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LIFE-STUDY OF ROMANS - MESSAGE SIXTY-THREE NOT AN EXCHANGED LIFE, BUT A GRAFTED LIFE

Although this revelation is in the Bible, not many have seen it. We praise the Lord that in His recovery this revelation has been made more than clear. No more are we veiled to the fact that man is a vessel to contain God and that God feels at home in such a wonderful vessel. If we see this, then we shall be able to understand the subject of this message: not an exchanged life, but a grafted life.

Some Christian teachers regard the Christian life as an exchanged life. According to this concept, our life is poor and Christ's life is superior. Therefore, the Lord asks us to give up our life in exchange for His. We yield our life to Him, and He replaces it with His own life. However, our Christian life is not an exchanged life. It is altogether a matter of the divine life dispensed, infused, into our human life. This is a basic concept in the Scriptures.

In the book of Romans Paul uses three illustrations to show the dispensation of the divine life into us. In each illustration we see that the Christian life is not an exchanged life. The first illustration is that of vessels. When a certain content is placed in a vessel, an exchange does not take place. On the contrary, there is a dispensation of the content into the vessel. The vessel may be earthy, not at all honorable or glorious, whereas the content is altogether honorable and glorious. When such a content is dispensed into the earthy vessel, the vessel becomes a vessel of honor, a vessel of glory. This is not exchange; it is dispensation.

Paul's second illustration is that of married life. Marriage is not an exchange of life, but a union of life. In marriage, the husband becomes the very person of the wife. For this reason, the wife takes her husband's name as her own.

In weddings throughout the world the bride's head is covered. This indicates that in the marriage union there can be just one head. Hence, marriage is a union of two persons under one head. In such a union there is no trade or exchange, but identification. The wife is to identify herself fully with her husband. In this union, this identification, the wife is one with the husband, and the husband is one with the wife. This is a union of life, not an exchange of life.

Because neither the illustration of the vessel nor that of married life picture anything organic related to God's dispensation, Paul goes on to use a third illustration—the grafting of one tree to another. In 11:17-24 Paul uses the illustration of branches from a wild olive tree being grafted into a cultivated olive tree. As a result

of grafting, the branches from the wild olive tree and the cultivated olive tree grow together organically. Each tree has its own life, but now these lives grow organically together and have one issue.

In Romans Paul uses the illustrations of vessels, married life, and grafting. The illustration of the vessels shows that we are God's containers with God as our content. The illustration of marriage shows that a man and a woman with different minds, emotions, wills, personalities, characters, and dispositions are joined to form one unit. The illustration of grafting shows that two lives are joined and then grow together organically.

A stanza in a hymn written by A. B. Simpson (Hymns,#482) speaks of grafting:

This the secret nature hideth, Harvest grows from buried grain;
A poor tree with better grafted, Richer, sweeter life doth gain.

No doubt, when Mr. Simpson wrote this hymn, he had Romans 11 in mind. I do not believe that A. B. Simpson would teach that the Christian life is an exchanged life.

In order for one kind of life to be grafted to another, the two lives must be very similar. For example, it is not possible to graft a branch from a banana tree to a peach tree. However, it is possible to graft some branches from a poorer peach tree to a healthy, productive peach tree, for the lives of these two trees are very close to each other. We may apply this principle to the dispensation of the divine life into man. The divine life cannot be grafted with the life of a dog because there is no resemblance whatever between these lives. But because our human life was made in the image of God and according to the likeness of God, it can be joined to the divine life. Although our human life is not the divine life, it resembles the divine life. Therefore, these lives can easily be grafted together and then grow together organically.

Furthermore, according to the natural law ordained by God, it is not the poor life that affects the richer life, but the richer life that affects the poor life. In fact, the rich life will swallow up all the defects of the poor life and thus transform the poor life. In the same principle, when we are grafted into Christ, Christ swallows up our defects, but He does not eliminate our own life. On the contrary, as He swallows our defects, He uplifts our humanity. He uplifts our mind, will, emotion, and all our virtues.

