

Message One

Living and Serving according to the Heavenly Vision of God's Economy

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Eph. 1:4-5; 3:2, 9; 5:26-27; Heb. 2:10-11;
1 Thes. 5:23; Acts 26:18-19

- I. **The one thing, the unique thing, that should be focused on, stressed, and ministered in the Lord's recovery is the heavenly vision of the eternal economy of God; the central subject of the Bible is the economy of God, and the entire Bible is concerned with the economy of God—1 Tim. 1:3-4; Eph. 1:10; 3:2, 8-9, 16-19; Acts 26:18-19:**
 - A. "God's economy and plan is to make Himself man and to make us, His created beings, 'God' so that He is 'man-ized' and we are 'God-ized'" (*A Deeper Study of the Divine Dispensing*, pp. 51-52).
 - B. God's eternal economy is for Him to become man that man might become God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead for the building up of the Body of Christ to consummate the New Jerusalem—John 1:1, 14; 1 Cor. 15:45b; Rev. 4:5; 5:6; 21:2, 10-11.
 - C. Today we can be in one accord because we have only one vision, the vision of the eternal economy of God—Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 1:9-10; Jer. 32:39.

- II. **Our becoming God in life and in nature but not in the Godhead was initiated by God the Father in eternity past by His choosing us to be holy, predestinating us unto sonship; the divine sanctification for the divine sonship is the center of the divine economy and the central thought of the revelation in the New Testament—Eph. 1:4-5:**
 - A. To be sanctified is to be made holy, which is to be separated unto God and saturated with God as the Holy One, the One who is different, distinct, from everything that is common—1 Pet. 1:15-16; Eph. 1:4-5.
 - B. He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy in order for us to become God in nature (v. 4); God is the only One who is holy; for us to be holy we need God in His holy nature dispensed into us, and this holy nature becomes the holy element with which the Holy Spirit sanctifies us (2 Pet. 1:4; Heb. 12:14).
 - C. He predestinated us unto sonship even before we were created in order for us to become God in life (Eph. 1:5); for us to become sons of God, we must be born of God by the dispensing of God's life into our being (John 1:12-13; 3:6; 1 John 5:11-12):
 1. Ephesians 1:4-5 reveals that God chose us to be holy for the purpose of our being made sons of God; to be made holy is the process, the procedure, whereas to be sons of God is the aim, the goal, so that our whole being, including our body (Rom. 8:23), may be "sonized" by God (Rev. 21:2, 9-11).
 2. Hebrews 2:10-11 reveals that the resurrected Christ as the Captain, the Author, of God's salvation is leading many sons into glory by sanctifying them.
 3. The divine sanctification is the holding line in the carrying out of the divine economy to sonize us divinely, making us sons of God that we may become the same as God in His life and in His nature (but not in His Godhead), so that we may be God's expression; hence, God's sanctification is the divine sonizing.
 4. We say that sanctification is the holding line because every step of God's work with us is to make us holy; the carrying out of the eternal economy of God is by the Spirit's sanctification—1 Thes. 5:23; John 17:17; Eph. 5:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:3b; Heb. 12:4-

14; Rom. 8:28-29; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thes. 5:19; Rev. 2:7a; Psa. 73:16-17, 25-26; Rev. 21:2, 10.

III. The divine, dispositional sanctification is carried out by Christ as the life-giving, sanctifying, and speaking Spirit—1 Cor. 15:45b; 1 Thes. 5:23; Eph. 5:26:

