are always linked together in the Bible, whether at Jesus' baptism when the Spirit appears, or whether it is even in a general statement such as 1 Cor. 12:13 where Paul says, "You were baptized by one Spirit into the body of Christ."

Consider also John the Baptist's own words. "I baptize you with water; He baptizes you with the Spirit." (Mt. 3:11). Very interesting! Again this link between baptism and the Spirit which is so characteristic in the New Testament. What is John the Baptist saying? John the Baptist is contrasting his own baptism with the baptism that the Lord Jesus would minister. He says, "My baptism is a baptism of repentance - a baptism with water for repentance." That is to say, when you repent you express your repentance publicly in baptism. But when He comes, when Jesus comes, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

Now that doesn't mean that water baptism doesn't matter anymore. Oh no! On the contrary, in John 4:1,2 for example, we read that the Lord Jesus, or rather His disciples, baptized many more people than John the Baptist did. They carried out water baptism. What John the Baptist is saying is this: "I give you only water which is external. I cannot give you new life. Only He can give you new life. I can give you the external ceremony of cleansing when you repent. But when Jesus comes, He can give you what corresponds to that external act, that is, the internal cleansing. I give you external cleansing; He will give you internal cleansing - the washing of regeneration." That is so important to notice.

### **When Are You Anointed With The Holy Spirit?**

Let us come quickly to this word "**anoint**". Many of you would know that the word "Christ" means "The Anointed". "Christ" is the Greek form of the Hebrew

word "Messiah" which simply means "The Anointed". So Christ is the Anointed One and many times in the New Testament He is spoken of as such. For example, in Acts 10:38 we read that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power." He was also sealed by God as we saw in John 6:27. It is important to notice that we too have been anointed with the Holy Spirit. I have already mentioned 2 Cor. 1:21, but we have also 1 John 2:20 where the apostle says to the Christians, "But you have been anointed by the Holy One." He repeats that in 1 John. 2:27. We discover that this anointing that the Christian receives is the Holy Spirit. And that Holy Spirit of God is the One who teaches us and who leads us into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13).

But again comes the very important question: when do you receive that anointing? Were you anointed with the Holy Spirit before baptism? Or was it some unspecified time after baptism? In which case of course you don't know when you were anointed. Or were you anointed at baptism? Again the baptism of the Lord Jesus answers the question for us. When did the Holy Spirit come upon the Lord Jesus? We see it there at His baptism where the Holy Spirit was visibly seen to descend upon Him in the form of a dove. Does that mean that the Lord Jesus did not have the Holy Spirit before baptism? Of course, it doesn't mean that. The Lord Jesus certainly had the Holy Spirit before baptism. Does it mean that you did not have the Holy Spirit in any sense before baptism? Of course, not. Because if you did not have the Holy Spirit in any sense before baptism, how could you repent at all? It is the Holy Spirit working in your heart and life leading you to repentance.

#### **The Anointing Vs. The Working Of The Spirit**

But, you say, if that is the case, that we already had the Holy Spirit before baptism, then what are we talking about? We are talking about the **anointing**. We are not talking about having the Holy Spirit, in any general sense, but in its specific sense. We must keep our thinking very clear here. Unless the Holy Spirit was **working** in your life before you became a Christian, how would you ever have become a Christian? Indeed, the Holy Spirit, has been working in your life, perhaps, even in your childhood, maybe even since the day you were born. The Holy Spirit has been constantly working in our lives from when we were non-Christians, when we were enemies of God.

Looking back I can see that God was working in my life long before I believed in Him. In fact, if God didn't work in our lives, we would never have believed in Him. But we are not talking about whether or not the Holy Spirit was present in each one of our lives in some way or other. We are talking specifically about whether you received the Holy Spirit as a gift, as a possession, as a mark, as a seal.

We are not talking here in any general sense. In the general sense, you can safely say that the Holy Spirit is working even in the lives of the non-Christians. If your father or mother is not a Christian today, when you pray, what are you asking for? You are praying that God, by His Holy Spirit, will work in their lives. Is that not what you pray for? That means you confidently believe that the Holy Spirit will be present to work in their lives even as non-Christians. It is obvious then that when you confess Christ, it is because the Holy Spirit has been working in your life. Certainly! Without Him, none of us would come to Christ at all.

But right now, we are not talking about that. We are talking about the seal. We are not asking when was the Holy Spirit drawing you or when was the Holy Spirit convicting you of sin. We are not talking about the working of the Holy Spirit in this wide sense of the word "work", but we are asking: When did you receive the Holy Spirit as a possession, as a gift of God? When were you sealed with the Holy Spirit?

### **Whom Does God Anoint With His Spirit?**

Consider, for example. Acts 5:32. What is the *condition* for us to receive the Holy Spirit? To whom does God give the Holy Spirit? There we read ***that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him.*** That is the principle stated. The Holy Spirit is given only to those people who obey Him. But you might ask, If He is given only to those who obey Him, how then could anybody become a Christian since those who don't obey Him don't have the Holy Spirit? They could never be changed unless they could save themselves without the power of the Holy Spirit. You see, that is to confuse your own thinking. We have already said that the Holy Spirit works in the lives of all kinds of people, including the non-Christian, but He is not given to them.

But to those who heed His voice and obey Him, the Holy Spirit is given in these very special ways - as a gift, as a down payment, as a seal, as an anointing.

### **The Holy Spirit Is Constantly At Work**

None of those here who are going to be baptized today would be here unless the Holy Spirit of God was working in their lives. Is it not so? Unless we want to teach a doctrine of salvation by works, in which they work their way to this position and so now they are going to save themselves. And upon being baptized, they receive the Holy Spirit and have Him from now on. But before that it was all up to them. Is that right? Of course, not. Right up to this moment the Holy Spirit has been working in their lives. You ask, "So they have had the Holy Spirit working in their lives?" Yes. "Then what's the point of saying that God gives the Holy Spirit only to those who obey Him because they had the Holy Spirit before they obeyed Him?" The point is that He now gives the Spirit as a gift - the fulfillment of that promise. You don't receive the promise of God until you have obeyed Him. It is very important to grasp this point.

### **The Anointing - The Granting Of Authority**

We have seen what the seal means. The seal means that you become God's property and that happens only when you repent and are baptized and you receive the Holy Spirit. What about the anointing? What does it mean that you have been anointed? Well, it means this: In Israel, the kings and priests and prophets were anointed. Why? Was it just some kind of religious ceremony? Not at all. ***The anointing always represented the giving of spiritual authority by God.*** A king has no authority unless it is given to him by God. And that's what the Lord Jesus said to Pilate, remember? "You would have no authority over Me unless it had been given you from above." (Jn. 19:11)

The kings of Israel were unlike the kings in the world; they were God's representatives in Israel. That is why they had to be anointed by God; that is, they had to be given that authority. They didn't anoint themselves; the anointing showed that this authority was conferred upon them by God. The same for the

priests, especially the high priest. He was chosen by God and anointed to show that he was a high priest, not because he was someone wonderful, not because he won the votes of the majority. Just because everybody were to vote for him wouldn't matter. He is the high priest only because God has appointed him. And the anointing means that he has received this calling and this authority from God. Remember that calling also is mentioned in Acts 2:38,39.

The prophets also received the Holy Spirit. Why? Because unless you have the Holy Spirit, you have no authority to prophesy. You cannot prophesy without the Spirit of God. We read in the Bible that the Spirit of God is the One who enables the prophet to prophesy: to declare the Word of God, or to foretell future things if God so grants him to speak. And that is why in Isa. 61:1,2 the prophet says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor". What is the anointing? The Holy Spirit is his anointing, which enables him to preach the Gospel. In Lk. 4:18, the Lord Jesus quotes Isa. 61:1 where the words are, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor."

Now when did the Lord Jesus quote Isa. 61:1? Was it when He was in the temple at the age of 12? No. It was immediately after His baptism. Did you notice that? When was the Lord Jesus anointed? At His baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. And that is why immediately after His baptism, and upon returning from the temptation, we find the Lord Jesus saying these words, "I have been anointed to preach the Gospel." He has now begun His preaching because He has been anointed.

And so we find that the whole picture becomes clear to us. When then do we receive the anointing of the Spirit? At baptism, just as the Lord Jesus did. The Lord Jesus, of course, had the Holy Spirit before baptism. But now He was anointed to preach the Gospel. That is why He began His ministry; He didn't preach the Gospel before the anointing. He didn't preach the Gospel before the baptism. But now after the baptism, He begins to preach the Gospel. He received the anointing, the task to preach from that point on. Now these things are truly wonderful and I could go on to expound a lot more in Scriptural teaching.

But now we begin to realize this one thing. I hope you can see from the Scripture. the constant connection between the word "baptism" and the word "Spirit". Because of this connection of baptism to the Spirit, we see also the connection of (i) the sealing and the Spirit in baptism, (ii) the anointing and the Spirit in baptism, and (iii) the earnest, or the guarantee and the Spirit in baptism.

I hope now you can see the importance of baptism. Not, as the apostle Peter says, as a washing of the flesh but as an expression of the inner repentance for a clear conscience before God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 3:21). This is what makes repentance meaningful. If Jesus never rose from the dead, there would be nothing left of repentance. You can repent, but where is the forgiveness of sins? Where will be the power to live the new life? But through His resurrection, you have His power to live in newness of life.

### **Two Exceptions That Prove The Rule**

And now I would also like to point out to you as a matter of the focus in

understanding Scripture, that Acts 2:38, the text we read right at the beginning, is the general principle. I ask you to bear in mind that it is the general principle. God can give the Holy Spirit before baptism if He wishes to. And He can give the Holy Spirit after baptism if He chooses to. But as a general rule, He gives the Holy Spirit at baptism.

I want to mention this last point because it is important. God is absolutely sovereign and free. He can give the Holy Spirit whenever He chooses. But as a general rule, He gives the Holy Spirit at baptism. For example, there is one instance in the Bible with a very special circumstance where He gave the Holy Spirit *before* baptism (Acts 10:44-48). And there is one instance in which He gave the Holy Spirit *after* baptism (Acts 8:12-17).

For the sake of completeness of exposition I mention also these two passages. These two instances in Acts are of course special circumstances in the history of the Church and I am well aware of them. But never quote these two exceptions so as to conclude that the rule doesn't exist, because the exception in fact proves the rule.

In the first of these two instances, Acts 10:44-48, the Holy Spirit is given before baptism. Why? Because Cornelius was a Gentile and the Jews were very reluctant to accept the Gentiles into the Church. So reluctant in fact that Peter had to make a long explanation to the Jerusalem Church as to why he had baptized those people. And he said, "You see, while I was still preaching to them, God poured the Holy Spirit upon them; therefore I had no choice but to baptize them." (See Acts 10:44-48; 11:15-18; 15:6-9). It is as though he is trying to say, "I wouldn't have baptized them but I really didn't have a choice." This was the situation in the Early Church where there was resistance to admitting Gentiles into the Church.

In another case, Acts 8:12-17, it was the other way around. In the case of the Samaritan Christians, they were baptized first. But they didn't receive the Holy Spirit. Why? Again it has to do with the situation in which a bad relationship existed between the Samaritans and the Jews. God compelled the leaders of the Jerusalem Church to personally go and receive the Samaritans into fellowship whom they hated so much, as you know. Therefore, though they did repent and were baptized, the church leaders at Jerusalem were commanded to go there and see that they receive the Samaritans personally into fellowship through the laying on of hands for the gift of the Spirit.

### **Go And Make Disciples Of All Nations**

So these two exceptions to the rule indicate, firstly, *the freedom of God* to give the Spirit before or after baptism, whenever He chooses. But secondly, these exceptions also indicate that as a rule, *the Spirit is given at baptism* as we see from all those other texts. And I repeat again, not because the water at the baptism itself is efficacious, but because of the obedience that baptism expresses, both the internal repentance and the external obedience to the command of Jesus. He commands us to be baptized and to baptize, "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Mt. 28:19) Jesus commanded baptism and when you do it, you have obeyed Him.

## **Temptation after Baptism I**

*3rd in a series of synopsis sermons on "Baptism" by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.*

In our last message, we were speaking about the Spirit and Baptism. It is appropriate after baptism to speak about temptation. Why? Well, what happened after the Lord Jesus was baptized? He was tempted. Therefore I would like to expound to you Luke 4:1-4, especially for those of you who have just been baptized. So let us read this passage: -

"And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan (the river where Jesus was baptized) and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. He ate nothing in those days; and when they were ended He was hungry. The devil said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.' And Jesus answered him, 'It is written, man shall not live by bread alone.'"

I would like to say right away that I am not going to expound the Temptation to you christologically, that is, in the sense in which we learn something about the constitution of the person of Christ as to His manhood and His godhead. Rather, I am going to study this passage from the point of view in which Jesus Himself suffered, in the words of 1 Pet 2:21, He suffered to leave us an example that we should follow in His steps. That is, we want to ask: What spiritual lessons can we learn for us to apply to our daily life? There are some very important lessons we can learn here.

### **To Be A Christian Is To Have The Holy Spirit**

Let us take up from where we left off in our last message: The Holy Spirit and baptism. What did we speak about? We asked the question: When does a person become a Christian? And from Rom 8:9 we saw the answer. You become a Christian when you receive the Holy Spirit of God. There Paul says that if the Spirit of Christ is not in you, then you don't belong to Jesus. So we saw that it is not religion as such that makes you a Christian; it is not going to church, or being active in the college Christian Fellowship, or doing things that Christians do, that make you a Christian. It is not even believing all the right doctrines. Although all these things are good and desirable, none of them make you a Christian! It is only having the Holy Spirit in you that makes you a Christian.

### **When Do We Receive The Holy Spirit?**

Therefore we immediately proceeded to ask the question: When do we receive the Holy Spirit? We don't want to know what other people say, we want to know what the Bible says. We saw in our last message that what we mean here is receiving the Holy Spirit in a particular way.

We observed that the Holy Spirit works in everyone's heart, even in the non-Christian's heart. In that sense, the Holy Spirit is present in every person, even the non-Christian, because if the Holy Spirit didn't work in the non-Christian, how would he ever become a Christian? How would he ever come to be saved? Unless

he is going to save himself, and then finally when he has saved himself, then he receives the Holy Spirit. But that, of course, would certainly not be the Scriptural teaching. So the important question we were asking is not when was the Holy Spirit working in your heart and life, because the answer to that would be right from the time you were born. Rather, when did you receive the Holy Spirit specifically as a *pledge*, as a *seal*, and as an *anointing*?

We also saw that the Lord Jesus certainly had the Holy Spirit before He was baptized, but it was at His baptism that the Holy Spirit came down upon Him bodily as a dove, signifying His anointing and His sealing with the Spirit. Until this time He had lived at home, working as a carpenter and functioning in a private life. But after He was baptized and had received His anointing, He said (quoting Isa 61:1-2), "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor." (Luk 4:18) He had now been *anointed* for the specific task to which He had been called - to be the Messenger of the Good News and to be the Saviour of the world.

### **The Vital Importance Of Baptism**

As we studied the Scriptural answer to the question, When does a person receive the Holy Spirit as an anointing, as a seal, as a pledge?, we saw what may have surprised us that the Scriptural answer is this: We receive the Holy Spirit at baptism when that baptism is accompanied by *faith*. Of course there is nothing that has any value without faith. Baptism taken simply as a ceremony is no better than having a bath. It is faith that makes the difference. ***It is when faith is present that the baptism becomes meaningful, and not only meaningful but vital.***

I should point out to you that in the last message we did not by any means use all the New Testament material available. There is some more evidence linking baptism and the Spirit which we need to look at briefly before we go on to speak about temptation. Let us look for example at the well-known passage in Jn 3:5. What does the Lord Jesus say to Nicodemus here?

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

Notice what it says here, "born of water and the Spirit." I'm particularly stressing this point because the Church has downplayed baptism almost to the point of making it insignificant. I knew a person at the Bible Institute in Scotland who had given up a very good career in banking to serve the Lord. He had been a Christian for many years and yet he had never been baptized. One day this dear brother came to me and said, "You know, Eric, I am now preparing to serve the Lord full-time and I am not even baptized!"

"Why not?" I asked.

He said, "Because I don't know the meaning and the significance of baptism. I thought that baptism doesn't really matter."

You see, this is the state of affairs in the Church today. Here is a person who is preparing to serve the Lord and hasn't been baptized, which means, in Scriptural

terms, that he hasn't been anointed to preach the Gospel; he hasn't been sealed by the Spirit of God, and he has not received the pledge of the Spirit.

Now here was a very fine person, a brother who was so devoted to the Lord, so loving, so gracious, but up till that point he had still not been baptized. I had noticed a significant lack of power in his life and in his preaching. Why? I realized why when he said he had never been baptized. At the time I myself was rather ignorant about Scriptural teaching and I said to him, "I really don't know how to expound this thing to you, but I know only one thing: the Lord Jesus commanded it and that is good enough for me. If He said so, I'll do it even if I don't understand it fully." So he thought about it and he said, "Oh yeah, that's a good enough reason for me too." So he got baptized.

### **You Must Be Born Of Water And The Spirit**

Since then, as I have studied the Word of God more and more, I have come to realize the importance of baptism. "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he shall not enter the Kingdom of God." Water alone, that is, baptism alone, is not enough, but water **and** the Spirit. Those are Jesus' words and not mine.

You may try and explain away the word "water" and there are many ingenious ways of doing this. For instance, water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. If you'd like to argue in this way, then you are born of the Holy Spirit twice, i.e., you are regenerated twice! Well, what else does water represent? You can continue your ingenuity and find some way around the word "water". Why bother with this kind of ingenuity? The answer is exceedingly simple and it can be seen right from the beginning of the Gospel. We saw what John the Baptist taught, "I baptize you with water,... He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit..." (Lk 3:16).

And this is what the Lord Jesus is saying. You need both. You need to be baptized with water and you need to be baptized with the Spirit. One doesn't have to get that complicated to understand the Word of God. In fact, the Lord Jesus Himself said that very thing. "John baptized with water but you are going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 1:5). You need both baptisms and except you are baptized with both, you cannot enter the Kingdom of God. This is a point we see very clearly in the Word of God.

I need also to mention to you that there is nothing original in all I have spoken about baptism and the Holy Spirit. New Testament scholarship is well aware of this important connection between baptism and the Holy Spirit. Some years ago, Professor Lampe of Cambridge wrote a book entitled, ***The Seal of the Spirit*** in which he emphasized this point. If you look in the Dictionary of New Testament Theology (Colin Brown), under the word "seal" or "anointing" you will also see it all there. [See also James Dunn's ***Baptism in the Holy Spirit***.] I don't claim to be original nor do I wish to be original. I just want to explain to you what the Word of God is saying. Today, not too many church leaders are aware of the advances being made by the New Testament scholars in the understanding of Scriptural teaching so they think I am saying something unusual. There is nothing unusual or original about it at all.



It is vitally important to know that **unless** you are born of **water** and **also of the Spirit** you will **not** enter the Kingdom of God. Therefore let us continue by looking at this in another example from Eph 5:25-26:-

"Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself up for her." (v.25)

Why did Jesus give Himself up for the Church?

"That He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word." (v.26)

You see this word "water" again, the "washing of water with the word." As I stressed to you, it is not the water alone that matters, but it is the water **with** the Word of God, which means **faith in that Word of God**. Paul understood this, and explained it perfectly clearly. Jesus died that He might cleanse us and make us holy. How should we be cleansed? **We are to be cleansed with the water of repentance with the Word of God**. That is so plain and clear to understand.

### **The Example Of Paul**

How then does Jesus cleanse us with the water? How does the water cleanse us with the Word? The answer is in baptism. The Apostle Paul explains this very point because this is what he himself was taught at the time he came to Jesus. What was he told? Paul gives his own testimony three times in Acts, and in the account in Acts 22 he tells us what Ananias instructed him to do when he first came to the Lord. This is what Ananias said to him (v.16):-

"And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name."

How do you wash away your sins? By being baptized and calling on the name of Jesus. Remember Eph 5:26 which we just read. Jesus died that He might cleanse us with water. Be cleansed by water with the Word. What water? From what we read, how are we cleansed? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. That is where **faith** comes in. That is the way we are cleansed. We are washed from our sins **as we call upon the name of the Lord**, and that is when we receive the Holy Spirit as we saw from Acts 2:38 in the previous message.

Paul himself experienced this very thing when he was baptized (Acts 9:17-18):-

"So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul [in those days Paul was still called Saul], the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, **and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**'"

Why did the Lord Jesus send Ananias? Two things: (i) that Paul might regain his sight, because he had been blinded when the Lord Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road, and (ii) that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit. **How** was Ananias going to help Paul be filled with the Holy Spirit? We can see the answer in the next verse (v.18):-

"And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized."

That's how he was to be filled with the Spirit. Ananias laid hands upon him and he was baptized. That was how it was done. So now all this becomes clear as we study the Scripture about the connection and the importance of baptism and the Holy Spirit. Let us move on to see what is the next point that we can learn from Luke 4.

### **Temptation After Baptism**

Now that you have been baptized and you have had your sins washed away and, as Paul says in Acts 22, you have called upon the name of the Lord committing yourself totally to Him as Lord and Master of your life, what happens next?

Well, after baptism comes the temptation. Notice that very carefully. The temptation did not come before the baptism, did it? No, it came **after** the baptism. And I would not be fair to you if I didn't warn you of the problems that arise with baptism. Those of you with whom I have spoken and prayed before your baptism are well aware that being a Christian is no easy thing. And you will find (and I must remind you of this again) that very soon after your baptism, the Enemy is going to start putting his pressure on you. This is the reason why many Christians who have been baptized and have not been well taught, often fall away within a very short time of their baptism. That is one thing that so worries me. It also worries many pastors and maybe that is one reason they want to play down the importance of baptism, but you cannot play around with God's Word like this.

### **Why Does God Allow Temptation?**

What happened after the baptism is that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. So you can see that after baptism the Lord does not protect you, in the sense of not exposing you to problems.

Why does God allow this to happen? Why does God allow you to be tempted after baptism? There are many reasons, but above all it is that you may be strengthened and that you may learn obedience through suffering. You have got to learn this. What happens now is your profession of commitment is going to be tested. As I have told you even before baptism, if you don't wish to be totally committed, if you don't wish to join in the spiritual warfare, if you don't have the courage of faith, then don't get baptized because baptism is not for cowards.

But now you are baptized and now you are in the spiritual warfare. This is not a place for cowards, nor is there any need for you to become afraid. And I am not telling you this in order that you should be afraid but because the time has come to face up to the spiritual realities - the realities of spiritual conflict. How are you going to grow spiritually? Through spiritual conflict. The Lord doesn't want to have a church full of babies, spiritual babies. ***It is through winning spiritual battles that you grow spiritually.***

It is only in battle that you will know how strong you are in Christ. It is only when your strength is put to the test that you realize what strength you really have. So don't be afraid and don't tremble because you're going to discover that the

armies fighting on your side are much greater than those of the Enemy. This is the joy of knowing the Lord.

I always like to remind those in training about the Old Testament account of Elisha, when he was surrounded by the Syrian armies (2 Kin 6:8ff). You might remember that his disciple (often spoken of as his servant because that is what a disciple was - an apprentice and servant to his master) was looking at the Syrian armies and all their flags surrounding the village, and he said, "Master, we are finished! The Syrians have got us!" He couldn't understand why Elisha looked so calm, so peaceful, as though nothing had ever happened, while he himself was in a cold sweat thinking, "Well, I'd better kneel down and say my last prayer now because the Syrians are everywhere." And finally Elisha said, "Lord, open his eyes that he might see that those who are with us are more than those who are against us!" (vv.16,17) Poor man. He doesn't see a single soldier standing up. If there were three or four he might still have some comfort, but there is not even one, never mind "more". And the Lord opened this man's eyes. What did he see? Wow! He saw the spiritual armies all around, far, far greater than those of the enemy!

How did Elisha know these things? Was it that he had read the Bible longer than his disciple? Or did he happen to have special spectacles that he could put on that enabled him to see spiritual things? Oh, no. Elisha was a man of God! He had been through a lot of spiritual warfare. He had been through temptations, he had been through the wilderness. He knew from spiritual experience that God never let down His own. You depend on Him and you win every battle. That doesn't mean, of course, that you'll never get a scratch, but you'll win all the same.

#### **After Every Spiritual Blessing Comes Attack**

So, this is the second point that I'd like you to bear in your mind: that after baptism comes the temptation. Be spiritually and mentally ready for it when it comes. After every time of spiritual blessing, there will be an attack of the Enemy. Anyone who has been in spiritual warfare knows that. To me it is second nature. Every time a blessing comes, I say, "Keep alert! Soon the attack will come. Let's be ready for it."

In the 1960s in England, at a little place called Chislehurst, in Kent, we had an Easter conference. There were fifty of us gathered there and on the last day of that conference, the Spirit of God came down upon us with such power that changed all our lives and there was no person in that room who was not seized by the Spirit of God and filled with the Spirit. We experienced Pentecost. Immediately the church broke out in a revival and within a few weeks the place was packed right out to the door. Everybody heard that something had happened to that church. The Spirit of God had come. I said immediately to those brothers and sisters in the church, "We have been granted a signal blessing and now Satan is going to attack and he is going to attack presently - watch for it!" We didn't have to wait long. Within two weeks the attack was on. Oh yes, all those who serve the Lord, such as Elisha did, will understand spiritual warfare very well.

#### **Resist The Devil And He Will Flee**

I remember in the Bible Institute every term we had a day set aside only for prayer. And it was remarkable that on the day of prayer, the presence of the

Enemy was so thick in the building that you felt you were being suffocated physically. It's an incredible experience. I have experienced the power and outpouring of the Spirit and I have also experienced the power and the presence of the Enemy which is quite capable of oppressing you physically. I also know people that have been attacked physically by the Evil One. Remember this, for James said, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (Jam 4:7). Don't give him one millimeter of ground. You are a child of God and if you stand firm, there is absolutely nothing he can do to knock you out. He might sometimes succeed in knocking you down but never in knocking you out. He hasn't got the power to do it because God will not allow him to.

As Paul said in 1 Cor 10:13, "God will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able to bear." He cares for you. He's going to let you get your arms exercised and even your neck twisted a bit because that is the way to learn spiritual warfare, **but** He is not going to let you get destroyed. Oh, no! He didn't lay down His life in order to allow you to be destroyed. He is going to watch over you as a shepherd watches over his sheep.

