

GENERAL SUBJECT:

**LOVING THE LORD AND LOVING ONE ANOTHER
FOR THE ORGANIC BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH
AS THE BODY OF CHRIST**

Messages One and Two

**Loving the Lord and Loving One Another—
the Most Excellent Way for Us to Be Anything and Do Anything
for the Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ**

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 8:1b; 12:31b; 13:1, 4-8, 13; 14:1, 3, 4b; John 21:15-17; Gal. 6:2-3

I. Paul commended the Thessalonians by telling them that “your faith grows exceedingly and the love of each one of you all to one another is increasing”—2 Thes. 1:3:

- A. To believe in the Lord is to receive Him as life, and to love the Lord is to enjoy the very person whom we have received; faith is given to us by God so that by it we may receive Christ as our life; love issues out of such a wonderful faith and enables us to live out all the riches of the Triune God in Christ as our life—2 Pet. 1:1; Heb. 12:1-2a; 2 Cor. 4:13; Gal. 5:6; John 1:12-13; 21:15-17; Col. 3:4.
- B. To the apostle Paul the grace of the Lord “superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:14); through faith we receive the Lord (John 1:12), and through love we enjoy the Lord whom we have received (14:21, 23; 21:15-17).
- C. In this wonderful faith and by this super-excellent love of the Triune God, we should love Him and all those who belong to Him; only in this way can we become, in the current of the church’s degradation, the overcomers whom the Lord is calling and desiring to obtain in Revelation 2 and 3.

II. The Lord’s recovery is a recovery of loving the Lord Jesus with the first love, the best love, and of loving one another for the building up of the organic Body of Christ, which is the building up of the New Jerusalem as the goal of God’s eternal economy—Eph. 4:15-16; Rev. 2:4-5:

- A. The Christ whom we love is the church-loving Christ; when we love Him, we will love the church as He does—Eph. 5:25.
- B. The degradation of the church begins with our leaving the first love toward the Lord; to love the Lord with the first love, the best love, is to give the Lord the preeminence, the first place, in all things, being constrained by His love to regard and take Him as everything in our life—Rev. 2:4-5; Col. 1:18b; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Mark 12:30; Psa. 73:25-26.
- C. The very life that we received when we believed in the Lord Jesus is a person, and the only way to apply and enjoy this person is by loving Him with the first love; since the Lord Jesus as our life is a person, we need a new contact with Him to enjoy His present presence at this very moment and day by day—John 11:25; 14:5-6; 1 Tim. 1:14; John 14:21, 23; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Rev. 2:4-7; Col. 1:18b; Rom. 6:4; 7:6; *Hymns*, #559.
- D. We must be persons who are flooded with and carried away by the love of Christ; the divine love should be like the rushing tide of great waters toward us, impelling us to live to Him and love Him to the uttermost beyond our own control—2 Cor. 5:14.
- E. In order to love the Lord to the uttermost, we need to be those who desire and seek to dwell in the house of God all the days of our life to behold His beauty (loveliness, pleasantness, delightfulness) and to inquire of God in His temple; to inquire of God is to check with God about everything in our daily life—Psa. 27:4.

III. Among the co-workers, the elders, the responsible ones, and everyone in the vital groups, love must prevail—1 Cor. 12:31b; 13:4-8, 13:

- A. We have been regenerated to be God's species, God's kind (John 1:12-13), and God is love (1 John 4:8, 16); since we become God in His life and nature but not in the Godhead, we also should be love; this means that we do not merely love others but that we are love itself.
- B. We must keep ourselves in the love of God and be constrained by the love of Christ to lay down our lives on behalf of the brothers—Jude 19-21; 2 Cor. 5:14; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:14-16; 4:7-21.
- C. God first loved us in that He infused us with His love and generated within us the love with which we love Him and the brothers (vv. 19-21); to abide in God is to live a life in which we love others habitually with the love that is God Himself, that He may be expressed in us—vv. 16-17; *Hymns*, #546 and #547.
- D. We need to beware of ambition and pride:
 - 1. Whether or not we will be useful in the Lord's hands for the long run and whether or not we will bring in the blessing for a lasting time does not depend on what we can do but on how pure our heart is; we need to have a pure heart, purified from any form of subtle ambition in intention, purpose, motive, and action in the Lord's recovery—Matt. 5:8.
 - 2. Pride means destruction, and to be proud is to be a top fool; humility saves us from all kinds of destruction and invites God's grace—James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5.
 - 3. We should never hunt to be the first in any work for the Lord (3 John 9); rivalry in the Lord's work is not only a sign of ambition but also a sign of pride; referring to our capacity, success, perfection, and virtue is a careless form of pride (Luke 17:10; Phil. 1:15; Gal. 5:25-26).
 - 4. Thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think is another form of pride (Rom. 12:3); self-boasting, self-exaltation, self-glorification, self-will, self-justification, self-righteousness, and lusting after vainglory are all ugly and base expressions of pride (Gal. 5:25-26).
 - 5. Wanting to be great and not to be a servant and wanting to be the first and not to be a slave are also a sign of pride—Matt. 20:26-27.
 - 6. We should pray for one another, have an intimate concern for one another, cherish and nourish one another, and always cover one another, speak well of one another, and never expose one another's failures and defects (2 Cor. 7:2-3; Eph. 1:15-16; Philem. 4; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; cf. Matt. 24:49); we need to forgive one another and seek to be forgiven by one another (Col. 3:12-15).
 - 7. On the one hand, we should have a clear sight over the people for whom we care with much discernment, and on the other hand, we should be blind spiritually—Isa. 11:1-4a.
 - 8. We should not speak reviling words; to revile is to rebuke or criticize harshly or abusively; to revile is to assail someone with abusive language; to revile is not only to rebuke someone but also to sharply wound him and stamp him with open rudeness or contempt arising from arrogance—Gal. 5:14-15, 25-26:
 - a. Revilers are ones who beat their fellow slaves, which means that they habitually mistreat fellow believers; revilers will not inherit the kingdom of God—Matt. 24:45-51; 1 Cor. 6:9-10.
 - b. Those who take in reviling words bear the same responsibility as those who speak reviling words; in order for the church to maintain the oneness, the brothers and sisters must withstand reviling words—v. 10; cf. Num. 6:6.
 - c. The consciousness of sin comes from knowing God; in the same way, the consciousness of reviling words comes from the knowledge of the Body; reviling words are opposed to the testimony of the Body—1 Cor. 1:10.

IV. Love is the most excellent way for us to be anything or do anything for the building up of the church as the organic Body of Christ—12:31b—13:8a:

- A. The love described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 is the expression of the divine life (vv. 4-8a); furthermore, the fact that love is the fruit of the Spirit indicates that the substance of love must be the Spirit (Gal. 5:22); if we do not have love, our speaking is like that of sounding brass and a clanging cymbal, which give sounds without life (1 Cor. 13:1; 14:1, 3, 4b, 12, 31; 2 Cor. 3:6).
- B. Love is not jealous, is not provoked, does not take account of evil, covers all things, endures all things, survives everything, and is the greatest—1 Cor. 13:4-8, 13.
- C. We should be like God in our love for others, loving people without any discrimination (Matt. 5:43-48); the first one saved by Christ through His crucifixion was not a gentleman, but a criminal, a robber, sentenced to death; this is very meaningful (27:38; Luke 23:42-43).
- D. The law of the Spirit of life is the law of Christ as the law of love—Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:2-3.
- E. The law of love must be substantiated by the law of the Spirit of life so that we may be able to bear one another's burdens (v. 2; Rom. 8:2); but if we are filled with pride, we will be unable to bear others' burdens because we deceive ourselves by thinking that we are something when we are nothing (Gal. 6:3).
- F. When the law of love is activated within us, we automatically and spontaneously will be shepherds who have the loving and forgiving heart of our Father God and the shepherding and seeking spirit of our Savior Christ—John 21:15-17; Luke 15:3-7.
- G. When the law of love is activated within us, our labor in the Lord is a labor of love (1 Cor. 15:58; 1 Thes. 1:3) in which we "support the weak" (Acts 20:35) and "sustain the weak" (1 Thes. 5:14); *the weak* refers to those who are weak either in their spirit or soul or body, or are weak in faith (Rom. 14:1; 15:1).
- H. The church life is a life of brotherly love (1 John 4:7-8; 2 John 5-6; John 15:12, 17; Rev. 3:7; Eph. 5:2; cf. Jude 12a), and the Body builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:16).
- I. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up"; we may listen to the messages of the ministry and become puffed up with mere knowledge—1 Cor. 8:1b; cf. 2 Cor. 3:6.
- J. Our God-given, regenerated spirit is a spirit of love; we need a burning spirit of love to conquer the degradation of today's church—2 Tim. 1:7.
- K. As the branches of Christ, the true vine, we need to love one another in order to express the divine life in fruit-bearing—John 15:12-17.

V. John 21, a chapter on shepherding, is the completion and consummation of the Gospel of John; after His resurrection the Lord shepherded Peter and commissioned him to feed His lambs and shepherd His sheep; this is to incorporate the apostolic ministry with Christ's heavenly ministry to take care of God's flock, the church, which issues in the Body of Christ—vv. 15-17:

- A. Peter was so impressed with this commission of the Lord that in his first book he tells the believers that they were like sheep being led astray, but they have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer (Christ) of their souls—1 Pet. 2:25.
- B. He exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock of God among them so that when the Chief Shepherd is manifested, they will receive the unfading crown of glory (5:1-4); Peter's word indicates that the heavenly ministry of Christ is mainly to shepherd the church of God as His flock, which issues in His Body.
- C. The main purpose and goal of the apostolic ministry incorporated with Christ's heavenly ministry are to build up the Body of Christ, which will consummate in the New Jerusalem for the accomplishment of the eternal economy of God.

VI. Psalms 22—24 are a group of psalms revealing Christ from His crucifixion to His kingship in the coming age; in Psalm 22 we see Christ's death, His resurrection, and His many brothers produced in His resurrection to form His church; in Psalm 23 we see Christ as the Shepherd in His resurrection; and in Psalm 24 we see Christ as the coming King in His kingdom:

- A. These three psalms show that between Christ's death and resurrection in the past and Christ's coming again as the King in His kingdom in the future is the enjoyment, experience, and expression of Christ as our pneumatic Shepherd in the present.
- B. This reveals that shepherding is the bridge between Christ's first coming and His second coming; in His heavenly ministry Christ is presently shepherding people, and if we participate in His wonderful shepherding, there will be a big revival, a new revival, in the Lord's recovery to bring Christ back.

VII. In taking care of the churches and in shepherding the saints, what is needed is the intimate concern of a ministering life—2 Cor. 7:2-7; 12:15; Philem. 7, 12:

- A. In shepherding the saints, it is possible that we may kill others; the reason for this killing, this fruitlessness, is the lack of intimate concern—cf. 2 Cor. 3:6:
 - 1. The milk of the word of God, the life supply of Christ, should be used to nourish the new believers in Christ, not to "boil" them—1 Pet. 2:2; Exo. 23:19b.
 - 2. If we have the ability to carry on a work but lack an intimate concern, our work will be fruitless; our heart must be enlarged to embrace all believers regardless of their condition—2 Cor. 6:10-11.
- B. How fruitful we are, how much fruit we bear, does not depend on what we are able to do; it depends on whether we have an intimate concern.
- C. A ministering life is a life that warms up others; if we would minister life to the saints, we must have a genuine concern for them, a concern that is emotional, deep, and intimate.