

OPEN HOMES FOR THE LORD'S TESTIMONY

by Titus Chu

EXPERIENCING CHRIST FOR GLORY THROUGH US TO GOD

One of the most experiential verses in the Bible is 2 Corinthians 1:20. It begins, "For as many promises of God as there are...." Consider for a moment just how many promises of God there are! Then the verse continues, "in Him [that is, in Christ] is the Yes." This is a fact, but it can be merely doctrinal to us. Paul then writes, "therefore also through Him [Christ] is the Amen to God." This is the part of the verse we must experience, if what is in Christ is to be expressed in the church. It is through Christ that we experience all the promises of God, for without the experience of "through Christ" the promises of God remain objective to us.

For instance, suppose a brother has accumulated a rich storehouse of spiritual understanding and historical knowledge. We might say that the knowledge and understanding are "in" that brother. Suppose, however, that the same brother has also written some books. These books are "through" the brother, and they enable us to enter into the riches of this brother. "Through" the brother, the riches that are "in" the brother become something that the rest of us can experience.

Have you ever realized that our relationship to our Lord has these two aspects? First of all, He is objective to us for us to appreciate. This is the aspect of "in Christ." For instance, the Lord might tell us, "Look at Me. I am attractive, beautiful, bountiful, all-sufficient, all-wise, all-powerful, and full of splendor. In Me is everything." When we appreciate what Christ is in this objective sense, however, we should realize that He is not merely an object for us to study; His objective riches are for us to experience. Thus, "through Christ" is the second aspect by which we must know Christ. We in the Lord's recovery,

particularly because of the ministries of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee, have seen so much of Christ. We could say that all the rich truths of the Lord's recovery are "in" the churches. We may not be able to say, however, that "through" Christ there is yet much "Amen" to God among us. "In" is one thing, and "through" is another. Christ must be experienced by us to the degree that through Him is the "Amen" to God.

The reason we might have so little "Amen" to God is because we have so little experience of Christ. How marvelous it is when a Christian becomes an "Amen" person. Such a person experiences what is "in Christ" becoming "through Christ" for glory to God. This verse concludes: "Therefore also through Him is the Amen to God, for glory through us to God." All the promises of God are in Christ, and when we experience this very Christ all the promises become "Amens" to God, and God gains the glory through us. By our experience of Christ, we become those through whom God gains glory.

**THE THREE ELEMENTS NEEDED FOR GOD
TO GAIN GLORY THROUGH US:
GOD HIMSELF, THE SAINTS, AND THE ANOINTED ONE**

When we pursue Christ in the way described in verse 20, we begin to operate in the church life. That is why Paul continues in the next verse: "But the One who firmly attaches us with you unto Christ and has anointed us is God" (v. 21). As those who aspire to experience Christ, we must realize the three crucial elements mentioned in this verse. The first is the very God who is attaching and anointing. The second is the saints with whom you are being attached unto Christ, the object of God's attaching. The third is Christ, the Anointed One, the One to whom everyone is being attached.

We have seen in verse 20 that we must be "through" Christ for there to be the "Amen" and glory to God. How can we be through Him? Verse 21 shows us that first, we have to be attached together with the saints as one unit. Second, we have to

realize that when we are attached to the saints, our being together must be unto the Anointed One. This forms a kind of “golden triangle,” involving each individual believer, the saints, and Christ. You must be firmly attached with the saints unto Christ (meaning “the Anointed One”). This is a crucial principle of experiencing Christ in the church life.

**WE MUST BE FIRMLY ATTACHED TO
BOTH THE SAINTS AND TO CHRIST**

Some of us may enjoy being with other saints, but neglect the experience of being “unto Christ” in our time together. Others may talk of being centered upon Christ but miss the aspect of the church. Some saints have the aspects of both Christ and the church, but they lack being firmly attached. It is not that we are merely responsible to the saints, nor is it that we are merely responsible to Christ. If someone says he only cares for what the saints are doing, that indicates he is unhealthy. If someone says he answers only to Christ, he is also unhealthy. We can only be healthy when we are firmly attached with the saints unto Christ. This is the secret of being anointed. We must be connected with the saints unto Christ. Then we will experience being anointed, for we become part of the “unit” of Christ and the church that God is anointing.