May we all be impressed with the fact that the Christian life is not a matter of exchange, but a matter of grafting. A lower life, our human life, is grafted into a higher life, the divine life. The higher life swallows the defects and infirmities of the lower life. As this takes place, the higher life spontaneously enriches, uplifts, and

transforms the lower life. How marvelous! This is not our doctrine or opinion; it is the divine revelation in the Word of God. Furthermore, this revelation can be supported by our Christian experience. Therefore, according to God's revelation and according to our experience, we see that as Christians today we have a wonderful grafted life.

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THREE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF OUR LIVING IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Col 1:18 And He is the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things;

1 Cor. 12:14 ~ 26 For the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body, it is not that because of this it is not of the body. And if the ear should say, Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, it is not that because of this it is not of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were the hearing, where would the smelling be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, even as He willed. And if all were one member, where would the body be? But now the members are many, but the body one. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. But much rather the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we consider to be less honorable, these we clothe with more abundant honor; and our uncomely members come to have more abundant comeliness, But our comely members have no need. But God has blended the body together, giving more abundant honor to the member that lacked, That there would be no division in the body, but that the members would have the same care for one another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member is glorified, all the members rejoice with it.

There are many members in the Body of Christ, and the members are one, each having their different function. God has not ordered all the members to have the same function. All the members are different. "For just as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function" (Rom. 12:4). How then can these members with different functions be linked and fitted together harmoniously in one Body? There are three basic principles which are essential for the harmonious functioning of the Body of Christ. The first defines the relationship between the Head and the members, the second, the relationship between the Body and the members, and the third, the responsibility of the members. All three principles are indispensable.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HEAD (CHRIST) AND THE MEMBERS — OBEDIENCE

The meaning of a Christian's absolute surrender is in the words, "I will be obedient to the Lord; I will renounce my freedom and will not disobey authority." The first principle of living in the Body of Christ is to obey the authority of the Head. Both the existence of the Body and the function and activity of the Body depend on authority. Whenever authority has no place in us, the Body is paralyzed. Any part that is disobedient is paralyzed. A paralyzed body does not follow the directions of the head; where there is

life, there is authority. If we want to have life, it is impossible to reject authority. Those who are full of life must obey authority. If my hand has life, it cannot resist the direction of the head. To be alive implies that we are being directed by the Head. Therefore, the first principle of living in the Body of Christ is to obey the Head. If we have not yet been dealt with in such a way as to be rendered obedient, what we know of the Body is only a matter of theory, not of life. God must deal with our fleshly life that we may see how blessed it is to be obedient to the Head. We must aim at obedience. Many times, we seek for opportunities to make good progress, to become holy, and to become righteous. We should similarly seek for opportunities to be obedient.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BODY (THE CHURCH) AND THE MEMBERS— FELLOWSHIP

Our relationship with the Head is that of obedience, while our relationship with the Body is that of fellowship. Among the children of God, fellowship is a matter of reality and necessity. The life of the Body of Christ needs fellowship, without which there is only death. What is fellowship? Fellowship implies receiving of assistance from other members of the Body. For instance, I am the mouth; I can speak. But I need the fellowship of the ears in order to hear. I need the fellowship of the eyes to see. I need the fellowship of the hands to take things. I also need the fellowship of the feet to walk. Therefore, fellowship means that I receive a benefit from the special features of others.

Some Christians do not understand the principle of fellowship. They want to seek spirituality as individuals, to pray by themselves, to do everything by themselves, to be the mouth, the ears, the hands, and the feet at the same time. But those who know the Lord are not so; they need fellowship. Fellowship implies the fact that we are limited, inadequate, and willing to accept what comes from others and take it as our own.

(to be continued)

(Collected Works of Watchman Nee, the (Set 2) Vol. 37: General Messages (1))

Burdens for Church Prayers

- Pray for YP that they will experience Christ in their spirit as the reality of all the sacrifices and the offerings for building up of God's dwelling place.
- Pray for the growth of the feeling of the Body of Christ.
- Pray for spreading to nearby cities
- For daily exercise in GOW training: prophesying on Lord's day by daily enjoying His word and pursue the truth and attend Lord's day meeting on time.
- For gospel preaching on West Valley College campus, as well as for English-speaking testimony in Campbell.

Announcement

- Morning Revival: 2011 Thanksgiving International Conference Message Two, The Focus of the Epistles – the Divine Trinity for the Divine Dispensing.
- YP Bible reading: John chapter 11.
- Prayer meeting Tuesday (1/3) at brother Tai's home.