

HWMR: LIVING AND SERVING ACCORDING TO GOD’S ECONOMY CONCERNING THE CHURCH, (Week 6)

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 4:6-8, 15-16; Ezek. 3:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:10; Rom. 15:6; S. S. 4:11

1 Timothy 4:6	If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed.
1 Timothy 4:7	But the profane and old-womanish myths refuse, and exercise yourself unto godliness.
1 Timothy 4:8	For bodily exercise is profitable for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the present life and of that which is to come.
1 Timothy 4:15	Practice these things; be in them, that your progress may be manifest to all.
1 Timothy 4:16	Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things; for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.
Ezekiel 3:1	Then He said to me, Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.
Ezekiel 3:2	So I opened my mouth, and He gave me that scroll to eat.
Ezekiel 3:3	And He said to me, Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your inward parts with this scroll that I am giving you. And I ate it, and it was like honey in my mouth in its sweetness.
Ezekiel 3:4	Then He said to me, Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.
1 Corinthians 1:10	Now I beseech you, brothers, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be attuned in the same mind and in the same opinion.
Romans 15:6	That with one accord you may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Song of Songs 4:11	Your lips drip fresh honey, my bride; / Honey and milk are under your tongue; / And the fragrance of your garments / Is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

A Good Minister of Christ

Day 1

- 1 Timothy 4:6* - *If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed.*
- 2 Timothy 2:2* - *And the things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, these commit to faithful men, who will be competent to teach others also.*

- I. First Timothy 4:6 says, “If you lay these things before the brothers, you will be a **good minister of Christ Jesus**, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed”:**
- A. A good minister of Christ is one who **serves people with Christ**, ministering Christ as Savior, life, life supply, and every positive thing to people.
 - B. If we would minister Christ to others, **we ourselves must be nourished**; a good minister of Christ does not merely teach others about Christ but ministers Christ into others as food— Matt. 4:4; Jer. 15:16; Ezek. 3:1-4; John 6:57, 63.
 - C. We need to lay before the saints the things with which we have been nourished by the Lord through the ministry; we need to present the saints with the riches, the groceries, the Lord has shown us from the Word; let us **first be nourished ourselves** and **then minister** this nourishment to all the people of God.

A minister of Christ does not mainly denote a minister who belongs to Christ, but a person who ministers Christ to others. He is one who **serves people with Christ**. For example, if we say that a man is a serving one of a particular meal, we do not mean, of course, that he belongs to the meal. We mean that he serves others with that meal. In like manner, although it is true that a minister of Christ belongs to Christ, the main thought here is that he serves others with Christ, **ministering Christ to them**. Not only does he belong to Christ, but he serves Christ to others.

In today's Christianity there are a great many ministers who belong to Christ, but **very few of them minister Christ to others**. To be a minister of Christ does not primarily mean to preach Christ, teach Christ, or tell others about Christ. The main significance of this term is **ministering** Christ to others.

1 Timothy 4:6 confirms this understanding of the expression "a good minister of Christ." Here Paul says, "*Laying these things before the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, being nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have closely followed.*" By "these things" Paul means all he has covered thus far in this Epistle. Just as a steward lays different courses of food before guests at a dinner, so a good minister of Christ should lay "these things" before the believers. Furthermore, Paul's use of the term "being nourished" indicates that his concept is that of supplying life to others. It is significant that here Paul does not say "being taught," but "being **nourished**" with the words of the faith. If we would minister Christ to others, **we ourselves must first be nourished**. Being nourished with Christ, we shall have Christ as food, as life supply, to minister to others. The words "being nourished" give us the ground to say that a good minister of Christ does not merely teach others about Christ, but **ministers Christ into others as food**. Others should be able to testify of us that we have nourished them with Christ. (*Life-Study of 1 Timothy, chapter 8*)

Day 2

Hebrews 5:12-14 - For when because of the time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you what the rudiments of the beginning of the oracles of God are and have become those who have need of milk and not of solid food. For everyone who partakes of milk is inexperienced in the word of righteousness, for he is an infant; But solid food is for the full-grown, who because of practice have their faculties exercised for discriminating between both good and evil.