This can be seen in Romans 12:1. “I exhort you therefore brothers, through the compassions of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service.” Paul is exhorting all the believers, for he speaks of “bodies,” but there is only one living sacrifice! There are perhaps one thousand of us in this room. How can we offer ourselves as one sacrifice? Only by being firmly attached one to another.

LIFE COMES THROUGH CHRIST BY REVELATION AND THROUGH THE SAINTS IN THEIR HOUSEHOLDS

There is only one organic operation on this earth. This one operation is based upon the visions, the revelations, and the experiences that come to us from one life as our source. What is this one life? First, it is Christ. Life comes through Christ by revelation. Second, it is the saints. Life comes through the saints in the households. This is the practical application of being firmly attached to the saints. Later we will discover that the households are even the substance of our being a living sacrifice. If we have Christ, the saints, and a testimony in our households, God's economy can be carried out, for without the households, there is no testimony. When we give ourselves to Christ, we see that our living is with the saints. When we see that our living is with the saints, it really means that we must be living the church life in our households. If this is lacking among us, we can never fully realize what it is to be a living sacrifice.

OUR REVELATION OF CHRIST IS THEORETICAL WITHOUT THE SAINTS

It should be clear to us that if Christ is not revealed, nothing works. But without the saints, everything is theoretical. Someone might come to a church meeting and enjoy the singing, the atmosphere, and so on, but his experience may be very similar to someone who goes to an orchestra concert and goes home the same person. A person who has truly touched the Lord can say, "I am now for Christ." But how about his living? How is he any different? For example, suppose I have been caught by a vision of the United States, but I live in China. I may say day after day, "The United States is so good," yet I remain in China as my place of residence. My vision must be substantiated by my living, or else my vision will remain, at best, something merely theoretical. (Actually, this is why I am very happy when someone asks me whether or not I am Chinese. Since I have lived in America for forty years, I have become different. I was born in China, but because I've chosen to live according to my vision, I have become "Americanized." The vision of America

has become real to me.) If your life is apart from the saints, you will only have the “Yes” in Christ, but you will not have the “Amen” through Christ. If you desire to have the “Amen” through Christ, you must be with the saints!

**PAUL’S EXPERIENCE: SEEING CHRIST, BECOMING BLIND,
AND HAVING HIS EYES OPENED THROUGH A BROTHER**

According to Acts 9, when the Lord first appeared to Paul (who was still “Saul” at the time), the Lord instructed him to go into Damascus and to wait there, for there he would be told what he must do. No Christian likes to hear this; we all prefer to get our revelation directly from the Lord, not from some intermediary. If we can claim that we have received something directly from the Lord, we feel special. When, however, the Lord doesn’t directly reveal to us what to do, this forces us to go to the brothers. This was Paul’s experience. After seeing the Lord initially, Paul became blind. His blindness was only taken care of when a little brother, a “certain Ananias,” laid hands on Paul. Ananias was a very common name at that time, and it was a “certain Ananias” that the Lord used to restore Paul’s sight. The Lord could have used Peter, or John, or one of the twelve apostles. Or He could have used James, the chief elder in Jerusalem and the brother of the Lord. But instead the Lord used a “certain Ananias.” According to our way of thinking, the apostle Paul, the greatest of apostles, should certainly have been initiated into his ministry by someone more significant than Ananias. Yet through Ananias’s laying hands on Paul, the Lord indicated that Ananias was at least as great as Paul. And after Ananias prayed, it says Paul looked up (Acts 22:13). Who did Paul look up to? To Christ? In a sense, Paul saw Christ. But the person he looked up to was Ananias.

It is typical for us to look up to the manifested brothers in the Lord’s recovery. This verse indicates that we should also look up to the brother next to us, for without him we cannot get our sight. Regardless of how great a revelation we have received from the Lord, our sight will not come until a certain brother comes along.

