

**International Training
for Elders and Responsible Ones**

April 2024

**BEING A VESSEL UNTO HONOR, A FULLY EQUIPPED MAN OF GOD,
BY BEING EMPOWERED IN THE GRACE WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS
TO FULLY ACCOMPLISH OUR MINISTRY
IN THE UNIQUE MINISTRY OF GOD'S ECONOMY
(Lord's Day—First Morning Session)**

Message Seven

**The Lord Being with Our Spirit to Be Our Empowering Grace,
Enabling Us to Minister the Healthy Teaching of God's Eternal Economy,
Speaking with Healthy Words of the Grace of Life
for the Organic Building Up of the Church as the Body of Christ**

Scripture Reading: 2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:1; 4:22; 1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3;
2 Cor. 1:12; 12:9; Rev. 22:21

- 2 Tim 1:13 Hold a pattern of the healthy words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.
- 2 Tim 1:14 Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.
- 2 Tim 2:1 You therefore, my child, be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus;
- 2 Tim 4:22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.
- 1 Tim 1:10 For fornicators, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever other thing that is opposed to the healthy teaching,
- 1 Tim 6:3 If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness,
- 2 Cor 1:12 For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you.
- 2 Cor 12:9 And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ might tabernacle over me.
- Rev 22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

I. The Lord is with our spirit that we may enjoy Him as our empowering grace, which enables us to minister the healthy teaching of God's eternal economy, speaking with healthy words of the grace of life for the organic building up of the church as the Body of Christ—2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:1; 4:22; 1 Tim. 1:3-4, 10; 6:3; 2 Cor. 1:12; 12:9; Eph. 4:16; Rev. 22:21:

- 2 Tim 1:13 Hold a pattern of the healthy words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.
- 2 Tim 1:14 Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.
- 2 Tim 2:1 You therefore, my child, be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus;
- 2 Tim 4:22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.
- 1 Tim 1:3 Even as I exhorted you, when I was going into Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus in order that you might charge certain ones not to teach different things
- 1 Tim 1:4 Nor to give heed to myths and unending genealogies, which produce questionings rather than God's economy, which is in faith.

- 1 Tim 1:10 For fornicators, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever other thing that is opposed to the healthy teaching,
- 1 Tim 6:3 If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness,
- 2 Cor 1:12 For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you.
- 2 Cor 12:9 And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ might tabernacle over me.
- Eph 4:16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.
- Rev 22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

A. Second Timothy begins with our God-given spirit fanned into flame and ends with the Lord being with our spirit to be our empowering grace as the unsearchably rich capital of our Christian life and church life—1:6-7; 4:22; Eph. 2:7; 3:8.

- 2 Tim 1:6 For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.
- 2 Tim 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.
- 2 Tim 4:22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.
- Eph 2:7 That He might display in the ages to come the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
- Eph 3:8 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

B. Second Timothy begins with the wonderful Christ as our saving grace, continues with Him as our empowering grace, and ends with Him as our ever-present grace—1:9-10; 2:1; 4:22.

- 2 Tim 1:9 Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the times of the ages
- 2 Tim 1:10 But now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who nullified death and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel,
- 2 Tim 2:1 You therefore, my child, be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus;
- 2 Tim 4:22 The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

II. “The last Adam became a life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45), “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17), “the Lord be with your spirit” (2 Tim. 4:22), and “he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17):

A. The Lord as the Spirit with our spirit, the two spirits mingled together as one spirit, is the key to the spiritual fellowship of the regenerated tripartite believers with the consummated Triune God—Rom. 8:16; John 4:24; Rom. 1:9.

- Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.
- John 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness.
- Rom 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve in my spirit in the gospel of His Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers,

B. The Lord as the Spirit with our spirit, the two spirits working together as one spirit, is the skillfulness, the secret, of all the aspects of God’s organic salvation—8:16; John 3:6; Titus 3:5; Eph. 4:23; 2 Cor. 3:17-18.

- Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God.
- John 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
- Titus 3:5 Not out of works in righteousness which we did but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit,
- Eph 4:23 And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind
- 2 Cor 3:17 And the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2 Cor 3:18 But we all with unveiled face, beholding and reflecting like a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord Spirit.

