

THE SEVEN SPIRITS AND OUR SPIRIT

Message 5

Being Desperate to Overcome Deadness and Lukewarmness in Order to Be Vitaly Living and Active for the Increase of the Lord's Recovery and the Building Up of the Body of Christ

Scripture Reading: Rev. 3:1-6, 14-22; Rom. 12:1-2, 11; Hag. 1:8; Eph. 4:16

I. According to the book of Revelation, we need to overcome spiritual deadness and spiritual lukewarmness—3:1-6, 14-22:

- A. We need to overcome the deadness of Sardis—vv. 1-6:
 - 1. The defilement in Sardis was not the defilement of sin, but the defilement of death; death is more defiling before God than sin—vv. 1, 4; Lev. 11:24-25; Num. 6:6-7, 9.
 - 2. The characteristics of the dead include a loss of function, a loss of feeling (Eph. 4:19), impotence (Rom. 7:15, 18), the odor of death (John 11:39), being buried (v. 17), and being bound (v. 44; Rom. 7:23).
 - 3. Darkness, uneasiness, dissatisfaction, weakness, and dryness are signs of inward spiritual death—Rom. 8:6.
 - 4. When we fail to exercise our spirit we leave it in a deadened situation.
- B. We need to overcome the lukewarmness of Laodicea—Rev. 3:14-22:
 - 1. Laodicea means to know everything, but in reality to be fervent about nothing; in name it has everything, but it cannot sacrifice its life for anything; it remembers its former glory but forgets its present condition before God—vv. 15-17.
 - 2. To be lukewarm is to be self-satisfied, indifferent, and inactive, not taking any action—vv. 16-17.
 - 3. "I am concerned that, although we may have much doctrinal knowledge and may consider ourselves spiritually rich, we may not be living and active but indifferent and lukewarm. A great number of saints in the churches have heard many truths, yet they do not take action to work for the Lord. Hence, there is the need to be made vital"—*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993*, vol. 1, pp. 269-270.

II. The overcomers are those who are vital—living and active—vv. 4-5, 21:

- A. The overcomers are living, which is versus the deadness of Sardis—vv. 4-5:
 - 1. We can conquer the deadness of Sardis in the Body life—Rom. 12:3-10; Ezek. 37:7-10; *Hymns*, #842, #843, #844.
 - 2. We can conquer the deadness of Sardis by presenting our bodies a living sacrifice to God and being transformed from the fashion of this age by the renewing of our mind—Rom. 12:1-2; cf. Gen. 12:7-8:
 - a. We are deadened because we do not present ourselves to the Lord and because we secretly follow this age—Rom. 12:1-2; cf. Exo. 7:17, note 1.
 - b. To present our body is to give ourselves to the Lord without any reservation; we need to repeat our consecration every day and even many times throughout the day; every day and every moment in everything, we need to stand on the ground of consecration—v. 1; Lev. 6:9, 12-13.
 - c. We also should not secretly follow this age; we cannot conquer deadness if we follow this age even partially.
 - d. In the United States today there are two very negative things: sin and the age; these two things are deadening the Christians in this country; our mind needs to

be renewed so that we will not be fashioned according to this age—Rom. 12:2; Exo. 7:17, note 1.

3. We can conquer the deadness of Sardis by keeping our spirit living, pulling it out of death through the exercise of our spirit—1 Thes. 5:23, 16-18:
 - a. We should not leave our spirit in a deadened condition; we should struggle to have our spirit freed from that kind of condition.
 - b. We can release our spirit from a situation of deadness through exercising our spirit by rejoicing, praying, and thanking—vv. 16-18.
4. We must be released, living, and refreshed persons—cf. Acts 2:46-47:
 - a. We must live a life that is released, living, and refreshing, keeping a constant fellowship with the Lord all day long, living in the Lord's presence, and spending time daily with the Lord to study His Word—1 Thes. 5:16-18; Eph. 6:17-18.
 - b. If we all become such persons, after a short time the entire church will be revived.
- B. The overcomers are active, which is versus the lukewarmness of Laodicea—Rev. 3:21; Rom. 12:11:
 1. We can conquer the lukewarmness of Laodicea by seeking the riches of Christ—Rev. 3:17-18, 20:
 - a. We may be enjoying Christ to a certain extent, but we need to enjoy Him in a deeper, higher, broader, and richer way; we should tell the Lord that we want to have new experiences of Him—Phil. 3:12-14.
 - b. We may be seeking Christians, but we may pursue Christ only to a certain extent, being content with a routine church life and routine work and service for Christ; because so many Christians do not pursue Christ in order to gain Him, God needs the overcomers.
 2. We can conquer the lukewarmness of Laodicea by not being slothful in zeal but being burning in spirit, serving the Lord—Rom. 12:11.