- A. Christ as the life-giving Spirit sanctifies the church by cleansing her according to the washing of the water in the word; according to the divine concept, water in Ephesians 5:26 refers to the flowing life of God, typified by flowing water (Exo. 17:6; 1 Cor. 10:4; John 7:37-39; Rev. 7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17); we are now in such a washing process in order that the church may be holy and without blemish.
- B. The Greek word for *washing* in Ephesians 5:26 is literally “laver”; in the Old Testament the priests used the laver to wash away their earthly defilement (Exo. 30:18-21); day by day, morning and evening, we need to come to the Bible and be cleansed by the laver of the water in the word.
- C. Paul uses the Greek word *rhema* when he speaks of the word with its washing process (Eph. 5:26); *logos* is God’s Word objectively recorded in the Bible; *rhema* is the word of God spoken to us on a specific occasion (Mark 14:72; Luke 1:35-38; 5:5; 24:1-8).
- D. As the life-giving Spirit, Christ is the speaking Spirit; whatever He speaks is the word that washes us; this does not refer to *logos*, the constant word, but to *rhema*, which denotes an instant word, the word that the Lord presently speaks to us—Matt. 4:4; John 6:63; Rev. 2:7; 22:17a; cf. Isa. 6:9-10; Matt. 13:14-15; Acts 28:25-31.
- E. The *rhema* reveals something to us personally and directly; it shows us what we need to deal with and what we need to be cleansed from (the laver of bronze was a mirror that could reflect and expose—Exo. 38:8); the important thing for each one of us is this—is God speaking His word to me today?—Rev. 2:7; 1 Sam. 3:1, 21; Amos 3:7.
- F. One thing that we always treasure is that the Lord still speaks to us personally and directly today; true growth in life depends upon our receiving the word directly from God; only His speaking in us has true spiritual value—Heb. 3:7-11, 15; 4:7; Psa. 95:7-8.
- G. The central point of our prayers should be our longing for the Lord’s speaking, which enables us to fulfill the goal of His eternal economy according to His heart’s desire to have His divine sonship—Luke 1:38; 10:38-42; Eph. 1:5.
- H. In a very practical sense, the Lord’s presence is one with His speaking; whenever He speaks, we realize His presence within us; Christ’s speaking is the very presence of the life-giving Spirit—cf. Exo. 33:12-17; Heb. 11:8.
- I. The speaking of the indwelling Christ as the life-giving Spirit within us is the cleansing water that deposits a new element into us to replace the old element in our nature and disposition; this metabolic cleansing causes a genuine and inward change in life, which is the reality of dispositional sanctification and transformation.

IV. Acts 26:18 reveals the contents of our divine commission to serve according to the heavenly vision of God’s economy; we need to pray over these contents, asking the Lord to make them our experience and reality so that we can bring others into this experience and reality:

- A. “To open their eyes”—v. 18:
 - 1. We need to continually pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation to understand and to see more and more of Christ, the Body of Christ, and the divine dispensing for the divine economy—Eph. 1:17; 3:5; cf. Rev. 4:6; 3:17; Matt. 6:6.
 - 2. We cannot go on without new knowledge of the Lord and a new vision of Him—Acts 26:16; Phil. 3:8b, 10a, 13; cf. Deut. 4:25.

