

The Economy of God in Song of Songs

by Ed Marks

In order to interpret the Bible properly, we must know its subject. Its subject is the hermeneutical key to interpreting any of its sixty-six books. We posit that this key is the eternal economy of God. In 1 Timothy 1:3-4 Paul exhorted Timothy to remain in Ephesus that he might charge certain ones not to teach different things other than God's economy. The teaching of the apostles was the teaching of God's economy. The Greek word for economy, *oikonomia*, is composed of two words—*oikos* meaning "house" or "household" and *nomos* meaning "law." God's economy is His household law, or administration, to dispense Himself in Christ with all of His unsearchable riches into His chosen and redeemed people that they may become His fullness, His expression, as the Body of Christ and consummately as His bride, His wife, the New Jerusalem, for His glory (Eph. 3:8, 19-21; Rev. 21:2, 9). The intrinsic content of God's economy is the divine and mystical romance between God and His chosen and redeemed people. This romance is the secret of the entire universe. "Song of Songs is an abridged form of this romance, and the Bible is the entire revelation" (*Crystallization* 76).

The Old Testament reveals that God loves His elect Israel as a husband loves his wife. The following verses bear witness to God's romantic relationship with His people. Isaiah 54:5-7 says,

For your Maker is your Husband; / Jehovah of hosts is His name. / And the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; / He is called the God of all the earth. / For Jehovah has called you, / Like a wife who has been forsaken and is grieved in spirit, / Even like a wife of one's youth when she has been rejected, / Says your God. / For a short moment I forsook you, / But with great compassion I will gather you.

Jeremiah 2:2 says,

Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says Jehovah: / I remember concerning you the kindness of your youth, / The love of your bridal days, / When you followed after Me in the wilderness, / In a land that was not sown.

Ezekiel 16:8 says,

Then I passed by you and saw you; and then was your time a time of love. And I spread my skirt over you and covered your nakedness; indeed I swore unto you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord Jehovah, and you became Mine.

Hosea 2:19-20 says,

And I will betroth you to Myself forever; / Indeed I will betroth you to Myself / In righteousness and justice / And in lovingkindness and compassions; / Indeed I will betroth you to Myself in faithfulness, / And you will know Jehovah.

The New Testament reveals that Christ loves His church as a husband loves his wife. Ephesians 5:25 says, "Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Verses 31 and 32 say, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh. This mystery is great, but I speak with regard to Christ and the church." In the church age, the believers have been betrothed to Christ as a pure virgin (2 Cor. 11:2). Revelation 19:7-9 speaks of Christ the Lamb's marriage to and His marriage dinner with His overcoming people at the end of this age:

Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints. And he said to me,

Write, Blessed are they who are called to the marriage dinner of the Lamb. And he said to me, These are the true words of God.

According to Revelation 21:9 and 10, the New Jerusalem is the bride, the wife of the Lamb. Through the processes of regeneration in their spirit, transformation in their soul, and glorification in their body, God's redeemed people become "the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (v. 2). It is apparent that in our love relationship with the Lord, we believers are considered as a female in His sight. We are pure virgins betrothed to Him, and He is our Bridegroom and our Husband.

Song of Songs is a portrait of the love of Christ in His union with His individual believers, unveiling the progressive experience of the individual believer's loving fellowship with Christ, which transforms them corporately into His bride, His wife.¹ C. I. Scofield says,

Nowhere in Scripture does the unspiritual mind tread upon ground so mysterious and incomprehensible as in this book, while the saintliest of men and women of the ages have found it a source of pure and exquisite delight. That the love of the divine Bridegroom should follow all the analogies of the marriage relation seems evil only to minds so ascetic that marital desire itself seems to them unholy. (705)

In his prefatory note to his exposition of Song of Songs, C. A. Coates says,

The Song of Songs is a book for the heart. It is a choice part of the Holy Scriptures, and has ever appealed to the affections of those who love our Lord Jesus Christ. Its voice was probably never more needed than it is to-day, for nearly all the influences of modern life combine to hinder the development of such emotions as find expression in this book, and to chill them even after they have been awakened. Our Lord's words are true of the present time: "Because lawlessness shall prevail, the love of the most shall grow cold (Matthew xxiv. 12)." If we enter into the experiences of our romance with Christ portrayed in Song of Songs, our love for Him will increase rather than grow cold.

The Lord's desire for us to love Him is seen with His disciples in Bethany during the last week of His life. During this final week He went into Jerusalem, where He was tested, judged, examined, arrested, tried, and eventually crucified. Although He went into Jerusalem, He did not lodge there. Every evening He went to Bethany, because Bethany was where His lovers lived (Matt. 21:17). It was the home of Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and Simon the leper (John 11:1; Matt. 26:6). We do not want to be today's "Jerusalem people," those who give preeminence to their

religious traditions and reject the Lord Jesus. Instead, we want to be the Lord's "Bethany lovers." It was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, that Mary "took a pound of ointment, of very valuable pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment" (John 12:3). When the disciples saw this, they asked, "Why this waste?" (Matt. 26:8). But the Lord responded, "Wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done shall also be told as a memorial of her" (v. 13). The story of the gospel is that the Lord loves us. The story of Mary is that she loved the Lord. His loving us is for our salvation, and our loving Him is for our consecration. The gospel which we proclaim throughout the whole world should include both—the Lord's loving us and our loving the Lord.

Song of Songs speaks of this mutual love. According to 1 Kings 4:32 Solomon wrote three thousand proverbs and one thousand and five songs, but among these songs, one is the Song of Songs. This love poem of eight chapters is sovereignly and very meaningfully preceded by the book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes shows that Solomon had everything a person could want in the material realm, but his conclusion was that the enjoyment and pursuit of the things of this world are "vanity of vanities" (1:2), "emptiness of emptiness." Once we receive Christ as our life and Savior and begin to pursue Him in love, our life is transferred out of the vanity of vanities into the Song of Songs, the satisfaction of satisfactions. Actually, Christ Himself is the Song of Songs to us (cf. Psa. 42:8). As the King of kings and the Lord of lords, He is the Song of Songs dwelling in our spirit, which is today's Holy of Holies (2 Tim. 4:22; Rom. 8:16). Paul revealed that our loving the Lord brings us into Himself as the incomprehensible blessing (1 Cor. 2:9), but our not loving Him makes us those who are accursed, set apart to woe (16:22). Paul counted all things as refuse that he might gain this uniquely satisfying Christ (Phil. 3:8). Song of Songs reveals the living of a Christ-seeker such as Paul, showing the lovers of Christ how they can gain and experience Christ for their transformation to be built up as His Body, to be prepared as His bride.