III. Grace is the circulating Triune God working, flowing, communicating, transporting, transmitting, and dispensing all that He is into us for our enjoyment; the entire church life depends on grace as the circulation of the Divine Trinity within us—13:14; 1 Pet. 5:10; cf. Heb. 12:28a:

2 Cor 13:14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

1 Pet 5:10 But the God of all grace, He who has called you into His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself perfect, establish, strengthen, and ground you.

Heb 12:28a Therefore receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us have grace, ...

A. The first case of grace in the New Testament is the case of God's incarnation— John 1:14, 16-17:

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.

John 1:16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ.

1. Mary was graced by God and found grace with God because He came to visit her, and He entered into her and stayed in her to be the very essence of her conceiving a wonderful person, who would be both God and man, a Godman—Luke 1:28, 30, 35; Matt. 1:18, 20.

Luke 1:28 And he came to her and said, Rejoice, you who have been graced! The Lord is with you.

Luke 1:30 And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace with God.

Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said to her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore also the holy thing which is born will be called the Son of God.

Matt 1:18 Now the origin of Jesus Christ was in this way: His mother, Mary, after she had been engaged to Joseph, before they came together, was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit.

Matt 1:20 But while he pondered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife, for that which has been begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit.

2. In this principle, grace is God's visitation to stay in us, to be born in us, to be one with us, and even to become us—Gal. 1:15-16; 2:20; 4:19; Phil. 1:21a.

Gal 1:15 But when it pleased God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,

Gal 1:16 To reveal His Son in me that I might announce Him as the gospel among the Gentiles, immediately I did not confer with flesh and blood,

Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Gal 4:19 My children, with whom I travail again in birth until Christ is formed in you,

Phil 1:21a For to me, to live is Christ ...

B. Grace is the wonderful Christ as the embodiment of the Triune God in three aspects: what He is, what He gives, and what He does on our behalf for our enjoyment; Christ can be everything to us as grace because He has been processed and consummated to be the life-giving Spirit indwelling our spirit—Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; Philem. 25:

Gal 6:18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.

Phil 4:23 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Philem 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

1. Grace is the wonderful Christ in what He is—John 1:14, 17; 8:58; Rom. 5:17, 21; 1 Cor. 15:10; cf. Gal. 2:20.
 - John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only Begotten from the Father), full of grace and reality.
 - John 1:17 For the law was given through Moses; grace and reality came through Jesus Christ.
 - John 8:58 Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham came into being, I am.
 - Rom 5:17 For if, by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.
 - Rom 5:21 In order that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 - 1 Cor 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me.
 - Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.
2. Grace is the wonderful Christ given to us, dispensed into us, superabounding with faith and love in Christ Jesus—1 Tim. 1:14:
 - 1 Tim 1:14 And the grace of our Lord superabounded with faith and love in Christ Jesus.
 - a. If we are short of something, this shortage is our opportunity to be supplied with more of Christ as grace to meet our timely need for our growth in Him—Heb. 4:16; Rom. 5:17; 2 Cor. 12:7-9; 1 Pet. 5:5.
 - Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come forward with boldness to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace for timely help.
 - Rom 5:17 For if, by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.
 - 2 Cor 12:7 And because of the transcendence of the revelations, in order that I might not be exceedingly lifted up, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, that he might buffet me, in order that I might not be exceedingly lifted up.
 - 2 Cor 12:8 Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me.
 - 2 Cor 12:9 And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ might tabernacle over me.
 - 1 Pet 5:5 In like manner, younger men, be subject to elders; and all of you gird yourselves with humility toward one another, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.
 - b. When we cannot do anything, when we are notable to move, and when we have no strength, that is the time to trust in and enjoy the supply of God as grace—S. S. 8:5-6; Heb. 11:21; Gen. 47:29, 31.
 - S. S. 8:5 Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, / Leaning on her beloved? / I awakened you under the apple tree: / There your mother was in labor with you; / There she was in labor and brought you forth.
 - S. S. 8:6 Set me as a seal on your heart, / As a seal on your arm; / For love is as strong as death, / Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol; / Its flashes are the flashes of fire, / A flame of Jehovah.
 - Heb 11:21 By faith Jacob, while he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph and worshipped God, while leaning on the top of his staff.
 - Gen 47:29 And the time for Israel to die drew near. And he called his son Joseph and said to him, If now I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and truth. Please do not bury me in Egypt.