3. Our commission is to “enlighten all that they may see what the economy of the mystery is”—Eph. 3:9.
- B. “To turn them from darkness to light”—Acts 26:18:
1. Light is the presence of God; we need to be people who are full of light—Isa. 2:5; 1 John 1:5; Luke 11:34-36.
 2. The enjoyment of Christ as our God-given portion is “in the light”—Col. 1:12; John 8:12; 1:4; Psa. 119:105, 130; Matt. 5:14; Rev. 1:20.
 3. We need to be luminaries in the world, holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2:14-16); we need to tell out the virtues of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).
- C. “To turn them...from the authority of Satan to God”—Acts 26:18:
1. The highest point in our spiritual experience is to have a clear sky with the throne above it; to have the throne above a clear sky is to give the Lord the preeminence in our being and the highest and most prominent position in our life—Ezek. 1:22, 26; Col. 1:18; cf. Ezek. 14:3.
 2. If we are under a clear sky with the throne above it, genuine authority will be with us to bring others under God’s authority—2 Cor. 10:4-5, 8; 13:3, 10.
 3. Our uttermost love for the Lord qualifies, perfects, and equips us to speak for the Lord with His authority—cf. John 21:15, 17.
- D. “That they may receive forgiveness of sins”—Acts 26:18:
1. We need to go to the Lord to receive a thorough forgiveness of all our sins— 1 John 1:7, 9.
 2. David begged God to blot out his transgressions, wash him thoroughly from his iniquity, and cleanse him from his sin—Psa. 51:1-2, 7, 9:
 - a. Like David we need to stay in the presence of God to have a thorough and genuine repentance and confession to receive a full forgiveness from God.
 - b. If we confess our sins to receive God’s forgiveness, we will have the glad-ness of God’s salvation and be sustained with a willing spirit; then we can teach transgressors His ways, and sinners will turn back to Him— vv. 12-13.
- E. “That they may receive...an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me”; this inheritance is the Triune God Himself with all He has, all He has done, and all He will do for His redeemed people—Acts 26:18:
1. The Triune God is embodied in the all-inclusive Christ, who is the portion allotted to the saints as their inheritance—Col. 2:9; 1:12.
 2. We enjoy the pneumatic Christ as the pledge of our inheritance (Eph. 1:14) “among those,” that is, among those in the church life (cf. 2 Tim. 2:22).
 3. We need to bring people into the enjoyment of the all-inclusive Christ in the church life so that they may enjoy Christ as we do and be sanctified dispositionally with the holy nature of God through the exercise of their spirit—Heb. 2:10-11; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 4:13.
- V. **Our being sanctified for the divine sonship ultimately consummates in the New Jerusalem as the holy city (Rev. 21:2, 10) and the aggregate of the divine sonship (v. 7); this is the ultimate consummation of God becoming a man in the flesh that man might become God in the Spirit to gain a great, corporate God-man (vv. 3, 22) for the corporate expression, the glory, of the Triune God (vv. 11, 23).**

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE LORD'S APPEARING MAKING SAUL A WITNESS

Acts 26 is also set against the background of the Jewish religion. In verse 17 the Lord said that He would deliver Saul from the people to whom He would send him. The word *people* in this verse does not refer to mankind but to the Jewish people, the religious people. In the Jewish religion there was a young man named Saul who had a strong will and who was faithful to that traditional religion. He was very zealous for the religion and tradition of his forefathers. While he was on the way to damage the church, doing his best to persecute it, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and knocked him to the ground. Saul asked, "Who are You, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you persecute" (v. 15). The background here is not that of paganism but of the typical religion. Saul was zealous for God according to the traditional religion, but he was persecuting the church of Christ and opposing God's economy. Although he was so zealous for God, he did not realize that he was part of the greatest deviation from the central line of God's revelation.

After Saul had been knocked down, the Lord called him, saying, "Rise up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a minister and a witness both of the things in which you have seen Me and of the things in which I will appear to you" (v. 16). Often the Lord knocks us down and then tells us to rise up. At these times the Lord may say, "Don't lie there—rise up. If you rise up, I will make you a minister and a witness, not a religionist. I will make you a witness of what you have seen." The Lord seemed to be telling Saul, "You have seen Me speaking to you from the heavens. Now go and witness to people of this. Witness to the priests, the elders, and the scribes. Formerly, you said that I was killed and buried, but now you must witness to the fact that I have been resurrected and am now living in the heavens."

In verse 16 the Lord told Saul that he would be a witness both of the things in which he had seen Him and of the things in which the Lord would appear to him. The Lord said that He would reveal other things to Saul, not in the way of teaching but by means of His appearing. In whatever the Lord appeared to Saul, Saul was to witness of that to the people. This is not a teaching, a doctrine, or a religion; it is absolutely a revelation of Jesus. All that the apostle Paul later ministered was something in which the Lord had appeared to him. He was not taught by the Lord; rather, he had revelation that came from the Lord's appearing. After his experience on the way to Damascus, Saul could say, "I have seen the living Jesus in the heavens. I will go tell people what I have seen. My seeing comes from the appearing of this living Lord. He charged me to minister those things in which He has ministered to me, and He even promised to appear to me again and again. Every time He appears, I see something. Then I go out and witness to people about what I have seen." Being a witness is not a matter of teaching and knowledge but of appearing and vision. The things in which the Lord appears to us are the things that we must minister to others.