It is fitting that a poetic song describes our romantic experience of Christ. Poetry expresses a depth of feeling and thought which mere prose cannot. Paul says in Ephesians 2:10 that ultimately the church is the "masterpiece" of God. The Greek word for *masterpiece* is *poiema*, which is a poem. The church is the poem of God, a divine work of art that expresses God's infinite wisdom and divine design. We can become God's poem by experiencing Christ as the poem of poems, the Song of Songs. This love poem is a crystallization of the divine romance revealed throughout the Scriptures. King Solomon, signifying the resurrected, ascended, and enthroned Christ, desired to marry a young

woman, and in order to do this he had to come down to her level. If he had come to her in his kingly status, she would have been frightened away. Through Solomon's courting her and her loving response to him, she became his queen to match him. She became the *Shulammitte* (S. S. 6:13), which is the feminine form of *Solomon*. This means that she became his counterpart, his wife, his duplication for his expression. This is a picture of God as the King becoming a man, even a Galilean, so that He could "court" His chosen ones. He then dispensed Himself into His chosen ones to make them the same as He is in life, nature, and expression but not in the Godhead so that they could become His "queen" (cf. Psa. 45:9), His bride, His wife, for His expression. As we love the Lord and as our love for the Lord grows deeper, the Lord is transforming us. Transformation is a great miracle. Who has the power to change a man inwardly? Only Christ as our inner life can do this. As we pursue Him in love, there is a metabolic function of the divine life operating within us that has an outward manifestation. This manifestation is the beauty of Christ shining out from His lovers for His magnification (Phil. 1:20). A hymn from the third century rightly says:

What e'er thou lovest, man,
That too become thou must;
God, if thou lovest God,
Dust, if thou lovest dust (*Hymns* 434).

Attracted by Christ's Love and Drawn by Him in His Sweetness to Pursue After Him for Full Satisfaction

The first section of Song of Songs (1:1—2:7) reveals that the lover of Christ is drawn to pursue Christ for satisfaction. This first stage is the key to the whole book, because the lessons learned afterward are not new lessons, but previous lessons repeated in a deeper way. In this stage four words need to be stressed which should describe our relationship with the Lord: *personal*, *affectionate*, *private*, and *spiritual*. Our personal relationship with the Lord is seen in 1:4, which says, "Draw me; we will run after you." The word *me* is personal. There are so many things in this earthly realm which tend to draw our hearts away from the Lord. Because He is a jealous God, He does not want anything or anyone other than Him to have our supreme affection. In the Lord's sight anything or anyone that we love more than Him or put above Him is an idol. In speaking of the elders of Israel, the Lord told Ezekiel, "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart" (Ezek. 14:3, KJV). Having been warned by the Lord to guard ourselves from these inner idols (1 John 5:21), each of us should daily pray, "Lord, draw me to Yourself." Such a prayer activates the indwelling Christ within us as an immense magnet, drawing us away from everything other than Him to Him as our unique goal and first love. When we are thus drawn, many more will be attracted through

our testimony in word and in living to run after Him. When we pray, "Draw me," then "we" will run after Him. Actually, His drawing power is our pursuing power.

Moses had such a personal relationship with the Lord. Exodus 33:11 says, "Jehovah would speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his companion." We all need to be companions with the Lord for His interests on this earth. This means that we need to have many personal conversations with Him. We may say that people do not understand us or our circumstances, but we cannot say this to the Lord. He understands us more than we understand ourselves. The Lord is our Father, our Brother, our Friend, our Husband, our Advocate, our Comforter, and our Counselor. If we cannot speak to Him, to whom can we speak? Every day we need to speak to Him face to face in prayer so that He can draw each one of us personally.

Our relationship with the Lord should also be affectionate. The seeker in Song of Songs says, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!" (1:2). *Kiss me* is affectionate. A kiss is the most personal expression of affection; it is impossible to kiss two people at the same time. Psalm 2:12 commands us to "kiss the Son." To kiss Him is to render Him genuine worship. John 4:24 says that we must worship God, who is Spirit, in and with our spirit. The Greek word for *worship* here is *proskuneo*. *Pros* means "toward," and *kuneo* means "kiss." Genuine worship, therefore, is to come to the Lord and kiss Him. This means that every day we need to have an affectionate contact with Him in our spirit. A practical way to do this is to say, "Lord Jesus, I love You." John Nelson Darby is a good pattern for us in loving the Lord. He was a brilliant man who had poured out his life for the Lord. He wrote a synopsis of the entire Bible and translated the Bible into English, German, and French. Near the end of his life, he was alone with the Lord in prayer, and he said, "Lord Jesus, I still love You." His personal and affectionate love for the Lord was the secret of his lifelong and prodigious service to the Lord.

In John 14:21 the Lord Jesus said, "He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him." When we love the Son, we are loved by Him and the Father. This is why we sense the sweetness of the Lord's presence when we say, "Lord Jesus, I love You." Furthermore, we enjoy His manifestation in us. The Lord surely lives in us all the time, but to enjoy His manifestation is to have His presence, which is His very person, the index of His eyes. The Lord went on to say in John 14:23 that if we love Him, He and the Father will come to us and make an abode with us. The word *abode* here means a mutual abode. The way for us to abide in the Lord and for the Lord to abide in us is to love Him in an affectionate way.

Our relationship with the Lord should also be a private

one. Song of Songs 1:4 says, "The king has brought me into his chambers." We need the Lord as the King to bring us into His chambers so that we can have private fellowship with Him. His chambers are our regenerated spirit as His dwelling place (2 Tim. 4:22; Eph. 2:22). The Lord Jesus, as the unique pattern of one living the life of a God-man, had a private relationship with the Father. Mark 1:35 says, "And rising very early in the morning, while it was still night, He went out and went away to a deserted place, and there He prayed." We need to follow the Lord's pattern by rising up early in the morning to contact the Lord privately for prayer. We may feel that we are too busy to have such a time, but we have no ground for such an excuse. The day before the Lord rose early to pray, verse 33 says, "The whole city was gathered together at the door." Luke 5:15 and 16 say, "Great crowds came together to hear Him and to be healed from their infirmities. But He Himself often withdrew in the wilderness and prayed." Despite the pressures and demands of the crowd, the Lord always found time to pray. We need to cooperate with this praying person in us to go out and go away to a solitary place for prayer. Matthew 14 records that after the Lord's feeding of the five thousand, He did not remain or bask in this success. Instead, He immediately "compelled the disciples to step into the boat and to go before Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. And after He sent the crowds away, He went up to the mountain privately to pray" (vv. 22-23). He compelled them to get in a boat and leave Him so that He could have more time to pray privately to the Father. This was so that He could have the Father with Him in whatever He did for the carrying out of His ministry to bring in the kingdom of the heavens.