Paul received a vision, and he became blind. As he prayed, the Lord sent him to a brother. After Ananias came, Paul's vision became clear. Paul's life-long labor and ministry was substantiated not only by Christ, but also by a little-known Ananias.

As he was waiting for the Lord to send someone, Paul prayed. He prayed for three days without eating or drinking. His prayer during this time was probably very different from our kind of prayer. It is likely that he was praying over the entire revelation of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi. Perhaps as Paul prayed he received revelation upon revelation, based upon all of his biblical understanding. He realized, "This Jesus who was crucified is now in the heavens. He is the Christ, the Messiah. And He said that His believers are also Him. How could these Christians become Christ?" After his revelation of Christ upon the road to Damascus, the first thing he saw was a little brother. Scales fell off his eyes, he looked up, and he beheld Ananias. Ananias was no one special, but this is the brother that the Lord used to open Paul's eyes.

WE SHOULD LOVE THE SAINTS WHO ARE NEXT TO US

In the church life there are many who are like Ananias. Very few among us are impressive. It seems the Lord takes away all our romantic notions of what the saints and the church should be. We all have received some glorious revelation of the Lord. Yet, the Lord tells us, "It is not real unless you come to a brother. The real thing is the brother next to you." In fact, if your great revelation does not bring you to the saints, you will be in trouble.

We should all be so impressed with this. We should pray, "Lord Jesus, I see You, I love You, and I give myself to You. Where I live, Lord, may my living be with the saints. You have your saints in the churches, and Your testimony comes through these saints, through all the households." To love the Lord is easy. If you forget to love Him today, you can give Him your love

tomorrow. But the Lord says, "Your living must be with the saints." This is practical, for it has no way to be theoretical. And thus, it requires something more than simply loving the Lord inwardly. The Lord requires that we love those saints we are with, and not merely the saints we might prefer to be with, or the saints who match us.

THE BIBLICAL WAY OF GATHERING IN THE HOUSEHOLDS

The Bible shows us a crucial principle of having the church life, that of gathering in the households. In the larger church meetings we may count the heads and be able to report a number, but with a household it is totally different. Can you say that you have six in your household today, after having eight in your household last week? This is the kind of church life mentality some of us have. It is a kind of sickness to be programmed with meetings. Unfortunately, in many places everything is oriented according to meetings. We all know what to do in meetings, but few of us know how to operate according to households. This indicates that our practice is contrary to the Bible.

In Acts chapter 2, a great number got saved in Jerusalem and began meeting together. In Acts 2:46 we are told, "And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they partook of their food with exultation and simplicity of heart." When the church life began, the saints met day by day. But our concept today is meeting "Lord's Day by Lord's Day"! And instead of "continuing steadfastly," we are more often "missing the meeting once in a while." And rather than gathering "with one accord," we often gather in many accords. At the beginning of the church life in Acts, the saints met together, ate together, and to a great degree even lived together. They were very simple. It is unlikely they had many expectations, for we are told that they took their food "with simplicity of heart."

Many places have changed their meetings on the Lord's Day and now have a gospel meeting in the morning and the Lord's table

in the evening. But it is still possible that the way we have been practicing the Lord's Table is the same as the way of Christianity. If we were to break bread from house to house, we would experience much more enjoyment. For instance, if instead of one large table meeting we held the table in a number of homes, that should be very sweet. We need to experience more of a family-life church life.

Even to use the statement, "Let's have the meeting in the homes," indicates that we have a meeting mentality. Our concept is to bring a large meeting into a smaller setting. Why would we not say, "Let's gather, let's get together, in the homes?" When we have a meeting mentality, we operate much differently. Even in the homes we might wait for a particular person to come before beginning, or we might feel that certain ones should sit in specific places. We might read a verse or call a hymn in a formal way, rather than simply enjoying the Lord, regardless of who is present. If we simply gather in the homes as they did in the Bible, we will not know when the "meeting" begins, or when it is finished. And because there is a smaller number involved, it is more likely there will be a real care for one another.