Gen 47:31 And he said, Swear to me; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself at the head of his bed.

3. Grace is the wonderful Christ doing everything in us on our behalf:

a. Grace is Christ as our burden-bearer—1 Cor. 15:10, 58; 2 Cor. 12:9; Phil. 4:6-7; Isa. 9:6.

1 Cor 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me.

1 Cor 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

2 Cor 12:9 And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ might tabernacle over me.

Phil 4:6 In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

Phil 4:7 And the peace of God, which surpasses every man's understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

Isa 9:6 For a child is born to us, / A Son is given to us; / And the government / Is upon His shoulder; / And His name will be called / Wonderful Counselor, / Mighty God, / Eternal Father, / Prince of Peace.

b. Those who wait on the eternal God (who stop themselves with their living, doing, and activity, and receive God in Christ as their life, person, and replacement) will experience the resurrection power of Christ as grace to support, sustain, strengthen, cover, and protect them—2 Cor. 12:9; Isa. 40:31; Ezek. 1:8; Psa. 17:8; 57:1; 63:7; 91:4.

2 Cor 12:9 And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ might tabernacle over me.

Isa 40:31 Yet those who wait on Jehovah will renew their strength; / They will mount up with wings like eagles; / They will run and will not faint; / They will walk and will not become weary.

Ezek 1:8 And the hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides. And the four of them had their faces and their wings thus:

Psa 17:8 Guard me like the pupil of Your eye; / In the shadow of Your wings hide me

Psa 57:1 Be gracious to me, O God, be gracious to me; / For my soul takes refuge in You; / Indeed in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge, / Until the destruction passes by.

Psa 63:7 For You have been my help, / And in the shadow of Your wings I will shout for joy.

Psa 91:4 With His pinions He will cover You, / And under His wings You will take refuge; / His truth is a shield and a buckler.

c. We need to be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:1) to be good stewards of the varied grace of God (1 Pet. 4:10; Eph. 3:2; 4:29) as teachers (2 Tim. 2:2), soldiers (vv. 3-4), contenders (v. 5), farmers (v. 6), workmen (v. 15), and vessels unto honor (v. 21).

2 Tim 2:1 You therefore, my child, be empowered in the grace which is in Christ Jesus;

1 Pet 4:10 Each one, as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God.

Eph 3:2 If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

Eph 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, according to the need, that it may give grace to those who hear.

2 Tim 2:2 And the things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also.

- 2 Tim 2:3 Suffer evil with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.
- 2 Tim 2:4 No one serving as a soldier entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please the one who enlisted him.
- 2 Tim 2:5 And also if anyone contends in the games, he is not crowned unless he contends lawfully.
- 2 Tim 2:6 The laboring farmer must be the first to partake of the fruit.
- 2 Tim 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth.
- 2 Tim 2:21 If therefore anyone cleanses himself from these, he will be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, useful to the master, prepared unto every good work.

IV. In order to be preserved in the Lord’s recovery, we must guard the good deposit of the Lord’s healthy words through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us:

- A. Second Timothy 1:13-14 reveals that the deposit must refer to the deposit of the healthy words of God’s economy, including the riches of life in the Lord’s words, which He has stored in us; we have to deposit the Lord’s healthy words into our being, like we deposit money in a bank—1 Tim. 6:20; Col. 3:16; Psa. 119:72.
 - 2 Tim 1:13 Hold a pattern of the healthy words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.
 - 2 Tim 1:14 Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.
 - 1 Tim 6:20 O Timothy, guard the deposit, turning away from profane, vain babblings and oppositions from what is falsely called knowledge,
 - Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.
 - Psa 119:72 The law of Your mouth is better to me / Than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.
- B. To hold a pattern of the healthy words means to live by the healthy words, being nourished with the words of the full gospel concerning God’s New Testament economy and the sweet words that contain and convey the riches of Christ—2 Tim. 1:13; 1 Tim. 4:6.
 - 2 Tim 1:13 Hold a pattern of the healthy words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.
 - 1 Tim 4:6 If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed.
- C. If we are persons acting, behaving, and having our life in the Spirit through the exercise of our spirit, all that has been deposited in our being will be guarded through the Spirit who is indwelling us—2 Tim. 1:12, 14; Acts 5:20.
 - 2 Tim 1:12 For which cause also I suffer these things; but I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard my deposit unto that day.
 - 2 Tim 1:14 Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.
 - Acts 5:20 Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.