### **The Nature Of Satan's Attack**

We can speak about temptation but still not know what temptation is. We can speak about Satan attacking us, but how does he do it? Let us now consider the nature of Satan's attack. This is very important to understand because if we know how he attacks us we will know how to wear out his attack. Let's take an example. Why do you need to learn boxing? What difference does it make whether you learn boxing or not? Surely you know how to curl up your fist and if somebody punches you, you know how to hit back. You don't have to be on a boxing team to know that. What do you learn on a boxing team? What do you learn in karate or judo? Surely you know how to grab another person - you don't have to have a judo lesson to learn that. So what is such training for? It is so that you learn how to **anticipate** what the other person is going to do - that is the whole point of it. It is the training of anticipation. So when your opponent puts himself in a certain position then you know it's going to be this or that move and you are ready for it. However, if you are not trained, you won't know what's going to be the next move and that is how he gets you.

So it is important to know not just that you are going to be tempted, but **how** you are going to be tempted. It is just like saying you know you are going to be hit but what good is that unless you know where your opponent will strike, and how to defend yourself. If I know how Satan is going to strike, then I can know how to wear him out.

What is Satan's tactic? What principle does he use? Let us look at it. What is the first thing Satan says in Luke 4? He says this, "If You are God's Son....". Now we must not understand this in any way to mean that Satan is doubting that Jesus is God's Son. Satan is not that foolish, he knows that Jesus is God's Son. Satan's words can be better translated as "**Since** You are God's Son...", because what he is trying to do is to draw a conclusion from this fact. If it were not certain whether or not Jesus is God's Son, then there is no more conclusion to be drawn and he can just put a question mark and conclude the matter there. No, what Satan is saying is, "Since You are God's Son then You have the right and the power to do certain things."

It is precisely because Jesus is God's Son that Satan uses this tactic, and it is precisely because we are God's children that Satan uses this same tactic on us. How do we reply to this?

### **With Anointing Comes Authority**

We have to understand that Jesus wasn't tempted because He particularly needed the temptation for His own sake. No, He did all these things in order to give us an example that we may follow in His steps (1 Pet 2:21). The example applies to us because we are also God's children. You will remember that in the last message we said that the anointing means that God gives you a certain authority. Jesus was **anointed** and given **authority** to preach. A priest is anointed and thereby receives authority to live at the temple and to minister at the altar. When a prophet is anointed, he thereby receives the authority and utterance in order to preach God's word with the power that comes from God. When you are anointed, what authority are you given? Among other things, you have the right or the authority to become a child of God. That is what John says in John 1:12:-

"But to all who received Him, who believed in His name, He gave the authority (or 'the right'; in the Greek the word in fact is 'authority') to become children of God."

We have the authority, we are given the right to become children of God. You may exercise that right, and that is exactly what Satan wants you to do - but **he wants you to exercise it in the wrong way**. Now there is a right way to exercise your anointing and there is a wrong way to do it. The whole point of Satan's temptation is to get you to do it in the wrong way. Understand this very well.

### **Satan's Tactic - Use Authority To Your Own Advantage**

What then is the wrong way? Well, he goes on to say to the Lord Jesus, "Command this stone ...." Notice the way he does this. You can almost picture Satan pointing to a stone and saying, "Command this stone to become bread." He appeals to the eyes. There is a stone and you are hungry, so command this stone. Satan is very specific. If he were vague, it would be difficult to tempt you but he knows exactly which way to approach you. He appeals to your eyes, he appeals to your stomach. Now that is the whole point of temptation. **What is the temptation? The temptation is that you should use your new spiritual status to your material or physical advantage; to use your new spiritual power of anointing to benefit yourself materially.** That is a very serious temptation. **It is to make the flesh dominate over the spirit and to allow the flesh to be in the decision-making position for whatever you do.** If you fall for the temptation, you are back where you first began - you are back in the world, you are back into sin again, and you are back under the control of the flesh. **That is the subtle temptation of Satan - to let the flesh determine your action.**

### **Your Needs May Indeed Be Legitimate**

But it is not only this, because the subtlety goes further: It is the temptation to make use of a **legitimate** physical need. Notice there is nothing sinful about being hungry, and if you are hungry there is nothing sinful about meeting the need of your hunger. Therefore the temptation to eat is not a sin. The logic goes further like this, "Well, you are in the wilderness now and you don't expect to find a bread shop around the corner, do you? Since you are hungry and since there is a legitimate need to meet that hunger then why not? You're hungering for a little

bread? Remember, you are the Son of God, so why not just turn this stone into bread?" Notice he is working on very legitimate grounds - the temptation to sin is not obvious at all. ***You are going to find that this is the most dangerous temptation precisely because it is not at all obvious that what you are doing is evil.*** The temptation makes use of what is not bad in and of itself. So if there is evidence that your spiritual life is under the control of your physical desires and needs then I warn you to take heed.

### **What About Your Career?**

Take for example the twentieth century life that you are living: "Why not put your career before serving God? After all, everyone needs a career and we all have to earn a living. So let your career be first. Let the consideration of your material well-being decide your spiritual direction." I don't know how many Christians have gone down on that one! They have become enslaved to the flesh and so fallen under the temptation. I can say to you very honestly that I have many times been tempted along this line. I have said to myself just as you have said to yourself, "Look, I can get a good job **and** serve God too." What is the difference between you and me, that I should be the one to stand here to preach the Gospel and am not allowed to do anything else? What prevents me from taking another job? If you can do it, why can't I? I look at my friends and this one is getting two times my salary and another fellow gets three times my salary and I say, "What am I doing here?. I must be the only crazy person around here." You say, "You are dedicated, you see," and I say, "Why can't **you** be dedicated, why is it that **I** am dedicated? Is it written in the Bible that Eric Chang is allowed only to preach the Gospel? Do I see this somewhere here? I don't see it here. I too was trained in other things."

### **The Subtlety Of Satan's Temptation: An Example**

This is precisely where Satan begins to get at you. I remember when I was in England, I experienced this very temptation. A university teaching job came up, exactly along the line in which I had been trained. I thought, "Well, why not be a university lecturer and then I can also serve the Lord. Why not?" Indeed, is there a human objection? Of course not, that is the most sensible thing to do. The preacher is a burden to the church, and I don't want to be a burden to the church. "So in fact you are even better than I in the last count and so why shouldn't I go and get a job too? I can still come to church and preach sometimes." I can remember looking at that advertisement in that journal and discussing it with Helen, my wife. I said, "What about me taking this job in Edinburgh? They are opening a new department there and in England there won't be too many people in this particular line so my chances of getting the job are quite good." So I thought I would write to the University of Edinburgh and apply for this job.

You know what? Before I could even take hold of my pen, the convicting of the Holy Spirit said, "Eric, what are you doing?"

I said, "Well, it's like this...".

"Like what?"

"Well...like errr....well, I guess it's like the flesh dominating the spirit."

I could never fill out the form.

A kind and well meaning friend wrote and said, "There is a job for you in Hong Kong," and he sent along a whole pile of application forms from Hong Kong University. And you know what I had to do? Drop the whole pile of forms into the garbage can. I couldn't go through with it because I knew Satan was tempting me again to put my legitimate (remember: *legitimate*) needs above the ministry of God. ***I would commit no sin in the sense of meeting my physical or material needs but I would commit sin by putting them above the ministry of God.***

### **Temptation: To Choose The Flesh Over The Spirit**

I hope you will not misunderstand what I am saying. I am not suggesting that anyone who is not preaching the Gospel is materialistic. That is not the point. I have already said elsewhere that serving the Lord is a matter of a gift. You may very much want to serve the Lord but it may not be your gift. Or, it may not be your time. For me, my gift and my time had come so there was no way to get out of this without sinning - that is, by letting the flesh dominate the spirit. Your time and your gift may not have come yet. Maybe not yet, but one of these days your time may come, or, it may never be. It may be that you are meant to stay where you are even though you say to the Lord, "Lord, I am willing any time to follow You." The Lord may say, "Alright, I know you are willing to follow Me, but you stay just where you are right now."

What I am saying is in no way meant to be a criticism of any person. I am not here to judge any man. My task is to expound a principle - a principle of temptation.

You see, what I am saying is this: In our life, *we must not allow our physical and material desires to control our spiritual life. We must not even use our spiritual standing to gain material benefit.* We all have the potential to do that. That is temptation. For example, if I preach the Gospel in order to make a good living for myself then this also is sin.

I receive all kinds of Christian magazines and journals and just lately I received one which says, "Pastor required." I looked at it and when I saw the salary being offered I thought, "Wow, I can do with that...after all, I will still be serving the Lord. What am I doing in Montreal when this other church needs a pastor and is going to pay me more than double of what I'm getting now?"

Well, what is your objection that I apply for this pastorate? Would I be doing something sinful? After all, they want such and such experience and I qualify on experience and on most of the terms, so I should stand a very good chance of going there. But I didn't apply. Why not? Because I know God's task for me is right here at the moment. Not because I know it is wrong for me to get double the salary or to go to a better climate. You know how long the winters are in Montreal. Surely those of you who are going back to Hong Kong are more fortunate. Here you have to face the next winter which might mean five months of snow. Why not go down to Florida, or at least to Hong Kong?

### **How To Deal With Satan's Temptation**

#### **1) Only Through Total Commitment**

I hope you grasp this principle because Satan is going to tempt you along these lines all the time, and it will continue to be a struggle until you come to the point

when you can honestly say, "Lord, I will do whatever You want me to do." Take for example, the fact that you are going to graduate this year. Should you now do a Master's or a Ph.D.? Is there something wrong or sinful with doing that? Of course not. So I'll do a Ph.D., right? Whether the answer is yes or no depends upon how you live in relation to the Lord.

I ask you, those of you who are baptised, remember your pledge to the Lord: Totally committed. What does that mean? That means you honestly say to the Lord, "Lord, I will do whatever You want me to do. If You want me to do a Master's or a Ph.D. then I will do it. If You don't want me to, then Lord grant that my material, personal, and worldly ambitions will never be allowed to dominate my spiritual life. All my decisions will come from You, Lord, and not because my physical, material and worldly ambitions have control."

Do you see what I mean? The Lord may lead you to do a Master's or a Ph.D. Never think that because the Ph.D. is less spiritual than preaching the Gospel that the Lord may never lead you to do a Ph.D.! It may not be your time to preach the Gospel and so the Lord leads you out to do a Ph.D. God may have His own reason why He wants you to have this particular qualification. With some of us, the reverse is true. You see, I was always willing to let the Lord do whatever He wanted. I was willing to have a degree or no degree. It didn't matter to me in the slightest which way it was.

Is a degree worldly or not worldly? It could be worldly or it could be not worldly. It all depends on what God wills. As it so happens it was God's will to send me to university although I did not pursue it and God is my witness that I did not pursue it for one moment. I said, "Lord, if You don't want me to do that, I am very happy to stay out of it," but the Lord said, "Go!" and so I went. When I was in university, I was quite happy never to graduate with a degree. It meant nothing to me. Two months before I was due to graduate, I was preaching the Gospel at a conference when I should have been studying to get my first class honours which my professor very much expected me to get. What was I doing? I was preaching the Gospel because I had been invited to preach. I had to make this choice: Shall I preach the Gospel or shall I study for my exam and get my first class honours?

If I had let my personal choice or any worldly consideration dominate, of course I would go for first class honours and say, "Next year I will preach at your conference, not this year. I have finals coming up." But I was caught between the two: The spiritual needs of the people or my own personal academic success. Which shall I choose? I chose to preach the Gospel instead of spending the time studying and ended up with second class honours. The thing is, to me it made no difference because I only wanted to do God's will for me.

After I graduated, I went on to study theology. At that time I thought, "Well, I don't know what the Lord wants me to do now. Maybe I should go on to a doctorate," and so I applied to a university in Switzerland and was accepted. And that is when the Lord said, "No." But I said, "Yes Lord. You see, it's good for You. Just think, 'Doctor Chang'. Every time I preach the Gospel, it will be 'Doctor Chang'. When I preach the Gospel now it's only 'Mr. Chang'."



So I said, "I've got to get there." And I was so ambitious that as an undergraduate I was doing my doctorate in my spare time. I wrote my thesis before I even went. Imagine that! Such was my ambition! All my material was there. Three hundred and thirty or forty pages of my thesis was all written before I got there to start the doctorate. In fact, a few years later, another person did a doctorate on exactly the same subject and I said to him, "I may as well just give you my thesis and you get your doctorate and you save yourself doing three years of work." When I had already been accepted in Zurich, the Lord said, "No, here you stop." And I tell you, what a struggle it was for me! All because of my flesh. My personal ambition wanted me to go on but the Lord said, "No", and I submitted to the Lord.

This is what I am saying to those of you who are baptized. God may, or He may not, lead you on to do a degree - a Master's or a doctorate or whatever. But the question is: **Are you willing to let Him decide?** Now if you are totally committed to the Lord, then of course if that is His will you will do it. If one of these days the Lord suddenly says to me, "Now I want you to go and do that doctorate," then I'll be off and you won't see me here. I'll take my thesis off the shelf, blow the dust off because it has been waiting there for so many years, and go there and say, "Here is my thesis. Let's have the doctorate. Hang a title around me."

But you see, God knows each one of us, and He knows how to deal with each one of us personally. You will fall into Satan's temptation if you don't follow His way because you will end up allowing your own personal, material, secular, worldly, and fleshly desires to defeat you in the battlefield. Remember, that is how Satan is going to attack you and that is the message in this passage.

### **Obedience Brings God's Power Into Your Life**

How then are we going to deal with this? I have partly given you the answer. "Lord, always Your will. I desire nothing but Your will." Let me tell you this: If you go contrary to God's will, He will put you aside and then you will be finished. If I had gone contrary to God's will by going ahead and getting my doctorate, do you know what would have happened to me? I would have been finished. God would never look at me again. When God puts you aside, then you are finished. You can have five doctorates but you will be useless to God. I know lots of people with doctorates and God doesn't even look at them. They are absolutely useless to God and that is no exaggeration. I know people with doctorates who are preaching to churches with nobody there. I've been to one such church. The preacher is Doctor-Such-and-Such and there were three people in the congregation because there was no power. You see, the moment your power is removed, you are finished no matter how many doctorates you have.

On the other hand, you may not even have one doctorate...you may not even have one degree... you may not even have high school...maybe not even primary school...but you have the Spirit of God and I tell you, the world will shake. That was D. L. Moody. He didn't have a primary school education but what happened? When he went forth to preach the Word of God, the people broke down. The Spirit of God moved in every heart and people were convicted of sin. They fell on their faces before God. You don't need a doctorate to preach, believe me. The Lord Jesus chose a bunch of fishermen and He shook the world with them. Not one of them had a degree and none of them even saw a high school.

### **Disobedience Robs You Of God's Life**

If you want to serve God, the only thing that matters as a disciple is having God in your life. Don't envy those people who carry the title, "Pastor So-and-so...this degree and that degree." It is all meaningless. Don't even look at it. It has nothing to do with preaching the Gospel. Rather, look for the power of the Spirit in that man. That is what I look for. That is what I desire. I knew if I had disobeyed God and gone ahead, I would have a Doctorate in Theology behind my name but God would have put me on the shelf for the rest of my life. I would have been finished - wiped out. What am I going to do with a D.Theol. when God doesn't have any more time for me? I'm down the drain!

Understand this very well. The cost of disobedience is incalculable. The cost of obedience is high but the cost of disobedience is incalculable. Never afford the luxury of disobedience - you cannot afford it!

### **2) Fasting: Bringing The Flesh Under Control**

The next thing to know is this: It is a battle against temptation. Please notice the word "fasting" in our passage. In today's sloppy Christianity, people have no use for fasting. There is no spiritual self-discipline. We have a church full of woolly people who are just there for the view. In England people like to say, "I'm here for the view." That means they are only here for what they can get out of it. There is no self-discipline, spiritual determination or spiritual drive. But quite contrary to this, what do we see the Lord doing when dealing with temptation? Learn His lesson. He was tempted for forty days and He fasted for forty days.

Now if you don't understand fasting, you may think that the fasting was to make the temptation more effective. Maybe it was to give Satan an easier time in tempting Him. In fact, when I was a young Christian, that was exactly what I thought. I thought it was rather strange that here was Jesus fasting and weakening Himself thus giving Satan the advantage. His stomach would be growling. How would He be able to stand up to Satan? Satan would have a field day with Him. If you think so too, then you are wrong. Jesus was not fasting because He wanted to give Satan a better means of attacking Him. That would be ridiculous. The Christian life is hard enough without making it more difficult!

The whole purpose of fasting was in fact to make Satan's temptation *less* effective against Him. If you have understood the previous point, you will understand what I am saying. ***Satan attacks you through your flesh.*** Do you understand this? Then how do you deal with temptation? ***You bring the flesh under control.*** That is what fasting is all about. ***Through fasting, you learn to control the flesh and so Satan's means of attacking you is greatly reduced because now you discipline the flesh.*** The undisciplined flesh is the surest weapon in Satan's hands and that is why he makes use of it. That is how he knocks out one Christian after another, because their flesh is not under discipline. But the spiritual man disciplines the flesh. Paul says in 1 Cor 9:27 that he gives himself black eyes, meaning he brings the flesh under control.

Almost nothing is understood about fasting in our woolly, soft, undisciplined church of today. We haven't got an army of Christians. All we have is a whole crowd of tourists in the church, who have come to look at the scenery. They haven't come to join the spiritual war. We need people of spiritual discipline.

There are very few books on fasting that you can find in our woolly, sloppy Western churches and it is clear that they know nothing about spiritual discipline. About all you can find on the subject is a book by Arthur Wallis called **God's Chosen Fast**. I'm not sure I can think of any more titles.

### **Learn To Fast**

I say to you: Learn to fast! Learn to bring your flesh under control because that is what the Lord did. Don't worry, you won't die. On the contrary, you will live and live a lot better than what you are doing now. It is tragic to see the lack of spiritual self-discipline today. I wonder how many have ever fasted? Here of course I have to advise caution. Notice it says that the Lord Jesus **did not eat** for forty days (Luk 4:2). It does not say He did not drink for forty days. That point is very important. When you fast, normally speaking, **you do drink water**.

The second thing that I would like to mention to you is don't try to fast for forty days, at least, not right now. **Start with one day, or if you can't manage one day, skip one meal**. Then try fasting for the whole day. I'm sure that by nighttime you will be thinking you can't survive until morning because you are so hungry and weak that your arms are shaking. Don't worry, you won't die; you will be alright by morning. But I would not advise you to go on too long to begin with.

The Lord Jesus fasted for forty days because He was a man trained to fast. The Son of God knew what it was to discipline the flesh. That is why He could fight the spiritual war against Satan so effectively. Read the passage very carefully (Mar 1:13; Luk 4:2) and you will see that He was tempted throughout the forty days. And so throughout the period of forty days He fasted, shutting off His flesh to the attacks of the Enemy. This greatly reduced Satan's capability against Him. **The man of God is hard to attack because he has his flesh so well under control**. And those in training have been learning something about fasting. They have learned to fast for a few days occasionally and are learning to get the flesh under control.

Gradually, as time goes on, you learn to extend the period but be realistic. Don't set an unrealistic objective that you can't keep. You say, "I'm going to fast for one week," and by the second day you feel you are about to die. Be realistic! Don't try to run before you can walk. One day will be enough to start with and then don't do it if your health is poor. My health is not that good and fasting hasn't done me any harm. In fact, it does me a lot of good.

### **Fasting Benefits Both Spiritually And Physically**

Please don't think fasting is dangerous. Fasting does you no harm at all. In fact it does you a whole lot of good. It purifies your system. Recently a certain doctor has written a book with the title or subtitle (I have forgotten which) called **The Best Diet Is No Diet**. There is a point to it. There is a nutritionist (P. Bragg) who wrote a very good book called **The Miracle of Fasting**. Now, he is not a Christian and is not in any way trying to suggest that fasting is good for the soul. He is trying to tell you that fasting is good for the body. It purifies the body. You feel healthier and stronger. In fact, I have noticed that after fasting for a few days, my mind becomes incredibly clear. It is a very strange experience where your thinking and intellectual perception seem to function even faster than usual. I guess that with a diet that has so much cholesterol and sugar and the like, the brain becomes dull and we can't think clearly any more. It is remarkable what fasting does even for

your intellectual powers, assuming of course, that you can survive for a few days. It won't hurt you, just drink a lot of water.

I am not so concerned with the physical benefits of fasting. I am concerned with bringing the body under control, with bringing the flesh under control. As the Apostle Paul tells us, if you want to run a race like an athlete, what must you do? You must discipline the body. That is what 1 Cor 9 is speaking about. I have dealt with this on one or two other occasions but I am mentioning it now for the sake of those who have been baptized.

### **3) The Importance Of Feeding On God's Word**

We come now to our final point. How does the Lord Jesus answer Satan in this passage in Luk 4:1-4? In v.4 we see that the Lord Jesus answers Satan from the Word of God, quoting Deut 8:3: "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God". This is a very important passage, which I won't have time to expound. We will only touch on a few points here.

#### **"Man Shall Not Live By Bread Alone"**

The first point is this: Just as your body depends upon physical food to live, so also your spirit depends on God's Word to live. You are not just a body, you are also a spirit. ***Just as you have to live physically by eating food, so you have to live spiritually by eating food, and that food is the Word of God.*** That is very important to grasp.

Secondly, notice this: It is not enough to be born in order to live. You all know that a baby needs food to live and grow. You may be born but if you don't eat, you are going to die. The same thing is true in the spiritual life. It is very important for you to grasp that in the spiritual life it is not enough just to be born again. Some preachers speak of being born again as though that is the end of the whole matter. "Once you are born again you have made it. You are going to be alright forever after." Not at all! ***To be born again is wonderful, but if you are to survive, you have to eat. You have to feed on God's Word.*** That is clear. From 1 Pet. 2:2 we know that a spiritual baby needs to drink milk, and what is that milk? It is the Word of God. That is the way you can live and grow. Remember this very well.

#### **What Does It Mean To Feed On God's Word?**

What does it mean to feed on God's Word? All of us tend to be intellectuals and I have to warn you about this. Don't think feeding on God's Word just means reading it. Too often that is what is preached to us: All you have to do is read the Bible and that is feeding on God's Word. That is only part of it. ***Feeding on God's Word means doing it, and not just reading it.*** You don't actually live by God's Word until you live according to God's Word. This is very important to understand. You may read the Bible but so does Satan. He also knows the Bible but he doesn't do it. Feeding on God's Word is not just to understand it or to know it but to live it.

So I say to all of you who have been baptised: Conform your life to God's Word. It is more important than looking at commentaries. What should you do? ***When you read a passage, you must ask yourself, "How is my life to conform to this? How do I apply it into my life?"*** When you do that, then you are living by God's Word, then you are feeding on God's Word. So every day read. It doesn't matter how

many chapters you read. That is not the point. What is the point of reading three chapters when you can't remember what it has to do with your daily life? It is better to read three sentences and apply it immediately into your daily life. Only then will God's Word cease to be intellectual knowledge to you. Instead it will become your spiritual food.

### **Summary**

So let us close with this summary. How then shall we meet temptation?

Firstly, by being filled with the Holy Spirit. This can only happen when we live in a relationship of total commitment to the Lord. Remember the first verse in Luke 4 which says that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. We are not going to fight the spiritual war in our own strength. We are given the Holy Spirit to overcome temptation.

What is the second thing? The second thing is to bring your body under control, and fasting is a very useful means. It is not the only means. You can also try jogging or exercising as a way of disciplining your body. Don't let yourself get sloppy. Jog, cycle, run, or do some light weight-lifting. Whatever it is, get your body under control as the athlete does. But use fasting also, and do it wisely and moderately to bring the body under control.

Finally, feed constantly on God's Word. Apply it to your life, and then you will know God's power in your life.

## Temptation after Baptism II

*4th in a series of synopsis sermons on "Baptism" by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.*

Let's continue our study in the Word of God on the subject of temptation so that we will have a deeper understanding of it. In the last message I pointed out that the Temptation of the Lord Jesus came immediately after His baptism, and that means it came immediately upon His being anointed with the Spirit of God. We began to study Satan's plan of attack, and we saw that the avenue of approach that Satan uses to reach our hearts is through the flesh. It is through appealing to our needs and desires - and some of these appeals are perfectly legitimate ones - which he then distorts into something that could lead to our ruin.

### Three Basic Principles

We need now to look at the remaining two principles which he uses to attack us. I must tell you very frankly that the Temptation in its whole account is very, very deep, and what we are doing in these expositions is no more than examining three fundamental principles. I don't want anyone to think that after we have studied the Temptation we understand all there is to understand. No, we are only dealing with three basic principles. There are great depths yet which, as you go on in the Christian life and are able to handle strong meat, you'll be able to understand better and better.

Let us look at this passage in Luke 4. Last time we studied vv. 1-4 and now we will look at vv. 5-13: -

5And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, 'I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.' And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God and serve Him only.'"

9And he led Him to Jerusalem and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning You to guard You,' and 'on their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'" And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.'" And when the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.

Notice that in the first two temptations which Satan uses, the Lord Jesus answers Satan by quoting Scripture saying, "It is written..." (v.4 and v.8). So in the third temptation, Satan also says, "It is written..." (v.10), and here he quotes Scripture using Ps. 91:11,12 which he quotes very accurately. In reply, Jesus quotes another Scripture from Deut. 6:16.

We have here some very important principles that you must understand, especially for those of you who have recently been baptized. You are now

engaged in spiritual warfare, and you must understand the tactics of the Enemy. These tactics are very subtle and clever indeed.

### **1) An Appeal To Your Physical Needs And Desires**

The first one which we looked at last time is crude enough. It is simply an appeal to your physical needs and desires, and legitimate ones at that. But as Satan goes on he refines his approach. If the first attack does not succeed, he will find other means, and he has many at his disposal.

### **General Principle Underlying Every Tactic Of Satan**

Before we look at the two remaining principles let us consider the fundamental thrust of every tactic that Satan uses. Satan's fundamental approach is quite simple. Though he doesn't put it in so many words, his basic suggestion is this: Never mind what God did or did not say. Do your own thing. Who cares what God said? Did God say it? It doesn't matter. You have to look out for number one and number one is you - the self; the ego is what matters. Look after yourself. Maybe God doesn't always look after you. GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES?

It is from this way of thinking that we get the saying: "God takes care of those who take care of themselves." Never was a more Satanic statement hatched out of hell than that. But it sounds very reasonable, doesn't it? You don't expect God to look after you if you don't look after yourself. How do you get around the logic of that? We've been so brainwashed and indoctrinated with this saying that we readily accept it: "God looks after those who look after themselves." It makes good sense. Sure, that's exactly the mentality that Satan thinks is very good sense. Look at the person who serves the Lord. He doesn't look after himself nor take his own interests to heart. He gives up his job, he follows the Lord. You see, that is already a violation of the statement and Satan is very quick to remind you of this: If you don't look after yourself, how do you expect God to look after you?