THE LORD'S CHARGE

In Acts 26:18 the Lord charged Saul "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." This is the work that you young people should do today. Do not preach the traditional gospel of Christianity. Rather, open the eyes of this generation that they may turn from darkness to light. The first thing we must do is to help others to see. In order to do this, we ourselves must have the vision and see the heavenly things. We must see the things concerning Christ, not by being taught but by having Christ appear to us. After you have seen the vision, you need to contact people, telling them that Jesus has appeared to you and that you have seen Him. Do not preach the low, traditional gospel. Many who have received this poor gospel are still blind and in darkness. Do not teach people religion—open their eyes that they may turn from darkness and Satan to light and God. By turning in this way, they will be released from the evil power of darkness, which is the authority of Satan, to God. As a result, they will receive forgiveness of sins and a portion among those who are sanctified. All the saved and forgiven

ones are saints, and all the saints have a portion (Col. 1:12). According to Colossians, the portion of the saints is simply Christ Himself. Christ has been allotted to us, and we all share a portion in Him. What is our portion? It is neither the heavens nor the earth but Christ. Thus, Christ is the common portion of all the saints. Unbelievers do not have a positive portion. Their portion—the lake of fire—is negative. Our portion—Christ—will consummate in the New Jerusalem. Those who turn from Satan to God will not have a portion individually but corporately and collectively with all the saints. This means that they will have a portion among those who are members of the church life. We cannot have such a portion alone; we can only have it among the saints, among those who are sanctified by faith.

THE FULL GOSPEL

In Acts 26:18 the full gospel is presented. The complete, perfect, whole gospel is found here: to open people's eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, be sanctified by faith, and enjoy the common portion of the saints to have the church life. In this one verse there are seven points: (1) to open people's eyes, (2) to turn them from darkness to light, (3) to turn them from the authority of Satan to God, (4) to help them receive forgiveness of sins, (5) to help them to be sanctified by faith, (6) that they may have a common portion among the saints, and (7) be in the church life. Have you ever heard such a gospel? This is the gospel that the young people must preach to this generation. Do not preach the poor gospel about going to heaven—preach the uplifted gospel revealed in Acts 26:18.

THE NEED FOR PRAYER

It is quite easy to point out all the seven facets of the gospel found in this verse. But now you need to go to the Lord and pray, saying, "Lord, open my eyes. I don't need knowledge, Lord. I need my eyes to be opened. Lord, turn me from anything dark. I don't want to remain in darkness. Lord, turn me from darkness to light." This is spiritual reality. When we are in it, people will realize it when we contact them. You also need to pray, "Lord, turn me from the authority, the dominion, of Satan to Yourself. I must be a person who is absolutely in God. God is my sphere, my realm, my kingdom. I must be in God." If you pray like this, you will become another person. I can assure you that you will be different. If necessary, even fast and pray about these matters, saying, "Lord, I want to have my eyes opened like they have never been opened before. I don't want to be opaque. I want to have eyes like the four living creatures in the book of Revelation." The living creatures have eyes everywhere, without and within. We need to be like this. Then when we contact people, they will realize that we are crystal clear. We are not opaque like others are. Others may be good, ethical, religious, moral, and even scriptural, but they are opaque. When people contact us, they must immediately sense that we are crystal clear. This is not preaching—this is witnessing. We must be this kind of person.