V. In order to minister the healthy teaching of God’s eternal economy, we must speak with healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 6:3), which are words of life (John 6:63; Acts 5:20), words of the grace of life (1 Pet. 3:7):

- 1 Tim 6:3 If anyone teaches different things and does not consent to healthy words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the teaching which is according to godliness,
 - John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.
 - Acts 5:20 Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life.
 - 1 Pet 3:7 Husbands, in like manner dwell together with them according to knowledge, as with the weaker, female vessel, assigning honor to them as also to fellow heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.
- A. The grace of life is God as life and life supply to us in His Trinity—the Father as the source

of life, the Son as the course of life, and the Spirit as the flow of life, who flows within us, with the Son and the Father, as grace to us—v. 7; 1 John 5:11-12; John 7:38-39; Rev. 22:1.

1 Pet 3:7 Husbands, in like manner dwell together with them according to knowledge, as with the weaker, female vessel, assigning honor to them as also to fellow heirs of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

1 John 5:11 And this is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son.

1 John 5:12 He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

John 7:38 He who believes into Me, as the Scripture said, out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.

John 7:39 But this He said concerning the Spirit, whom those who believed into Him were about to receive; for the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Rev 22:1 And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street.

- B. “All bore witness to Him and marveled at the words of grace proceeding out of His mouth”—Luke 4:22.
- C. “My heart overflows with a good matter; / I speak what I have composed concerning the King. / My tongue is the pen of a ready writer. / You are fairer than the sons of men; / Grace is poured upon Your lips; / Therefore God has blessed You forever”—Psa. 45:1-2.
- D. “The stewardship of the grace of God... was given to me for you”—Eph. 3:2.
- E. “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, according to the need, that it may give grace to those who hear”—4:29.
- F. “Each one, as he has received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the varied grace of God”—1 Pet. 4:10.
- G. We need to treasure up God’s words of grace in our heart (Psa. 119:11), for out of the abundance of the good treasure of our heart, our mouth speaks the good things of God’s eternal economy (Matt. 12:34b-35).
 - Psa 119:11 In my heart I have treasured up Your word / That I might not sin against You.
 - Matt 12:34b ... For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.
 - Matt 12:35 The good man, out of his good treasure, brings forth good things, and the evil man, out of his evil treasure, brings forth evil things.

VI. “Our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you”—2 Cor. 1:12:

- A. To conduct ourselves in the singleness of God, the simplicity of God, means that we do not base our confidence on ourselves or on our natural human ability to workout a solution to our difficult situation; to conduct ourselves in the sincerity of God is to be in the grace of God.
- B. Grace is God for our enjoyment, and we need to continually receive this grace, even grace upon grace, for our experience of resurrection in our sufferings—John 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 12:9; Rom. 5:17.
 - John 1:16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.
 - 1 Cor 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am; and His grace unto me did not turn out to be in vain, but, on the contrary, I labored more abundantly than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God which is with me.
 - 2 Cor 12:9 And He has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ might tabernacle over me.
 - Rom 5:17 For if, by the offense of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.

VII. The grace of the Lord Jesus must be with each one of us in every aspect of our daily life because we are saints; this grace consummates in the New Jerusalem as the consummation of God’s good pleasure in joining and mingling Himself with man for His glorious enlargement and eternal expression—Rev. 22:21.

Rev 22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.

Excerpts from the Ministry:

THE APOSTLES’ BOASTING

In 2 Corinthians 1:12 Paul says, “For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and more abundantly toward you.” Here Paul says that their boasting was the testimony of their conscience regarding the way they lived and behaved themselves. We need insight to understand what Paul means.

The Greek word rendered “singleness” in verse 12 can also be translated “simplicity.” Instead of *singleness* or *simplicity*, some manuscripts read “holiness.” The deep thought and rich experience found in verse 12 are mainly related to the Greek word that means “single ness,” “sincerity.” In the New Testament this word is used at least five times. Different translations adopt different renderings: “singleness,” “simplicity,” “liberality,” “generosity,” “bounty.” Without adequate experience it would be difficult to decide which word to use in the translation here.