### **Being A Christian: A Means Of Double Insurance?**

But the strangest thing is that I have heard Christians quoting this statement as though it was Bible truth - as though it was self-evident common sense that every Christian should understand. Indeed, it is common sense. It's the common sense of the natural man. After all, he looks after himself and God is also going to look after him. Wonderful! What else do you need? The whole point of being a Christian is not only that you look after yourself, but you can also get God to look after you! This is the man-centered world in which God is there to serve you, not you to serve God. Who wants to believe in God if God is not going to be there to look after you?

How wonderful to have Jesus! He washes our feet; we wash our own feet. We get our feet doubly washed! Who washes Jesus' feet doesn't really matter. Who cares whether Jesus gets His feet washed, so long as I get my feet washed. And He washes my feet, better than that you can't get. That's "double insurance" as A.W. Tozer used to say. To be a Christian is to be doubly insured - you save yourself and God saves you. That is perfect logic according to the natural man.

After all, why do you want religion? Why do you want to be a Christian? So that you can have God do something for you. Whether you do anything for God or not, that is irrelevant. Who worries about that? Maybe in your spare time you might

think of doing something for God. But in the meantime, God is there to do everything for you. That is what I call the man-centered religion of Satan.

And so, if you ever hear someone quoting this statement, "God takes care of those who take care of themselves," then you'd better tell him that that was something that came straight from the mouth of Satan. And what Satan actually wants to say is this, "Why do you worry about what God said? Just do your own thing and God will look after you. When you take care of yourself, He takes care of you too." That sounds wonderful. I've seen so many Christians who are totally without discernment, who unquestioningly swallow this because they don't have the spiritual insight to see through the Satanic logic of it.

Now that we understand this general principle which underlies every tactic that Satan uses, let us turn our attention to the second principle of temptation which derives from this.

## **2) The Temptation To Choose The Easy Way Out**

The second principle works like this: If you look after yourself then whenever you face a problem or conflict, what will you do? The answer is very simple: Choose the easiest way out - the path of least resistance. If you have your own interests at heart then of course you are not going to make things hard for yourself. The narrow road is difficult, so take the broad road - it offers no resistance. Join the crowd. Who wants to be one against many? That's the hard road.

### **Satan Gives Jesus An Exciting Spiritual Experience**

This is the principle of temptation that Satan is using in vv. 5-7. Satan is tempting Jesus to take the easy road. Let me explain the background of this so that you'll understand the picture more clearly. In v.5 it says that the devil took Him up - he took Him up to a high place and showed Him all the kingdoms of this world. The kingdoms are not just nations - they are the powers, the authorities of this world. He didn't take Him on a guided tour such as a tourist today might take to see all the 12 countries of Western Europe. No, this was not what Satan was doing for Jesus. He was not giving Him a guided tour through all the countries of the world. Notice that it says in v.5 that Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world "in a moment of time". That means, in one flash, in one vision. This is not a guided tour. This is all in a vision.

In the parallel passage in Matthew it says that Satan took Him up onto a high mountain, that is, into a spiritual 'mountain-top' experience. Satan can give you some pretty good spiritual experiences too. He can take you up onto a high place and give you some spiritual experience - a vision - and what a vision of the glories of the world! I'd like to say to those of you who are baptized: Beware of spiritual experiences that come from Satan.

Perhaps you are not experienced in spiritual warfare, but don't think that every 'mountain-top' experience comes from God. It is not necessarily so. When a person comes back from a conference and he has had a 'mountain-top' experience, I'm not always too sure whether it is of God. And the reason is because often within a week, I see that it has faded out; he has reached a state of depression. When a spiritual experience depresses you, it worries me. This is not very likely something from God. Satan lifts you up just to bash you down. That's



the only reason why he lifts you up, and that is why I worry about some of these 'mountain-top' experiences.

### **Can You Discern?**

Satan gave Jesus a vision of the kingdoms of the world. Beware of visions; not all visions are from God either. It is wonderful to have a vision from God, but when you have a vision from God, the vision is of God's glory, not the glories of the world. So look into the substance of it. Is it a boost to your flesh or is it a boost to your spiritual communion with God? There's a big difference between the two.

Can you tell the difference? If you get emotionally excited and worked up, this is not going to be from God. But if you are spiritually lifted up, you'll find that you don't get excited. Instead, there is a great peace, a great calmness. That is the sure sign of a spiritual lifting up. It is not an excitement of the flesh. In other words, approach every spiritual experience with caution, especially those which offer you instant uplifting.

I worry particularly when people seek for the experience of speaking in tongues. I have nothing against tongues, but it worries me when they look for tongues not because they want to serve God better, but because they want to have a reassuring, uplifting 'spiritual' experience. Now people that are just looking for a lift will get one from Satan. Satan took Jesus up. Do you want a lift? He will give you one. You be careful! Watch out for these experiences.

Or, say the exhilaration of some healing meeting. I have nothing against healings, and God has, in some small way, also used me in healings. But beware when all you are looking for is a 'spiritual' uplift - this is very dangerous. Satan is very ready to provide you with that, and you will have trouble knowing which is genuinely from God and which is not. Not all tongues are from God. Neither are all healings from God. Beware of this.

Distinguish carefully between the flesh and the spirit, between the world and God. When God works, it is something very different. The vision that Isaiah saw was a vision of God, not one of the glories of the world that draws your heart after the world. Understand these principles, so that you know how to discern between the one and the other. If you go to a big meeting (and it is not to say that all big meetings are wrong) be on your guard that nobody works you up emotionally with big choirs and moving music, because then they are playing upon your emotions, and we don't want that. Rather, press very close to God. Quieten your spirit before the Lord that you are not carried away into the wrong thing.

### **The Pull Of The Masses**

It is very easy to get carried away in a mass meeting. Every psychologist knows the effect which the masses can have to stir up one's emotions. When I lived in China I saw this strategy being used and with great effect. Have you ever seen a mass of one million people on the march with bands playing and everyone waving flags? It is very moving, very impressive, very exciting. You get one person shouting slogans and soon you have the whole crowd out of their minds. And afterwards, when they go home, they wonder, "What was I doing that for?" The reason is simple to understand: It is because everyone else was yelling their heads off. All

you need is to get one person started and soon it spreads through the whole crowd.

Satan is the master when it comes to playing on your emotions. Beware of this. The reason we don't use these techniques is because we know they produce Satanic, not spiritual, results. I am grieved to see Christians using this same technique, thinking that they can serve God in this way. You don't serve God by using Satanic or worldly techniques. You'll get the opposite effect.

What happens as a result of these mass meetings is that you get an enormous fall-out rate. People who make decisions just do not stick to their decision. Every statistician knows that over 80% fall out within the first year. Are those the kind of results you want? It may be very impressive on paper that so many thousands made a decision but the question is how many last even one year? And how many are left after five years?

Any wise preacher refuses to use such techniques because he knows that if you lift a person up with the flesh, he will fall spiritually. A spiritual uplifting does not require this kind of playing upon the emotions. When the Spirit of God lifts you up, there is a deep inner peace, not an excitement, not a sudden weeping and shivering. I have seen people weep and shiver and get into terrible emotional states. That is emotion; that is not necessarily from God. But when the Spirit of God convicts you, the convicting is spiritual. There is quietness, there is brokenness. There is a quiet weeping that has nothing to do with chattering teeth and the like. So understand spiritual warfare. Understand the techniques of the Enemy. Understand that he knows how to use your flesh and don't go for these cheap 'spiritual' experiences.

### **What Does Satan Offer Jesus?**

We have seen that Satan tries to tempt Jesus to take the easy road by means of a vision. And what does Satan say to the Lord Jesus? He says [paraphrased], "Now to You I will give all this authority and its glory. I will give You the whole thing. On what condition? Let's make it very easy. We'll strike a bargain between us, alright? All I ask of You is to pay me homage." (cf. vv.6,7). What it is that leads up to this statement we are now going to see.

Let us consider carefully what is taking place here. Satan is no fool. He knows why Jesus came into the world, don't you think? The Scripture, in 1Jn. 3:8b is very plain, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil." That's what He came for and Satan knows it very well. Satan knows it and Jesus Himself knows it. That's why in Jn 12:27b Jesus said, "For this purpose I came to this hour." For what purpose? To destroy the works of the devil and to do so by laying down His life.

And so the reasoning is quite simply like this: Satan says, "I know what You came for. You have come to fight me and to destroy my power in the world. And You know that I am not going to take this lying down. I'm going to fight and You are going to get hurt. And I am also going to get hurt because I know that You have power." So we can imagine some sort of discussion going on. Satan goes on: "Look, You and I both know what this is all about and since both of us are going to suffer in the process, why not make a deal? Let's make a deal. I'll give You the

whole thing without a fight - on one small condition, of course - and that is that You recognize that You received it from me. That's all I ask, that You recognize that it was in my power to give to You and that I gave it to You without a fight. So all I'm asking is that You acknowledge that up to this point I had the authority and that You got it from me, because of course, once I give it to You, I don't have it any more. So that's a very small thing that I'm asking: I would just like You to acknowledge my kingship up to this point, and that You do by paying me homage."

### **What Satan Is Asking When He Says: "Worship Me"**

That's what Satan is saying in v.7: "Therefore if You worship before me it shall all be Yours." This is a very important point to grasp but many people do not correctly understand it. They think that Satan is asking Jesus to worship him as God. Clearly it would be ridiculous to expect that Jesus would worship Satan as God. It would be ridiculous to expect this even of a young Christian or a religious Jew. Even many nominal Christians would refuse to do this if they were put to the test, never mind the Son of God Himself. This would not even be a subject for discussion. Satan is not that stupid. He knows it would be no temptation for Jesus if he were to ask Him to worship him as God. There would be no deal. There would be nothing to discuss in such a temptation. No, what Satan is asking of Jesus is simply to pay him homage as king, to acknowledge him as king. "I'm not asking You to treat me as God. I'm only asking that You acknowledge me as king of this world, and that you pay me homage as king."

The same Greek word translated as "worship" is used elsewhere, for example in Mt.2:2. There it says that the wise men, the Magi, "worshipped", or, paid homage to, the Baby in the cradle. Now when it says they worshiped the Baby it doesn't mean they worshiped Him as God. The Magi didn't know that He was God nor did the angels ever reveal this to them. No, they worshiped Him as king - the King of the Jews. They paid homage to Him as king. So that is an important point to understand about this word "worship".

### **Does Jesus Acknowledge And Honour Satan Is King?**

Note this carefully: Satan does not ask you to do something you would never dream of doing. Not even a weak Christian would dream of worshiping Satan as God. Would you? No, that is not even a point for discussion. But when Satan asks Jesus to honour him as king, that is quite a different matter.

At least that is a fairly reasonable request because after all, Satan is a king. Furthermore, Jesus does acknowledge that Satan is a king. But He is not going to honour or pay him homage as king. Jesus recognizes that Satan has kingly authority, and we see this for example in Mt.12:26 where the Lord Jesus speaks of Satan's kingdom, that is, his kingly power. Jesus acknowledges that Satan has kingly power and that this kingly power stands in opposition to God's kingly power (v.28). In fact the Lord Jesus also speaks of Satan as "the ruler of this world", for example in Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11. In all these passages, the Lord Jesus acknowledges that Satan does have power, that he does rule the world. And so we realize that Satan is indeed ruler of this world.

Notice Satan's whole line of reasoning. He is simply saying to Jesus, "You know that I am the ruler of this world. That's a fact that I know You acknowledge. So all

I'm asking You to do now is simply kneel down before me; acknowledge that I am king. That's all I ask of You and I'll hand all my authority over to You. That will make everything much easier for both of us. You don't have to go to the Cross and I don't have to fight. Neither one of us needs to get hurt in the process. You want the kingdoms of this world? I give them to You. Just choose the easier road - it's easier on You, easier on me, easier on everybody. And I'm not asking for very much. I'm simply asking that You recognize the fact which You already recognize anyway - that I am ruler of this world - the only thing You need to do is to go a little bit further and honour me as such."

You see, you may recognize a person as king but you refuse to honour him. So Satan is saying, "I only ask that You honour me as king and in return I will give You all the kingdoms of this world. From now on I'll be finished, I'll sign myself out, because once the kingdoms are handed over to You I haven't got them anymore. But I'll be satisfied with the fact that You recognized that I gave them to You and that I had the right to give them to You."

As you can see, the whole account of the Temptation is given to us in a very condensed form and there are depths here which we will not be able to fathom. Nevertheless, it is clear that this is a very dangerous maneuver which Satan is using here. And without looking at all the many implications (and the reasoning gets deep and complicated as we go on in the spiritual battle), let us simply recognize the basic principle involved: It is to choose the easier way. This attack is exceedingly subtle because a little bit of compromise is all it takes. I have seen this used on Christians again and again and there are a great many ways to apply this principle.

EXAMPLES For example, I have seen Christians who wanted to serve the Lord full-time. When the family hears about it there are two possible responses. The family can take them on in straightforward confrontation, or they can choose another way, that is, to use the soft approach, and this is usually far more effective. "Alright, I don't object." In fact, of course they do object. "But let's make a deal. You do a certain something for me, such as working in the family business for two or three years (after which you might forget about serving the Lord) and I will pay your way right through Bible college. Now how about that? We are not going to quarrel. You want to go to Bible college? I'll pay for it."

And I have seen Christians walk straight into the trap. They say, "Hey, my family doesn't oppose me. They are even going to pay for me to go to Bible college. Hallelujah!" Don't shout too soon. You have walked straight into the trap. If you are wise you would not accept one cent. But if you accept it then you are well in their grip. You are now going to owe even your theological training to the non-Christian, even though that non-Christian is family. I have seen many Christians who are completely without discernment and unable to see through the device, walk straight into it and are then spiritually wiped out.

Beware! Notice that the most frightening thing is when Satan comes to you in a sympathetic manner. I am not afraid of a head-on attack. What worries me is the soft manipulation. That really frightens me because then you fail to see through to what lies behind it.

The Enemy has tried using this tactic on me quite a few times. In England there was a lady who tried to confront me with force. When that failed she tried to buy me with money. It is always a risky thing to confront a man of God because you discover that God's power is too much for you to deal with. So she changed the tactic. "Let's be friends. We're not going to fight anymore, okay? I want to give you a church. We've got this building here, and you are going to have it free of charge." That was what worried me - the soft approach. I asked, "What are the strings (i.e. conditions) attached?" "No strings whatsoever," she said, "the building is yours. You do as you like with it."

Wow! How would you like to have a whole church handed over to you? That was a big building. All yours as a gift. That worried me more than anything else. I prayed about it and gave her the reply, "No thanks, I don't want a building. No, madam." "But it's free. No strings attached. We'll get a lawyer and sign it over to you." I said, "No thanks." "Alright. You don't want this building? How about another one? We've got another one." I said, "No thanks. I don't need a building." "No? Well, we could build a new one for you. You get the architect. You design the building. I'll build it for you." If I had accepted, then she would rightly have been able to say, "He received his church building as a gift from me."

Satan wants to be able to say, "You know, even Jesus got His kingdoms from me. I may be nothing anymore, but never forget, He got it all from me. I gave it to Him." Can you see through the trick - the subtlety of Satan? When Satan starts to get sympathetic you really have to start worrying. "Are You hungry, my friend? Oh, how God has neglected You! Well, never mind. You're the Son of God? Just turn the stone into bread. God isn't concerned about You. You are sitting here hungry. Where is God right now? But you see, I am sympathetic. I'm concerned about You being hungry. Come on, let's turn this stone into bread." Oh, he's getting very sympathetic.

"Well, let's not fight. We're going to be friends, okay? I am going to give You the kingdoms, but a very small favour in return, just a very small favour, it will only take a moment and You'll have the kingdoms forever. I only ask that You bow down before me for one moment." Oh, he's so sympathetic, he's so understanding. And he really knows his technique.

### **Jesus' Reply - To Worship Is To Serve**

Notice how Jesus answers Satan. "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.'" (v.8). In other words, Jesus is saying, "You see, Satan, you have got the principle wrong. True worship involves serving. To worship Him is to serve Him. And you don't serve anyone but God."

Here, Jesus counters Satan with the answer of total commitment. Always remember this. That's why I've constantly stressed to you this total commitment. He proved His total commitment to His Father in the first instance, refusing to turn the stone into bread. Now He proves it again. "...Him only you shall serve. No one else. There is not going to be any compromise." Notice, Jesus doesn't deny that he is a king, but He says, "No one else do I serve but God."

### **3) In The Next Message - The Third Basic Principle**

In these two messages on the subject of temptation after baptism, we have

studied two of the three basic principles of temptation that Satan uses against us. When both of these fail, Satan will go on to use the third principle, and this we shall study together in the next message.

## Temptation after Baptism III

*5th in a series of synopsis sermons on "Baptism" by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.*

Why is the Temptation account so important? What does it have to do with us as Christians, as disciples of the Lord? In the previous two messages we have already seen that the Temptation account contains many practical lessons for each one of us - lessons which we must learn if we hope to survive spiritually and be overcomers in the spiritual battle.

The first thing that we observed in our study is that immediately after the Lord Jesus' baptism (which means immediately after the Lord Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit), He was led into the wilderness where He had to face spiritual attack from Satan, in the form of temptation. In the same way, every Christian after he or she has been baptized, is going to be tested. Have you been baptized recently? Or are you contemplating baptism? Then be prepared. You can be very sure that Satan is going to test you, to tempt you.

Are you prepared for Satan's attack? You may know that you need to be spiritually alert, but do you know what it is that you must be watchful for? In what way is Satan likely to attack? What is the strategy he is likely to use? To answer these questions we have been studying carefully the strategy and tactics which Satan used when he tempted the Lord Jesus. Thus far in our study we have looked at two principles of temptation which Satan uses:

1) Satan tempts you by making an appeal to your physical needs and desires.

2) In times of difficulty, Satan tempts you to choose the easy way out.

When neither of these two tactics prove successful, he will go on to use a third. This third principle is what we want to study in this message.

### **3) "Serve God With All Your Might" Satan's Way**

When Satan tempted the Lord Jesus he began his attack with an appeal to Jesus' physical needs and desires (Lk.4:3,4). When that failed he tried to tempt the Lord Jesus to take the easy road, instead of the road that was going to lead to His suffering and death on the cross (vv. 5-8). In each case the Lord Jesus countered Satan with the answer of total commitment. So what is the third principle which Satan uses? It is this: "Serve God and serve Him to the utmost of your capacity." How? "Let's go to Jerusalem, and You're going to stand on the pinnacle, the high point of the Temple. Then You just jump down from there into the courts below. You are going to come down from heaven, descending upon those worshiping multitudes from above. How's that for a plan?"

"I've thought of a technique for You. You want to come as the Saviour of the world? You come down to earth." The Second Coming already takes place at the First Coming - He descends from heaven - right down into the worshiping multitudes! SATAN'S PLAN ALSO REQUIRES TOTAL COMMITMENT

Yes indeed, how's that for a plan? When Satan starts getting sympathetic and suggesting plans on how to carry out your job, you had better think about it very carefully. And what is more, Satan knows the Bible. Oh, he can quote Scripture and he is going to quote the finest of Psalms - Psalm 91. It's a wonderful Psalm in which twice God is spoken of as "The Highest". You see, Satan is now taking Jesus' answer and turning it back on Him like a good swordsman, a good judo man. He knows how to use your strength against you. "God only? He is the highest? Okay. Let's quote from Psalm 91, the Psalm that begins, 'He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High.'" The Hebrew word means "the highest, supreme."

"You just said He is the only One You must serve. He is supreme. We are all kings but He is the King of kings. All right. You want to accomplish Your purpose of coming and You also want to show Your total commitment to God? Well, here is the plan then: Didn't God say that if You jump down from there He will give His angels charge over You? That takes total commitment, but God promises You won't get hurt." Satan's quotation is exact - there is nothing wrong with it. So what is your objection?

### **Are You Really Serving God?**

Do you want to serve God? Then the principle that Satan is going to use is this:

"You can serve God and serve Him in your own way."

That is exactly what Jesus is being tempted to do. Beware of a zeal to serve God, but not according to God's way. Now you would think that nobody would make such an elementary mistake. Let me tell you that the majority of Christians make that kind of mistake. They want to serve God but serve Him in their own way. It always worries me when Christians say, "Well, why can't I do it in this way?" What do you mean you can't do it in this way? "I can worship God at home. Why do I have to go to church? Isn't God everywhere? Therefore I can worship God at home." Sounds reasonable. God is everywhere - so He must be in your home. And therefore you can worship God at home. So who needs a church? That's it. Do it in your own way. Worship God but worship Him in your own way. Have you not heard that one very often? "I can do it in this way too. I can serve God, but in this way."

### **"You Err Because You Do Not Know The Scriptures"**

The question is not whether you can or cannot serve God in this or that way. Of course you can do it. Can Jesus jump off the pinnacle of the Temple? Why not? What's there to stop Him from doing that? So it is not a question of whether you can do it. The question is: Is this God's way of doing it? This is a very vital principle. When Satan quotes Scripture, what he quotes is truly Scripture. But the question is: How do you use that passage in the Bible? The passage is true but Satan tempts you to misuse it. He wants to get you to do your own thing, to serve God, but in your own way.

In Mt. 22:29 the Lord Jesus tells us the reason why people fall into this trap. He said to those zealous religious people, the Pharisees, "You do err because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God." As a young Christian it is not always easy to discern whether or not you are playing into Satan's hands. Why do you go wrong? Because you do not know the Scriptures.



Have you noticed that every false sect - Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Christian Scientists - comes to you quoting the Bible. They may even come to you with a gold-edged Bible that costs five times what yours costs, and they really know how to quote from it. It is so important to know the Scriptures. That is why in this church we are concerned to train everyone in the Scriptures. "You do err", the Lord Jesus says, "because you do not know the Scriptures." You have not understood the meaning of the Scriptures.

I get concerned when people don't take Bible study very seriously. You are going to be open to Satan's attack if you don't want to feed on the Word of God. As we saw in the previous message, we live by every word - not some words - but every word that comes out of the mouth of God. If you don't do that you won't survive long as a Christian. You will not survive. That's why it's so important to know the whole Scripture.

Let me tell you how to counter this particular thrust from the devil. When anyone quotes to you one verse or passage of Scripture, always think whether there is another verse or passage of Scripture which supplements it. In other words, what he quotes is Scripture, but is it the whole truth concerning that particular point, or is it only some part of the truth? If you think this error is not common, let me tell you it is the most common of errors. Satan has misguided the Church to a great extent along this line.

#### **Partial Truth: Satan's Tool**

For example, a church that only preaches on how you should get saved has told you only part of the truth. That is very dangerous. In Scotland where I studied, there were many Gospel Halls, and they always preached on salvation. Sunday after Sunday it was how to be saved by believing in Jesus. And looking through the congregation I saw that 98% of them were "saved" in the sense that they were Christians. So I wondered, "Who are they preaching to? I don't see any non-Christians around here." But because the preacher really doesn't know any other message he just keeps preaching the same thing all the time. To speak about the blood of Jesus, about the cross of Jesus is wonderful, but that is not the whole Scripture.

Even as a young Christian I noticed that wherever I went in the Protestant churches, I heard only about the preaching of Paul - it was Paul this and Paul that. "Today we are going to study Ephesians, tomorrow we study Colossians." I asked myself, "When is anyone ever going to tell me what Jesus said?" But nobody seemed to know or care what Jesus said, and so I began to get suspicious. After all, Paul wrote only one-third of the New Testament. What about the other two-thirds? Nobody seemed to care. And what did James say, or Jude? Who cares? What about the Apostle Peter, what did he say? It doesn't matter. So long as every Sunday it was Paul this and Paul that.

#### **What Has Happened To The Teaching Of The Lord Jesus?**

The next time you go to a Christian bookshop, cast your eye along the shelves and you will see something very interesting: the number of books that concern the epistles of Paul - everywhere you will see Paul. What books are there about Jude? You'll have a hard time finding one. What is there on the letters of Peter? Very little. And on the Lord's teaching? Next to nothing! If you wanted to find one book

on the Kingdom of God, you'd find none! I've been trying because I am doing a new study on the Kingdom of God, and I can't find anything. In the evangelical world the only person who has done a serious study on the Kingdom of God is G.E. Ladd, who used to be a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary until he retired. That book was published in the 50's. Apart from him, no evangelical has written anything of any exegetical importance on the subject of the Kingdom of God. In fact, the title "Kingdom" is sometimes used without apparently even understanding what it means. The few books that do exist on the subject of the Kingdom of God are, strangely enough, all studies done by liberal theologians; and very few of them are up-to-date. But if you wanted to look for books on Paul, there are so many you just could not count the number of them. They run into the thousands.

The Kingdom of God is the central theme of the Lord Jesus teaching, and when I could not find anything written on the subject it began to cause me to think - something is not in order. When I see a constant emphasis on only one aspect of Scripture, and that aspect not even being the central theme of the Lord's teaching, I begin to get worried. Let me tell you: the teaching of the Lord Jesus is the only teaching that is complete. You will find in it the whole counsel of God, and that is the reason I have been stressing it. In Jesus' teaching nothing is left out, nothing is missing. Everything is there in its proper proportion and emphasis. Did you realize that? I have studied the Lord's teaching for many years and I have discovered that in His teaching there is perfect completeness.

The apostle Paul is in fact a commentator on the Lord's teaching. Everything he writes is in fact a commentary on the teaching of Jesus, and he assumes you know what your Lord taught. If you don't understand the text, how will you understand the commentary? In other words, what has been happening is that there has been an enormous amount of study on the commentary (Paul's writings) and almost no study on the text (the Lord's teaching itself). The result is imbalance, lopsidedness. The result is misinterpretation, because if you don't understand the text, by what means are you going to understand the commentary? Paul never wrote anything original. The more I study Paul in relation to the Lord's teaching, the more I begin to realize that everything which Paul wrote I can find in the Lord's teaching. But there are things in the Lord's teaching that you do not necessarily find in Paul. That is very important to understand.

#### **Example: Justification By Faith**

Don't misunderstand me. I love Paul and I love his writings. He has a profoundness of spiritual insight that is unmatched. But I suspect that the reason why there is so much study today on Paul's writings, is because people want to harp forever on only one aspect of Scriptural truth - namely, justification by faith. Am I saying that the teaching concerning justification by faith is not important? Not at all! It is as important to me as it is to anyone. But we must recognize that it is our responsibility to preach the whole counsel of God, of which justification by faith is only one part, and not a very big part at that. The Church preaches this with great zeal but seems to have forgotten the central message of the Lord Jesus, namely, the Kingship of God in our life. No wonder the whole Christian Church is so lopsided. "Be zealous for God but be so in your own way." That is exactly Satan's strategy against the Church, and it works. This strategy didn't work against the Lord Jesus but it has proven to be extremely effective against the Church.