III. We need to be vitalized so that we can be burdened by the Lord for two things: the increase of the churches and the building up of the organic Body of Christ; this is the Lord's burden today, and this should be our burden—Acts 16:5; Eph. 4:16:

- A. If we are vital, we will realize that among the churches there is a desperate need for the proper increase—Acts 5:14; 6:7; 9:31; 16:5; Ezek. 36:37-38; Hag. 1:8, and note 1.
- B. Today the Lord desires to see the churches have the proper increase, and He also desires to see a real building up in the churches as the organic Body of Christ.
- C. The Lord will carry this out through our begetting sinners through the gospel, nourishing the new believers, perfecting the saints, and prophesying for the building up of the church; therefore, we need to be burdened and vitalized to take this way absolutely and desperately—1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Thes. 2:7; Eph. 4:12; 1 Cor. 14:4.
- D. After we pick up such a burden, we need to take definite action to go and contact others, including those who are unsaved among our relatives, friends, colleagues, and classmates, as well as Christians who are seeking, backslidden, or dormant.

IV. "Today [God] has prepared the U.S.A...for the preparation of the bride...[His desire] is for us to live Christ, to have Christ as our living, to have Christ as the reality, the real contents of the church life, making every church a golden lampstand. The Body life will reach the reality of Romans 12, and this will be the spontaneous preparation of the bride for His coming back"—*The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1981, vol. 1, pp. 308-309.*

Excerpts from the Ministry:

To Be Vital—Living versus the Deadness of Sardis and Active versus the Lukewarmness of Laodicea

A proper Christian should be vital. To be vital means to be living and active. Since I am a man, I must believe into Christ. If I am a Christian, I must be in the recovery. If I am in the recovery, I must be vital. If we are not vital, we may be in the church, but we are not among the overcomers. An overcomer is a vital person.

In the seven epistles in Revelation, the Lord condemned the church in Sardis for its deadness. The Lord said that in Sardis nothing was living; everything was dying (3:1-2). It is possible to be attending all the church meetings regularly yet still be dying, not vital. The church in Laodicea was lukewarm. Those who are lukewarm are not active. They do not take any action. To be vital is to overcome both the deadness of Sardis and the lukewarmness of Laodicea. Maybe the entire church where we are is like Sardis, but this does not mean that we need to leave it. We may say that our church is too dead and that we want to have a living church. But on the entire earth there is not one church that is completely living. The church may be dying, but we need to stay in the church to overcome the deadness.

In Saving Sinners That They May Become the Members of Christ

We have to be vital in four things. First, we must be vital in saving sinners that they may become the members of Christ. If we do not bear fruit and are barren, we are defeated and are not overcoming. If we are overcoming, we must first overcome our barrenness. At least we should bear one or two new ones as fruit yearly.

Some told me that they tried going out to knock on doors for three weeks or three months and that they realized it did not work. But we need to try for three years before we say that contacting people for the gospel does not work. We need to go out once a week for two hours, fifty-two times a year, to contact sinners. Sometimes you do not need to go out directly. You can contact people by writing to them or by calling them on the telephone. Do you believe that by doing this continually for fifty-two times a year, you will not gain one person? Surely you will gain someone. Even if you do not gain someone within one year, you will eventually gain someone through your consistent and faithful labor to contact people. Of course, if you do not go out and do not contact people, nothing will happen. The extent of your labor determines the extent of your result.

According to Matthew 25, the Lord has given each one of us at least one talent of money for us to deposit with the money changers so that we can make some interest (v. 27). The money changers are the sinners and the young ones whom we perfect to grow in Christ. We have to use our talent from the Lord on them. Then through them we will gain the interest. We have to do business until the Lord comes (Luke 19:13). Whether or not we get persons, we still must be busy to do our business. No doing means no gaining.

Matthew 25 tells us that the Lord will come back and ask us to give Him an account (v. 19). We do not want to be the evil and slothful slaves who are rebuked by the Lord. The Lord will cast the evil and slothful slaves into the outer darkness for discipline (v. 30), and that age of discipline will last for one thousand years. We should not consider that we are okay and be self-contented. Sooner or later, we all will see Him to give Him an account.

In Feeding the Newborn Believers in Christ

Once we contact sinners and make them the members of Christ, they become young babes in Christ. We have to feed these newborn believers in Christ.

In Perfecting the Saints

Our feeding the babes will cause them to grow. Then they will become the saints who need the perfecting.

*In Building Up the Churches for the Building Up of the Body
by Prophesying—Speaking for God*

Eventually, we have to help these perfected saints learn how to prophesy, how to speak for God. Prophesying in the church meetings builds up the churches for the building up of the Body of Christ. If only a few speak in the meetings of the church, the Body of Christ cannot be built up.