Verse 12 opens with the word *for*, indicating that this verse is to be an explanation of the preceding verses. Thus, in order to understand verse 12, we need to keep in mind what Paul has said in the foregoing verses. Paul has just pointed out to the Corinthian believers that he and his co-workers were in a death situation. In verse 10 he testified that God had delivered them “out of so great a death.” Every difficulty, problem, or hard situation can be changed by human power, strength, wisdom, or methods. The only exception is death. No human being has a way to handle a situation of death. Wealthy people can solve problems by writing a check for a large amount of money. There is a proverb that says, “Money goes everywhere.” This means that money can solve every problem. But not even the wealthiest person can handle a death situation. When death comes to a millionaire, no amount of money can enable him to avoid it. Before writing this Epistle, Paul was in a death situation. Humanly speaking, there was no way out of that situation. But for the apostle, and for those who believe in resurrection, there is a way out. The God of resurrection is the way.

The situation in which Paul found himself in Asia forced him to be single or simple in the way he dealt with it. Those who are rich, strong, or knowledgeable are not single in the way they deal with difficult situations. On the contrary, they apply their knowledge, their wisdom. If a certain method does not work, they turn to another method. Their mind is very complicated; they are far from being simple. Because they are knowledgeable and capable, they have many ways to deal with situations. A person who has many ways to deal with situations surely is not simple.

According to the preceding verses, Paul and his co-workers were in a situation that restricted them to such an extent that no human way was of any help. Only one way was available to them: the God of resurrection. They were not just in difficulty or afflictions, and they did not just have problems. They were in death. No matter how knowledgeable, capable, or wealthy we may be, there is nothing we can do about a death situation. For Paul and his co-workers, the only way of escape was the God of resurrection.

A dead person is always simple. A living person, however, is not simple. On the contrary, he always has a way to face a situation. We human beings are not simple. We all have many different ways. But blessed are they who are simple. What kind of person can be simple? Only a dead person. When Paul and his co-workers were suffering affliction in Asia, they were pressed to such an extent that they regarded themselves as dead. They had no way to deal with their situation. Their confidence

was not in themselves; it was only in the God who raises the dead.

The Testimony of Their Conscience

In verse 12 Paul refers to the testimony of the conscience. We must have a pure conscience (2 Tim. 1:3), a conscience without offense (Acts 24:16), to bear a testimony to what we are and do. Paul's conscience testified that he was sincere, faithful, and honest. In particular, he had the testimony of his conscience that he was single. He did not use any human way to deal with situations. He did not exercise his knowledge, ability, strength, or wisdom. He did not use any policy, and he did not play politics. Rather, he was single, simple. His conscience bore testimony concerning this. This testimony was his boast. Thus, Paul could say, "We live, behave, act, and work only in God, not in any way that is of ourselves. Our unique way is the God of resurrection. The God who raises the dead is our only way. Therefore, we did not play politics, and we did not exercise our wisdom. We were absolutely simple, as simple as those who are dead. Our confidence is in nothing other than the living person who is the God of resurrection. This is our boast, and this is the testimony borne by our conscience."

Conducting Themselves in the World

In the Singleness and Sincerity of God

Why did Paul speak to the Corinthians about singleness? It was because the Corinthians were very complicated. They had many different ways. This was the reason some preferred Apollos, and others preferred Cephas or Paul. Actually, 1 Corinthians is a book that deals with the complications of the believers at Corinth.

The source of confusion and division among Christians today is the complications that are within the believers. If all Christians became simple, there would be no problems among them. The problems in a local church always come from complications. If there is a problem in your locality, that problem comes from someone who is not simple but who is complicated. For this reason I always try to avoid being involved with a complicated person. Whenever you meet a complicated person, you should not try to argue with him or correct him. Any attempts at argument or correction will cause you to become trapped in complications.

In 2 Corinthians 1:12 Paul speaks of the singleness and sincerity of God. The sincerity of God is a divine virtue, a virtue of what God is. To conduct ourselves in such a virtue means to experience God Himself. Hence, to conduct ourselves in such a virtue is to be in the grace of God, mentioned later in this verse.

God is wise and almighty. But in a sense He is also single; He is very simple. When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He was wise; yet He was also simple and single. I very much enjoy having contact with the Lord Jesus because of His singleness and simplicity. However, when you talk to certain brothers, you find that they are extremely complicated. But our God is simple. Whenever we talk to Him, we find that He is not full of complications. When He says yes, He means yes, and when He says no, He means no. Likewise, when He says white or black, He means white or black, not gray. No matter how God may feel about us at a particular time, He is always single. He may be unhappy with us or He may be happy, but He Himself is simple.