- D. We need to minister the riches of Christ as **spiritual food** to others that they may be nourished and grow in life; the word of God is likened to milk and solid food, which are for nourishment—Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Pet. 2:2:
1. The words of the faith are the **words of the full gospel** concerning God's New Testament economy.
 2. The words of the good teaching are the **sweet words** that contain and convey the riches of Christ to nourish, edify, and strengthen His believers.
- E. As members of the one Body of Christ, we should aspire to be good ministers of Christ who **"speak the same thing"** (1 Cor. 1:10) **"with one accord"** and **"with one mouth"** (Rom. 15:6):
1. "We have to learn the high peaks of God's present revelation and learn to speak these things...I would encourage all of us to pick up this high commission: to go out with...God's up-to-date vision to move with God for His high peaks of the divine revelation that will consummate His eternal economy"—*The Triune God's Revelation and His Move*, p. 98.
 2. The saints who have been raised up by the Lord's up-to-date ministry have a taste for this ministry, and this taste is the controlling factor in the Lord's recovery; those who have been raised up by this ministry will reject a taste that is contrary to it; this means that if you speak something **contrary** to the taste of the Lord's recovery, your speaking will be **rejected**, and you will **suffer loss**—cf. Psa. 34:8; 1 Pet. 2:3.

Day 3

1 Timothy 3:15 - But if I delay, I write that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth.

John 17:17 - Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

II. A good minister of Christ **sacrifices himself and puts himself aside** in order to keep the absoluteness of the truth; the truth cannot be entrusted to a person who walks according to his feelings; a man must stand on the side of the truth to oppose himself:

- A. The **condition of an individual has nothing to do with God's truth**; what you are personally cannot affect what God's truth is, because the truth is like an immovable pillar—1 Tim. 3:15.
- B. Some people lower down the truth a little when they are wrong, and they lift up the truth a little when they are right; this means that they are like elevators, and the truth goes up and down with them; **only those who have dealt with themselves** are able to maintain the truth.
- C. If we can take the truth as the unique standard, and we have the courage to admit that we are wrong, **new light** will come to us; if we do not sacrifice the light, the light will uplift us; blessed are those who can go along with the truth.
- D. On the one hand, a man cannot preach the truth **unless he has the experience**; on the other hand, a person has to know that the **truth has nothing to do with him**; if a man is brought to a point that he can no longer withstand God's word, if he does not sacrifice the word, and if he finds the word condemning him, he will receive the light; this is the secret to receiving revelation.

III. A good minister of Christ, as a good steward of the varied grace of God, speaks oracles of God for the **glorification of God**, the **expression of God** (1 Pet. 4:10-11; Eph. 1:6); he does not seek his own glory to express himself (1 Thes. 2:6; John 5:41, 44) but continually exercises his spirit to reject the self, not preaching himself but **exalting Christ** as Lord and considering himself as a slave to serve the believers (2 Cor. 4:5; Lev. 14:9 and footnote 1; 1 Cor. 10:31; Isa. 43:7).

Day 4

Revelation 22:14 - Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter by the gates into the city.

Ezekiel 37:10 - So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them; and they lived and stood up upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Song of Songs 4:11 - Your lips drip fresh honey, my bride; / Honey and milk are under your tongue; / And the fragrance of your garments / Is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

IV. A good minister of Christ **ministers** life and **serves** the saints **according to the principle of the tree of life**, not the principle of the tree of right and wrong (Gen.2:9; John 10:10b; 1 Cor. 15:45b; 2 Cor. 3:6; 4:10-12; 1 John 5:12, 16a); in his ministry he keeps the following principle and rule of conduct according to Paul's pattern in facing the problems in the church in Corinth—"We should concentrate on Him [Christ], not on any persons, things, or matters other than Him. We should focus on Him as our unique center appointed by God, that all the problems among the believers may be solved" (footnote 2 on 1 Cor. 1:9).

V. A good minister of Christ helps the saints to think the “one thing”: the *one thing* in Philippians refers to the subjective knowledge, experience, and enjoyment of Christ; the *one thing* is the **pursuing of Christ to gain Him, lay hold of Him, and possess Him**—1:20-21; 2:2, 5; 3:7-14; 4:13.

VI. A good minister of Christ is like the **Lord’s loving seeker** described in Song of Songs 4:11—“Your lips drip fresh honey, my bride; / Honey and milk are under your tongue”—cf. Exo. 3:8:

- A. Honey is sweet, and it **restores the weak and stricken ones** (Psa. 119:103); milk **feeds the immature ones** (1 Pet. 2:2).
- B. The sweetness of honey and the nourishing milk under the tongue of the Lord’s loving seeker indicate that she has **stored up the riches of the Lord as her spiritual food**; she has stored so many riches within her that food seems to be under her tongue, and she can dispense this food to the needy ones at any time—Psa. 119:11; Col. 3:16.
- C. Her indwelling treasure of the Lord’s sweet and nourishing words is not produced overnight; it comes from a **long period of gathering**, inward activity, and careful storage; this is the unique possession of one who is taught by God with the healthy words of the healthy teaching of God’s economy—1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3.

The picture at the beginning of the Bible shows that **God has been manifested as food**. After man was created, he was put in front of the tree of life, which is the embodiment of God. The fruit of the tree of life as man’s food signifies that God came in the form of food to be man’s life. However, when God became flesh and lived on the earth, those around Him were filled with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Hence, they only asked what they should do and how they should work. But the Lord Jesus said that He came to be food: He is the bread which came down out of heaven **for man to eat**.