We need to find a way to spend more time to pray privately to the Lord. Matthew 6:6 says, "When you pray, enter into your private room, and shut your door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will repay you." This repayment is given not only in this age but also in the next age for our reward. There should be much prayer that we have with the Lord which no one knows about. Our flesh lusts for man's glory, even in spiritual things. We always like to do things to be seen, but the Lord tells us that if we do things to be seen by men, we have as our reward the vain praise of men instead of the eternal glory of God. No matter where we are or what our situation is, we must find a place to pray, a private room. Intrinsically speaking, our private room is our spirit where the Lord as the Spirit dwells. We can contact Him in our spirit at any time, but we also need a practical "private room," a place where we can get away from people and affairs to spend private time with the Lord.

All the members of Christ's Body need to have a private relationship with Him so that their heart can be the good earth in which Christ as the seed of life can grow.

The Lord's word in Matthew 13 shows that we need a secret life with Him for our growth in life. He reveals that He is the One sowing Himself as the seed of life into people's hearts, which are depicted by different kinds of

soil (vv. 3-23). One type of soil has rocks in it. The rocks that can come up in the soil of our heart are things such as hidden motives, hidden sins, personal desires, self-seeking, and self-pity. The Lord told us what happens to the one whose heart is full of such rocks: "Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much earth, and immediately they sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered" (vv. 5-6). Such a heart is shallow in receiving the word of God, having "no root." Roots are our unseen growth through our private relationship with the Lord. There should be many things "underground" in our relationship with the Lord, which no one sees. In order to be built up in Him, we must be rooted in Him (Col. 2:7). What people see of Christ through us is based on what they cannot see in us. A plant's root system is never exposed to public view; otherwise, it will wither and die. If we do not have private and secret times with the Lord to fellowship with Him in prayer, rocks will arise in our heart, and we will have no root system. The scorching sun becomes a death blow to an unrooted plant but a facilitator of growth and ripening to a rooted plant. Likewise, if we have a secret life with the Lord, a private relationship with Him, affliction, hardship, and persecution (signified by the scorching sun) will not cause us to fall away but will only help us to grow and ripen more. Our growth in the divine life is not for our own spirituality. The Bible reveals that our growth in life is the building up of the Body of Christ (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:15-16). All the members of Christ's Body need to have a private relationship with Him so that their heart can be the good earth in which Christ as the seed of life can grow.

Our relationship with the Lord also needs to be spiritual. We pointed out that for the King to bring us into His chambers is for us to be brought into fellowship with Him in our regenerated spirit. The Lord Christ is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), indwelling our spirit as His chambers. We must exercise our spirit continually to contact Him and live Him in our daily life for His expression. This is to exercise ourselves unto godliness, the expression of God (1 Tim. 4:7). We need to exercise our spirit to rejoice always, to pray unceasingly, and to give thanks in everything (1 Thes. 5:16-18). Then we will be those who live, move, and have our being according to the spirit (Rom. 8:4). We need to be a spirit-exercising people who enjoy the Lord in a spiritual way. We should pray, "Lord, teach me how to exercise / My spirit now to contact Thee, / That in Thy Spirit I

may walk / And live by Thy reality” (*Hymns* 449). Our personal, affectionate, private, and spiritual relationship with the Lord for the building up of His Body is the essence of the Song of Songs, which is Solomon’s. Solomon, typifying Christ, is called the beloved, and the Shulammitte, typifying the Christ-seeker, is called the lover (lit., love—1:15; 2:2; 4:1, 7; 6:4). Solomon was the one who built the temple, and the resurrected, ascended, and enthroned Christ as the real and greater Solomon is the One who builds up the Body of Christ as the real temple of God (Matt. 12:42; 1 Cor. 3:16). It is our personal, affectionate, private, and spiritual relationship with Christ as the real Solomon which causes us to grow in life for the building up of His Body to consummate in our being the New Jerusalem, His bride and eternal wife.

After Christ brings the seeker into His inner chambers to have private and spiritual fellowship with Him, she is enlightened to see that although she is sinful in Adam (“black”), she is justified in Christ (“lovely”) to make her beautiful in Christ in the eyes of God (S. S. 1:5-6). Furthermore, she receives the revelation concerning how to enter the church life and is led to follow the footsteps of the flock (v. 8). In our initial pursuit of the Lord, our concern is our satisfaction, but Christ’s concern is God’s satisfaction. Because we want the Lord to satisfy us, He brings us into His chambers where we enjoy Him. Then He leads us to take care of His satisfaction, which is the church life on the pathway of the footsteps of the flock. The flock is the church in the proper sense according to the apostles’ teaching, following the footsteps of all the faithful Christ-seekers through the centuries.

It is in the church life that the seeker is transformed by the remaking of the transforming Spirit. At first the seeker is likened to a “mare among Pharaoh’s chariots” (1:9). She pursues the Lord with her natural strength, signified by the mare, and is still enslaved by Satan in the world, signified by Pharaoh’s chariots. When she enters into fellowship with the Lord’s children in the practice of the Body life, she is transformed. Those in the church who have experienced being perfected by the Lord to be transformed cooperate with the Lord to minister God into the seeking one. They make her plaits of gold with studs of silver. She is also adorned with plaits of ornaments and strings of jewels (vv. 10-11). To minister gold, silver, and precious stones into people is to minister the building God into them for the building up of the church (1 Cor. 3:12). Gold signifies the Father in His divine nature, silver signifies the Son in His redeeming work, and precious stones signify the Spirit in His transforming work. The plaits of gold are in the hair to make the hair bound, and the studs of silver fasten the hair. A woman’s plaited hair is a sign of her submission to God (cf. 1 Cor. 11:15). This shows that we need to dispense the divine nature, signified by gold, into people to bring them under God’s throne so that they

will submit to God according to His nature. Furthermore, we need to minister the redeeming Christ, signified by the silver studs, into the Lord’s seekers to “fasten” them so that He becomes their holding factor. The seeker’s pursuit of the Lord in her love for Him brings about a further inward transformation in her so that she has the eyes of a dove (S. S. 1:15). The dove signifies the Spirit (Matt. 3:16), and its eyes signify the insight, realization, understanding, and apprehension of the Spirit. A dove can look at only one thing at a time, signifying that the seeker is looking unto God with a single eye, a single heart. She is further transformed to become a lily (S. S. 2:1-2), living a life of trusting in God and not in her natural strength (Matt. 6:28-30).