We must try our best to perfect and to build up all the saints to prophesy, to speak for the Lord. The more speakers there are in the church meetings, the better it is. This kind of speaking edifies the saints locally and builds up the Body of Christ universally. First, we need to exercise ourselves to speak for the Lord. If we will speak for the Lord every week, we will build ourselves up, and we will grow. Then we will become living members not only of one local church but also of the universal Body of Christ.

To Overcome the Degradation of the Church

With all the four steps of the God-ordained way mentioned above, we need to pay the price. However, to overcome is not just to overcome all the obstacles and frustrations to carry out the practices of the God-ordained way. We still need to overcome the degradation of today's church.

Being in the local churches makes it easier for us to be overcomers, but this does not mean that as long as we are in the local churches, we are the overcomers. No church is an overcoming church. But we have to remain in this non-overcoming church to be the overcomers. We should not expect the local church to be an overcoming church. Of course, we all like to see that the church is going on well and improving, but not all the members of a family are the strong ones. Still, in every family there should be a number of strong ones. Not all the citizens of the United States can be soldiers who go to war, but the stronger ones can. We should not excuse ourselves by saying that others in the church are not overcoming. This is wrong. We still have to be overcoming.

In Revelation 2 and 3 the Lord rebuked the churches. He even told those in Laodicea that He would spew them out of His mouth (3:16). Still the Lord said to them, "He who overcomes, to him I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne" (v. 21). Regardless of the condition of a local church, as long as it is set up on the proper ground of oneness, it is still the church. The ground of the church is the deciding factor as to whether that is a local church or not. If it is, we have to remain there, but we should not remain there in a routine way. We have to be vital.

Now we need to consider how we can be vital. First, we must have a time to contact the Lord. Then we will be enlightened by Him to see all our defects, mistakes, wrongdoings, shortcomings, trespasses, and transgressions. We should make a thorough confession to the Lord to have a thorough forgiveness and a thorough clearance of all these negative things before Him.

Then you should ask the Lord to give you a companion with whom you can labor in the gospel. You should not say that you do not have the time. Everyone is busy. You have to redeem and budget your time. You should reserve two hours every week for contacting sinners by many ways. Then you can get some saved and baptized to be your spiritual babes. You have to feed them, perfect them, and build them up to prophesy. You must pay the price to take the biblical way, the God-ordained way in the New Testament, not depending on the elders or co-workers but on yourself.

Perhaps many in your locality are merely living a routine church life. All these routine church life people are defeated ones. They are not overcoming. But you have to rise up to pick up the way to be vital. Then you will be a vital person in your local church to produce and build up a vital group. The Lord will then gain some overcomers in your locality, and there will be a way for the Lord to accomplish His eternal economy. (*CWWL*, 1993, vol. 2, "The Training and Practice of the Vital Groups," preface, pp. 258-262)

THE THREE ENEMIES TODAY— DEADNESS, LUKEWARMNESS, AND BARRENNESS

In this [message] we want to see three particular enemies that we have today. These enemies are deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness. This is why we feel desperate that we need to look to the Lord for Him to vitalize us. We need to be made living, burning, and fruitful.

These three enemies are mainly against good Christians, the brothers and sisters who are regularly attending the meetings. They are not enemies to worldly Christians, to those who live in their pleasures and entertainment. We may love the Lord and attend the meetings faithfully and regularly, but we have to realize that deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness are our habitual enemies. We may not even consider them as practical and even fatal enemies.

Death is more defiling before God than sin (Rev. 3:1; Lev. 11:24-25; Num. 6:7, 9). Furthermore, lukewarmness is an abominable thing in the eyes of the Lord. The lukewarmness of Laodicea caused the Lord to spew the Laodiceans out of His mouth (Rev. 3:16). Do we appreciate being spewed out of the Lord's mouth? This shows us how serious it is to be lukewarm. We may be good Christians and good saints in the recovery who attend the meetings and serve the church regularly, but we are not so living or burning. We are neither hot nor cold. Instead, we are lukewarm.

Barrenness is an even more subtle enemy. Some married couples are not able to have children, and this becomes a big problem to them. According to human desire, the meaning of a couple's life is to have children. Likewise, if we do not bear fruit, beget some spiritual children, there is not much meaning to our church life. Without fruit-bearing, there is no practical church life. Suppose that we baptized fifty-eight new ones in the next Lord's Day church meeting. All of us would be excited and joyful in the Lord. But we do not have much joy, because we are barren. Barrenness is the biggest enemy that annuls the proper church life.