### **Are You Open To The Word Of God?**

During my student days in London, I attended a meeting where a dear brother was going on about "justification by faith alone". Notice that the word "alone" is not in Scripture. Be careful of inserting a word which is not in Scripture. Justification by faith alone is nowhere to be found in Scripture - absolutely nowhere. And yet this little word was inserted, and that disturbed me. I immediately quoted to him the words of the Apostle James: "A man is justified by works and not by faith alone." (Jam. 2:24) Do you know what his response was? He was very, very annoyed! But why? Because lopsidedness causes us to destroy the truth by chopping it into parts and throwing one, or more parts away. This brother stressed one part of Paul's teaching but tacitly rejected the other part of his teaching. Had he realized and accepted the fact that Paul's teaching on good works is just as emphatic, possibly stated even more strongly than James stated it, he would have had no reason to take offence at the quotation from James.

Consider, for example, these words from Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith...not as a result of works...For we are...created in Christ Jesus for good works...(read carefully the whole of 2:8-10). That is in fact, a lot stronger than anything James said! James (Jam. 2:14-26) was essentially affirming that works is a necessary counterpart or correlative of faith in the same way that body and spirit are necessarily interrelated in a living person. But Paul is affirming something considerably more than this. He is making a teleological statement, i.e. a statement about God's plan and purpose for saving us: He saved us, made us a new creation in Christ, for good works!

### **The Serious Consequences Of Lopsidedness**

Why do I cite this incident? The reason is that if I quote a verse of Scripture and someone else quotes another verse of Scripture, balancing out the truth, I should be most grateful to him for showing me something I may have overlooked. But if I start getting annoyed then I am in trouble. Beware when a person gets offended in this way. That is where Luther's troubles began. He started to criticize the letter of James, and in doing so he gave rise to the whole Liberal tradition in Germany. Do you realize that? The reason is that once you start criticizing Scripture then why shouldn't anyone else do it? And of course that's what the Germans have been doing ever since the days of Luther. I don't mean to be harsh with Luther, because in fact I love him very much. And no one who has studied the life of Luther (as I have done) can help but have a deep affection for him. But he was not perfect. None of us are perfect. He made a very serious mistake that started the whole Liberal tradition in Germany. To this day, Germany has been the stronghold of Liberalism, more than any other country.

Paul never taught justification by faith alone. Nowhere in Paul's writings can you find this! But what does Professor Jeremias do? Some years ago, this German professor (with whom I communicated because I questioned some of the things he had written) wrote a book entitled "The Central Message of the New Testament". In it he argues that although Paul never used the word "alone", the word is nonetheless justified. When you start reasoning in this way you are in trouble. Never play around with the Word of God like this. We are justified by faith - yes - but not "alone". True faith is never alone. Anyone who knows the Word of God should understand that.

### **God's Word Is Liberating In The Fullness Of Its Riches**

After I had been a Christian for many years I began to wonder whether the Bible had anything else to say besides justification by faith, because that is what I was constantly hearing. Is that all the Bible speaks about? But the more I studied God's Word the more I began to see how vast are the riches it contains! What great horizons! What a great vision it speaks about! So I wondered, Why has the Church left us all so poor, emphasizing one thing only? There are such great riches in God's Word, God forbid that we should narrow it down to one thing only, as if that alone is precious and nothing else. God's Word is liberating in the fullness of its riches. And that is why I must warn you on this point: Be sure that you have the whole Scripture, the whole Word. of God. I hope that you will love the whole Word of God and never pick and choose whatever you please as so many Christians do. For your own salvation's sake and that of others I urge you to take the Word of God in its entirety. Let nobody emphasize one thing alone, because if you do this, you will be in trouble. That is why in this ministry, I have sought by the grace of God to teach everything that Jesus taught, in all aspects - whether it be justification, or sanctification, or glorification.

Have you noticed how many Christians have fallen into this error? You go into the Pentecostal Church and what do you hear about? Tongues, tongues, tongues. You'll begin to wonder whether the Bible has said anything else besides speaking in tongues. They somehow find tongues everywhere in the Bible. Certainly the Bible teaches about speaking in tongues and it is a wonderful truth. But tongues is a very small part of the Bible, although you would never realize this if you went to a Pentecostal church.

### **What Happens When You Have A Narrow-Minded Zeal?**

There is another reason why you must beware of emphasizing only one aspect of Scripture: It is because when you do this you are going to be so misled that you become bitter, you become partisan, you become more and more narrow-minded. And one of these days you are going to become one of those people whom the Lord Jesus speaks about in John 16:2 where He says to His disciples, "An hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God."! How can anyone be so misguided as these people that they think they are serving God by killing others? Have they never read the Bible? Well, that's the whole problem. You will soon find that the people who emphasize only one doctrine are very impatient, very intolerant, very narrow-minded.

You will find that those who emphasize justification by faith alone will soon become very impatient when you point out to them the riches in James. They may even start to accuse you of this or that. In fact, the more they try to hound you in one way or another, the more they think they are doing service to God!

I have both seen and experienced the unloveliness of conduct from Christians of this sort. They are not interested to know what the whole Scripture says. They only want to hold on to their doctrine, and anyone who departs so much as a fraction from that doctrine will be accused of being a heretic. I'm very sorry to say that this sort of thing happens very often among the Plymouth Brethren, to quote one example. The Brethren are forever accusing one another of being heretics. There seems to be no end to it. Why? The reason is that the Brethren have this great weakness of not having any trained people to teach them. As a result of the

lack of proper teaching they focus more and more on one aspect of Scripture and they can only pass on what they themselves have learned. What they haven't learnt they cannot teach others. What happens through this lack of teaching is that their thinking becomes narrower and narrower. Soon they are squabbling about the minutest things, things which you find are not worth arguing about, and they start calling each other heretics. I love the Brethren very much and I do not say this out of any sense of bitterness or hostility. Rather let us learn a lesson from this.

### **What Is Your Attitude When You Study The Bible?**

Bear this in mind dear brothers and sisters: When you study the Word of God do not be easily satisfied and say, "Ah, I have discovered the truth." Instead ask yourself what is the other side of that truth. Especially study those Scriptures that disturb you and make you uncomfortable. I have made this my principle: To study not those Scriptures that I know so well and which bring me a lot of comfort, but rather to study particularly those Scriptures which disturb me, which make me uncomfortable, which I don't seem to understand. I do this because perhaps there is something that I have missed, and I want to be sure that I have not missed anything of God's Word. How can we live by every word which proceeds from His mouth if we have missed those words? So always make it your principle never to use the Bible just to gain your comfort. Let it make you uncomfortable. Be willing not to choose the easy road and you will not go wrong.

You can see how successful Satan's technique is. He wants to get you to focus your attention on part of the truth and to serve God in this way with great zeal. As a result, although not intentionally, you end up serving God in your own way. You end up insisting on that little part which you have been able to see, and you become closed to further truth which the Lord wants to teach you.

### **How Can We Guard Ourselves From Error?**

How can we keep on the right track? How can we guard ourselves from error? There is only one way: we must stick closely to the teaching of the Lord Jesus. Have you noticed that Jesus stressed one thing in His teaching? He emphasized God's Kingdom and His rule in men's hearts and lives. And that is what I want to emphasize. I don't want to emphasize what He didn't emphasize. Jesus didn't emphasize tongues so I'm not going to emphasize tongues. I accept tongues but I don't emphasize it.

Jesus also preached about justification. Though the word "justify", in this specific sense, occurs only twice in His teaching (Lk. 18:14; Mt. 12:37) and in neither place is it conjoined with the word "faith", the fundamental ideas of justification, namely, getting right with God through repentance and faith and being made right through God's forgiving and transforming grace, are prominent in the Lord's teaching. It was an important element in His preaching, but it was not central to His message. Justification in Jesus' teaching was simply the gateway to the Kingdom of God. For Him the Kingdom was the central issue. But today, as I told you, you will have a hard time finding any book written on this subject. Isn't it strange how Satan has gained his way?

### **Satan's Goal: To Use Man To Displace God**

Well, if God enables me to do so, I intend to set this thing right, precisely for this

reason. I have to keep speaking about God's Kingship, God's Lordship over all. When you emphasize justification, man becomes central in your system! Remember this. That is exactly what Satan wants. God is there to save you; God is there to do this and that for you, to cleanse you, to sanctify you, to glorify you. He is there to do everything for you. Man becomes the center when justification becomes the central doctrine. But when you stress the kingship of God, God is the center, not man! We have shifted our emphasis away from the true center. It's very important to observe this. When you do this you have turned the whole Gospel upside-down, and you are headed for disaster! We must return to what the Lord Jesus emphasized, which is God's Kingdom, God's Kingship.

Before we conclude this message I would like you to notice one particular thing: When Jesus answers Satan, He always quote to him from one book. Have you ever noticed that? Every reply to Satan comes from the book of Deuteronomy. And when Satan quoted from the Psalms, Jesus still replied from Deuteronomy. That intrigued me. I wondered why the Lord kept answering from Deuteronomy. When I studied this question, looking into Deuteronomy, I began to understand why. What is the characteristic of the book of Deuteronomy? It is the kingship of God! This is one book in the Old Testament which particularly stresses God's Kingship. You see, it comes back perfectly to the emphasis of the Lord Jesus' own teaching - the Kingdom of God.

You see, Satan tried to tempt the Lord Jesus to do His own thing, to go His own way. And Jesus' constant reply was, "God is King." Let me illustrate this to you with a statistic:

The Hebrew word "mitzvah" which means commandment, occurs 43x in Deuteronomy. It occurs throughout the book. By contrast, in the other four books of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament are called "the Pentateuch"), you will find that this word "mitzvah", commandment, occurs in Genesis 1x, in Exodus 4x, in Leviticus 10x, in Numbers 5x. But in Deuteronomy it occurs 43x! When you study words related to "mitzvah", that is, words that deal with commands and statutes, you will find the same thing. What is more, there is no other book in the Old Testament which has this word "commandment" anywhere as frequently as Deuteronomy. This book stresses God's law and that is where it gets its name. The word "nomos" means law and the word "deutero" means second. "Deuteronomos" or "Deuteronomy" itself means a copy of God's Law - it is an earthly copy of God's heavenly Law. It is a repetition on earth of God's Law in heaven. So it is the book of Law par excellence. And it is precisely this book which emphasizes God as King because He gives His Law to His people. His people are subject to His Law.

### **Do You Delight In God's Law, God's Life-Giving Word?**

It was no accident that the Lord Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy in countering Satan's temptation. Like the Psalmist the Lord Jesus delights in God's Law, and under temptation from Satan He knows what is the right weapon to use against the Enemy. Anyone who loves God will love God's Law. But beware of the Christian who doesn't like the Law of God. He just wants to get saved. He just wants God to be doing something for him, but he doesn't want to be doing anything for God. He doesn't want to be under God's Law. If that is your feeling you need to beware. You are on the wrong track. But the true Christian delights in

God's Law. He loves it. The Psalmist says, "I delight in Thy Law, O God." (Ps.119:174). With his whole heart he delights in it. In Ps. 119:127 he says, "Your Law, O Lord, is more precious to me than gold, than fine gold." He loves God's Law. Can you say that? If you can really love God's Word, God's Law - if you make it your aim to live by every word that proceeds out of His mouth - then Satan will never be able to bring you down. You cannot be brought down.

### **Summary**

Before we conclude, let us summarize the three principles of temptation which we have covered in these three messages:

We have seen that Satan tempts us by appealing to our physical needs and desires, even legitimate ones. Failing this he will give us a hard time by bringing difficulties into our life and tempting us to choose the easy way out. If we stand firm through all this because we are determined to be totally committed to the Lord, then Satan, like a good swords man, will try to turn this zeal for God to our own destruction by encouraging us to focus on only a part of God's truth.

### **A Warning To All Of Us**

"Serve God with zeal, but partisan zeal." This partisan zeal is the most terrifying thing! You end up serving God with devotion to only one part of the truth. It is this that has resulted in the most dreadful things in the history of the Church. It is this that resulted in the Inquisition. Have you heard of the Inquisition? Read about it some time. It will make you weep. Christians torturing other Christians in God's name - in God's name! And what happened in Calvin's Geneva? John Calvin tried to create a theocracy in the city of Geneva and they ended up burning people at the stake. The Protestants did that! And what about the Crusaders? They went forth and killed the Muslims in God's name too. I feel so sick in my heart when I think about this. But this is what happens when you have partisan zeal - zeal in one misguided concept, in one misguided way - serve God, but in your own way. If you go along that road then one day you'll be killing people in God's name, thinking that you are doing God a service. This is what Satan wants, of course. Satan has so misguided the Church that I dread to think of the future of the Church in the way it is heading today. God help us. Some of us may end up being killed, not by non-Christians but by Christians.

### **Let God Lead You Into All Truth**

That's why I plead with you brothers and sisters: Understand the whole Word of God - study the whole Word of God - especially those parts that make you uncomfortable, especially those parts that don't seem to agree with your theology. Don't hide yourself behind your theology. As I said, I love to look at those parts that don't seem to agree with my way of thinking, and I've had to change my thinking again and again as I've studied the Word of God. I used to prize one particular doctrine only to find that the Word of God blew my doctrine to pieces. And I've had to say, All right Lord, if that's the way it is then out goes my doctrine. Please lead me in Your truth. I don't want to believe anything except what Your Word says, and I want to know the whole of it, not just some part. Make this your aim and you will not go wrong. You will find that God is truly faithful to lead you into an ever greater understanding of His truth.

### **Do You Come To The Bible Looking Primarily For Comfort?**

One more point before we conclude: Have you noticed the words from Psalm 91 that Satan quotes to the Lord Jesus? (Lk. 4:10,11) "He will give His angels charge over you to guard you. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." Oh, what comforting words. Beware of comforting messages, brothers and sisters. When a message makes you uncomfortable - when it convicts you and disturbs you - thank God for that kind of message. But woe to people who go to church just to look for comfort. Then their religion becomes an opium. We don't need opium. We don't want to turn the Bible into a tranquilizer. People who are looking just for comfort are going to be very much exposed to Satan's attack. But thanks be to God if you are a person who goes to church and are willing to let the Word of God cut into your heart, to let it disturb you, to let it convict you deeply of sin and of judgment.

I don't comfort people very much, do I? My record on comforting people is not very good - at least not in preaching - perhaps on a personal level, but not in preaching. Why? Because what the Church needs today is not comfort. It needs conviction. But Satan is always there to make up for this lack of comforting. "He will give His angels charge over you." When Satan starts getting sympathetic you better start worrying!

But do you notice what Satan is really saying? Can you see the logic behind his use of this quotation from Psalm 91:11,12? It is this "once saved always saved" doctrine right there in the Old Testament! Do you see it? "No matter what you do you will be all right. You won't get hurt even if you jump off the pinnacle of the Temple, in fact, even if you disobey His Word! If God didn't say to jump off the pinnacle of the Temple and you go ahead and do it, then that is disobeying His Word. But even if you disobey His Word He is still committed to saving you, to seeing that no harm comes to you in any way. Have you ever considered the origin of this "once saved always saved" doctrine? I would really like you to think about it: a doctrine which tells you that whatever you do, God is committed to safeguard you to the end. How dangerous is this teaching! I am amazed that people today have so little discernment that they cannot see through the wiles of the Devil. Such a doctrine is not to be found in the Bible and it doesn't come from God.

On the contrary, these words in Psalm 91 are addressed only to people who dwell in the secret place of the Most High. It is for people like this, who live in utter obedience to God, who recognize Him as the Most High, that God promises such care. But the moment He is not the Most High in your life, the moment that Jesus is not the Lord of your life, you are simply not going to be borne up by any angel. And if you decide to jump off pinnacles to prove certain religious points, you're going to be dashed to the ground. Make no mistake about it. But if you walk in the secret place of the Most High, if God is the Most High in your life and you live in fellowship with Him, you can be sure that if you ever trip over a stone or stumble over a cliff, He will bear you up. Because you have been living in total devotion to Him, walking in His way and not your own, He will bear you up.

In other words, you can be perfectly sure of your salvation as you walk in total obedience to God. But that assurance is not for those who do not want to acknowledge Him as King. I have great assurance of salvation. I live in no fear and



no dread. Why? Because by God's grace I ever seek that He will be the Most High in my life; I ever seek to dwell in His secret place.

# A Pledge to God From a Good Conscience

*6th in a series of synopsis sermons on "Baptism" by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.*

Many Christians have a great problem: they have been baptized without really knowing what it is that they were doing. And I have found in this church that we have often inherited problems that began somewhere else - that people were baptized somewhere else without really understanding what it was they were really doing. Maybe they thought that they were joining a club or society, and that baptism was some sort of ceremonial rite of initiation into this club or society. And as a result they have carried their spiritual problems with them for years and years. Often I've had to counsel people who had dragged their spiritual problems on in a very unhappy sort of "Christian" life. The Church is full of nominal Christians, so-called Christians, phoney Christians, half-Christians or quarter-Christians. And the result is one of defeat and unhappiness. But that is not what the Christian life is about.

In order that everyone can be perfectly clear what baptism means, I want, in this message, to expound to you from Scripture the spiritual meaning of baptism. This I would like to do under four main headings. In none of this do I want to give you my opinions about baptism. It is essential that you understand what the Word of God says, and I want you to look carefully at the Word of God.

## **1. Baptism: A Pledge To God From A Good Conscience**

Let us look at 1 Pet. 3:21,22 and I will read from the Revised Standard Version (RSV) although it does not give a good translation of the verse as I will explain in a moment.

"Baptism, which corresponds to this, ("this" here refers to the great flood waters in Genesis which Peter has just spoken of in v.20) now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him."

Peter tells us that baptism corresponds to the whole event of the flood, with particular reference of course to the Ark, by which, as Peter says, eight people were saved through the floodwaters. From that whole generation only eight people survived through the Ark, through faith.

It is important to understand clearly what is meant here. It says here that baptism is "an appeal to God for a good conscience." This translation is incorrect. If you have the New International Version (NIV) you will have the correct translation and a very good one. The NIV translates that baptism is "the pledge of a good conscience toward God." This is an accurate translation and I will briefly explain why.

Liddell and Scott's Greek English Lexicon gives three meanings for the Greek word "eperotema" which has been translated in the RSV as "appeal". The first meaning

of the word is a question; the second, an answer to a question, especially an affirmative answer to a question, hence having the meaning of sanction or approval; the third is equivalent to the Latin "stipulatio" which means, an obligation, a contract, or a commitment, or a pledge. This meaning is also supported by Moulton and Milligan's *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*. I cite these references for those of you who are more familiar with the technical aspect and would like to study it more closely.

Now you will notice from this definitive Greek lexicon (i.e. dictionary) that nowhere does it give the meaning of this word as "appeal". A question and an appeal are by no means one and the same thing. They are quite different. An appeal is one thing and a question is quite another thing. In fact, "eperotema" rarely has even the meaning of question. Generally it means a response to a question - a specific response in fact - and from there it went on to have the meaning of agreement, which became further extended to have the meaning of contract, commitment, pledge. For those of you who would like to study the matter technically, you can refer to E.G. Selwyn's standard commentary on 1 Peter which gives a careful discussion of this matter.

Suffice it to say that I can find no linguistic evidence for the meaning given here as "appeal". Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* gives the definition of "eperotema" as appeal but fails to give any evidence as to where in Greek literature this word has this meaning. Usually they give linguistic evidence for a definition and they may cite many examples from Greek literature to substantiate it, but here they fail to give any such evidence. And I simply cannot find any linguistic evidence for such a meaning for the word "eperotema". Now this means that the word "eperotema" is correctly translated in the NIV as "a pledge". Baptism is a pledge. It is a commitment to God. This is very important to understand.

### **From A Good Conscience**

What is more, the genitive in the Greek text is correctly translated as the pledge of a good conscience, not for a good conscience. It is a pledge made from a good conscience. Baptism is a pledge to God made from a good conscience. How do we have a good conscience? We have a good conscience when we repent of our sins - when we genuinely, honestly, and sincerely do something with no double-mindedness and no deceitfulness. That is what it means to do something from a good conscience. No fraud, no lies, no untruthfulness - that is a good conscience. You cannot have a good conscience when you are being untruthful, or not wholly truthful. But baptism then is a pledge to God made out of or from a good conscience. When with a genuine heart, with a right attitude, I make my pledge of total commitment to God, that is baptism.

This word "eperotema" is particularly interesting because it expresses a question and a response. You make a pledge (as those who are about to be baptized are going to do) in answer to a question. The response amounts to a commitment, a pledge. When they say "I do", that is a pledge, a commitment, in response to the question posed to them in baptism. This word is particularly suitable because in the Early Church it was their practice before baptism to ask the baptismal candidate certain specific questions which he or she must answer in the affirmative. And we have noticed that "eperotema" is not only an answer, but an

answer in the affirmative. This is very important, and hence the choice of this word here begins to be very clear. This answer constitutes a pledge. This is also the reason why, in the Church, baptism was called a sacrament and is still called a sacrament.

### **A Sacrament**

Do you know what a sacrament is? In the Church we have basically two sacraments: the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of communion, also known as the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper. What does sacrament mean? The English is simply a transliteration of the Latin word "sacramentum" which means an oath. That is the basic meaning of a sacrament. It means an oath, an obligation, a vow. In legal terminology it means a pledge. For example, it means money deposited by the parties before a legal suit. That is, you pledge by paying this money before a legal case.

But this word had a particular meaning. It was used of a military oath of allegiance. A military oath of allegiance was called the *sacramento*, when the Roman armies made their oath of allegiance to their country and to their emperor. This they sometimes did by the raising of their hands as you see today when a president takes an oath, or when somebody takes an oath in a court of law, symbolizing that he or she is doing this in all honesty and truth, with a good conscience. "I will speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Sometimes it was done with a clenched fist over the heart, again representing a good conscience, a pure heart. It may at other times be done by soldiers with a drawn sword as they commit their swords and their lives to their nation and to their emperor. The Germans made great use of this. The Nazis, required of every German soldier the military oath of allegiance, the *sacramento*. So this word *sacramento* had the particular significance of the military oath of allegiance.

Why is baptism called the sacrament? Precisely because there the pledge is made. We make our oath of allegiance to Jesus as our King. We crown Him King of our lives. We owe our loyalty to Him once and for all at baptism. It is a pledge made to God from a good conscience. It is very important that the conscience is good. As M. was just sharing with us, she made a commitment but not from a good conscience. She had not severed her allegiance to the old life. How can you be serving God and the world at the same time? How can you serve God and mammon? Your heart would then be divided and your baptism would amount to making the oath of allegiance, but not from a pure heart and a good conscience.

Just in passing I will mention also that the Lord's Supper was said to be a sacrament. One of the early Roman military governors reported to the Roman emperor about certain Christians whom he had arrested. He said that upon interrogating these Christians (presumably under torture), he got from them that at the communion they renewed their vows to the Lord. They renewed their vows to love God and to live a life of holiness. They renewed their vows to one another, to love one another. So the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, also in itself contains the essence of a commitment to God, a renewal of our commitment every time we take the communion. This aspect we seem to have forgotten today which is why we hardly know why it is called a sacrament.

### **How Can Baptism Save You?**

We can see that the Early Church attached great importance to baptism, and we too must grasp its vital importance. Baptism is not something which you can take or leave. Many people today have this casual attitude because they have not understood the Scriptural teaching on baptism, nor have they realized how the Early Church understood baptism. So important it is that you will notice the words of Peter here. Look carefully again at v21a: "Baptism now saves you." Those are important and significant words. Yes indeed, that is where the doctrine of baptismal regeneration comes from. We are born of water and the Spirit as we read in John 3:5. Water and the Spirit - not only the water but also the Spirit; but not only the Spirit, also the water; because there [in the water] the pledge was made, the commitment was made.

Modern theologians are also beginning to see the great importance of baptism in the Scriptural teaching as well as in the history of the Early Church. A friend of mine, Robert Banks, who is now teaching at the University of Sydney, Australia, recently wrote a book called Paul's Idea of Community. This is what he says on p.82 in that book, "Paul's linking of faith with baptism suggests that it was by means of baptism that the individual actually committed himself to God." This is coming to quite an accurate and close understanding of the Scriptural teaching. I don't mean in citing this book that I fully agree with everything that he says in that book, but at this point he is certainly very much in line with Scripture.

Notice what Paul says concerning salvation in Rom. 10:10. "For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved." Two things are said here by Paul to be essential to salvation. Two things, not just one: a man believes with his heart and so is justified and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.

When does a person make the confession with his lips? In the Early Church, the confession was made at baptism in response to the question posed to him or her. He or she responds, "I do. I confess Jesus as my Lord and as my King." So by the mouth he makes confession and through that confession Paul says he is saved. This is also why Peter says that baptism saves. There must be faith in the heart but there must also be confession. This confession is of course no ordinary confession. It is very important to understand this. It is precisely the pledge made at baptism, the oath of "military allegiance" made to Jesus as King.

But we must understand also that baptism itself does not save. Let us be very clear about this. There must be the faith and the confession from a good conscience. The conscience is of the heart. You cannot just make a confession. Anyone can make a confession with his mouth, but there must also be a good conscience based upon faith.

### **Confessing Christ Before Baptism Vs. At Baptism**

Then you may say, "Did I not already confess Jesus before baptism?" Indeed you did, but that is not the same as the oath of allegiance. That is a very important thing to understand. Does the soldier who makes the oath of allegiance to the country and emperor, not already love his emperor and his country before he makes the oath of allegiance? Indeed he does, but it is at the making of the oath that it takes on a legal aspect of commitment. It becomes a binding vow. He

places himself under oath, hence the "sacramento". Up to that point he can say he loves the country but he did not make any vow. Up to that point he loves the emperor but he did not make any commitment, any pledge. But in baptism, the Christian has made his oath of allegiance to his King and God. It is just like two people, who love each other before marriage, but they have not made a commitment in a legal sense until they have made their marriage vows. Of course they love each other before that and they have made some sort of commitment, but that commitment only became legal at the wedding.

In the same way, at baptism your commitment becomes, as it were, legal in God's sight, established forever in the heavens. Now this is the first point that I'd like to make very clear to you, so that you understand what you are doing in baptism. Anyone who is not clear about this should withdraw from baptism. In baptism, you have pledged your oath of allegiance. You have committed yourself wholly to God as King.

So the first thing about baptism is that it is a pledge, a legally binding pledge every bit as marriage is, every bit as the military oath of allegiance is. Any soldier who went back on his oath of allegiance understood and gladly accepted the penalty that the country and the emperor would impose upon him as a breach of faith, as an apostate, as a traitor to his country and his people. The soldier (especially if he is not a conscript) voluntarily enters into the pledge of allegiance. He is not compelled to enter into it, but once he enters into it, he will stand by it unto death. Just as at marriage the two people say, "Til death us do part."