The lover of Christ experiences being satisfied with Christ mutually in the churches. She is brought to a feast of divine love as the expression of Christ’s enjoyment of her and her enjoyment of Christ (S. S. 1:12). God’s salvation is a feast (Luke 14:15-24), and the Christian life is a feasting life (1 Cor. 5:7-8). The Christian life is not a code of do’s and don’ts. We should not resolve to improve our conduct outwardly by self-improvement methods. We should simply and daily feast on the Lord as our spiritual food (John 6:57) and enjoy the Lord by loving Him (Eph. 6:24). Then we will spontaneously be infused with His divine attributes, which will become our human virtues for His magnification (Phil. 1:20). Song of Songs reveals that the lover gains Christ and Christ gains His lover. Furthermore, the lover enjoys Christ and Christ enjoys His lover (1:13-17; 2:3-5; 1:12; 2:6, 2). The consummate result of this mutual gain and enjoyment is the banqueting in the banqueting house, the church life. “He brought me into the banqueting house, / And his banner over me was love” (v. 4). This banner of all-conquering love is a sign of our victory in Christ (Rom. 8:35-37).

Called to Be Delivered from the Self through Our Oneness with the Cross of Christ

The second major section of Song of Songs speaks of our being called by the Lord to be delivered from the self through our oneness with His cross (2:8—3:5). Concerning His loving seeker, the Lord says, “My dove, in the clefts of the rock, / In the covert of the precipice, / et me see your countenance, / Let me hear your voice; / For your voice is sweet, / And your countenance is lovely” (2:14). The cross is the central stress of this section and is signified by the clefts of the rock (1 Cor. 10:4; Exo. 17:6) and the covert of the precipice. For the Lord to call the seeker His dove means that she is continually being filled with the Spirit to cause her to be saturated with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). We should pray, “Lord, constitute me into Your dove. I want to be saturated and soaked and permeated with You so that I actually become a person of the Spirit.” For us to become such a person, we need to be those who are dwelling in the cross, the crucified Christ. The Lord

wants to see our countenance and hear our voice in Him as the clefts of the rock and as the covert of the precipice. He is our hiding place, the place of safety for fallen man.

When we contact the Lord, we experience Him as the cross and as the resurrection. We should not think of the cross as a thing. The cross and resurrection are Christ Himself.

Our particular experience of the crucified Christ is vividly portrayed in Exodus 15:22-27. After the children of Israel were brought up out of Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, the Lord led them to Marah, a place where there were bitter waters. What happened there is not merely an event but a principle in our Christian life. In our romance with the Lord, many times we are led to bitter waters. This means that we are led into a bitter situation. Things happen in our circumstances, on our jobs, with our family, and with our Christian brothers and sisters that may offend us and wound us. The Lord allows these things to happen to expose the bitterness in our being. When this bitterness is exposed, the Lord has a way to heal us. When we are led to a bitter situation, we need to cry out to the Lord in our personal time with Him. At such times, we become more real and intimate with the Lord and are brought into a deeper union with Him.

When Moses cried out to the Lord, the Lord showed him a tree. Moses then cast this tree into the bitter waters and they became sweet. What, or we should say, who, is this tree? Revelation 2:7 speaks of the tree of life. The Greek word for *tree* here is the same word used in 1 Peter 2:24—"Who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree." The word *tree* signifies the cross, the crucified Christ. The word *life* in Revelation 2:7 signifies Christ as the resurrection life (John 11:25). Thus, the tree of life is the crucified and resurrected Christ. The fact that the children of Israel went three days' journey into the wilderness to arrive at Marah (Exo. 15:22) also points to the resurrected Christ, since three is the number of resurrection. When we contact the Lord, we experience Him as the cross and as the resurrection. We should not think of the cross as a thing. The cross is a person. The cross and resurrection are inseparable because both are Christ Himself.

The medicine that the Lord gives us for our bitter situation and our bitter being is the cross. The cross is His unique solution to every problem. The problem is not with that person. The problem is not with that thing that happened to us or that situation. The problem is right inside of us, the bitterness in our being, and the solution to that problem is the cross. Whenever we are offended or bitter, it is usually because our being is set on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, right and wrong. Someone wronged us and we are right. Instead, we need to set our being on the tree of life, the crucified and resurrected Christ. Christ as our inner life includes a killing element and a resurrecting element. He kills the negative things in

our inner being and brings our inner being into resurrection life to heal our inner wounds and make our inner being sweet with the riches of His presence. We need to open to the Lord in prayer and "cast" the crucified

and resurrected Christ into our bitter being to change all our inward bitterness into sweetness. It is in this way that we experience the Lord as our Healer. Our entire fallen being needs to be healed. The ultimate healing will be when we are glorified in our body and raptured. As this crucified and resurrected One is spreading from our spirit into the parts of our soul and eventually into our body, we are being healed progressively.

The Lord's loving seeker dwelling in the crucified Christ as the clefts of the rock and the covert of the precipice matches Psalm 91:1—"He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High / Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." The crucified Christ is our secret place in which we can dwell. This secret place being of the Most High and the covert of the precipice being a high place also implies His resurrection and ascension. We hide in the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ in order to be delivered from the self. The self is the fallen and rebellious soul (composed of man's mind, will, and emotion) that declares independence from God. Because Peter was independent of the Lord in expressing his opinion that the Lord should not go to the cross, the Lord turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" This shows that our natural man, our self, which is not willing to take the cross, is one with Satan (Matt. 16:21-24). We Americans celebrate Independence Day, but in the Christian life every day is "dependence day." We depend on the Lord as the Head, and we depend on the members of His Body. The self which declares independence from God is the greatest enemy to the Body of Christ. This is why the Lord spoke of the denial of the self immediately after Peter received the revelation of the church (vv. 18, 24).

A good illustration of our need to deny the self by depending on the Lord is in Joshua 9, which records how the children of Israel were deceived by the Gibeonites. These Gibeonites were Hivites (11:19), one of the tribes which Jehovah had commanded Israel to utterly overthrow and cast out of the land (Exo. 3:8; 23:22-24). Why were the children of Israel deceived? Joshua 9:14 tells us why: "They did not ask for the counsel of Jehovah." Concerning what to do with the Gibeonites, Israel as the wife should have checked with the Lord, her Husband. A wife should always rely on her husband, be one with him, and seek his counsel in everything. In this matter Israel did something independent from the Lord, her Husband, and thus, suffered the consequences. J. N. Darby has a telling insight into this occurrence:

Satan...deceives only when we take the management into our own hands, instead of consulting the Lord. Communion with Him was needed to discern that these were people of the country, enemies who *dared* not to be enemies: but to make peace with such is to deprive oneself of a victory, and of one's right to make good the judgment and the glory of God, in the unmingled possession of the land of blessing....May He give us always to trust in Him, to seek counsel of Him, to own none but Him, and to be always subject to Him! This will ensure victory over every enemy, and the land will be all our own. (368-369)

The good land signifies the all-inclusive Christ for our enjoyment. If we are going to possess Him, gain Him in full, we must seek His counsel in everything. This is the essence of prayer, which declares our dependence on Him. Because Israel did not seek the counsel of Jehovah, they dwelt in the good land in a mixed way, not in an unmixed, pure way according to God's desire. The self, which declares independence from God, does not seek the Lord's counsel. Do we consult the Lord in all the decisions we make, great or small? May the Lord draw us to seek His counsel in all things in utter dependence on Him. This honors His headship, this means that our self is on the cross, and this means that we are living by another life, Christ Himself (Col. 3:4).