From experience we have learned that a person who is simple and single is also generous and full of liberality. Those who are simple are those who give freely. For example, suppose a brother approaches a person so single and tells him that he is short of money to pay his rent. Immediately, the one who is simple will be willing to give that brother whatever he needs. This illustrates the fact that to be simple is to be generous. But those who are complicated are not generous. Instead of being willing to give freely, they may consider the matter in a complicated way and then give an amount that falls short of the need. Paul was single, simple, and generous.

Only a person so single is a generous person. If you lack singleness, you will never be generous or bountiful toward others. Our God is bountiful toward us because He is single. Imagine what would happen to us if God were not single and if He thought about us in a complicated way. Probably He

would not care for us. Would you like God to consider your situation and examine you in detail? Would you like Him to look at you from head to toe and consider what you are inwardly and outwardly? None of us would be favored by God if He examined us in this way. But because of God's singleness and generosity, we have received blessing from Him.

I would ask you to compare Paul to the Corinthians. Paul was like the simple God, but the Corinthians were extremely complicated. If Paul had not been single and simple, he probably would have forgotten about the Corinthians and would no longer have been willing to minister among them. Paul's conscience testified that toward the Corinthians he and his co-workers conducted themselves in the singleness of God. Therefore, they could be generous toward the Corinthians and be willing to give them anything. Toward those believers Paul and his co-workers were generous and full of bounty.

The Greek word rendered "singleness" is rich in meaning. The words *singleness* or *simplicity* are not an adequate translation. This word implies generosity, liberality, bounty, and willingness to give. If a married brother is simple, he will be very generous toward his wife, no matter what she does or how she treats him. However, if a brother is complicated, he will deal with his wife in a strict way.

Paul was one who conducted himself in the singleness of God. He was a true imitator of God and one who lived God. God is simple, and Paul also was simple. God is generous, and Paul also was generous. He behaved himself in the singleness of God.

When we have singleness and generosity, we will also be sincere. It is a common practice to close a letter with the words *sincerely yours*. Actually, this usually means "politically yours," or, at best, "politely yours." A person may write a long letter full of complications and then at the end say "sincerely yours." That is not sincerity. Only when you treat others in a single way and with generosity can you truly say "sincerely yours." Because Paul conducted himself in the singleness of God and because he was generous, he was truly sincere.

I certainly would not claim to be an absolute and faithful imitator of Paul. But I can testify that throughout the years we have been trained, taught, and helped by the Lord's mercy and grace to behave ourselves in simplicity, singleness, sincerity, and generosity. I can testify to you before the Lord that I do not play politics. Furthermore, I can say before Him that I am a simple person. My yes is yes, and my no is no.

Not in Fleshly Wisdom but in the Grace of God

In verse 12 Paul refers to fleshly wisdom and the grace of God. Fleshly wisdom is human wisdom in the flesh. This equals ourselves, just as the grace of God equals God Himself. The grace of God is God for our enjoyment. The grace in verse 12 is the gift in verse 11, which the apostles received for the experience of resurrection in their sufferings.

Being simple and single is an aspect of the expression of the life in resurrection. Only when we live in resurrection and by the God of resurrection, not by ourselves, are we simple. It is when we live in resurrection that we are imitators of God. Although others may play politics with us, we will not be political with them. The most we will do is try to remove ourselves from the snare of complications. I want to follow Paul to conduct myself in the singleness and sincerity of God. This is an aspect of the manifestation of resurrection.

Only by living a life in the singleness and sincerity of God can we be constituted ministers of Christ and of grace. Those who are constituted in this way are needed in the church today. The elders and all the serving ones must be people of this kind. If you consider the history of the Lord's recovery, you will see that those who play politics and who do not live in the singleness of God cause damage and loss to the Lord's recovery and to themselves as well. Only those who truly live in the singleness of God have been a profit to the recovery. Regarding this, we have learned some important lessons. To live in resurrection is to live in the singleness of God. In 1:12-14 we see, as a continuation of 1 Corinthians, how to live in resurrection. (*Life-study of 2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., pp. 9-15)