## **2. Baptism: United With Christ**

The second point concerning baptism has to do with being united with Christ. Through baptism, you become united with Christ. In Rom. 6:4 we read,

"We were buried therefore with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

We will come to the second part of this verse a little later, but here in the first part it says we are buried with Christ by baptism into death. Notice this expression "with Christ" - not just for Christ but with Him. In a message some time ago I expounded the words of the Lord Jesus, "He that is not with Me is against Me." (Mat. 12:30) I expounded the fact that there is a big difference between being for Christ and being with Christ. Many people are for Christ but not many people are with Christ. There is a world of difference between these two positions.

### **For Christ Vs. With Christ**

To be for someone is to cheer him on. You see two fighters in this boxing ring and you cheer on your man because you are for him. You are for him but you are not with him. To be with him you must be right there in the ring with him fighting alongside him in the struggle. It is like two parties fighting it out in the arena. The crowds are for this party or for that party and they are all cheering on their heroes - but of course they are very safe up there in the stands. None of the fighting parties can touch them.

Oh yes, today we have lots of people who are for Christ. What about you? Where do you stand in relation to Christ? Are you merely for Him or are you with Him? Do you say, "Oh, Christ is good. We need some Christianity. It's good to have some religion because the world is going bad, it's getting rather corrupt, so we need to have a little morality." Many people are all for religion. It's good to have some Christianity and they don't mind sending their children to Sunday School. "Get some good clean thinking into their little brains." But then you ask, "What about you coming to church?" they say, "No, just my children. Christianity is good for other people, not for me." Very interesting! That's why in Liverpool we had a bus and we would pick up all the children and bring them to church. The parents didn't come to church but they were very happy to send their children to church. That is to be for Christ.

But to be with Christ is to be beside Him on the battlefield. You are not just cheering Christ on, but you are standing beside Him, fighting for the victory with Him and taking the wounds. Yes, you will take the injury, too. Spectators are not likely to get hurt, except of course by accident. Sometimes it does happen that the baseball goes into the stands and hits someone on the head as he's busy chewing on his sandwich.

Here in Romans 6, we find for the first time that we have done something with Christ, that through our commitment and pledge to Him, we are buried with Him. We have stopped being spectators. We have stopped being there to cheer Jesus on; we have joined with Him in this baptism. We have identified ourselves publicly with Him.

### **To Die With Christ And Be Buried With Him**

Your friends may snigger at you. "What? You're suddenly turning all religious? What is happening to you? Is your conscience bothering you? Are your psychological needs beginning to eat you up? Why don't you see a psychologist? Maybe a psychologist will put you right, but instead you are getting all religious." So you have to face the sniggering. You see, now you are a casualty. If you were cheering on Christ nobody would bat an eyelid, but now that you have taken your stand with Christ, you are buried with Him; you have died with Him. The situation has changed. You become the object of scorn. If they do not scorn you, they become puzzled about you.

I was a very worldly guy in my time, so when I became a Christian my friends' minds were boggled. They were all very worldly guys too and they were scratching their heads. "This guy can become a Christian? Hey, what happened to him? How come he became a Christian?" My friends couldn't imagine me being seen inside a church. None of them laughed at me. I think they were more shocked than amused. They were very puzzled and they would give me a strange look.

I remember a very long conversation I had with one friend. This handsome fellow, who was very popular with the girls, asked, "What happened to you? Why did you become a Christian?" He was a very close friend of mine and I remember how he just sat back in the sofa with his legs up and for two hours he was deep in thought, trying to figure that out. In fact he kept firing questions at me which I did not want to answer and I did not even know how to answer, as I had only just become a Christian.

Two to three months later he himself became a Christian. I guess he finally figured it out. This time it was his turn for his friends to say, "What happened to you?" At first he was not for Christ at all. Then he became for Christ, very slowly, very gingerly. And then the big day came when he took his stand with Christ. What a great joy it was for this dear friend of mine, whom I love very much, to take his stand with Christ.

So it is in being buried with Christ that we take the first step of becoming united with Him. At baptism we are buried with Christ. Look at the next verse (Rom. 6:5) which makes this point even more plain:

"For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His."

If you want to be in the resurrection - united with Him in the resurrection - then you must start by being united with Him in His death. There is no other way you can become united with Him in His resurrection.

In these two verses, we see this phrase "united with Him" three times. With Him, not just for Him. So our part is to die with Him of our own free choice. No one will compel us to do it. I did not become a Christian because I was afraid to die. For some reason I was never afraid to die. Some people are terribly afraid of death. But no one could frighten me into the Kingdom of God by talk of death or ghosts. Rather I came to see the truth in Christ, and that of my own free choice I must make my commitment to the truth in order to be freed from the slavery of sin. When we take this step then the Lord on His part raises us up by His power, by His grace, to the new life in Him. No one compels us to it.

#### **United With Christ: His Resurrection Life In You!**

But there is one more thing I want to stress about being united with Christ. That is, when you are united with Christ, and only when you are united with Him, then His life begins to flow into you. When you are just for Him, just cheering Him, that is no use; you will experience nothing spiritual, though you may be emotional. But when you are united with Him then you will begin to experience what it means to have the life of Christ flowing into you. Then you will understand what John 15 means, "Abide in Me and I in you; then My life will flow into you and through you, and you will bear much fruit." (paraphrased, Jn. 15:4,5)

As M. pointed out, many times we read the Bible and we understand the words but we don't experience them. Have you experienced the life of Christ flowing into you? Gently perhaps, quietly perhaps, and yet surely and powerfully transforming you and working through you to the transformation of others. When I talked to my worldly friend that I just mentioned, I did not know any theology. I did not even know the Bible. Yet even my stumbling words spoke to him. Something about this new life flowing through me got to him, touched him. And this very, very worldly man, who spent much of his time on the dance floors with pretty girls, was transformed, because somehow the life of Christ flowed through me to him. I don't understand what in my answer touched him because surely I did not even know how to answer his questions. I did not even understand enough about the Christian life, but it was sufficient that that life was now flowing



through me. And not only he but also several of my friends, one by one, were transformed, changed.

Another dear friend was willing to forgo a whole university career under the Communists, because becoming a Christian meant he could not enter university. He was denied entrance to the university. He was willing even to accept that price because now he experienced something even more valuable. Such was the power of the new life in Him. You've got to know that new life before you would be able to come to that depth of commitment. That new life comes because the Spirit of God now dwells in us. Here is something very beautiful.

The Bible tells us that God gives His Holy Spirit to dwell in us as an earnest, as a pledge, as a first down payment. When we make our pledge to God in baptism then God makes His pledge to us: He gives us His life. He gives us His Holy Spirit, and this is something you don't philosophize about. It is not a question of philosophy. It is something that you either experience or you don't experience. It is a question of the reality of life.

If I don't experience His life I am only talking philosophy. I don't want to talk philosophy. I am not even interested in philosophy. Either this thing is the reality of life or it is not worth talking about, as far as I'm concerned. That is why there are Christians who are willing to lay down their lives. Does that ever puzzle you? Why are they happily willing to lay down their lives for Christ? It is because they can say, like one of the first martyrs, Polycarp was able to say, "I cannot deny Him. I know Him in my life. I have experienced Him for these 80 years. (He was over 90 by that time.) I cannot deny Him." When the Roman governor tried to persuade him to deny Christ so he could spare this old man, he said, "Just get on with the execution. There is no way I can deny Christ."

You may even be able to stand and die for a philosophy. But this is not a philosophy; it is the reality of a new life. You have pledged yourself to God in baptism and God pledges Himself to you in giving you His Holy Spirit. Here is the beauty of God's way.

We have seen that baptism is a pledge, a commitment of ourselves to God. We have seen that in baptism we are united with Christ. Let us now look at the third point which is that in baptism we are incorporated into the body of Christ.

### **3. Baptism: Incorporated Into The Body Of Christ**

As I mentioned at the beginning, the Church is not a club that you join by means of some fancy rite called baptism whereby you gain your membership. Now this is something very important to grasp. You can join a church and get membership but that does not make you a member of the body of Christ. There are many church members today who are not members of the body of Christ. They are not Christians in the true sense, in the Biblical sense. They are members of a church, yes, but members of the body of Christ, no.

#### **The Body Of Christ - A Reality**

You see, the body of Christ is a spiritual reality. It is not an organization. It is not a society organized by man. It is a spiritual reality. And the only way you can

become member of the body of Christ is through the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. That is what we read in 1 Cor. 12:13:

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one Spirit."

It says here, "We were all baptized into one body...." Notice very carefully here that it is not our being baptized into the Holy Spirit. This is not talking about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, in which the Spirit is symbolized by water and we are baptized into this Holy Spirit, into this water which symbolizes the Spirit. Here the Spirit is not passive; The Spirit is active. The Holy Spirit is the One who baptizes us into the Body of Christ. This is important to grasp.

Here I cannot spend too much time on the technical details of exegesis. Suffice it to say that it is rather unusual that Paul uses the word "baptize" here. If he only meant to say that we were placed into the body of Christ, the word "baptize" doesn't mean to place either, it means to immerse, to dip, quite literally. And if Paul simply wanted to say that the Holy Spirit placed us into the body of Christ he could have used the word "placed" or "put", or he could even have used the word "grafted" into the body of Christ. But he uses this word "baptized". It is curious because the Greek word used here is "baptize" which generally means to place into something that is liquid, not into a solid. (Again, if you would like to study the technical details of this you could consult a book by Conant called *The Meaning and Use of Baptizein*. "Baptizein" is the Greek word from which the English "baptize" comes.) Therefore it is rather curious to be "baptized" into a body. Sometimes it is used figuratively of the plunging of a sword into the body, but the idea here being that the sword is being plunged into the blood of the victim. But this meaning cannot be the one that Paul had in mind, since it would be destructive to the body. Sometimes "baptize" means to overwhelm, to be overwhelmed by problems and so forth. But none of these meanings are applicable here.

Why then does Paul use the word "baptized" in this verse? The only reason we can see is that he is making the allusion to baptism. That when we are placed into the water of baptism, so also the Holy Spirit of God places us, baptizes us, into the body of Christ. This can only happen through our commitment on our part, and through His power on His part. It is then that not only are we baptized with water, but also we are baptized by the Spirit into His body.

At what point is it that we become a part or member of the body of Christ, the spiritual entity called the Church? At what point does the Holy Spirit take us and place us so that we become members of the body of Christ? Paul indicates that it is at baptism when we make our pledge to God out of a good conscience.

#### **4. Baptism: The Death, The Gateway To The Resurrection Life**

We come now to the last point. Very early on in the New Testament, baptism already symbolized or represented death. In fact, it often represented martyrdom more than simply death. For example, we find this already in the teaching of the Lord Jesus in Mk. 10:38,39 and Lk. 12:50 where the Lord Jesus says, "I have a baptism with which I must be baptized." What He meant was, "I have a death which I must die." Already at this early phase of His ministry, the Lord is using the

word "baptism" as representing death. When He speaks of the baptism that He must undergo He is speaking of the death that He must die.

### **Why Death?**

Now this immediately brings us to the question: Why is death so important? Death is not a nice subject so why do we have to keep talking about death? The reason is simple and we can see it from 2 Cor. 5:17:

"Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come."

Why the stress on death? Here it is stated very clearly: If the old does not pass away, the new cannot come. This is precisely the problem that so many Christians have, and it is this problem which M. was testifying had happened in her case. She had been baptized before but the old had not passed away. Therefore the new could not come. There was no way she could experience what Romans 6 is talking about because the old was still there in her life. M. had entered into baptism but not with a good conscience perhaps because she was not fully instructed as to what was involved.

I'd like this point to be very, very clear in each one of your minds. I beg of you to understand this, especially if you are a Christian: If the old has not passed away from your life, if you are still holding on to the old sins, the old mentality, the old way of thinking, then the new cannot come.

### **What Does It Mean To Die?**

If, when I became a Christian, I still held on to my old mentality, I could never have experienced the fullness of the Christian life. If I still held on to those military ambitions that I had, my old thoughts of making myself great, leading my own army, exalting myself in this world, looking after number one, I could not have become a true Christian. I had to renounce all this old way of life, all my selfish ambitions. There is nothing wrong necessarily with ambitions, but selfish ambitions are what we have to check. There are spiritual ambitions. There are also selfish ambitions and my ambitions were certainly most selfish. If I had held on to that old way of life, if the old had not passed away, I could not have experienced the new.

I wrestled for over two months in my mind. Bitter wrestling. I still tried to cling to my ambitions. They had meant so much to me. For years I had lived in those ambitions, for years I had disciplined myself in those ambitions. I got up early in the morning for physical training. I was very strong and muscular in those days. I used to use one of those bull-workers and my muscles were bulging. Now of course I've only got ribs to show, but in those days, I took pride in my strength. One of my special delights was to shake hands with big strong fellows and watch their face. You see, there is the carnal man, the pride.

And as for martial arts - I worked at it everyday with my Japanese teacher, training hard. In those days it was disciplined training, early in the morning. I also studied hard, training the mind, working in mathematics which was my best subject. I loved it because I took it as mental discipline. So in this way my whole

life was geared to my ambition. I didn't just dream about my ambition but I constantly worked towards it. I was a very systematic, disciplined kind of person.

For years I lived with that dream, my military ambition. I cultivated my thinking. I deliberately removed any fear of death from my thoughts. But when I came to the Lord, all this selfish ambition had to go. What a battle it was! What a struggle! Today I am amazed how some people can come to the Lord so easily. How do they do it? I fought and struggled and wrestled and kicked until finally I knew I must let it all go. I knew I could not play around with two lives. I knew I could not be wishy-washy. I knew I could not be a true Christian if I brought this kind of mentality into my Christian life. I knew it would not work unless the old passed away.

Now, my problem may not be your problem. You may not think of worldly grandeur in the way I did. Maybe your problem is the love of money. That was not my interest. Money never interested me. I don't think any true soldier would be interested in money. He is committed to his goals, his military ambitions. But many Christians are absorbed with money, and unless this mentality goes from you, you cannot be a true Christian. Jesus plainly said that you cannot serve God and mammon (i.e. money; cf. Mt. 6:24). Many Christians are trying to do this very thing and they justify it with a spiritual cloak. In this way you only deceive yourself.

Why does baptism mean death? Why is this death important? Because unless the old passes away you will never fully experience what it is to be in the resurrection life. There is the root of the whole matter. In Rom. 6:7 Paul says that "it is through death that we are freed from sin." Understand this very clearly. Maybe even in baptism you were afraid to die. Were you? I must say that death was one thing that never scared me. If this is the way to finish the old life, then so be it. I felt that if I had to die, then die I would. This is why so many Christians are not fully committed. They don't want to part with the old life. For this reason the Scripture speaks of a total commitment because in death you are totally committed.

In China, when many of us became Christians this was our motto: loyal unto death. When we made the military oath of allegiance, we did not only pledge allegiance to the Lord, but we also understood (as every Roman soldier understood), that the pledge was a pledge of loyalty unto death. Faithful unto death. Loyal to Christ to the end. This is total commitment. Death is always total. You cannot be half-dead, otherwise you haven't really died. Maybe many Christians are half dead, that's why they are only half-alive too.

### **Make Up Your Mind!**

I have often said that it is not worth living that kind of a Christian life. Do you enjoy being half-dead? Have you seen somebody half dead? He is lying there, moaning, too weak to move. We cannot say he is dead, but neither can we meaningfully say that he is alive since he is totally non-functional. We don't really know where he is. Can we call this kind of a life the Christian life? I say to you quite simply, that those who are half dead are in a most wretched state. I say to you that if you only want to die half way, just go on and be a non-Christian and soak in whatever the world can give to you. I believe in clean-cut living. There's no point in being a half dead Christian. It's ridiculous. It's a wretched state to be in.

You just go out there to the world and soak yourself in sin to the hilt, and die with it and accept hell for all eternity. Don't mess around half way, being neither here nor there. Don't drag your filth into the church. That's what happens when you have not once and for all renounced your old way of life. We don't need that in the church and you don't need it either.

I have pleaded time and again that if this is the way you're going to end up then the only sensible thing is not to be a Christian at all. What is the point of being neither here nor there, struggling to live a Christian life and falling down, then wondering to yourself where is the victory? "How come the old life is still there? I thought was going to experience some freedom. But what do I get? I get only defeat all the time." Then you might as well go and sit in the movies and soak it in. Go to the dance hall and dance your feet off. Enjoy yourself! If you like drink, then drink yourself into the ground. At least you enjoy yourself to the hilt. Live it up! Eat and drink, since you are going to die tomorrow. What kind of a Christian are you? If you are neither here nor there, if you are only a Christian with a long face, if you find the Christian life is so hard and you are wondering to yourself, "Why did I get myself into all this?", then forget it. Go into the world. Enjoy yourself while you have whatever time you've got left to enjoy. Then take the consequences.

Or else, die once and for all. Finish with this whole business and enjoy the Christian life. How many Christians enjoy the Christian life? The Christian life is really worth enjoying. Oh yes, it is tough, like a soldier's life. A soldier's life may be tough. He goes to battles. He takes wounds. He takes scars, but there is the glory. Why do these soldiers enlist in the army anyway? Why do they voluntarily go into it? To get killed? No, it is for a cause they cherish, for a king they love. Have you heard about the Roman soldiers? Outnumbered, surrounded, wounded, bleeding, they refused to surrender. They had made their allegiance. They would stand to the last man. No surrender. Still triumphant, still happy, still rejoicing, even in the moment up to death. That's wonderful. Do you understand the joy of the Christian life? These soldiers don't even have God with them. They are fighting for an ideal. I've known of communist soldiers charging into machine gun fire. The machine guns were spitting out bullets and they carried a charge and ran straight into it. Of their own choice they say to their unit commander, "Please let me go. Give me the privilege to go." And we say, "What's the matter with you? Are you crazy?"

There is a vision for them. For that vision they are willing to live and die. But we've got much more than a vision. If they are prepared to die for a vision, what about us? I was prepared to die for a vision, an ideal. Now I begin to see my foolishness, because now I've got the reality. Now I've got Christ, not just a vision or an ideal. Now I've got the reality of a new life from God to live for, and to die for, if the Lord so permits.

Therefore what does baptism mean? Baptism is a commitment to death. Death to the old way of life, so that we can enjoy the freedom from sin and have the power to serve God fully and effectively. Enjoy your Christian life! What is the point of becoming a Christian if you do not enjoy the Christian life? Do we like to torture ourselves? If this is the reality, if this is the truth, then I'll go all the way with it.

If this is not the truth, then forget it. I'll go to the dance hall. I'll outdance everybody else. I too know how to dance. Either we give up on this halfway-Christian life or else let us once and for all say, "Lord, I'm finished with this old way of life. Lord, let this new life come into me."

### **Summary**

So let us summarize. Only he who has wholly died can be resurrected. By definition you cannot be resurrected until you die. You cannot be resurrected when you are half-dead. It is only when you die that you can be resurrected. It is only when you put off the body of flesh in baptism (cf. Col 2 :11,12), that you will be born of the Spirit. To put off the body of flesh means that your thinking is no more dominated by the flesh, but by God, and you are living wholly for God. Only when you have determined to put off the body of flesh will you be born of the Spirit. Only when you are faithful unto death will you receive the crown of life as we read in Rev. 2:10.

In summary, what does baptism mean? Firstly, baptism mean allegiance to God as our Lord, made out of a good conscience. Secondly, we are united with Christ through baptism. Thirdly, we are incorporated into the Body of Christ through baptism. Fourthly, baptism represents death. At baptism we must die to our old life. This is the only way to enter into the new life, into resurrection life of Christ.

## **Baptism and Freedom: "Let My People Go"**

*7th in a series of synopsis sermons on "Baptism" by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.*

What is baptism all about? It's not very meaningful to witness a baptism and not know what's going on. What is baptism about? Can we sum it all up in one word?? one word which I would like you to take home with you after you have witnessed what is happening here today; one word which you are going to remember every time you see a baptism in the future. I wonder what that word might be? What do you think? In a few moments, as you watch these dear ones being baptized one by one, and you ask yourself, "What does this mean? Why are they doing this?", that one word will come back to your mind.

### **What Is The Bible All About?**

One of the most dramatic, one of the most powerful, one of the most significant events in the history of mankind was the Exodus from Egypt? when about two million people (virtually the whole population of Montreal) packed up and left Egypt. Imagine standing on the top of Montreal's Mount Royal and seeing the houses stretched out endlessly to the north, south, east, and west? two million people. Imagine two million people pack up one day and everybody leaves Montreal, leaving the place as a ghost town. It would be quite a disaster for Canada if nearly one tenth of its population moved out, particularly if it was a very productive part of its population. That will give you an idea of what the Exodus was about? two million people on the move. No wonder it was one of the most striking events. Egypt, at one stroke, was going to lose a very significant part of its working population.

And through that event there comes down to us those significant words: "Let My People Go." Even if you are not a Christian, even if you do not know much about the church or the Bible, I'm sure you have heard those words before: "Let My people go." That is what Exodus was about. That is what the Bible is about: "Let My people go." You say to me, "That's a few words, not one word. You've got too many words there." Well, we can sum it in one word: Freedom. That's what it's about: Freedom. Now I would like this word freedom to really stick in your mind, because you and I know that freedom is something more important even than life.

### **What Do People Seek For Above All Else?**

When they built the Berlin Wall, do you know how many people risked their lives, indeed lost their lives to get through that wall? And they had no other life to live. But to them it was freedom or death. There is no point living anymore without freedom. But what do we mean by freedom? Were the people in East Berlin starving to death? No. Did they have enough to eat? Yes. Maybe they couldn't eat steak everyday, but they weren't exactly dying of starvation. So you ask them: "What are you complaining about? You've got enough to eat, you've got enough to wear. Do you freeze in winter?" "No". "So what are you complaining about? You've got food, you've got clothing, so be content with that. But you're not content. Why?" "We want freedom." " You say, "Come on, let's be reasonable. If

you go over the Berlin Wall and into West Berlin, you might not even have enough food to eat. Who guarantees you will have a Job? In East Berlin the government guarantees you a job but in West Berlin nobody guarantees you a Job. So you might be out of a job and you might be hungry. So if you want to be hungry and free, that's alright with us, but you really don't seem to make much sense. After all, you might have a good job right now here in East Berlin, but when you go to the West you've got nothing. Nothing is guaranteed to you. But you still want to go. Why? It has something to do with the meaning of life. Freedom has something to do with the meaning of life.

Let's look at the people in the West. Haven't you got enough to wear? Yes. You've got enough to eat? Yes. You're very contented? So, so. I always remember when I came out of China and went to Switzerland, one of the wealthiest countries in Europe. And I asked people, "Say, you've got a very high standard of living here. You must be very happy people?" "No!" No? Surprise! I just came out of Communist China and there everyone wants to get out, even to Hong Kong, not to say to a country with the standard of living of Switzerland. Everyone's happy just to get to Hong Kong, into the hovels there, into the wooden huts on the mountainside which are liable to get washed away by the next rain storm. And they are willing to risk that, but you people living here in Switzerland, you are not content? "No." Why? Because life is more than food, life is more than clothing. What is that more?

### **What Are You Looking For?**

Now if you don't care about freedom then there is no message here for you. You've come here to waste your time today, and I have to say sorry to you. But if you are interested in freedom, then this Bible has something to say to you. "Life", the Lord Jesus says, "is more than food. Life is more than clothing" (Mt. 6:25; Lk. 12:23). And what is that more? You can have enough clothing, you can have enough food, but you don't have freedom. "Oh", you say, "Sure we have freedom. I can vote." I'm not talking about that kind of freedom. I'm talking about the freedom from sin. I am talking about the freedom from that bondage which somehow suffocates you. You are very jealous of somebody and that jealousy is killing you. You are very envious of somebody at work, at school? that envy is poisoning your system. You are under the bondage of something just as dangerous as any other kind of bondage can be, because when you live under the bondage of sin, sin will destroy you. You don't have the freedom to be what you desire to be because other forces are pushing you around. Your job pushes you around, your boss pushes you around, your peers push you around? you've got to live up to them, you've got to match up to them, you have to live according to other peoples' opinions of you. You are not free because you have to please this person, you have to please that person, you have to please everybody else. That's called freedom?

### **Do You Want True Freedom?**

Freedom? think about it tonight when you go to bed. Think about the meaning of life. Think what exactly you are studying for and what you are working for. If you don't want to think then we have no message for you either. The message of the Bible is for people who think, and who think about what life is all about. If you want to bury your mind in wine, if you want to bury your mind in the TV, if you don't want to think, fine, the Gospel has nothing to say to you. But for those



people for whom life means more than food and clothing, the Bible has a message for you. In China they have food and clothing too, they're not starving to death. When you go to China you see that people have enough to eat and enough to wear, but how many people are willing to swim shark-infested waters to get to Hong Kong, and how many people don't make it? Either they drown or they are attacked by sharks. Most of them did not make it. But for them it is be free or die. Have we got a message for you? Why am I a Christian? Why did brother B. tell us he turned his back on a prosperous future that his father was offering to him? Why? What's the matter with these people? It's because there is something more than prosperity. There is something more than food and clothing. Freedom is what it's about. You may have food, you may have clothing, you may have prosperity, but without freedom it is as though you've got nothing. After all, what else can you do with prosperity? How much more clothing can you buy? How much more food can you stuff yourself with? Some people spend half their time stuffing themselves with food and the other half of their time is spent dieting in order to get their weight down again. A very interesting society this is.

### **God Wants You To Be Free. Are You Free?**

In 1 Cor.10:1,2 the apostle Paul says this:

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

Now, if you don't know the Bible that's very hard to understand. Its meaning is basically very simple. It is telling us about the Exodus. At the Exodus the people sought for freedom. "Let My people go" Moses said to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. And when they were finally free to go, something remarkable happened. They were moving out of Egypt, following Moses, and when they looked ahead they saw a cloud. Astonishing sight! A cloud, not up in the sky, but there on the ground, in front of them, leading them. By nighttime, the cloud became a column of fire. In the daytime it became a column of cloud, and at night it turned back into a column of fire. So day and night they followed the column until they came to the sea. And when they came to the sea, all of you who have seen The Ten Commandments and other such interesting films will know what happened. God set His people free.