The self is also manifested when we are introspective concerning our spiritual condition. Introspection is to examine ourselves by looking into ourselves, analyzing ourselves, recalling ourselves, and dwelling upon ourselves. This is the greatest weakness and the greatest enemy in our spiritual life. To be concerned about what others think about us is to be in the self. Paul said that he and his co-workers spoke "not as pleasing men but God, who proves our hearts" (1 Thes. 2:4). We should not look at ourselves. We should always look away unto Jesus (Heb. 12:2) so that we can be saved from self-consciousness into God-consciousness. In Song of Songs the seeker's overcaring for her spiritual condition causes her to fall into introspection, which becomes a wall that secludes her and keeps her away from the presence of Christ. Although the Lord is standing behind the seeker's introspective wall, He is also "looking through the windows, / He is glancing through the lattice" (2:9). Sometimes we are trapped in our self, but there is still a window in the wall, and the Lord is looking into our being. He is calling us: "Rise up, my love, / My beauty, and come away" (v. 10). This is a call to come out of our self and away with Him into resurrection. The peculiarity of introspection becomes one of the little foxes that ruins the flourishing resurrection of Christ. "Catch the foxes for us, / The little foxes, / That ruin the vineyards / While our vineyards are in blossom" (v. 15). We need to look away to the Lord and allow Him to deal with all the habits of our introspective self that damage the riches of resurrection in us.

Songs of Songs shows us that we can be delivered from the self through our oneness with the cross by His resurrection power. The One who is calling the seeker to come out from behind her wall is likened to a gazelle leaping upon the mountains and to a young hart skipping upon the hills, showing forth His resurrection power over difficulties (vv. 8-10, 13). When we have intimate fellowship with Him, He brings us out of our seclusive self, and we become one with Him as the mountain-leaping and hill-skipping Christ. The mountains and the hills signify difficulties, obstacles, and barriers in our being, but no mountain or hill is too high for Him to leap and skip over. The only way we can go to and remain in the cross is by the power of Christ's resurrection, not by our natural life. The clefts of the rock and the covert of the precipice are very steep and hard to reach. But this mountain-leaping gazelle and hill-skipping hart can bring us there. The resurrected Christ is the real gazelle, the real hart, indwelling our spirit. By the power of His resurrection, we can be conformed to His death (Phil. 3:10). The lover of Christ is entreated to respond to Him and is encouraged with the passing away of the winter and the coming of the spring of resurrection in its flourishing riches. When we respond to the indwelling resurrected Christ, the dormant days (winter) are past and the trials (rain) are gone, life in all its appearances is blossoming, the time of praising (singing) has come, the fruit tree has ripened its fruits, and the vines are in blossom, giving forth their fragrance (S. S. 2:10-13). Thus, the life of the cross is by the power of resurrection, and it is encouraged by the riches of resurrection. In order to experience Christ as the reality of resurrection in our spirit, we need to be those who continually exercise our spirit to contact Him and deny the self.

Called by Christ to Live in Ascension as the New Creation of God in the Resurrection of Christ

The third stage of the portrait in Song of Songs of the living of a Christ-seeker is the call for us to live in His ascension. By living in Christ's ascension, we become God's new creation in resurrection (S. S. 3:6—5:1). Before this call, the Christ-seeker becomes worthy of God in His economy to move with Him in union with Christ. She is moving with God in the unshakable power of the Spirit, typified by pillars of smoke (3:6; cf. Exo. 14:19-20). As a pillar she is perfumed with myrrh, signifying the death of Christ, with frankincense, signifying the resurrection of Christ, and with the fragrant powders of Christ as the merchant (cf. Matt. 13:45). According to Paul's word, she has become "a fragrance of Christ" (2 Cor. 2:15). We should pray, "Lord, saturate me and soak me with the Spirit to such an extent that I become a fragrance of Christ." It is recorded that Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel at all times—if necessary, use words." When we are permeated with Christ, not only our words but also our very being becomes a pillar of the gospel. In Exodus there are the

pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire leading the children of Israel (14:19-20). This is actually one pillar—by day it is a cloud and by night it is fire. According to 1 Corinthians 10:1-2, the cloud signifies the Spirit. In Jeremiah 23:29 the Lord says that His word is like fire. We can become pillars by experiencing Christ as the Spirit and the Word. We need to receive “the sword of the Spirit, which Spirit is the word of God, by means of all prayer and petition” (Eph. 6:17-18). When we receive God’s word by reading it with prayer, by pray-reading it, His word becomes spirit and life to us (John 6:63), to transform us into unshakable pillars for His move.

According to Exodus the presence of the Lord was in the pillar. The Lord told Moses, “My presence shall go with you” (33:14). Moses told the Lord that they would not go if His presence did not go with them (v. 15). His presence means everything to us. The Lord is in us and never leaves us, but do we have His presence? Once we receive Him, He dwells in us but He may not be happy with us. Witness Lee gives an excellent illustration of this in *The All-inclusive Christ*:

One time four or five of us who were serving the Lord together were going to a certain place. We all travelled together. One brother at that time, however, was not happy with us; yet he had no choice but to go. We all travelled on the same train; all but this one brother sat in car number one, and he sat by himself in car number two. He went with us, but his presence did not go with us. He left with us, he travelled with us, and he arrived with us, but his presence was not with us. When the brothers came to welcome us, he was there, and through all of our visit in that place, he was there. He was with us, but his presence was not. It was indeed strange....

Oh, this is not a theory, but our real experience! Many times in past years while I was serving the Lord I have realized His help. The Lord is bound to help me; He must help me for His own sake. But I can tell you that many times I did not have the presence of the Lord, simply because He was not happy with me. He had to go with me, but He was not happy. I was sitting in car number one, but He was sitting in car number two. He went along, but He withheld His presence that I might know His displeasure....