Hopefully we can all change our way of having the Lord's table to be more according to our homes. If there are 100 saints in a church, that means there could be five gatherings of about 20 each for the Lord's table. This would allow for a lot of variety and creativity. Perhaps in one home some saints could come over a little early to eat something simple together, then take a walk together to a nearby park and have the Lord's table there. Wouldn't that be sweet, to sing and praise the Lord together in such a setting? Perhaps in another home a few saints would come together for tea and sandwiches. Then as they are fellowshiping, some others would come in, and perhaps some would like to sing a song. This is the best kind of meeting, for they do not even realize they are having a meeting. Such a home would be filled with love and life. It would be good if someone had a portion from the ministry for everyone to get into, but we are not lacking in this so much. What we need to learn is how to take care of one another and love one another.

THE NEED FOR LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE HOMES

Could we be more relaxed in our church life? For instance, tonight someone could come to one brother's home, and another night he might go visit another home. And when you meet in the homes, remember that there is no demand, and there are no forms. Instead, there is a lot of love and acceptance. In my home, my children experience up times and down times. I do not criticize them when they are down. I am with them in their weaknesses as well as in their successes. I receive them and love them even when they make a decision that may go against some principle I hold. If I am to help all those in my household come to a certain place in their growth, I must be more understanding than I am demanding. It is true that we would like to see the saints memorize verses, get into the Biblical truths, prophesy in the meetings, and exercise themselves in a certain way so that they might become useful to the Lord. We must, however, realize that we need to exercise understanding more than we exercise according to demands.

A church life that is "house to house" is love-oriented and life-imparting. It is filled with care. If there are disagreements among us, let them be due to our consideration for what is best for the saints. Out of this consideration, there can be prayer and fellowship. In order to realize such a church life, one element is crucial: our homes must be open. Our houses must be open to each other.

WE SHOULD NOT WAIT TO ACHIEVE SOME STANDARD BEFORE OPENING OUR HOME

We may feel that our home has to be up to a certain standard before it can become a place for the saints to gather. The wife may feel that she is not so functional, or that she and her husband are not in agreement concerning certain things, and therefore their home is not proper for the church life. If you are one with your husband or wife in the matter of opening your home, that is

good enough. You do not have to achieve a certain level of life or spirituality in order to open your home. Don't feel that you have to go through a process in order to be qualified to open your home; opening your home is the way to begin the process. When your home is open, you will find it easier to have a daily revival and to apologize to one another, but these should not be the pre-conditions to opening your home. Actually, the best time to invite the saints to your home is after you have had a fight! Another good time to invite saints over is when your house is a mess. Don't be so legal. It is your home, not something perfect.

TWO EXAMPLES FROM THE BIBLE

In chapter 12 of Acts, when Peter was released from prison by the hand of an angel, he went to the home of "Mary, the mother of John, who was surnamed Mark, where there was a considerable number assembled together and praying" (12:12). The Lord loved this house, or else He would not have included so many qualifiers describing which Mary this was. But there were probably many such houses in Jerusalem where people were gathering. During the persecution under Herod, surely many homes became places of prayer. The church in Jerusalem was filled with homes that were open in this way, functioning according to the church's need.

The book of Philemon gives us another example of an open home. "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy the brother, to Philemon our beloved and fellow worker and to Apphia the sister and to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church, which is in your house" (Philem. 1-2). Perhaps Apphia was Philemon's wife and Archippus was Philemon's son. At any rate, in this verse we have three saints functioning together for a household church life: Philemon, a fellow worker of Paul's; Apphia, a good sister and mother; and Archippus, a "soldier," fighting for the Lord's interest. The church in Colossae met in Philemon's home. If in your home you can have such a church life, the Lord will gain His testimony. May the Lord grant every home such a co-worker, such a mother, and such a fellow

soldier. May every open home have such saints who function as living sacrifices for the Lord's testimony.

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