If we do not bear fruit, there is a danger that we will be cut off from the vine tree. This does not mean that we will suffer eternal perdition but that we will lose our enjoyment of Christ as our portion. This proves that if we do not bear fruit, there is a problem with our enjoyment of Christ. This is just like a couple who cannot bring forth children. They may say that they do not feel that anything is wrong with them, but actually something is wrong, which is preventing them from having children. They may even go to some doctors to find out what is wrong with them. This is an illustration of our problem of barrenness. We may feel that there is nothing wrong with us, but based upon the fact that we have not borne fruit, we must realize that something is wrong with our enjoyment of Christ. If we do not have fruit, our so-called enjoyment of Christ can be a self-deceiving matter. It is not so real.

We may think that we have seen a number of saints who have not borne fruit for quite a long time, but we did not notice that they were cut off from the enjoyment of the Lord. My answer to this is that the matter of life is a mystery. There may be a couple who cannot bear children, but no one can see the reason. In the same way it may seem that we are doing quite well, but where is our fruit? This is a test. If we are not bearing fruit, this is evidence that we have lost our enjoyment of Christ. In this chapter I want us to realize that every day, day and night, these three enemies are around us: deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness.

THE DEADNESS OF SARDIS To Be Conquered in the Body Life

The first enemy is the deadness of Sardis (Rev. 3:1-2). This enemy is conquered in the Body life (Rom. 12:3-10). If you are not living in the Body, you are through. You cannot conquer deadness. Today's Christians are dead because they do not live in the Body.

By:

Presenting Our Bodies a Living Sacrifice to God

Romans 12:1 says that we need to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God. Our body includes our entire person. Our spirit and our soul are within our body, so if our body is presented to the Lord, our entire being is presented to Him. We may say that we have already offered ourselves to the Lord, but we need to repeat our consecration every day and even many times throughout the day. This may be likened to eating. We cannot say that we do not need to eat today because we ate yesterday. We have to eat three meals a day every day in order to stay healthy. Consecration also is not a once-for-all matter. It should be something continuous, without ceasing. Every day and every moment in everything, we need to stand on the ground of consecration.

***Being Transformed from the Fashion of This Age
by the Renewing of Our Mind***

We also need to be transformed from the fashion of this age by the renewing of our mind (v. 2). To offer our body to the Lord is to deal with ourselves. To be transformed by the renewing of the mind is to deal with this age, the practical world in front of us. We need to deal with ourselves, and we need to deal with our relationship with and our concept concerning the practical world, which is today's age. We are deadened because we do not present ourselves to the Lord and because we secretly follow this age. To present our body is to give ourselves to the Lord without any reservation. We should not keep any part of ourselves for ourselves. We must give ourselves to the Lord absolutely. Also, we should not secretly follow this age.

The age in front of us is very subtle. I have seen some of the saints unconsciously become deceived by the age to follow it. We cannot conquer deadness if we follow this age even partially. The age is not hidden, but our following of it may be hidden. We may still have a pretense that we love the Lord to the uttermost, but actually there is an undercurrent within us to follow the age, to love the world. If we are being secretly fashioned according to this age, how can we be living in the Lord? In the United States today there are two very negative things: sin and the age. These two things are deadening the Christians in this country. Our mind needs to be renewed so that we will not be fashioned according to this age.

THE LUKEWARMNESS OF LAODICEA

**To Be Conquered by the Seeking
of the Riches of Christ**

We also need to conquer the lukewarmness of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-16). We can do this by seeking the riches of Christ (vv. 17-18, 20). We may be enjoying Christ to a certain extent, but we need to enjoy Him in a deeper, higher, broader, and richer way. We should tell the Lord that we want to have new experiences of Him. Some among us may be enjoying Christ in the same way that they did ten years ago. This means that they have become lukewarm and are self-contented.

By:

Not Being Slothful in Zeal

Romans 12:11a says that we should not be slothful in zeal.

Being Burning in Spirit, Serving the Lord

Romans 12:11b says that we need to be burning in spirit, serving the Lord. We must seek the riches of Christ continuously. We should not be slothful, but we should be burning in our spirit. Then the lukewarmness will be swallowed up by the burning in our spirit. (CWWL, 1993, vol. 2, "The Training and Practice of the Vital Groups," ch. 2, pp. 278-282)

References and Further Reading:

1. *The Collected Works of Witness Lee, 1993*, vol. 2, “The Training and Practice of the Vital Groups,” preface and ch. 2.
2. *Life-Study of Revelation*, msg. 14.
3. *Life-Study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, msg. 23.
4. *1993 Blending Conference Messages Concerning the Lord’s Recovery and Our Present Need*, ch. 7.