Brothers and sisters, though it be with tears in our eyes, we must say day by day, “Lord, nothing but Thy smiling presence will satisfy me. I do not want anything but the smile of Thy glorious face. As long as I have this, I care not whether the heaven comes down or the earth falls apart. The whole world may rise against me, but as long

In order to experience Christ as the reality of resurrection in our spirit, we need to be those who continually exercise our spirit to contact Him and deny the self.

as I have Thy smile upon me, I can praise Thee, and everything is well.” (116-118)

The Christ-seeker is filled with the presence of the Lord to make her not only an unshakable pillar for God’s move but also Christ’s bed and His palanquin. The lover of Christ, signified by the bed, and Christ, signified by its sleeper, are in a union of love (S. S. 3:7-8). The lover of Christ, signified by the palanquin, and Christ, signified by its rider, are in a union of triumphant celebration (vv. 9-10). Just as Solomon made himself a palanquin, the Lord is making us His palanquin. He is building Himself into our being. For Him to build Himself into our being is for Him to make His home in our hearts (Eph. 3:16-17). The wood of this palanquin is from the high country of Lebanon, signifying the resurrected and ascended humanity of Christ which has been wrought into us. The silver posts signify that the supporting structure in our being should be the redeeming Christ. The bottom of this palanquin being gold means that we need to be filled with the divine nature. We should pray, “Lord, make me Your palanquin. Build Your humanity into me, build Your redemptive work into me, and build Your divine nature into me.” This palanquin is also “inlaid with love” (S. S. 3:10). This means that our whole inner being, the interior structure of our soul, should be filled with His divine love, the very love with which we love Him. The seat of this palanquin is royal purple, signifying that Christ as the King is living and reigning within us.

After the lover of Christ has experienced Christ in His sweet death and resurrection, she determines to stay in His sweet death (the mountain of myrrh) and fragrant resurrection (the hill of frankincense) until her Beloved comes back when the day dawns and the shadows flee away (4:6). Previously, she was merely perfumed with myrrh and frankincense. Now she makes a determination; she wants to enjoy His death as a mountain and His resurrection as a hill. Paul said that he did not determine to know anything among the Corinthian believers except Jesus Christ and this One crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). We should all have such a determination, but once we have this determination, the Lord will call us further to live in His ascension. “Come with me from Lebanon, my bride; / With me from Lebanon come. / Look from the top of Amana, / From the top of Senir and Hermon, / From the lions’ dens, / From the leopards’ mountains” (S. S. 4:8). We need to respond to the Lord to look from His ascension, signified by the mountains of Lebanon. *Amana* means “truth,” *Senir* means “soft armor,” and *Hermon* means “destruction.” When we are in the ascended Christ, we are enjoying Him as the truth (*Amana*). Furthermore, the war is over because the tempered armor has

become soft (Senir), and the victory is won because His enemy is destroyed (Hermon). The seeker is to look from the heavenlies, signified by the lions' dens and the leopards' mountains, to fight against Satan and his power of darkness (Eph. 6:12).

By living in Christ's ascension as the new creation in resurrection, the lover of Christ becomes mature in the riches of the life of Christ so that she becomes a garden to Christ. "A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride, / A spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (S. S. 4:12). A garden is for someone's private enjoyment. We need to be people with a spring shut up and a fountain sealed for Christ's private enjoyment. The more sealed we are, that is, the more we have the secret experiences of Christ, the more impact we will have in our service to the Lord.

Before the seeker became a garden, she enjoyed Christ as the myrrh, the henna flower, and the frankincense (1:13-14; 4:6). Now as Christ's garden, she is growing out of her being the very aspects of Christ that she has enjoyed (vv. 13-14). The Christ that we have enjoyed grows out of us for His private enjoyment and appreciation. First Corinthians 3:9 tells us that we are God's cultivated land; Christ is growing in us, and we are growing Christ. This growth builds up the Body of Christ to consummate us, to prepare us, to be His bride, His wife.

As Christ's private garden, the seeker says, "Awake, O north wind; / And come, O south wind! / Blow upon my garden: / Let its spices flow forth; / Let my beloved come into his garden / And eat his choicest fruit" (S. S. 4:16). The north wind is cold, harsh, bitter, and strong. The south wind is warm, mild, pleasant, and gentle. These two kinds of winds signify different environments that the Holy Spirit uses to train us to enjoy Christ and put forth the fragrance of Christ in any kind of environment. Our environment may be pleasant, like the south wind, but if we do not touch the Lord, our easy days will produce a bad result. At other times the Lord will use a north-wind environment to produce a good result in us because we become desperate to contact Him. The apostle Paul's aspiration was that he would not be put to shame in anything, but that he would live and magnify Christ, put forth the fragrance of Christ, in any environment (Phil. 1:20-21). We need to ask the Lord to save us from the failure of not living Him and from the defeat of not magnifying Him. We want to magnify Him in any situation, circumstance, or environment.

At this point in her experience, the Christ-seeker realizes that all problems come from within, not from without. Our harsh environment is not the problem. The Lord uses our environment to expose our inner shortage of Him. As long as we are filled with the Spirit, the Lord's presence, we can be at peace in any environment. Paul is

an excellent pattern to us. Although he was a prisoner of the Roman Empire, his view was that he was a "prisoner of Christ Jesus" (Eph. 3:1) and even a "prisoner in the Lord" (4:1). To Paul's realization, not only was he the Lord's prisoner, but also the Lord was his prison. To Paul the environment arranged by the Lord was even the Lord Himself. In Ephesians 6 he asked the saints to pray for him that he might have the utterance for proclaiming the gospel (v. 19). Then he said, "For which I am an ambassador in a chain" (v. 20). We surely want to be Christ's ambassadors, but in order to be such, we also need to be "in a chain." The chain is our environment which presses upon us, limits us, and restricts us. It is in this environment of limitation that the unlimited Christ can be manifested in us. In the midst of our limiting circumstances, we can put forth the limitless fragrance of Christ.

Paul also said, "I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content...In everything and in all things I have learned the secret..." (Phil. 4:11-12). What a proclamation this is! The secret here is to know how to be abased in the north wind and how to abound in the south wind. Christ was Paul's secret of sufficiency in every environment. The way to enjoy Christ as our secret of sufficiency is seen in Philippians 4:6-7:

In nothing be anxious, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses every man's understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

There is a wonderful secret here to living Christ in any kind of circumstance. Notice the phrase "*in everything*, by prayer and petition." This means that we should talk to the Lord in and about everything. "Let your requests be made known to God." The word *to* in the Greek "denotes motion toward, in the sense of a living union and communion, implying fellowship. Hence, the sense of *to God* here is *in the fellowship with God*" (Recovery Version, Phil. 4:6, note 4). When we move toward God by fellowshiping with Him, by speaking to Him, by talking to Him, He moves into us as the peace of God. This peace mounts patrol over our hearts and thoughts, and spontaneously we live Christ. If we have some problem, the Lord is right within us. We can speak to Him face to face at any time. If we practice speaking with the Lord constantly, we will spontaneously live Him. As we speak to Him, beholding Him in prayer, spontaneously His element is infused into us, and there is an outward manifestation of this element. That outward manifestation is our living Christ and magnifying Christ. It is by our intimate talks with the Lord that we become His private garden for His enjoyment. The key is to remain in fellowship with the Lord.