If we do not take God as food and enjoy Him as our life, we will leave the tree of life, for even a little mixture will turn us to the detour. The way of the detour is complicated. This way has everything—good, bad, right, wrong, the things of God, and the things of Satan. We must see that we do not need to take the detour. **We must be people who eat, drink, and enjoy God**. This is the straight way. We do not need to think of the problems of sin, the record of sin, the flesh, the world, Satan, or death. We need only to enjoy God. When He is in us, He will deal with all the problems for us. This is the principle of Romans 8: the law of the Spirit of life frees us from the law of sin and of death. This law in us is responsible for everything.

The tree of life does not depend on our spiritual cultivation, morning watch, or anything else; it depends on our **enjoying** God, **absorbing** Him, **eating** Him, and **drinking** Him. The Lord Jesus went through the detour on our behalf to become the life-giving Spirit. Now He contains all the elements that meet our needs. We need only to enjoy Him, appropriate Him, eat Him, drink Him, and live by trusting in Him. Then the problems will be dealt with, and God’s intention will be fulfilled. (*The Vision of the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, chapter 2*)

Day 5

Isaiah 13:1 - The burden concerning Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw:

Zechariah 12:1 - The burden of the word of Jehovah concerning Israel. Thus declares Jehovah, who stretches forth the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him,

VII. The **revelations** that the prophets received were the **burdens that they received**; without burden, there is no ministry of the word, no prophesying, for the building up of the church—Isa. 1:1; 2:1; 13:1; 15:1; Zech. 12:1; Mal. 1:1; Acts 6:4; 1 Cor. 14:4b:

- A. Our burden is to **release God's revelation to man**, and God's revelation is released through the words of revelation that God gives to us—2:11-16.
- B. When we minister the word of God, our concern must be **whether we have God's speaking**, not the topic of our speaking; in order to have God's speaking, the one who ministers the word must have a burden—Mal. 2:7; S. S. 8:13-14; Eph. 5:26-27.
- C. Those who minister the word must **bear** people's condition before God, **sense** their condition, and **know** what God wants to speak—Exo. 28:29-30.
- D. The greatest problem in the ministry of the word is not having a burden from the Lord; **without** a burden, all our activity will be **dead** and **ineffective**; **with** a burden, we will **be living** and **flourishing**:
 1. Having a burden deals with us the most; if there is a burden, the **self decreases and is dealt with**, because there are things that our burden will not allow us to do, and there are areas that will require our being dealt with before we can release our burden.
 2. If we serve according to **obligation** instead of serving with a burden, such service will cause us to **lose** the Lord's presence—Mal. 3:14; Deut. 4:25.
 3. Whenever our service becomes a matter of fulfilling an obligation, our service has already **degraded**.

Since the discharge of a burden is related closely to the inner words, how can we receive the inner words? Most of the time, we receive the inner words through reading the Bible and in our moments of waiting upon God. Suppose we receive some intense light, and the Lord mercifully grants us an active, creative, and energetic mind to capture the light. God's shining then becomes our thoughts. This is sufficient for ourselves. The light of revelation and the translated thoughts are sufficient for our own use. God's revelation has already generated some benefit in us; it has become permanent, specific, and tangible thoughts in us. Yet as we have pointed out earlier, this is not sufficient to supply others. **We cannot supply others with our thoughts. We are ministers of God's word.** We cannot dispense our thoughts to others; we can only dispense words. Yet these words cannot be merely the product of our mind. An inner word requires a **fresh revelation from God**. We must have a word that comes directly from the Holy Spirit. This word is not just for ourselves but also for others. It is a word that qualifies us to be a minister. One thing is clear: We are all members of the Body of Christ, and God's light must not stop in us. God's shining is altogether for the ministry; it is not just for ourselves. We have mentioned previously that sometimes light is accompanied by God's word when it is translated into thoughts, and that it is this word which enables us to be a minister of the word. Yet many times, even most of the time, we do not receive a word when light and thoughts come. In order to receive such a word, we have to wait on God and study the Scripture. I am not saying that this is always the case. Each situation is different. Sometimes the experience is quite special. At other times the experience is quite ordinary. Under ordinary circumstances, God gives us such words while we are waiting on Him and reading His Word. We may receive a word from God today in our study of the Scripture. We may receive a word tomorrow when we study the Scripture again. In our study of the Scripture, we may receive one or two phrases that aptly express what we have seen in our spirit. These life-releasing words release what we already understand in our mind. When these phrases are released, what is contained in the spirit is also released. **These words discharge the light that has been captured by the mind.** This is the basis of the ministry of the word. This is what a minister of the word needs. (*The Ministry of God's Word, chapter 12*)

Day 6

2 Timothy 4:2 - Proclaim the word; be ready in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and teaching.

2 Timothy 1:6-7 - For which cause I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of cowardice, but of power and of love and of sobermindedness.