We also need to pray, "Lord, grant me a full and thorough forgiveness of all my sins. I want to have a clearance of sins from the top to the bottom. I would leave nothing that has not been dealt with. Lord, I also want to be fully sanctified. I don't want to be merely a forgiven person but also a sanctified person. Then I will be able to enjoy my portion, the all-inclusive Christ." Day by day we enjoy Christ as our portion, not in an individualistic way but by enjoying Him among the saints. Who and where are the saints? They are those who are sanctified in the church. The saints are the church. When we get into the church, we get among the saints. Oh, how we must pray over these seven matters! Pray desperately to the Lord, saying, "Lord, I want to experience the gospel that You revealed to Paul as mentioned in Acts 26:18. I want to experience this full, complete, perfect, and thorough gospel." This gospel covers not only God's kingdom but also Satan's kingdom. It includes the rich Christ as our portion and all the saints as the corporate Body, the church of Christ. How we need to experience this gospel!

If we experience the whole gospel, we shall not merely be a preacher—we shall be a witness. I can guarantee you that whenever you pray this way, the Lord Jesus will appear to you, and His appearing will give you a vision. Then you will see certain things. In all these chapters we need to see a vision. I cannot

give you anything. We all must touch the throne of grace. Does the Lord still need to knock you down? Are you that stubborn? There is no need to be so stubborn. Rather, we should say, "Lord, I'm here. You don't need to knock me down. Lord, I'm here touching Your throne of grace. Open my eyes and turn me thoroughly from all darkness to light. Turn me from the authority of Satan to God, and grant me a thorough forgiveness of all my sinfulness. O Lord, sanctify me that I may enjoy You as my portion among the saints in the local churches."

PAUL'S RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND THE LORD'S APPEARING

In Galatians 1:11-16 we also see the religious background of the revelation of Christ in Paul's experience. In Galatians 1:13 and 14 Paul says that he persecuted the church of God and advanced in Judaism, being more abundantly a zealot for the traditions of his fathers. In these verses Paul seems to be saying, "You know of my conduct. I was exceedingly zealous in the religion of my fathers, surpassing many of my equals. As far as religion was concerned, I was on top. I even persecuted the church, doing my best to lay it waste and to oppose God's economy. But one day the very God who separated me from my mother's womb was pleased to reveal His Son in me." All we need is this revelation, this vision.

I am concerned for many of you because our situation today is exactly the same as that in the ancient times. We all have been influenced by the background of Christianity. I am fearful that as you do a work among the young people, you may carry it out in a religious way.

When you preach, you may preach the traditional gospel of Christianity. In these days we all must see something. We should no longer bring old traditional Christianity into our gospel preaching. Rather, we must cast away the old things and say, "Lord, show me something by appearing to me. Lord, You appeared to Paul, and he saw something, and You told him that You would show him more through Your appearing to him. Lord, appear to me so that in Your appearing I may see something and then tell people of what I have seen." It is not adequate simply to read this chapter. You must pray to the Lord. I can assure you that if you go to Him, He will be open. He is in the heavens, but to Him heaven is the same as earth, for He is everywhere. While Saul of Tarsus was going his way, the Lord Jesus, who was in the heavens, appeared to him. Today the Lord is open to us all. Simply come to Him, saying, "Lord, I have never heard such a gospel before. Lord, open my eyes and turn me from all other things to Yourself." I assure you that if you pray this way, He will appear to you immediately. In His appearing, you will see something. This appearing will make you a witness. Then, as you contact other young people, you will not merely be a preacher but a witness.

You will be a witness telling people of what you have seen in the presence of the living Lord. It pleased God to reveal His Son to us that we might preach Him. Our preaching must be the issue of what we have seen. We do not preach doctrine; we minister and witness of what we have seen in His appearing.

GRACE GIVEN TO LESS THAN THE LEAST

In Ephesians 3:8 Paul says, "To me, less than the least of all saints, was this grace given to announce to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ as the gospel." Probably we all hold the concept that the apostle Paul was a specially selected one. But here he says that he was less than the least of all saints. If one who is less than the least can have such a vision, then certainly all of us can have the same thing. Do not say, "I am not an apostle, especially not the apostle Paul. Thus, I could never see as much as he did." Paul said that he was less than all of us. Paul said this because he had opposed God's economy. In Paul's understanding, the one who opposed the most was the smallest and the least. Since he was the most opposing, he became even less than the least. Peter, John, Andrew, and Matthew were with the Lord Jesus, but Paul was far away. No one else opposed Christ and the church as much as Paul did. Therefore, this one who was the farthest away and the most opposing became the least and smallest one. In Ephesians 3 Paul seemed to be saying, "Dear brothers in Ephesus, don't you realize that I was once far, far away? None of you was as far away from Christ as I was. Because I was the farthest away, I am less than the least of all the saints."