**Called by Christ More
Strongly to Live within
the Veil through His Cross
after Our Experience
of His Death and
Resurrection**

*God's goal in the universe is His building.
Our love affair with the Lord,
our romance with Him, is so that we
can be built up as the Body of Christ.*

In the fourth section of Song of Songs, the seeker is called by Christ in a stronger way to live within the veil. Through her living in Christ's ascension as the new creation in resurrection, the lover of Christ becomes the building of God (5:2—6:13). This building is the sanctuary of God, signified by Tirzah, and its safeguard, signified by Jerusalem. The Lord praises her by saying, "You are as beautiful, my love, as Tirzah, / As lovely as Jerusalem" (6:4). Tirzah in ancient times was the place of the palace of the king (1 Kings 14:17; 15:21, 33; 16:6, 8-9, 15, 17), and Jerusalem was the city of the great King where His temple was (Psa. 48:2). In the New Testament reality, God as the ruling One, the King, lives in His palace, which is His sanctuary, His temple. God's real palace, His real temple, is the church consummating in the New Jerusalem, which is His building (1 Cor. 3:9, 16). God's goal in the universe is His building. Our love affair with the Lord, our romance with Him, is so that we can be built up as the Body of Christ. The whole Bible reveals that God wants a building. In Genesis 2 the Lord took a rib out of Adam's side and with that rib He built a woman (v. 22). Today the Lord is also building a woman. He is building up the Body of Christ so that this Body can be prepared to be His bride, the consummate Eve.

The sanctuary of God in the Old Testament was divided by the veil into two sections: the outer Holy Place and the inner Holy of Holies. When Christ died on the cross, the veil (signifying His flesh) was split (Matt. 27:51; Heb. 10:19-20), but with His believers, the flesh still remains for the purpose of God's dealing with them. Even though the apostle Paul was so spiritual, the flesh still remained with him for God's purpose. Paul received tremendous revelations from God. He was transported to the third heaven, he visited Paradise, and he heard unspeakable words that were not lawful for a person to utter (2 Cor. 12:1-4). God realized that there was no way for Paul to avoid becoming proud because he had received those revelations. Thus, the Lord in His sovereignty allowed Paul to have a thorn in the flesh. Paul entreated Him three times that this thorn might be removed from him, but the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (v. 9). The seekers of Christ each have a particular thorn allowed by the Lord to humble them and keep them in a position where they can receive God's grace. "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5).

The flesh is our rotten, corrupted, fallen, and transmuted

body, which has been infected with sin and death, the poison of Satan. Paul calls the flesh "the body of sin" (Rom. 6:6) and "the body of this death" (7:24). Because the flesh is such a terrible thing, God uses it to force us

to turn to Him in our spirit. Many times the Lord uses our failures to make us more desperate to turn to Him and gain Him. If we are not in our spirit, we are hopeless. "The mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the spirit is life and peace" (8:6). Our daily choice is death or life and peace. Because of the death in our flesh, we must set our mind on the spirit. Our spirit is today's Holy of Holies, the place where God dwells. In the ark within the Holy of Holies, there were three items: the hidden manna, the budding rod, and the tablets of the law (Heb. 9:4). God's intention is to bring us within the veil, into the Holy of Holies, into our spirit. It is here that we enjoy the hidden manna, signifying God the Father as the source of supply, the budding rod, signifying Christ the Son as our resurrection life, and the tablets of the law, signifying the law of the Spirit of life. This is the enjoyment of the Triune God in our spirit, within the veil (Eph. 4:6; 2 Cor. 13:5; Rom. 8:9; 2 Tim. 4:22).

Through her living in Christ's ascension and further living within the veil, the lover of Christ experiences the cross in a stronger way and is transformed into the heavenly bodies. Song of Songs 6:10 says, "Who is this woman who looks forth like the dawn, / As beautiful as the moon, / As clear as the sun?" The overcoming believers are luminaries as the moon reflecting the light of the sun in the church age. Philippians 2:15 and 16 say that we are in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation, among whom we shine as luminaries in the world, holding forth the word of life. To hold forth the word of life is to apply, present, and offer the word of life to people. In Acts 5:20 Peter was charged by an angel of the Lord to "go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." Notice that the angel pointed out the life by saying "this life." This reveals that Peter's life and work made the divine life so real and present in his situation that even the angel saw it and pointed it out. *This* life was the divine life which Peter was continually enjoying, experiencing, and ministering. We need to be such luminaries in this world, speaking the words of this life. As the Lord's luminaries, we should be filled with the freshness of Christ as the dawn. In order to enjoy the freshness of the presence of the Lord, we should have a personal time with Him morning by morning. Eventually, we will be the overcomers who shine forth like the sun in the kingdom age (Matt. 13:43; Dan. 12:3).

Since the overcoming believers have become the sanctuary of God and the heavenly bodies, they also become as terrible as an army with banners (S. S. 6:4, 10). We need

to be lovely toward the Lord and terrible toward the enemy. *With banners* indicates that the overcomers are always ready to fight against God's enemy and display Christ's victory. According to Romans 16:20, as we are living the Body life, the church life, we experience Satan being crushed under our feet. Deuteronomy 32:30 shows the principle of living in the Body. This verse says that one will chase a thousand, and two will put ten thousand to flight. According to our mathematics, if one chases a thousand, two should chase two thousand. But God has His mathematics in the principle of His Body. Our strength against God's enemy is multiplied fivefold when we carry out things in fellowship with another member of the Body. Through the fellowship of the Body, we enter into the corporate experience of being a terrible army to God's enemy.

Ultimately, in our pursuit of Christ, we are conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29) to be the wonderful Shulammitte, who as the duplication of Solomon is the greatest and ultimate figure of the New Jerusalem, the counterpart of Christ (Rev. 21:2, 9). The Shulammitte is like two camps, or armies, in the eyes of God. "Return, return, O Shulammitte; / Return, return, that we may gaze at you. / Why should you gaze at the Shulammitte, / As upon the dance of two camps?" (S. S. 6:13). The phrase *two camps* in Hebrew is *Mahanaim*. When Jacob was on his way to meet Esau, he was concerned that Esau was going to kill him. While he was on his way, the angels of God met him, and he called the name of that place Mahanaim (Gen. 32:1-2). After he saw the angels divided into the two armies of God, Jacob divided his wives, children, and possessions into two camps, or two armies. He said, "If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp which is left will escape" (v. 8).