VIII. In order to be a good minister of Christ, we must aspire to have the following organic characteristics:

- A. We must **love the Lord to the uttermost** to be filled with Him and overflow Him into others with the resurrected Christ as our authority—Psa. 18:1; 91:14; 97:10; 116:1-2; 119:140; John 21:15-17; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 John 4:16, 19; Num. 17:1-10; Matt. 19:26.
- B. We must **maintain our victory** in Christ by having a revived living and a labor in shepherding—Rev. 3:18-22; Hosea 6:1-3; Rom. 6:4; 7:6; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:1-4.
- C. We must **abide in the fellowship** with the Lord daily and hourly—1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14.
- D. We must be **praying persons**—Col. 4:2; Gen. 4:26; Lam. 3:55-56; Rom. 10:12-13.
- E. We must **enjoy the Lord in the Word** early in the morning to have a new start of each day—Psa. 119:147-148.
- F. We must **walk by and according to our spirit**, which is mingled with the divine Spirit—Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4, 16; 1 Cor. 6:17.
- G. We must **live Christ for His magnification** by the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ—Phil. 1:19.
- H. We must **build up a habit of speaking Christ** to all kinds of people daily in season and out of season—Acts 5:42; 8:4; 2 Tim. 4:2.
 - I. We must be ones who **deal with our sins thoroughly**—1 John 1:7, 9; Psa. 51:1-9, 17.
 - J. We must be **filled with the essential Spirit** inwardly and with the economical Spirit outwardly—Acts 13:52; Eph. 5:18; Acts 4:31, 8; 13:9.
- K. We must **accumulate the experiences of Christ** (Phil. 3:8-10, 12-14) and keep a rich storage of the Lord's word (Col. 3:16; Psa. 119:11, 15; John 8:31; 15:7; 1 John 2:14).

IX. Whenever we minister God's word, the primary thing is for us to exercise our spirit; a good minister of Christ builds up a habit of exercising his spirit unto godliness to live Christ in his daily life—1 Tim. 4:6-8, 15-16; 2 Tim. 1:6-7; Rom. 1:9; 7:6; 12:11; John 4:23-24:

- A. We saved ones have the capital to live the Christian life and the church life; this **capital is our God-given spirit**—2 Tim. 1:6-7; 4:22.
- B. Godliness, a living that is the expression of God, is the issue of the divine dispensing for the divine economy, and this dispensing depends on the **exercise of our spirit** to live Christ in our daily life for the corporate manifestation of God in the church life—1 Tim. 1:3-4; 3:15-16; 4:7-8; 2 Tim. 1:6-7; *Hymns*, #493, stanza 5.
- C. The word *exercise* implies **forcing**; if we Christians want to be strong and want to grow in the Lord, we must **force ourselves** to use our spirit until we build up a strong habit of exercising our spirit—1 Tim. 4:7.
- D. We must **exercise our spirit** to employ and enjoy the entire blessed Trinity by praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping ourselves in the love of God, and awaiting the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ in the day of His victorious appearing so that we may become the totality of the eternal life, the New Jerusalem—Jude 19-21.

We all have to desperately endeavor to **build up a habit of speaking in any meeting**. We must be desperate to build up a **habit to speak**. This habit has to be built up universally in the Lord's recovery. We do not have such a habit due to the background of Christianity, and our function has been killed because of this background. Many Chinese people do not speak English well because they did not have the habit of speaking English when they grew up, and they still do not have this habit. I did not pick up the habit of speaking English until I began to minister the word in the United States in 1962. It was hard for me to acquire this habit, but for my grandchildren it was easy because they grew up in an English-speaking environment. If we learn to build up a habit of speaking in any meeting, our children, the new ones, will **spontaneously become speaking ones**. The new ones will **follow** the trend and the atmosphere in the meeting. They will pick up the habit of speaking easily. We must endeavor to do this because it is not just for ourselves but for the benefit of the Lord's recovery.

All of us can speak. We have the Bible, a hymnal, the Life-study messages, and other spiritual publications to speak. If we spoke a Life-study message together, this would make the best message full of the divine riches and the refreshing utterances. We should not merely read the message but **speak it**, and this speaking should not be an individual speaking but a **corporate speaking**. May we all rise up to **pick up the burden to be the speaking ones in our meetings**. May we be desperate to practice speaking and to build up a habit of speaking. This is a great thing for the Lord's recovery, for His move on this earth, and this practice will really build up every saint in life. (*Speaking Christ for the Building Up of the Body of Christ, chapter 4*)