Anyone who is closer to Christ than Paul was is greater than he. Since we are all close to Christ, we are more than qualified to receive the vision and get the revelation. If the one farthest away from Christ could receive the revelation of Jesus Christ, then why could we not receive it also? We should be encouraged by this. Do not be disappointed. I am familiar with the subtlety of the enemy. When I was young, I excused myself, saying that the verses in Ephesians 3 were wonderful, but they were only for the apostle Paul, not for me. Since I did not care for these verses, I missed the grace. But one day I woke up and saw Ephesians 3:8, and I believed it. I jumped up, shouting, "Hallelujah! I am bigger than Paul. To one less than I, grace was given. If he could receive this grace, then why can't I? I'm more qualified than he was." I can testify that since that day the vision has always been with me. If we saw this, we would all be like the apostle Paul. I am not saying that you should presume to claim your apostleship. No, what I mean is that as far as qualification goes, we all are greater than Paul. Thus, we must pray, "Lord, whether I understand it or not, Ephesians 3:8 says that Paul was less than I am. If grace was given to him, then, Lord, You must also give this grace to me. Standing on Ephesians 3:8, I claim the grace."

We need this grace in order to see and enjoy all the riches of Christ. We must go to the Lord, the source of the heavenly vision, and see something. There is no other way except to pray. If you pray, you will be different, and the Lord will have a way. Many eyes will be opened, and many young people will turn from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God and will enjoy forgiveness, sanctification, and the common portion among all the saints in the proper church life. Ephesians 3 indicates that the riches of Christ are for the producing of the church. Therefore, in this portion of the Word we have Christ with all His riches and the church as God's instrument to shame His enemies, the principalities and powers, and through which God will make known the manifold wisdom of His economy. Pray-read all the verses mentioned in this chapter in a serious, weighty way. Say, "Lord, I mean business with You. You have given grace to one who is less than I, and now You must give grace to me. Lord, I mean it. Lord, cause us all to experience the riches of the unlimited Christ and to have the church life that comes out of this enjoyment." If you pray like this, something will happen. The Lord is real, living, present, practical, and available. If you mean business with Him, He will mean business with you. I know what I am talking about.

Do not follow the trend of today's Christianity. Rather, forget about it. We have a new, heavenly trend. In Revelation we have the seven local churches. If you will pray-read all these verses and live in them and witness according to them, the issue will be the local churches. In the local churches we have the practical church life. The enemy, Satan, hates the Spirit because the Spirit is the reality of Christ. Today Christ is realized as the Spirit, but some are fighting against this, saying that it is heresy to teach that Christ is the Spirit. Moreover, Satan also hates the local church and causes some to rise up against it. Most Christians only care for the universal church, but to have only the universal church is to have a vanity fair. While most Christians care for the universal church, they insist on perpetuating the denominations and free groups. Due to this, there is no local church. Instead, there is the vanity fair of the so-called universal church and all the denominations and groups. Where is the church? It can exist only when the saints realize that all Christians in a particular locality must be one. This is the local church.

Are you young people burning today? If you are, then I challenge you to pray with all these verses. If you pray, something will come out, and you will see the vision of the full gospel and become a witness of what you see of the Lord to today's young generation. You all must fellowship about this chapter and pray about it both individually and corporately until you are transfused by the Lord with such a heavenly vision and are burdened for the Lord's move among today's young generation to bring a number of them into the Lord's testimony. (*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1975–1976*, vol. 3, "Young People's Training," pp. 308-316)