Our God is a God interested in freedom. Freedom for you and for me. Freedom to live a life that has meaning? a life that has purpose. Does your life have purpose? If you are not a Christian, are you content with your life as it is in the world today? If you are, we have no message for you. But are you? In the days when I was not a Christian, many a time I meditated about the meaning of life. I was ambitious. I was very ambitious. I aimed for nothing but the top. But my question was: "What is it all for? Where is all this going to lead to? What is the end of all this?" And I had to concede that it was all leading nowhere? the end was nowhere. I realized it would all come to nothing. Because we are not free, above all things, from meaninglessness. Life without God is forever going to be meaningless. And the only way to be content with a life without God is: just don't stop to think about it. Don't stop to think about death. Those Christians are always trying to scare you about death. Unfortunately, all of us are going to die one day sooner or later, but we don't want to think about it. And who knows about all the other things that lie

in wait for us? We don't want to think about it. That's why I say the Gospel is only for those who are willing to think, who have the courage to think, who have the courage to say, "I'm going to stop and look at this situation." The Gospel is only for those who are free from fears and have the courage to face reality.

### **True Freedom Is Spiritual Freedom**

So I could go on for a long time with this message, because freedom is a very big subject. But I won't. But when you watch these dear ones being baptized, you will now understand why they are being baptized. It is to be free from sin, free from the power and the fear of death, free from the utter meaninglessness of this life. And let's be honest. Let's be very honest: Without God this life ends up six feet underground and goes nowhere else, absolutely nowhere else. And if you are happy with that fate, with that conclusion to your life, then the Gospel has nothing to say to you. But if you don't find it satisfactory that your life is simply going to end up in a hole in the ground, whether it be in five years or ten years or twenty years? if you are not happy with that and you want freedom, freedom even from death, then let me tell you that the Gospel has more to offer you than wishful thinking. As I said already, freedom from falsehood means commitment to the truth. If death is all there is, we'll have to accept it with courage. But when these dear ones are being baptized, they don't stay under the water any more than Jesus stayed in the ground. He rose from the dead, as they also rise from the water into newness of life, to the freedom that belongs to the children of God.

Now I experience that freedom and that is why I am speaking to you with conviction. Jesus says, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn.8:36). If I don't experience that freedom, if I find myself still in bondage, then I say, "Jesus, You are talking nonsense because I am not free." But because I experience that freedom, I speak to you with confidence and with certainty. I could also be pursuing another career. I don't think I would do worse in any career than you can do. Perhaps if we were in the same line, I might even do better than you can do. My record isn't that bad, even in the world. But why have I, like brother B. and so many others, turned my back on the world? Because I know there is no freedom in it. It's all going to end up in the ground - that's all the future there is. But when I discover that Jesus rose from the dead and brought us a new kind of freedom? a freedom which is called the resurrection? then that is the freedom I want to experience. And when I experience the liberating power of that resurrection? when I experience it now and not some airy? fairy time in the future? then I can speak with conviction because I experience it to be true. If we don't experience His power now, how do we ever know whether His power will work in the future? Of course it becomes wishful thinking! The reason I speak with conviction is because I know it is true. And so does everyone who has ever truly followed the words of the Lord Jesus: "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me." And so will these dear ones being baptized today experience that freedom and that power.

### **Freedom And Power? What's The Connection?**

Freedom of course requires power. Poverty, for example, is a bondage. It is a bondage because poverty is a lack of power to deal with situations that we encounter. As a result of this lack of power, we end up in bondage. Without power there is no freedom. So every time you think about freedom, remember that there is no freedom without power. And now we are not talking about

physical power. We are talking about the only kind of power that matters - spiritual power. The power of this world passes away. Great empires have come and gone. Nations that are great today will pass away. And you will pass away too, because your power is just about non-existent. But God's power does not pass away, and God's power is the power we are talking about. It abides forever.

Remember then, every time you see one of these dear ones go into the water and rise up again, remember "that for freedom Christ has set you free!" These are the words of the apostle Paul in Gal.5:1. Remember them well. And every time in the future when you witness a baptism, think again of these words: It is for freedom that Christ has set us free through His power. Are you free?

# Baptism and Resurrection: "I will Manifest Myself"

*8th in a series of synopsis sermons on "Baptism" by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.*

On this joyous occasion of baptism I would like to speak to those who are not Christians; to those who are almost Christians, but not quite; and to those who indeed already know the Lord but whose depth of relationship with Him leaves much to be desired. As for all of us who know the Lord, we would truly desire to walk in a closer relationship with Him.

Baptism, as you know, has to do with a dying with Christ to our old way of life - the way of life that is dominated by sin - in order to be raised up into a new life, the resurrection life of Christ - a life which is free from the power of sin. And when you see how many Christians do not appear to have been freed from the power of sin you just wonder whether they really know what the Christian life is all about. And so in this message I would like to address myself to this question: What is the relationship of baptism to the resurrection?

## **"Show Us God" - The Longing Of Every True Heart**

Let's begin with a passage from John 14 on which we will base our exposition. This passage is too long to read in its entirety, so we can only look at certain sections from it. It is all part of one talk, one continuous discourse, that the Lord Jesus is giving to His disciples, and it begins with a request from one of the disciples called Philip (v.8).

Philip said to Jesus, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied.'

I would like you to feel the depth and sincerity of Philip's request. There is nothing superficial about it. And I deplore the way that some preachers present it, as though somehow Philip had asked for something silly. Far from being silly, it was a profound, very earnest and sincere plea, coming from the depths of his heart:

"Lord, show us the Father that we may be satisfied." Our whole heart just longs to be able to see God, to know God. Show us the Father - God, the Father - and we will be satisfied.

This is a wonderful request - something truly deep and touching. What is the Lord's reply? Jesus answers him in this way (v.9):

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

The Lord is in no way rebuking Philip for his request. Instead, He is disappointed that Philip did not have the spiritual perception to see the answer to his own plea. The answer had been standing right in front of him, but he had failed to recognize it. But far from brushing aside Philip's request, the Lord Jesus now embarks on a

continuing discourse, an exposition that goes on all the way without stopping, through chapters 14, 15, and 16 - and that shows you just how important Philip's request was to the Lord Jesus.

"Show us the Father." I can say that there cannot be any genuine Christian who does not, with his heart, long to know God in a manner that is so vivid that he can really say, "I have seen Him." Is this not the whole point of the book of Job? - where through all the trials of Job, he was able to say at the very conclusion and climax, "Once I had heard of You, O God, with my ears, but now I have seen You with my eyes." [Job 42.5] Now I perceive the reality: You are the Living God. Job loved God before all those trials, but the end of those trials resulted in a new depth of experience with God - an experience which was on an entirely new and different level from what he had had before.

This is the point I am getting at. There are many Christians today who love God with all sincerity, but unlike Job, they are not yet able to say, "Before I heard of You with my ears, and what I heard was enough to make me love You with all my heart, but now I have seen You with my eyes, and that has made all the difference to me. All that I have gone through, all the suffering, it has been more than worth it." (cf. Job 42) Much like the words of the apostle Paul who said, "I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ." (Phil. 3:8)

#### **How Jesus Seeks To Fulfill This Longing!**

Let's look further on in John 14 to see what else the Lord says. Does He say, "Don't ask to see God! Because faith is not seeing and seeing is not faith!""?? No, not at all! He doesn't give him a lecture on this. He understands Philip's desire in a way that we do not appear to understand it, and in v.18 He meets Philip's longing in a most beautiful way: "I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you." In other words, "I will not disappoint you; I know your longing and I will not leave you desolate. I will come to you." Then the Lord Jesus continues in v.19: "Yet a little while and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me." Notice these words, "You will see Me." Philip had asked, "Show us," and the Lord's answer was, "You will see Me."

In the later part of this chapter He goes on to explain to the disciples that He is about to be taken away to die for the sins of the world. But He will rise again. "The world from now on, from the time of the Cross, will see Me no more, but you will see Me." Let's not underestimate the importance of this word "see". The Greek word here is "theoreo" which means seeing with the eye. "You will see Me."

#### **Fellowship With The Resurrected Jesus!**

Then the Lord Jesus goes on (v.19b): "Because I live, you will live also." Baptism is a dying with Christ, but if Jesus does not live, if there is no resurrection, then all those who have been or are going to be baptized must be the greatest fools of all. We were already dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2.1), and now we are going to die once more, being united with Christ in His death: We would all end up doubly dead, with no resurrection to follow. For this reason, baptism only has meaning if Jesus is alive.

"Because I live," Jesus says, "you will live." Our life depends on His. If in baptism we are united with Him in death, what would we have come to if He never rose? There would be two deaths instead of one - a double disaster. What did the apostle Paul say in 1 Cor. 15? "If Christ was not raised, if Jesus is not alive today, then we of all people are the most to be pitied. We are the biggest fools of all." (cf. 1 Cor 15.17-19).

Hence the importance of Philip's plea. He wants to know the Father because he wants to have the assurance that God is real, that God is the Living God. If not, what is he believing in? What are you believing in? Myths? Fairy tales? Philosophies? If Jesus is not alive then we are, of all men, most to be pitied - and Jesus fully understands this point as I will go on to show you.

### **Union With God - Baptism, The Gateway**

I am struck with how the Lord Jesus sets about to answer this request: "Show us God the Father". After saying, "You will see Me", He goes on to say: "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and You in Me and I in You" (v.20). In other words, in the day you see Me, and because you see Me, you will know and understand that I am united to the Father, the Father is united to Me, I am united to you. You are therefore united to the Father.

How does this union come about - this union with God the Father through Christ? It is through baptism: "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." (1 Cor. 6:17). Baptism indicates this very thing: that we have become united with God. It is just as in a marriage ceremony where two persons are united and become one. First of course, they have to be united in heart before the marriage ceremony, but the ceremony is, as it were, the legal expression of their commitment to one another. And that is what baptism also is.

### **Who Can See God?**

Then, in v.21 Jesus says, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Notice this word manifest: "I will manifest Myself." Now what does manifest mean? The word manifest, whether in the English, or in the Greek, means to make visible. "You will see Me", "I will manifest Myself." This is Jesus' promise to the person who has His commandments and keeps them.

In v.22, Judas , (not Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus), said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us and not to the world?" Now here he puts the question in a nutshell. Why will Jesus not manifest Himself to the unbeliever? The reason is that faith must precede this experience of Christ, because we are saved by faith. If He manifests Himself before that act of faith then we don't need faith anymore. The seeing would dispense with the need for faith. No, first there must be faith, and then the substantiation of that faith by the manifestation of Christ. This is the order. The world will not know Him because they have rejected Him in the first place. He will not manifest Himself to the world. But to those who have His word and keep it, He will manifest Himself.

Now I want to stress this word manifest because it is the key word of this whole exposition. And notice that Judas asks Jesus, "How is it that You will manifest

Yourself to us and not to the world?" "You will manifest..." Here the Greek word "mello" has been left untranslated [in the NKJV and the RSV]. The meaning here is actually: "How is that You intend to or are about to manifest Yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus answered this question by saying that He manifests Himself only to those who have already taken the step of loving Him (v.23): "Jesus answered him, 'If a man loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our home with him.'" Notice these words.

### **Much, Much More Than A Glimpse!**

You say you want to see the Father? You ask only for one look at the Father? I will do something better than that for you! The Father will come and make His home with you. How's that? He will come and live with you. That's wonderful, isn't it? If my daughter asked if she could have just one look at her two best friends and I said, "That's fine," then she would already be so delighted, but if I said, "They'll come and live with you." Wow! That would be far more than anything she had hoped for. That's a different story altogether. And so that was what Jesus replied, "You want to just have a look or a glimpse of the Father? I'll tell you something better. Not only the Father, We, My Father and I - We will come and make Our home with you!"

### **Jesus' Manifestation - The Reality Of Experience**

Let us now study this word manifest, and we have to deal with it in two stages: historically and experientially. In all proper exposition you must first look at the thing historically, and then experientially. Now I am not afraid of using this word "experiential". There are Christians in certain quarters who are very frightened of this word "experience", as though the Christian faith should be based in no sense on experience. I don't understand this. All of the Gospel account - if it is not experience, what is it? When the apostles were called by Jesus and they followed after Him, is that not an experience? "That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have handled with our hands concerning the Word of Life - this we testify and proclaim to you. We are sharing our experience with you" (cf. 1Jn 1:1-3).

We cannot be witnesses without having experience. What are you going to witness to if you haven't got an experience to talk about? And yet, in today's climate of Christianity, which is often so detached from anything of an experience of God, from any relationship with God which produces experience, people are puzzled. They are almost frightened by this word "experience". Well, I'm not frightened of it. My spiritual life is rooted in a long experience with God. You cannot say, "I know whom I have believed", unless you have experienced Him. If I have never met you, how can I say I know you? If I've heard of you, I can say I know about you, but I cannot say I know you because I've never experienced you. I've never met with you. To meet with you is to experience you. Paul was able to say, "I know whom I have believed" [2Tim 1.12], because he met Jesus. "I have seen the Lord, I met Him on the road to Damascus, and since then I've met Him many times. Therefore I can say, 'I know whom I have believed'".

It is this kind of confidence that Jesus wants every one of you to have. "I will manifest Myself to you." In other words, "I want you to meet with Me in a way that is so unmistakable that you will be able to say, 'I have met with the Lord.'"

Just as Job was able to say, "I have heard of You before, but now I have met with You." [Job 42.5] I don't mean that there is anything wrong with having heard of the Lord, with having faith on the basis of hearing. That is perfectly all right because faith comes on the basis of hearing [Rom.10.17]. But one must move on into deeper things with the Lord, and this is what the Lord challenges us to. "Meet with Me. I will manifest Myself to you."

I'm saying this particularly to those who are going to be baptized, that your faith will go on from baptism. Baptism is just a beginning. It is not the end of the road, but just the beginning, and you need to go on to meet with the Lord because He wants to manifest Himself to you. I can speak with this kind of confidence because I know He will, because I know He is the living Saviour. And I know He wants every person to have this confidence.

### **Jesus' Manifestation - The Historical Fact Of Resurrection**

Having spoken of the vital importance of experience to the Christian life, let us consider the historical aspect of what the Lord is saying here. What is the historical significance of this passage where the Lord says to the apostles, "You will see me. I will manifest Myself to you"? The first and primary significance of course is that He is referring to the resurrection event. We can see this in Jn 16:16-22. What do we read in v.16? "A little while, and you will see Me no more; again a little while, and you will see Me." Then in v. 17,18 some of His disciples said to one another, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me because I go to the Father?'" They said, "What does He mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what He means."

Jesus knew that they wanted to ask Him so He said, "Is this what you're asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me?'" (v.19). Then He explains to them. "Truly, in a little while you're going to weep. The world will rejoice but you will weep. The tears will run down your face because the One in whom you trusted, the One to whom you have committed your life to follow all these years, you will see Him hanging on a Roman cross, being put to death. And as you see Him slowly dying on that cross, your hope will fall away, and you will begin to say to yourself, "What have I done? I have given up my life, I have given up my profession to follow Him, and look at Him. He is dying." The world will be happy that I am gone, but your hearts will be broken (cf. v.20). But a little while, and you will see Me again, and the joy which you will then have nobody will take away from you. You will see Me" (v.22).

It is clear therefore, that in this whole context He is referring to His resurrection. Now this point is vitally important and I'd like to impress it upon your minds: He tells His disciples that they are going to see Him - with their physical eyes they are going to see Him when He has risen from the dead - so that there will not be a shadow of doubt in their minds that He is alive. And He wants them to have this confidence. He doesn't say, "Well, take it by faith. You're going to see Me die on a cross, you're going to see Me placed in a tomb, and then you'll never see Me again. But just take it all by faith that I'm going to be alive from here on in."



Today, there is a popular notion that you mustn't see Jesus in any way because you are to take His resurrection "by faith". And when you hear this kind of preaching, you get the idea that having the experience of seeing the risen Lord is somehow rather inferior, because it is no longer a matter of "faith". What are we talking about? Jesus wanted His disciples to know that He would see them and that they would see Him after His resurrection.

This point is so important to the Lord Jesus that in Matthew alone, He repeats it to His disciples five times (Mt. 16:21; 17:9; 17:23; 20:19; 26:32) so that they get this message very clearly: "I'm going to die. I'm going to rise again. And you are going to see Me." And in three of these five times He specified how long they would have to wait. How long is the "little while" which they must wait"? Three days, specifically, three days. You see, there is nothing vague about the words of Jesus. His words are not wishy-washy, unlike so many preachers. He tells it to them straight: "I'm going to die and you are not going to see Me. And then you will see Me in three days." Furthermore, in Mt. 26:32 He specifically tells His disciples that after He has been raised. He will go before them to Galilee, and that He will meet them there.

The resurrection account is very interesting. We have no time to analyze it in detail, but there are basically three stages during those 40 days in which the Lord Jesus was still on earth. The whole thing is perfectly planned out; there is nothing haphazard about it. The Lord Jesus knows exactly what He will do, and where He wants His disciples to be in the first period, in the middle period, and in the last period. Stay in Jerusalem first, then go into Galilee, and then come back to Jerusalem, where, in front of their very eyes, He ascends to heaven from the Mount of Olives. Who says that experience is not something that the Lord wants us to have, and that it is somehow a bad word?

### **The Centrality Of Jesus' Resurrection**

The resurrection is central to the teaching of the Lord Jesus. He Himself makes everything depend on it. I don't wish to minimize this word "everything", because by saying to them five times that He would rise again, He literally makes everything depend on the reality of His resurrection. I would like you to understand this very clearly. Suppose I were a teacher and I claim to be the Messiah. I go around saying that I am the saviour of the world. Would I dare to say to you that I am going to die and that I will rise in three days, and that you will see me? Would I dare to say that to you? You see, that can be easily checked. It is an empirical event that can be empirically verified. Whether I rise or not will be seen in three days. Jesus doesn't tell His disciples they're going to have to wait for 50 years, by which time most of them would be dead, although one or two of them might still be around to see Him rise from the dead. He wants them to verify whether or not He is speaking the truth. Do you see the point? Anyone who dares to say that means he wants you to check.

He also told His disciples that in a little while He was about to die. In His reply to the warning in Lk.13.31, "Go away because Herod wants to kill you," the Lord said in Lk.13.32, "I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day, I shall be perfected." It's another way of saying, "In a matter of days, I will be put to death" (cf. vv.33,34). He even specified the manner of His death. Could you predict how you will die? None of us could do that. Yet the Lord says,

"Take up your cross and follow Me", the implication being that He's going to the cross. In Jn 12:32 He made this quite specific, "When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all men to Myself." And John says that by this He explained what manner of death He would die (cf. v.33). There's only one way you get lifted up and that is you get hung up. And crucifixion was the form of hanging that took place at the time. You see, if you get beheaded like John the Baptist (Mt.14.10) you don't get lifted up, you get cut down.

Napoleon was a very short man (just about 5 feet tall) and he always had a complex about the fact that he was so short. One day when he was unable to reach a book on his shelf one of his officers said, "Oh, I'm higher than you are, I'll get .the book." That of course greatly annoyed Napoleon and he immediately said, "You are not higher than me, you are only taller than me. And in one fraction of a second I can shorten you by a whole head." You see, beheading shortens a person, it doesn't lift anybody up. When the Lord says "I'll be lifted up", He was referring to the manner of His death, that is, He would be lifted up upon the cross.

### **God Leaves Us In No Doubt**

Could you predict the manner of your death? Could you say that you would rise again? None of us could, yet Jesus could say to His disciples. "Everything I have preached to you, everything I have proclaimed to you, you will soon be able to see whether what I have spoken is true or not. I have told you that I will die very soon, that I will be crucified upon a cross. But more than that, in three days I will rise again, and you will see Me after My resurrection. Otherwise you might think I must be talking hot air. How will you verify that I am alive? You will see Me." Any one who reads the New Testament will see that throughout it, one theme comes back again and again: that Jesus is alive. Jesus lives!

If you take a concordance and look at every message preached by the apostles in the book of Acts, you will see that there is not a single message which does not revolve around the resurrection. Already in Acts 2, Peter was saying: "God has raised Him up and made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (cf. vv.23,24,32,36). And where was he preaching? In Jerusalem - the very place where only a few weeks before Jesus had been crucified. It was in that same place, not in some other corner of the world! The disciples didn't go off to a remote place where nobody knew anything about Jesus and say, "You know, Jesus rose again." No! It was right in Jerusalem - right in front of the very people who saw Jesus crucified. They said to them, "Jesus rose from the dead", and nobody could contradict them!

Surely, if Jesus had not truly been resurrected it would have been very easy for the authorities to contradict them - just take His body out of the tomb and say, "Here is Jesus - look at Him. Here He is." And crucifixion has a great advantage because, unlike beheading, you have the whole body intact, and you can readily identify the person. What is more, they used embalming methods in those days to preserve the body. As you remember, when Jesus was buried the women put spices on Him, but when they went back to complete the embalming process, He wasn't there anymore. He had risen.

### **Jesus' Resurrection - Physical, Or Spiritual??**

I want to thoroughly tackle this historical aspect of Jesus' resurrection because

there are some people who say, "Yes, Jesus rose again, but maybe He rose in some spiritual sense. Maybe when He said He will rise again in three days, He didn't mean physically but spiritually." Even that point is taken care of in Scripture. In Jn 2:19-22, you will remember the Lord Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (v.19). And then in v.21 we are told very plainly that by "this temple" the Lord Jesus referred to His body, i.e. "I will raise up this body in three days."

Now that is something pretty incredible. Imagine again that you or I pretend to be the Messiah. None of us would be foolish enough to put our neck on the line, to stake our whole claim to open investigation, by saying that in three days you will see me alive, after being publicly executed. Remember, Jesus wasn't executed in the inner recesses of a prison where nobody could see Him. Nowadays, people are often executed in prison where only a few people are present. But Jesus was executed on a hill outside Jerusalem and the people stood watching, not only at the cross, but also all along the city walls. The crowds lined the city walls, watching Him being crucified. And He wasn't crucified alone. There were two others crucified with Him. It was a big public event. Everyone was there to see Him die. Everyone knew which tomb His body had been placed in. He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea who was a well-known politician of the time. His body was not hidden in some unknown place, but in the tomb of a well-known personage.

#### **Jesus Even Testified To His Enemies**

What is more, not only did Jesus tell His disciples that in three days He would rise from the dead, but He said the same thing to those who didn't believe in Him. On two occasions He told His enemies, "I will give you no sign but one - the sign of the prophet Jonah." (Mt. 12:39,40; 16:4). Now any Sunday school child knows the story of Jonah: he was swallowed by a great fish and spent three days and three nights in its belly before he came out again. He was, as it were, dead and buried for three days, and then he rose again to life. This is the sign of Jonah, and Jesus specified very clearly to His enemies what He meant by it. In Mt. 12:39,40 He spelt it out for them. There He said, "Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." In other words, "In the same way I will rise again after three days." You see, Jesus left nothing to guesswork. He indicated exactly what part of Jonah's life was going to be the sign - the very part about his being three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. Twice He said that to His opponents, so that when Jesus was crucified His enemies remembered this. They remembered that He had said that He would give them only one sign - the sign of the prophet Jonah - that He would rise again. And so they went to Pilate and said to him, "You know, He said that He's going to rise again. So, just in case His disciples go and steal His body and then claim, 'He rose again,' we had better put a guard on the tomb." (cf. Mt.27:62-66). Which is what they did of course - they set a guard of soldiers at the tomb.

You see, by telling His enemies He would rise, He prepared their minds to eliminate all possibility of doubt afterwards. He wanted them to set a guard on the tomb of course. He wanted them to take every precaution. This is the reason why no one dared to open their mouth to contradict the disciples when they

proclaimed that Jesus had risen from the dead, only 50 days after His resurrection.

They boldly proclaimed that Jesus was risen - right there in Jerusalem, in the very place where Jesus was crucified. And no one could open their mouth to contradict them. This is the vital importance of Jesus' words, "I will manifest Myself to you." He appeared to them again and again. Not once, not twice, but by John 21 (which was still in the earliest days after Jesus' resurrection), He had already appeared three times to His gathered disciples (i. Jn 20.19, ii. Jn 20.26, here iii. Jn 21.1ff), without mentioning His appearances to individuals like Mary Magdalene (Jn 20.15-18), Simon Peter, and others like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk.24.13ff). Most of these are not even counted when Paul lists the resurrection appearances in 1 Cor.15.

"I will manifest Myself to you." I'd like to sum this part up very simply: Jesus wants us to know, just as He wanted His disciples to know, that He is alive. Whether Jesus is true or false is crucial to us. I've said before and I say it here again, if Jesus is not real, not one of you should believe in Him. Don't waste your time believing in such absolute rubbish. It is our duty to finish with this kind of nonsense. But if Jesus is real, the consequences for our lives are incalculable. You just cannot imagine the effects on your life if Jesus is real to you. If Jesus has manifested Himself to you (which He desires to do - and this is the point I'm trying to get at) your life would be so revolutionized that it would be burning with fire. As I have shared with many of you, He has manifested Himself to me again and again that this fire cannot but burn in my heart with a flame that consumes everything. And I would like to spread some of this fire to you.

#### **Has Jesus Manifested Himself to You?**

"I will manifest Myself to you." This is what made the difference between the church of the New Testament and our church today. We wonder, what secret did the New Testament church have that we don't have? They have no more Scriptures than we have. But the difference is that Jesus was manifested to them. Has He been manifested to you? That is the question. But the point I want to stress is that He wants to manifest Himself. "I will manifest Myself to you." That is as strong as any promise He could make. Read these words in Jn 14:21 again and notice carefully that Jesus is not referring exclusively to the apostles.

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him".

"He who has My commandments...." In the Greek original, as in English, "He who has" is a very general term for anybody - anyone who has His commandments. Do you have His commandments? Or can you say you are ignorant of His commandments? What are His commandments? "Take up your cross and follow Me"; "Love one another"; "Love God with all your heart, love your neighbour as yourself". That's the essence of His commandments. "He who has My commandments and keeps them (the trouble is in the keeping of them), he it is who loves Me, and I will love him and I will manifest Myself to him. I will manifest Myself to such a person". The only condition is that by faith you keep His commandments. You must have faith because without faith you cannot keep His

commandments. When you do this He will manifest Himself. Either He is a liar or He will manifest Himself. Let's put it in plain language without beating around the bush. You take your choice: either you make Him a liar or you will find that He manifests Himself. He who has not got faith makes God a liar, the apostle John says (1Jn 5:10).

### **Jesus' Manifestation To You Will Be Revolutionizing!**

I can tell you it's dangerous - it will so turn your life upside down that it really will be dangerous. Think about what the visions of Christ after the resurrection did to the disciples. There they were huddled together in the room, those timid, cowardly apostles (Jn 20.19), and Jesus comes into the room and what happens? They can't believe their eyes. "This is Jesus? Oh yes! He did say He would rise again; but we didn't really believe it, did we? But here He stands!" As though that was not enough, the next week (Jn 20.26) He appeared again; and as though that was not enough He appeared again in Galilee (Jn 21.1).