These two armies, two camps, are a picture of the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is Mahanaim, two armies. This means that those who live in the Body of Christ are more than conquerors and that they bear a strong testimony for the Lord, signified by the number two. But who are the members of these two armies? These armies, according to what is portrayed with Jacob, are composed of the feeble ones, the weaker ones, the women and children. In order to be the overcomers, we must be the weaker ones. All those who are strong in themselves will be disqualified. Those who are counted as overcomers will be the weaker ones who utterly depend on the Lord in the principle of the Body. "It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (Rom. 9:16). We are still pursuing the Lord and loving the Lord because of God's mercy. We need to depend on Him as the God of mercy every day. We may tell the Lord, "Lord, I can't make it; I can't do it. I'm so weak, Lord." He will respond, "You're so weak, but as you fully open your being to Me, I will do everything in you,

through you, and for you. Revelation 3:8 says that the overcomers in Philadelphia "have a little power." This means that they do their best for the Lord with what they have of the Lord. We cannot make it without depending on the Lord and on the members of His Body. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 depicts this dependence:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor; for if they fall, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls and does not have another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm. But how can one be warm alone? And while a man may prevail against the one, the two will withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

When you are with another member of the Body, you probably will not fall, but if you fall, your companion will lift you up. When you are alone and isolated from the Body, it is inevitable that you will fall. Furthermore, no one will be there to lift you up. This shows that we need to depend on one another, shepherd one another, and care for one another so that we can be the Lord's overcomers. Each of us needs some divinely arranged companions in the Body of Christ with whom we can pursue the Lord and labor in the Lord for His interests. Then we can prevail against the enemy and become a threefold cord which is not quickly broken.

Sharing in the Work of the Lord

By this time the Christ-seeker is equipped to share in the work of the Lord (S. S. 7:1-13).

Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields; / Let us lodge in the villages. / Let us rise up early for the vineyards; / Let us see if the vine has budded, / If the blossom is open, / If the pomegranates are in bloom; / There I will give you my love. (vv. 11-12)

In her initial pursuit of the Lord, the work was a distraction to the Christ-seeker. She said, "My mother's sons were angry with me; / They made me keeper of the vineyards, / But my own vineyard I have not kept" (1:6). How can we work with the Lord to be a keeper of the vineyards, if we do not keep our own vineyard? We need to learn how to cultivate our own vineyard, our own life with the Lord, so that we can be one with Him to take care of the many vineyards. At the end of Song of Songs, the Christ-seeker becomes a keeper of the vineyards because she has learned how to cultivate her own vineyard. The first and foremost responsibility of someone who is serving the Lord is to take care of his personal time with the Lord, especially in the early morning. "Let us rise up early for the vineyards." When we enjoy the Lord in love to cultivate our own vineyard, we can work together with Him to take care of the many vineyards, and it is there

that He will give us His love. In other words, we will experience the Lord as our love not only personally but also in our work with Him for His purpose.

The Lord's speaking to His people transforms them and prepares them to be His bride so that He can return like a gazelle or a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

Hoping to Be Raptured

Because the Christ-seeker's heart is fully possessed by Him, she has become mature in the divine life and can declare, "Whom do I have in heaven but You? / And besides You there is nothing I desire on earth" (Psa. 73:25). At this stage she is filled with a hope to be raptured (S. S. 8:1-14). The last two verses of Song of Songs are very critical for our being prepared to be the bride of Christ so that we may hasten His coming and bring Him back (2 Pet. 3:12; Rev. 19:7). "O you who dwell in the gardens, / My companions listen for your voice; / Let me hear it. / Make haste, my beloved, / And be like a gazelle or a young hart / Upon the mountains of spices" (S. S. 8:13-14). She addresses Him as the One who dwells in the gardens, the transformed believers. She says that her companions listen for His voice. Then she implores the Lord, "Let me hear it." This should be our daily prayer: "Lord, let me hear Your voice today—the voice of my Beloved." In S. S. 2:14 the Lord says to the seeker, "Let me hear your voice." Then she says, "Let me hear Your voice, Lord." This is mutual fellowship.

Our life as believers depends on the Lord's words, and our work depends on His commands. Our Christian life hinges totally upon the Lord's speaking. We need His speaking to us in our corporate gatherings, and we need His speaking to us in our personal contact with Him. The Lord's speaking to His people transforms them and prepares them to be His bride so that He can return like a gazelle or a young hart upon the mountains of spices. This is His coming in the power of His resurrection, signified by the gazelle or the young hart, to set up His sweet and beautiful kingdom on earth, signified by the mountains of spices. We are prepared to be His bride to bring Him back by being infused with His speaking day by day. We need to get into the written Word, the constant Word (Gk. *logos*), by reading it with prayer, in prayer, and through prayer so that this *logos* can become to us His instant, present, and personalized word (Gk. *rhema*). *Rhema* is the Lord speaking His word a second time. He spoke it once in the written Word, and He speaks it another time to us personally as an instant word. This is what prepares us to be His bride.

The last two verses of Song of Songs, concerning our hearing the Lord's voice so that He can return, match Ephesians 5:25-27. These verses in Ephesians encapsulate God's entire economy. Verse 25 says that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her. He died to redeem us, to purchase us, because He wants us to be His bride. Verse 27 says that the Lord will present the church to Himself glorious, not

having spot or wrinkle or any such things and that as His bride, the church will be holy and without blemish. This refers to our wedding day with Christ as the Bridegroom. In the past He was our Redeemer; in the future He

will be our Bridegroom. How can we cooperate with Him in the present to usher in that wedding day? The answer is in verse 26: He gave Himself up for the church "that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of the water in the word." In the present Christ is the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45), and as the life-giving Spirit, He is embodied in His word. The *word* here is not *logos*, but *rhema*. We personally need to hear our Beloved's voice, His instant, present speaking to us every day. Thus, it is vital that we have the attitude of a hearer, like Samuel: "Speak, for Your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10). The Lord's call in these last days is, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2:7). The Lord's speaking cleanses and washes us with the flowing life of God inwardly and metabolically to sanctify and transform us. The wrinkles, signifying our oldness, the spots, signifying our natural life, and everything of the old creation in us are thus washed away for us to be His transformed new creation, His Shulammitte. His personal, particular, and direct speaking to us day by day prepares us to be His glorious bride so that He can come again to marry us. Song of Songs ends with the seeker praying for the Lord's coming. May this also be our prayer as we give ourselves unreservedly to Him for His inner transforming work to make us His bride: "Make haste, my beloved" (S. S. 8:14). "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). AFC

Notes

¹Primary sources for this article are *Life-study of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* and *Crystallization-study of Song of Songs* by Witness Lee and *The Song of Songs* by Watchman Nee, all published in Anaheim, California by Living Stream Ministry.

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