"I will manifest Myself to you." What did all this do to the disciples? It transformed them from being timid and fearful to being bold and fearless. It really was dangerous because you can see in the book of Acts how it revolutionized their lives. This is the historic element. Take hold of this word manifest. This word is used several times in the New Testament. What does it mean? Let me first give you a dictionary definition of this word translated as manifest. The definition is taken from Liddell and Scott's unabridged Greek-English Lexicon which is the most authoritative Greek dictionary there is. For those of you who know some Greek you will find it under "emphanaia", in which the two New Testament words are "emphanes" and "emphanizo". The adjective "emphanes" means "visible to the eye, manifest", and Liddell and Scott goes on to say, "In Greek writings, especially of God's appearing bodily among men." The verb "emphanizo" means to "show forth, manifest, exhibit". The word is translated in this passage as "manifest" and when you look in Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament you will see it means "to make visible" - that's the basic meaning. In a figurative sense, "to make known, to make clear, to make certain, to explain."

That is what the Lord wants to do. He wants you to have absolute certainty about His reality, because everything hinges on this. Otherwise we might be fools. We may have talked ourselves into believing in Christianity. We may have talked ourselves into believing in a philosophy. We may think it's very reasonable, "After all, intelligent people believe in Jesus and this pastor looks reasonably intelligent, so if he believes in Jesus, it can't be all that wrong." Or you may say, "Look at so-and-so. He's a clever man. If he believes in Jesus, I can believe in Jesus too." Is that why you believe in Jesus? If so, you've missed the mark. You don't base your faith on that. I don't say that is entirely wrong, because faith does come by hearing and that hearing has a place. But you see, your faith will always have an element of reservation. What if so-and-so is wrong? What if this pastor is wrong? What if all these good brothers and sisters are wrong? It's a lingering question mark in your mind, is it not?

It is manifestation that removes every question mark. That's the point I'm getting at. I don't want any doubt in anybody's mind, because the fire cannot burn when there's a question mark remaining. The lid is always on. You're always having a

nagging doubt. Is He real? Could it be true? So long as this nagging doubt is there you cannot have the fullness of conviction, the fullness of power. That is why Jesus says: "I will manifest Myself to You." You've got to know for yourself - not because this pastor knows, not because so-and-so knows, not because all these people in the training team know. You've got to know for yourself. When people like Mary Magdalene came to the apostles after the resurrection, they said, "We have seen the Lord." (Jn 20.18,25) That should have been enough. After all, faith comes by hearing and you heard her say she saw the Lord. So that's good enough and Jesus doesn't have to come anymore. No. Though they heard other people testify that Jesus had risen, Jesus still appeared to them that they could see for themselves: Jesus is alive!

### **Do You Long For His Manifestation?**

This word manifest is very important because, as I said, you cannot be very sincere or really mean business with God unless deep down in your heart you have a longing to see God. This is what the Lord said in Mt. 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." But if you don't long to see God what's the value of the promise, since you wouldn't want to see God anyway? Whether you're pure in heart or not would make no difference because it wouldn't matter to you whether you see God. No, the point is that the pure in heart want to see God, and their longing will be granted to them. "They shall see God".

Moses, that great servant of the Lord, wanted one thing in his life above all else. He wanted to see the Lord. Do you think he was lacking in faith because he asked to see the Lord? Quite the contrary. It was the expression of his love that he already had for God. Exodus 33:13 has exactly the same word in the Septuagint as we have here in John 14. In Ex. 33:13, the great servant of the Lord, Moses, says to the Lord, "If I have found favour in Your sight, reveal Yourself to me that I may evidently see you." Notice these words "that I may evidently see You". Now in the Hebrew this is not translated "that I may see you", but "that I may see Your ways". However, in v.18 even the Hebrew becomes more specific, "that I may see Your glory". And the Lord grants him that. "You will see My glory. I will grant you to see My glory." And in v.19ff the Lord appears to Moses, in a veiled way, because no one can see God and still live. But even though the Lord appeared in a veiled way, it was in a manner sufficient for Moses to have his questions fully answered.

### **Face Up To The Challenge Of Jesus' Manifestation**

I dare to preach this and I know that Jesus dares to say it simply because He is not afraid that you put Him to the test in this matter. He wants you to see His glory. He wants to manifest Himself to you. And if my Jesus is not real, I dare not say that to you. I challenge you to put Him to the test in this. And if He fails you, you come and look for me. You come and beat me up and say to me, "Well, I tried it, He never revealed Himself. You told me a lie because I kept His word, I had His commandments and I kept them, and yet He never revealed Himself to me." Then I'm a liar, and you have the right to say that this whole thing is garbage and you have no time for this nonsense. You have the right to say it and you ought to say it. Because we either speak the truth or else we are speaking lies. Either Jesus is real or He is not real. There isn't a third alternative.

"I will manifest Myself to you." Historically then, the meaning of these words and their specific application were to His apostles. "I'm going to show Myself to you

after My resurrection. You are going to see Me." And in 1 Cor. 15, Paul lists a number of resurrection appearances. (Not all of them; if you look at the gospels you will see there were more appearances than that.) Particularly for those who are younger in the Lord I'd like to read this passage from vv.3-9).

"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas (that is, to the apostle Peter), then to the Twelve. Then He appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

Here is the list. And notice that Paul points out that the Lord Jesus on one occasion appeared to 500 brethren at one time. 500 brethren! How many people are permitted by law to sit in this hall? 437 people. That means that if every pew and every seat up in the balcony was filled, and we also put in extra seats, opening all the doors, we would not have 500 people in this hall. And yet, just imagine this place packed full and the Lord Jesus appeared - to more than 500 people at one time, not one in sequence after the other. At one time. They were all present to see Him. And the apostle Paul says to the Corinthians, "You can go and talk to these people and check whether what I say is true. Most of them are still alive up till this very day, though some have died because this is 20 years ago." You see Paul Himself mentions this so that they can check his facts: Is it true or not? Did Jesus appear in front of all these people?

### **Jesus' Manifestation - Abiding, Not Momentary**

In Acts 1 we read that Jesus appeared to His disciples over a period of 40 days and gave definite proof of His resurrection (v.3).

To them (that is, His disciples), He presented Himself alive after His passion (that is, after His suffering and death) by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days, and speaking of the Kingdom of God. And while staying with them He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father (namely the coming of the Spirit).

Notice these words: "while staying with them". Here is something more which is applicable to John 14. What does this word "staying" mean? If you have a Revised Standard Version (RSV) and you look in the margin you will see it also means eating with them. This is very interesting. Remember Jn 14:23? "We will come and make our home with him." This word "staying" actually can mean to spend the night with, to live with, to have meals with.

You see, He didn't just appear and then disappear. No, He was fellowshiping with them! He didn't just suddenly appear and say, "Here, see I'm alive", and the next moment He was gone. If that was the case the disciples would have been left saying, "Hey, that's too fast. Like one flash of lightning He's gone." The point is, He not only appeared but He also talked with them, He lived with them. Taken literally this word means He spent the night with them. They would talk for hours together; they sat at the table and ate together. He showed them His hands and

His side (Jn 20:20). He even asked them to touch Him. "Here, feel Me. See, that's Me. Look at the wounds in My hands." He said to Thomas, "Put your finger in the nail prints, that you know that I am not a ghost. That's Me that you're looking at. I told you, you would see Me again" (Jn 20:27).

That is experience. No wonder the disciples went out after those 40 days burning - they were burning with fire. "We have seen the Lord" (Jn 20:25). "That which we have seen and heard, which our hands have handled, that is what we are preaching to you." (1 Jn 1:1).

### **Whoever Who Keeps His Commands Will See Him**

This message also burns very much upon my heart and I have so many things to share, but we must conclude quickly. So let's come to this question: But what about us, poor us? You see, it's fine for the apostles. They were granted 40 wonderful days. They could walk and talk with Jesus like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They could sit there eating with Jesus, chatting together. What wonderful days!

But what about us? Where do we fit into the picture? It's great for them to be burning with fire, but we don't come into this picture at all. That is why earlier on I pointed you to the Lord's words in Jn 14:21: "He that has My commandments...". The Lord made His statement very general. He didn't say, "Now I make this promise only to the apostles, and you guys are not apostles. So sorry." No! He says, "Anyone who has My commandments and keeps them, I will manifest Myself to him." That is truly wonderful. This is the challenge that I would like you to take up, that I would like you to take hold of.

But how does Jesus manifest Himself to us in these days? One thing we must understand is that Jesus is no longer in the world. He is risen and has ascended on high. That means to say, He will manifest Himself to us no longer physically, but spiritually. Now this point is very important for you to grasp. Jesus cannot manifest Himself to us physically because He has ascended on high. He will come again bodily, but that is at His Second Coming. But right now, as all the Scripture tells us, He is at the right hand of the Father. So that means that right now He will indeed manifest Himself to us, He will reveal Himself to us, but not in a physical manifestation.

### **Is The Spiritual Manifestation Any Less Than The Physical??**

"Ah," you say, "but now you have watered it down. Now you've made a proviso. The disciples had 40 days when He was here and they could see Him, but now He's at the right hand of the Father, so He's going to manifest Himself to us in some sort of diluted way." Wrong! You see, you think that a spiritual revelation of Jesus is less real than a physical one only if you don't know what a spiritual revelation is. He can manifest Himself to you today, spiritually, in a way that is every bit as real as when He was physically upon the earth.

Lets' put it like this: When He revealed Himself to Paul, was He still on the earth? Of course not. He had already ascended. But the revelation to Paul was every bit as real to Paul as though he had seen Him physically and touched Him with his own hands. In fact, you will have noticed that when I read to you the list in 1 Cor.15. Paul makes no distinction between the earthly resurrection appearances



of Jesus and his own vision of the Lord. He makes no distinction between the two. To him the spiritual revelation on the Damascus road is every bit the same as the physical revelation on earth when the Lord had not yet ascended.

The apostle John on the island of Patmos experienced the same thing. He fellowshiped with the risen Lord, he had visions of the risen Lord (Rev.1.9,10). The same is true of Stephen as you remember in Acts 7.55-59. When he was being stoned to death, he looked up and said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of the Father" (v.56). And as the stones were bashing his skull, he was so absorbed with the vision of Jesus that he didn't feel a thing. He only had time before his departure to say, "I see the Lord, I see my Lord. Father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing." (v.60)

You see, you must understand one thing: the spiritual vision is the real thing. It is the most significant thing that matters to us. And it is this kind of spiritual vision, this kind of manifestation that the Lord Jesus wants you and me to have.

### **"I Will Sup With Him" - The Picture Of Communion With God**

One last point, and this is something I want to stress. Not only here in John's gospel, but in many places the Lord speaks about His seeking to manifest Himself to us. For example, in Rev. 3:20 which is well known to many of you:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with Me."

Notice these words, "I will come in to him and sup with him." Do you take these words literally or not? Let's not play around with the Word of God. Does the Lord mean what He says or does He not mean what He says? Now if you don't think the Lord means what He says then you and I of course are not talking about the same Lord, it would seem. He says, "I knock at the door. If you open the door of your life to Me, I will come in and sup with you. I will have dinner with you - that's what it means - literally, to have dinner with you. Notice again that this is not referring to the apostles but to anyone. Jesus will come into your life and He will fellowship with you in such a way that you will know that you have met with Him.

This brings me to the point which I would like to stress because it is so important. When I look at the resurrection appearances, one thing strikes me: Have you ever noticed how many times He ate with the people to whom He revealed Himself? Have you ever noticed that? Remember again, the Emmaus road. The two disciples were walking along and talking with Jesus, and as evening approached they said to Him, "Come in and have some supper with us because it's getting late." And they urged Him to come in. And there at the dinner table, as the Lord broke bread, their eyes were opened. "That's Jesus! That's Him". Maybe as He lifted up His hands the nail prints became visible. They looked one more time at Him. "That's Jesus!" At supper He revealed Himself. Not on the road but at supper (Lk. 24:28-32). Very shortly afterward, you remember that these two disciples ran back to Jerusalem, and we can imagine they must have been out of breath and panting as they came and told the apostles, "We have seen the Lord." And while they were still talking Jesus Himself appeared (v.36). And you remember the fright of the apostles. What does the Lord say? "Have you anything to eat?" (v.41).

There we have it, supper again! And they brought Him some fish and He ate it with them.

"I will sup with him". And then you'll remember what happened at the Lake of Galilee (Jn 21:1-14). They were fishing that morning and they heard somebody calling to them from the shore (v.5), "Have you caught anything?" "No, we haven't". And then they came to the shore and what happened? (vv.9,13). He gave them bread and fish to eat - again eating together. "I will sup with him."

What is the spiritual lesson here? What does the Lord want to say to us with these words: "I will sup with him."? Well, think of a meal together. It's very relaxing, isn't it? The atmosphere is very congenial. There is something friendly and warm about having a meal together. We Chinese know a lot about that because we like to eat together. It's so relaxing when you have a pair of chopsticks and a bowl and you're eating together - it's very easy to talk. But when you're not supping with one another it can be so awkward. You sit in your chair, I sit in mine and we face each other - really stiff. You don't know where to put your hands so you sit there fiddling with your fingers; it's all very awkward. But over a meal everything is very relaxed; somehow the food relaxes the mind and makes people very easy to talk with. It's amazing - if you don't like someone, try inviting him for a meal some time. It's incredible to see how it can change a relationship. Yes, a meal together can make all the difference.

What important spiritual lesson is the Lord trying to show us here? You see, we often think of our relationship to God in very stiff and formal terms. Many people feel that they cannot pray unless they are on their knees. They think that their relationship to God has always to be very formal. They think that it has to be very unrelaxed, almost tense, before it can be really spiritual. The Lord doesn't want that. He wants us to come to Him as friend to friend, in the atmosphere of having a meal. Have you ever noticed that when you sit down at a meal you're not in a hurry to go away because you are supping with one another?

#### **Jesus' Warm Invitation To Us - "Let Me Sup With You"!**

You know, if you treated prayer time as having a meal you wouldn't want to rush away in such a hurry. But if prayer time is such a formal and stiff thing then it's no wonder that three minutes is enough to exhaust you. And that is not the atmosphere in which the Lord would like us to come to Him. What He wants is for us to be with Him in a relaxed, congenial, friendly, and respectful yet warm manner. Do you know this kind of relationship with God? Do you know that this is the kind of relationship God wants to establish with you? That is the way that we must learn to come to Jesus.

And let me say this one more time: When you keep His word He will manifest Himself to you. Prove it. And then your heart will burn with fire. Then you'll be able to say: "Once I heard of Him with the hearing of the ear, but now I have seen Him - I have seen His glory with my own eyes."

## The Bronze Serpent - John 3:14-15

*9th in a series of synopsis sermons on "Baptism" by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.*

The Lord lays it upon my heart to expound to you the precious words in John 3:14-15. The next verse, John 3:16, is familiar to most of you, but how many of you can remember what is recorded in verses 14 and 15? In these verses, the Lord Jesus says to Nicodemus,

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life."

Here we encounter a remarkable statement. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up." To get the background to this, let us turn to Numbers 21:4-9:

"From Mount Hor they set out by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. And the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord, that He takes away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live."

Through mighty and awesome deeds, God had delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and led them out into the wilderness. Imagine two million people walking and wandering about the desert for forty years! How do you provide for their needs in a barren desert? God had accomplished this very thing by bringing down manna from heaven, which they ate every day for forty years. Although the Lord had saved them from starving in the harsh wilderness, the people were so brazen as to grumble against Him, saying, "We loathe this worthless food! Back in Egypt we had delicious garlic, but now You give us this stuff called manna? Why did You bring us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" They had totally forgotten what they were in Egypt - wretched, oppressed slaves.

### **Sin - An Attitude Of Opposition To God**

That is so true to life, and so typical of too many Christians, isn't it? God has granted us so many blessings, and yet we are ungrateful, always blaming Him for every little difficulty that comes along. That is the basic characteristic of sin. Sin is an attitude of speaking out against God either with the mouth or in the heart. Sin is more than just making a mistake; it is a definite attitude of opposition to God.

Man brings trouble upon himself, and blames it all on God. "Why does God allow man to suffer?" We never hear an end to this question! But let us stop to ask who caused the suffering. Did God start the First World War? Or the Second World War? Or any war for that matter? Human beings destroy one another and bring untold suffering upon millions of people - yet the same familiar complaint, why does God bring suffering upon us?

When the marriage is getting unbearable, the husband complains, "Why did God give me a wife like this? I deserve someone better!" And the wife says, "I'm so bright and good-looking. Why did God give me this useless hunk of humanity?" It's always God's fault, isn't it? And the complaints go on. "God could have done something. He's God! He knew well this wasn't the right person for me!" Sin is this attitude towards God, an attitude of denying responsibility for our own wrong doings, and then blaming Him for the consequences. But let us be careful lest we constrain the Lord to remind us who is the one really at fault. He does this not to justify Himself, but to show us that we can never be changed until we realize that we are the cause of the problem.

### **Overcoming Sin - By Destruction? Or By Transformation?**

People have asked me, "The world's a mess. What's God doing about it?" My reply is, What can He do about it, short of wiping off every sinner from the face of the earth? God has two choices. Which do you prefer? He can either eliminate sin and suffering by destroying sinners, or He can achieve that by transforming them. To destroy sinners He doesn't need your permission. But to change you, He needs your cooperation. If you want a new world with new people, God has to change you, but He will not do it by force.

The communists have tried - and failed - to change people by force. I have lived seven years under the communists, and I know that you cannot change a person by force. You can point a gun to his head and force him to obey you, but you cannot control what goes on inside that head. Put down the gun, walk away, and everything will revert to what it was originally. Jesus is not going to make that kind of mistake. He says to Peter, "Put back the sword (cf. Jn. 18:11)." The Kingdom of God will not be expanded by the sword. If we mobilize every Christian, we would have a vast army, with hundreds of millions of soldiers, all equipped with submachine guns, ready to fight for Christ. But in His perfect wisdom, the Lord refuses to conquer the world with the sword.

You can control people externally, but never internally. Nothing can change man's heart except love - the love of God. That is the way God is dealing with sin in the world!

### **The Consequence Of Sin Is To Teach The Sinner**

But some still complain, "Why must we suffer the consequences of sin? When we sin, why doesn't God limit the suffering?" That's wonderful! We want to sin but not suffer the consequences. We want God to make it comfortable for us to sin! On the contrary, He will not let you escape the consequences of sin. He wants you to see its bitter fruits. And if the fruits don't come immediately, He might even hasten them a bit. And if you think you got away with sin just because you didn't suffer the immediate consequences, don't be too confident because God may make you suffer for it sooner than you expect. It is for your own good that He

makes you understand how bad sin is. Even judgment is designed for your salvation.

When the people grumbled against God in the wilderness, He sent fiery serpents to attack them. These serpents are said to be "fiery" not because they had fire blasting out of their mouths (no such species is listed in any encyclopaedia), but simply because they were poisonous (poison has a burning effect). And as the people were dying from the poison, they started to repent. Sad to say, many people do not repent when things are going fine; they wait and wait until things get bad. That is why God tells Israel not to be like the stubborn mule that refuses to walk until it is forced to (Ps. 32:9).

In Nanking, I once looked out a window and saw about five people trying to move a mule. With all their strength and effort there was nothing they could do to move it. They pulled it, beat it, and tried everything. The mule stuck out its front legs, leaned back, and refused to budge. They swung a log at the poor mule - and I thought that was going to break its back - but still it would not move. They finally got it to budge by jabbing it with a sharp object. Hard to understand, but why does it refuse to move until it gets hurt? It is like some non-Christians who say, "Though the world collapses about me, I refuse to believe in God!"

But there was another time, just outside Shanghai, when I saw people riding on beautiful horses. I noticed how this one rider did not even carry a whip because his horse understood what he was saying to it. He would lean forward and speak to the horse as it was galloping. If he told the horse to run faster, it would immediately pick up speed. Are we like this horse, or are we like the mule that does not budge unless driven by whip or bridle?

### **Saved By Looking At The Bronze Serpent?!**

When Moses interceded for the people dying from poison, God instructed him to make a serpent of bronze and put it on a signal staff. The signal staff was used for flying different flags to signal various messages to the vast multitudes in the wilderness, messages such as to camp or to march on. Picture the situation. There was this great camp invaded by poisonous snakes, and the people had died, or were dying from the poison, just as people in the world today are dying from sin. They did not die instantly because poison takes time to work. So they were collapsing one by one. Then Moses lifted up the signal staff, this time not to signal the usual instructions, but in order that everyone could see the bronze serpent. It must have been a fairly large serpent for the people to see it from afar. And God told Moses that whoever looks at the bronze serpent on the signal staff shall live, even though he has been bitten.

Is God's way of salvation wise or foolish? The people were dying from the poison, and they were told to look at a bronze snake. Surely a snake was the last thing they wanted to look at! Many must have ridiculed the idea, "What kind of a salvation is this? By looking at a bronze snake?! That's just superstition. This must be one of Moses' cranky ideas! He claims that God said this and God said that, but I didn't hear anything. Anyway, there's too much distance. I'm here and the snake's over there. It would make more sense for God to distribute a serum to fight the poison. I'm busy trying to extract the poison. So don't ask me to do impractical things like looking at some bronze thing." And so they tried to save

themselves by their own efforts. If that were possible, God wouldn't have asked Moses to put up the bronze serpent.

### **Saved By Looking At Jesus The Crucified?!**

Today people are dying in sin, and whom does God lift up on a pole but Jesus! What do we see at Calvary but a dead man hanging on a cross, one who died for our sins! And objections start pouring in. "Are you telling me that I will be saved by looking at this dead man hanging on a cross? What a ridiculous solution to the problems of the world! Anyway, there is too much distance between Him and me, the distance of time for one thing. He died two thousand years ago. There is also the distance of geography. He died in Israel but I'm here in China, Canada or England. He is in heaven and I'm on earth. Geographically or spatially or whatever, there's a lot of distance. How can believing in Jesus break the power of sin in my life? The apostles cooked up this whole business about Jesus dying for our sins, a human idea which they attributed to God." Similar thoughts, I am sure, must have crossed your mind at one time or another.

### **Truth Is To Be Experienced**

Isn't it sad that, as the people were arguing, they died one by one from the poison? But those who turned around and looked up at the bronze serpent were saved. What does that teach us? You cannot know whether something is true or false until you experience it for yourself. Fix your eyes on that bronze serpent, and immediately you will experience the power of the poison destroyed! But you will get nowhere if you spend your whole life analyzing the pros and cons of whether the bronze serpent can fight poison or not. Find out by looking at it! You are dying anyways. What have you got to lose? What a pity to lose your salvation over a mental block! The poison of sin is killing everyone in the world. Are you going to forever argue whether you can be saved by looking at Jesus hanging on the Cross? The moment you look at Him you will experience His power. It is not a fairy tale; it is something that you can experience for yourself.

How can we tell whether an apple is sweet or not? We can analyze its shape and colour. We can weigh the apple and calculate its sugar content. We can slice it up and observe it under a microscope. But the easiest way is to taste it! We don't need to expend so much mental effort and behave like fools. Taste and see! It is like asking whether a certain medicine can cure you of a certain disease. If it works for other people, why not try it yourself?

Why would these brothers and sisters go forth into baptism if they have not experienced anything of God's power? Nobody compelled them to be baptized. In the policy of this church, we hold people back from baptism for as long as possible so that nobody rushes into it. We want to make sure that it is God who is drawing them to be baptized. If I see any reason for them not to receive baptism, or I feel before God that they are not well prepared for it, I advise them not to receive it for the time being. The ones receiving baptism today are beginning their walk in the Christian life. They have not experienced everything in the Christian life; there is a long way ahead of them. But having taken the first step, they will experience more and more of God's power, as those who have gone ahead of them can testify.

### **But Why A Bronze Serpent?**

Do you think God's way of saving is wise or foolish? Let us see God's wisdom in the way He does things. The foolishness of God is wiser than men (1 Cor. 1:25). Where is God's wisdom in asking Moses to make a bronze serpent?

Notice that it was a dead serpent up on that pole. The wages of sin is death. The dead serpent symbolized the destruction of sin and of the power of evil. God always has a good reason for everything He does.

But if God wanted a dead serpent, why go through the trouble of making a bronze one? He could have simply told Moses to kill a real one. Again, God had a good reason for a bronze serpent: to show the world what His future redemption will be like. Not any snake would do; it had to be a bronze serpent unlike any other serpent. The bronze serpent, by nature, was not a snake at all; it only looked like a snake and only cast into the form of a snake. Similarly, Jesus had an outward appearance of a sinner, but in His nature He was not a sinner. Rom. 8:3 says that He was made "in the likeness of sinful flesh." The word "make" in Num. 21:8 ("make a fiery serpent") is exactly the word used in the New Testament. 2 Cor. 5:21 says that the Lord Jesus was "made" sin although He knew no sin.

There is yet another reason for choosing a bronze serpent over a real one: a real snake is of corruptible flesh, but bronze is incorruptible. Correspondingly, although the Lord Jesus was truly human, unlike man He was of incorruptible origin; He was of God.

Finally, in the Old Testament, all the instruments of salvation were made of bronze or covered with bronze: the altar, the laver where the priests washed, and all the instruments used for the sacrifice. Wise is God's way of doing things!

Bronze, moreover, is too hard to be carved. The only way to make anything of bronze is to subject the bronze to intense heat in the furnace. Fire, in the Bible, represents various things, of which one of the most important is judgment. Before bronze can be fashioned into the likeness of a serpent, it had to pass through fire. And in order for Jesus to save us from our sins, He had to pass through the fire of God's judgment for you and for me.

Even the manner of Jesus' death was prophesied. Moses was told not only to make a bronze serpent, but also to lift it up on a pole. In the New Testament times, the expression "to be lifted up" means to be crucified. The criminal would be nailed to a cross that is flat on the ground. Once he is affixed to the cross, the cross is lifted up and dropped into a hole in the ground for upright support. Now we can understand why the Son of Man had to be lifted up in the manner that Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. The Lord uses the words "lifted up" also in John 12:32-33 to show what manner of death He will die. God's wisdom is marvellous. Do His ways sound to you foolish or wise? God has a good reason for everything He does, even though you may not understand it yet.

### **But How Does A Bronze Serpent Save?**

How can looking at a bronze serpent save a person dying from poison? The answer is very simple. It is not the bronze serpent that heals, but God who heals. It is not some kind of superstition involving bronze healing. We are saved by God's

power. When I look at Jesus hanging on the Cross, it is not His physical body hanging there that heals me of my sins, but God's power working through Him. The Lord Himself says, "The flesh profits nothing. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life." (Jn. 6:63). A Christian is saved, not by merely believing that someone died on the cross two thousand years ago, but by God's power working here and today. But it works only if we fix our attention on Jesus. That is faith.

### **Faith Is Not Just Looking, But Fixing Your Gaze**

In Jn. 3:14-15, looking is compared to faith. As those who looked at the serpent were saved, so those who believe in the Son have eternal life. But nobody was saved merely by taking a quick glance at the serpent. There is an important difference between a glance and a look, a distinction that God's Word is careful to make. The Hebrew word in Numbers 21 means a very attentive, concentrated looking; this shade of meaning is not obvious in the English word "look". Many people must have turned around and seen the bronze serpent, but they would not be saved unless they had taken a concentrated, careful look. To do that, they had to crawl out of their tents with all their strength, despite being weakened by the poison, and fix their attention on the bronze serpent, an act similar to what is described in Hebrews 12:2 as "looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith." Here the Greek is also precise in making the distinction between a glance and a look: looking to Jesus is not just taking a quick glance at Him, but fixing one's full attention and concentration on Him with one's heart and mind. God does not save through a superficial glance any more than He saves us through a superficial belief.

### **Faith Demands Obedience**

There is another and very important reason for God's power working in you: your act of obedience to God. What God says, you do. It is the opposite of sin. Sin, as we have seen, is an attitude of disobedience to God. To be saved, the Israelites had to obey the Lord's instructions to shift their attention away from their wounds and suffering, and to concentrate it on the bronze serpent. It took great determination not to be distracted. That was why it was an act of obedience to God, even though the act itself did not make much sense to the people. And when we take that step of obedience, God's power will come into our lives. This new attitude of obedience towards God is the New Testament definition of faith. Heb. 5:9 says that Jesus is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

### **Summary - Will You Take that Step Of Faithful Obedience?**

God's way of salvation will sound to you either foolish or remarkably wise. His words penetrate the heart; the Lord did not come to bring peace but a sword that creates division. Which side of the line are you standing on? Those who are going to be baptized today have indicated their choice by crossing the line. Baptism is crossing the line, from opposition to God to obedience to God. Many people do not fully understand the meaning of baptism, but these brothers and sisters are taking a big step of obedience as an expression of their faith.

Again I ask, does God's way of salvation sound foolish to you that you don't obey it? Do you have a better way of salvation? Do you have the power to break sin in your life? If not, why do you say that God's way is foolish? Will you not say to Him, "Lord, I have always had a rebellious attitude towards You, always blaming You,



but today I heard that Jesus was lifted up on the Cross. I can't break the power of sin in my life, but You asked me to look to Jesus, and so I will."

When you do that, you are taking a step of obedience. You will be like a person dying from a snakebite, someone who also could not understand how looking at a bronze serpent could save him. But when he obeyed, he immediately discovered that the poison had ceased to be active. You too will experience the power of sin broken in your life, and the guilt of sin removed. Your past sins will be cleansed away, and you will enter into a new freedom that you have not known before.

## Baptism and Victory

*10th in a series of synopsis sermons on "Baptism" by Rev. Eric H. H. Chang.*

Baptism, as we have seen, has to do with a dying with Christ to your old life in order to be raised up with Him into a new life, a life of victory over sin. But granted that you have died, granted that you have indeed finished with the old life, what then is the key, or the secret (if you can put it like that) of entering into the fullness of the Christian life, of living victoriously? As a brother was saying today, the problem with him was that he couldn't find the victory. What he needs is the victory, that's what we all need - victory. What is the secret of this victory? This is what I would like to share with you in this message.

Let us turn to 2 Kings chap. 13, v.14-19. This passage already fascinated me as a young Christian and many times my thoughts have returned to it. It is a passage concerned in fact with victory. Let's, read from v. 14-19.

*"Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash king of Israel went down to him, and wept before him, crying, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and arrows"; so he took a bow and arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, "Draw the bow"; and he drew it. And Elisha laid his hands upon the king's hands. And he said, "Open the window eastward"; and he opened it. Then Elisha said, "Shoot"; and he shot. And he said, "The Lord's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Syria! For you shall fight the Syrians in Aphek until you have made an end of them." And he said, "Take the arrows"; and he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground with them"; and he struck three times, and stopped. Then the man of God was angry with him, and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have made an end of it, but now you will strike down Syria only three times".*

### **If God Has Given Us The Victory, Why Are We Not Victorious?**

As I said, as a young Christian this passage fascinated me. It fascinated me because there was a very important message in it, and I wonder whether you perceive what that message is? It is the message concerning victory. Let me give you a little of the background. Joash was a king of Israel who reigned from about 800 B.C. - 800 years before Christ. And he reigned for 16 years as we are told in v.10 of this chapter. His name means "The Lord has given". The Lord has indeed given - the question is whether you've got it. There is a difference between what the Lord has given and what we actually have. The Lord has given us victory - the question is whether you've got it. What has happened between the giving and our having it? How come we do not have what He gives? Where is the missing link between the giving of that victory and the actual enjoying of that victory? That is the question. Something has been missed out in between, unless we want to say that God has not given us the victory; unless we want to say that if we live defeated Christian lives it's because God wanted it that way; unless we want to say that the grace that God has provided for us is not sufficient and that we cannot win any victories in the Christian life. When we look at the Church today

we ask: "Did God give the victory or didn't He? Is this what the Church was meant to be? Is this the Church of beauty, the Church of power which God meant it to be, which radiates His light throughout the world?"

To ask the question is already to answer it. The Church has been, for the most part, an abysmal failure. Sure, there are exceptions. There are exceptional men of God, there are exceptional servants of God still around these days. There are still some Elishas in a wretched situation such as Israel was in. Israel was a disgrace, but thanks be to God that there was still an Elijah, there was still an Elisha, there were still a few men of God around. But that is not what the Church was meant to be - the Church was not meant to depend on one or two people to save what's left of its name. The Church was meant to be a light to the world just as Israel was meant to be a light to the Gentiles, a light that would shine. God had chosen Israel to be His servant. But Israel failed. Is it because God meant her to fail? Is it that God cannot give us the victory? If not, then precisely what was the problem? This is what this passage is concerned with.

### **The Vital Need For Men Of God**

What was happening? Let us look at the situation. The mighty prophet Elisha was about to die and how anxious was the king of Israel. He addressed him as, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen." What does that mean? It means that Elisha was more important to the king of Israel, or at least as important to him, and to the whole nation of Israel, as its entire armed forces put together - its chariots (which were equivalent to the modern day tank) and its horsemen. Elisha was as significant for the safety, for the future, for the defence of Israel as its whole armed forces put together. Elisha was so vital to the survival and security of Israel and he was about to die. No wonder the king was very anxious.

It's remarkable how important a mighty man of God can be - not only to the Church, but to an entire nation. There are many such examples from history - people such as Ambrose, a mighty man of God who was far more capable than the Emperors of Rome and to whom they turned to in their times of crisis, knowing that the mighty man of God was their only hope, and not the armies of Rome. When the Huns stood at the gates of Rome, ready to wipe Rome off the map, who did the Emperor turn to but Ambrose of Milan. The Hun armies were sweeping the whole of Europe, wiping away everything before them, and now they stood at the gates of Rome, right at the door of Italy. And somehow this mighty man of God was able to turn back the Huns from the gates of Rome. He was able to accomplish what even the Emperor knew the armies of Rome could not accomplish.

### **Why Did Joash Fail?**

Yes, in the same way the king of Israel depended on this mighty man of God, Elisha. Syria had been a grievance to Israel. It attacked Israel again and again, putting Israel under constant economic and military pressure. Strange how history seems to repeat itself because even to this day, right now, we have the same state of affairs where Israel is facing pressure from Syria. After so many thousand years we still have that situation. And here I wonder if history might have been quite different - whether Syria would still be a threat to Israel today (as it is) if Joash the king had done what Elisha expected him to do but which he failed to do.

What happened? Well, there Elisha lay, dying of his illness, very weak by this time, and by God's power he was giving Joash a last chance - a chance to wipe out Syria forever as a threat to the survival of Israel. But he didn't take the chance, he missed it Why?!

Here there are a number of things we need to observe. Look at how totally this king obeyed the man of God. Notice that from v.14 right on to v.17 that whenever Elisha gave him an order to do something the king did it. He said, "Take the bow and the arrows" and the king took the bow and the arrows. He said "Stretch out the bow," and the king did that. He then told him to open the window and he did that. He also told him to shoot out of the window and he did that too. Every time it says, "and he did it", "and he did I." He obeyed. But there was a step beyond which Elisha could not take him, where he must himself step forward in faith and that is precisely where he failed. He failed not for want of obedience, he failed for want of faith. I'd like you to understand this thing very very clearly. Faith is something that I cannot do for you, that nobody else can do for you. Elisha could not implant his own faith into Joash. Joash, when it came to the step of faith, was on his own. And that is where he failed. Now here there are several points that I would like to share with you.

### **Six Principles Of Faith And Victory**

#### **1. God Has Given Us The Victory, But We Must Take Hold Of It**

Firstly, notice that in v.17 the prophetic promise is made: "The Lord's arrow of victory" - the arrow of victory over Syria - "for you shall fight the Syrians at Aphek until you have made an end of them." You will gain total victory. That's the promise made, but two verses later the promise had to be rescinded. Why? Because of the lack of faith to draw upon the promise. God provided unconditional victory - a victory that Israel never was able to gain on its own. Syria was simply far too powerful in those days and Israel could not gain the victory. Now God promised the victory that they themselves could not have, but two verses later, the victory had to be rescinded, the promise had to be taken back because there was not the faith to avail itself of that victory. Notice this painful account. Elisha says to the king, "Take the arrows in your hand and strike the ground - strike it." And what does Joash do? Joash takes the arrows and he strikes three times and he stops.

Why did he stop?! That is where the man of God became angry as we read in v.19. "Why did you stop? Why didn't you keep hitting the ground?" I wonder what you would have done if the man of God had said to you, "Now take the arrows in your hand and strike the ground." Well, you might just have stopped at one stroke. He just said, "strike the ground" and he didn't say how many times, so that's it, finished. You got one victory. At least Joash did it three times, that's still not too bad - but not enough, not enough. He should have kept on bashing the ground until the man of God said, "Stop, stop." Then he would have the victory. But why did he stop?

#### **2. God's Promise Of Victory Is Undeserved, A Gift Of His Grace. But Still We Must Take Hold Of It**

Secondly, consider God's mercy. Consider God's mercy to Joash. You know that Joash was not in himself worthy of any of this promise. He was not an outstanding

spiritual man, in fact he was nothing spiritually. Yet God, for the sake of Israel, granted him this promise. Indeed, in v.11 we are told that he was a king who did evil in the sight of God because he followed in the sins of his father Jeroboam. He was a sinner in other words. He deserved no grace and no mercy whatsoever. Yet God in His kindness gave him a promise for the sake of His people. For the sake of Israel, God would give this sinner victory. And so it is with us. We are also sinners. Where are we better than Joash? Yet God promises that He will give us the victory - if only we have the faith to take hold of it. And Joash didn't have enough of it. He had obedience. He also had some faith, but not enough. Isn't that the problem with so many Christians? You've got some faith. Not enough. And therefore you live in this twilight state of Christianity where you are defeated most of the time. You gain one or two little victories, and then you are defeated again - up and down, up and down - a seesaw kind of life. What kind of a Christian life is this?

### **3. Victory Comes Only With Faith, Obedience Alone Is Not Enough**

The third thing to notice here, which we have already seen, is to discern the distinction between obedience and faith. There is a close relationship between obedience and faith, but there is also a distinction that we must understand. You notice that Joash, even though he was king, was amazingly obedient to the prophet Elisha. Indeed, he obeyed partly out of great respect for this man of God. But his willingness to obey also shows something about Joash himself, which is more than could be said for lots of other people who have very high opinions of themselves.

And here we can see that if we think we are superior to Joash we might not be, because in spite of his position as king, he was willing to obey and do whatever

the man of God told him to do. But here is where obedience is not enough. There is a place where obedience and faith part company. Faith goes beyond obedience. What is that added extra? That is the question we must ask. What is it? We can sometimes follow a man of God and the man of God says, "Do this", and we do it and we succeed, and the man of God says, "Do that", and we do it and we succeed. But there is a point beyond which the man of God cannot take us any more. There is a point beyond which you are on your own. You will notice that it was after Joash failed to strike the ground more than three times that Elisha said to him, "You should have struck the ground at least five or six times and then you would have had total victory. You were 50% under just now. You went only half way. It wasn't enough." But you see, had Elisha told him beforehand, "Now strike the ground five or six times", of course he would have done so. But why didn't Elisha tell him to strike five or six times?

He couldn't do that. Because if he had done that, that would have been Elisha's faith, not the king's faith. The promise was made to the king, not to Elisha. My faith cannot substitute for you, your faith cannot substitute for me. I have to stand or fall by my faith, not by your faith. This is the important thing. And so Elisha had to let him go on his own. "Strike the ground and there God will observe your faith". And his faith went only half way - half way - like so many Christians. Maybe a little bit more than half way but more or less half way. What then is the problem? This really is something that we must look at. Where then do faith and obedience differ? This brings us to the fourth point.

#### **4. Faith Has Initiative: It Presses On To Victory Without Stopping**

At this fourth point, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that, unlike obedience, faith has a certain initiative of its own. Obedience is simply that you do what the other person tells you, but faith is something where you must act on your own. You must go on, on your own. You must have the initiative of faith. You have to make your own decision. For example, in the case of those being baptized today, they have taken that initiative - not from any pressure from any one else. They have taken a step of faith. Now that is why it is faith because it is on their own initiative. I didn't say to them, "You've got to be baptized." In fact I kept constantly cross-questioning them as to whether they are really ready for baptism. They have to go on in that act of initiative. Now they are, in baptism, taking one step. But I want to tell them today, as I tell all of you, that baptism is only the first step. It is very far from being the last step. It is the first step and you've got to keep taking more steps onward. It's very good to take one step but if you stop there you are not going to enter into the fullness of victory.

"You've got to take a second step and another step and another step and keep going. Only then will you enter into the fullness of victory. So many people take the step of baptism and then they stop. They think, "I've arrived." Arrived? You've only taken the first step on your journey. You've got a long way to go. So many Christians take the first step and then they slowly take a second one, and the third one gets even slower and the fourth one takes even more time to come, and finally they come to a halt, to a standstill, as though they have finished. And what happens? What happens is that they will soon be sliding back. So the important thing then is to consider the problem that Joash had. Why did he stop after three times? Why did his initiative run out? Why did his dynamic (if you like) cease after three strikes? Why so soon? That is a puzzling question. Why do people stop so soon and others even turn back? Where is the root of this problem? Why does our momentum run out so readily? How is it that we do not see people going on from strength to strength - people who instead of slowing down actually increase in speed? You see, the secret of the matter is that we need to keep pressing forward towards the mark as Paul did.

That was his simple secret. He refused to allow anything to sidetrack him. There will be many hindrances. Your commitment will be tested, and tested by fire. But so many people, as soon as they are tested, as soon as they encounter some hindrance, they become discouraged, demoralized, weary, exhausted - they slow down. But that is precisely the point where you must not slow down - where you must keep pressing forward. Pressing forward even when you feel you are getting tired, your steps are becoming heavy, you are weary and you are saying, "Lord, I am so tired." It is precisely at that point, at the point when you are feeling very tired, and when Satan seems to be doing everything to hold you back, that to stop is the fatal mistake. Because there is where faith is going to be put to the test. And as you press forward just one more step you might suddenly find that you are lifted up with eagle's wings. There is the beauty of it. I have many times gone on - gone on against discouragement, feeling weary physically, weary mentally, exhausted - but like Gideon's men, "faint, yet still pursuing" (Judg.8:4). Exhausted but still going on. And you know why? Because as you keep going on, somewhere, somehow, you suddenly find that you are lifted up, that grace has taken over, that God's power has come in and transformed what seemed to be imminent defeat into glorious victory. Maybe so many Christians have failed

precisely at the point where they might have had the victory because they gave up just one step too soon. One step too soon. That is the tragedy.

### **The Important Connection Between Faith And Grace**

God is going to let you go on, He will allow you to almost come to the point of hurt, of discouragement in His test and at that point there is victory - just when you think you can't make it any more, it's your last breath, and the next step you're going to collapse and just as you are about to collapse you are lifted up. You say, "What's this? This is too good to be true." Grace has come into operation. It is very very important that God uses these circumstances to test our faith, because it is through testing that our faith is strengthened. Like a father He doesn't pamper us. He doesn't prevent us from sometimes tumbling over when we are learning to walk - we trip and fall and bash our nose on the ground and we think, "I'm not going to take another step. This business of learning to walk is ridiculous. I've got bruised knees, a bruised nose, a bruised chin - everything is bruised, and am I still going to go on?" Sure, you go on. But if your father is always holding you so you never fall, how are you going to learn to walk properly? Every parent knows that. God also knows that. But, eventually, when you are finally discouraged, when you sit on the floor and cry and think, "I'm never going to make it", His comfort comes, His strength lifts you up. He says, "You'll do it. Stand up one more time - you will not only walk, you will run and not be weary." That is wonderful. That's why I said this passage fascinated me.

### **5. You Are The One Who Determines To What Extent God's Victory Will Be Yours**

It fascinates me for another reason and this is the fifth point I would like to come to. It fascinates me because it tells me something about faith. I picture faith rather like a tap. When you turn on the tap there is a whole reservoir behind that tap - a whole reservoir - a whole lake behind you. That water comes into your home through that tap, you turn it on and the water comes. Now if you turn it on a little bit, some drops from that reservoir will come into your sink. If you turn it on a little bit more you get some reasonable flow of water. But if you turn it on full - wow, you will have showers of blessing. The thing that fascinates me about this passage is that it is we who determine to what extent God's victory will be ours - to what extent that grace will be ours. It is in your hands, not in God's hands. That tap of faith is for you to decide what you're going to do with it. And the strangest thing is that often though we are so thirsty, we only turn the tap on a little bit and when we only get a few drops of water, we say, "What's the matter? Has the reservoir dried up?" Of course it hasn't dried out! You have barely turned on the tap. Or you can picture faith like window blinds. Outside the sun is shining brightly; and inside you are sitting in darkness. Is it because the sun isn't shining? No, it's because you've got your blinds down! Now if you open the blinds a little bit, you'll get some light. But if you want to have the full blaze of light you have to open the blinds fully.

### **6. Your Victory Or Lack Of It Has A Profound Effect On Others**

There is another remarkable thing which is this: Not only does our faith affect us, it affects other people too! Because remember this: When your faith is small your blessing is small, and when your blessing is small you haven't got much to share with anyone else. But worse than this, if you close the door of faith, you may become a hindrance to others. And this is exactly what we read in Matthew 23 in that passage concerning the Pharisees, "You neither enter into the Kingdom of

God yourselves nor permit others to enter it" (v.13). You do not enter in yourselves, but worse, you have shut the door of the kingdom upon others. I want to say this: It is not just you that is affected by a lack of faith. You may be blocking the way for others to enter the Kingdom of God.

Therefore whether or not I gain the victory is not just a matter of my salvation. It may be that you and I will be responsible for the blood of many others whom we prevented from entering into the Kingdom, because they looked at the likes of us and said, "Who wants to be a Christian? If that's a Christian, forget it, I don't want to be a Christian." I remember that that was the very thing that prevented me from becoming a Christian. I looked at the Christians and I said, "I don't want to be like them. I don't want to be a Christian." What do your friends see when they look at you? Do they look at you and say, "Wow, it's good to be a Christian. That is what I call life - victorious living - that is what I call victory in day to day affairs"? But we can't have any of this if we do not open our doors wide - the doors of our heart - to let His grace flood into our souls. We cannot live this Christian life in our own strength.

### **Are You Living Victoriously? Be It Unto You According To Your Faith**

But let me close on one point. By now of course you have seen that I have dealt with a very basic principle in Scripture, but the strangest thing is that we have still not learned the ABC's of the Christian life. The very basic principle in Scripture is again and again as we see in the gospels: "Be it unto you according to your faith." It's according to your faith. It's always like this - according to your faith. We read that in Mt 9:29 for example. There came two blind men to the Lord Jesus and they asked Him to help them, to heal them. The Lord said to these blind men, "Do you think I can do this? Do you really believe I can do this?" They said, "Yes, ' Lord." He said, "According to your faith be it done to you." According to your faith.

There were lots of other blind men but they didn't receive their sight but these two blind men were healed. Why? Because of their faith. According to their faith it was done to them - they had the faith. "Yes, Lord, You can do it." He did it. How much we miss I wonder. It is always according to your faith as we can see in that same chapter in v. 2,22 and in 15:28, and we could go on and on in the gospels, giving many examples of the principle. You either have it or you don't have it. God has given. The very name "Joash" means "God has given", but have you got it? He gave the victory. Do you have it?

### **The Christian Life: A Challenge To You Of Infinite Possibilities**

And so in closing I would like to put this challenge before you as I put it before myself: How exciting the Christian life could be - how exciting! - if only we would learn this very thing that the Lord Jesus says in Mk 9:23: "All things are possible to those who believe." He wanted His disciples to take hold of the infinite possibilities of the Christian life. "All things are possible to those who believe." Wow! That is a statement to reckon with. That is a statement to think about. Indeed, more specifically, "All things are possible to him who believes" - singular - to any particular person. You could be an Elisha. Why are we content to be a Joash if we can be an Elisha?

Elisha was a good student. You know he became exactly as his own master was - His own teacher was Elijah. And I often think of the words of the Lord Jesus, "It is



sufficient for a disciple to be as his master" (Mt.10:25). Indeed, that is exactly what Elisha was - he was as his master. You know that the words that the king addressed to Elisha, "My father, my father - the chariots of Israel and its horsemen", those were the very same words that Elisha spoke to his master and teacher, Elijah, when Elijah was taken up into heaven. (See 2 Kings 2:11,12)

### **Are You A Person Of Vision? Have You Learned To Dream?**

"All things are possible to them that believe." Oh - that gives you all the possibilities of the Christian life. I find that challenging. I aim by the grace of God to rise to those possibilities. And you know what I do? I dream. Because if you have such possibilities you start dreaming but if you have no possibilities there's nothing to dream about. I dream of what God will do in this generation even through somebody as weak and unworthy as I am. I am nothing. But what God can do through a nobody like me is what excites me! And so I dream. What do I dream? I dream of what the Church will be. But of course I have to start with myself. I dream of what God can make of me, this worthless lump of clay. And even as a young Christian I started to dream. I looked at the Bible, the Word of life. It could transform my life and it could transform the life of others, and I knelt down before the Lord, and I said, "Lord, I beg of You. I am so spiritually dull. I so lack spiritual insight and understanding. When I read Your Word I can't understand it. I just can't understand it. I beg of You, teach me Your Word. Teach me by Your Holy Spirit that greatest Teacher of all. Illuminate my mind. Bring light into this dull understanding. Open Your Word to me that I may serve You, that I may bring this Word of life to others."

That's what I dreamed. And in those days I could not imagine the day would come when I could understand some of the deep things of the Word of God. You know, as time went on He did it. I began to find that he opened to my understanding passage after passage which I could not understand before. How many times I was filled with joy and excitement. Like a new discovery, the Word of God opened up to me indeed even some of the secrets concerning the future, things concerning the past, things concerning the present. I began to find that what I desired - to be able to use the sword of the Spirit in spiritual battle - was beginning to happen. The sword of the Spirit was becoming a weapon that by His grace I was learning to wield with some degree of skill. Oh yes, we have more to learn. There is yet more light for us to enter into, but I saw that He was beginning to fulfill that which I asked of Him to do.

I continued to dream. I looked at the Church. I said, "Lord, what is this? Lord, raise up for Yourself mighty men of God in this generation. Raise them up I beg of You." And then one year and I didn't see anything, two years and I saw nothing and I kept saying, "Lord, where are the men? Raise up your faithful servants in this generation." And then I began to see them. Men of God were being raised up. He was raising them up, and He is raising them up. Of course, the part that I didn't bargain on, the part that I didn't expect, was that He said to me, "Now here are some of them. You take and train them." The part about training them hadn't crossed my mind at the time. All I had prayed for was that they be raised up. He said, "All right. I raise them up. You train them." So that was more than I'd bargained for. That part I had not been asking for. But so it is that He commits some part of this work to our hands.

And so I continued to dream, to see the revival of the Church in this generation, to see the time when the Church is again conformed to the Scriptural pattern of the New Testament Church; to see the time when groups of disciples begin to multiply in a new community with increasing love and concern for one another, deepening in the spiritual life - little groups of disciples - committed to the Lord and to one another, caring for one another, and building more disciples until the Body of Christ grows in this generation.

### **Learn To Dream Big, Because No Dream Is Too Big For God If You Seek Only His Glory**

Now I have discovered that I can keep on dreaming - dreaming of the days when the Church will begin to reach out with power into China and throughout the world, and those days are coming. But I have also discovered that no matter how hard I dream I cannot dream anything mightier than what the power of God could do. This is something remarkable. Let me read to you Eph.3:20 and then you will begin to understand what the Lord Jesus meant when He said, "All things are possible to him that believes." What does Eph.3:20 say?

"Now to Him who by the power at work within you is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever."

What does this mean? Look carefully and you'll see what it means. "To Him who by the power at work within you is able to do far more abundantly than even you could think." You just try thinking and you will find that your greatest thoughts will be less - far less - than what the power of God can accomplish. Now that is a challenge to rise to. You try thinking. I have tried thinking. I have tried to think bigger and bigger thoughts, and I can't think of anything that is beyond the power of God. He is able to do far beyond what you could think of. Try thinking hard some time. I am determined to think very hard because: when you think, you can ask. But if you don't think of anything, then what is there to ask? Ask for His Church, ask for His glory and I'll tell you that you will be amazed to discover that God is greater than our thoughts - greater than anything that you could ask.

I would like you to capture the vision of this possibility so that we will all be motivated. Joash was not motivated. Joash had no dynamic of faith - after three strokes he stopped. What is this? Your God will give you only three victories against Syria? Take hold of that arrow and bash there on the ground. Until your arm is tired keep bashing - until His grace comes along to give you that total victory - total victory. Don't let that tap be turned on so little. Launch out into the deep. And I want to say to those of you who are being baptized today: Through this launching forth, if you keep on in this direction, walking on even when you are weary, never letting up until God lifts you up with eagle's wings so that you will run and not be weary - if you keep on in this way then the day will come when you will discover that others will say concerning you, as they said of Elisha: "The chariots of Israel and its horsemen." The power of God through faith will be so manifested in your lives that people will say, "You are more important to Israel (the people of God, the Church of God) than all its armed forces put together." God's power will be manifested in your life and you will have the victory. And I do pray earnestly that this victory experience through faith will be ours, each one of us.

