

# About Watchman Nee — A Brief Biography

## Early Ministry

Shortly after Watchman Nee was saved, he began to love the Lord and was intensely burdened to preach the gospel to his schoolmates and countrymen in season and out of season. Through his preaching nearly all his schoolmates were led to the Lord, and a revival was brought into his school and spread extensively to the people of his hometown in 1923. Hundreds were saved and had their lives changed. Watchman Nee did not attend a theological school or Bible institute. Most of what he learned concerning Christ, the things of the Spirit, and church history was acquired through studying the Bible and reading the books of spiritual men. Watchman Nee was not only an excellent student of the Bible; he was also a studious reader of spiritual books. He was brilliantly gifted in being able to select, comprehend, discern, and memorize appropriate material. He could easily grasp the points of a book at a glance.

## A Living Faith

Because of overwork and lack of adequate physical care, Watchman Nee became sick with tuberculosis of the lungs in 1924. It became so serious that rumors were spread that he had died. During this time of illness, he was greatly exercised to trust in God for his existence, and God faithfully cared for him. God graciously healed him of tuberculosis, but sovereignly left him with angina pectoris. He could have died at any moment. This spontaneously ushered him into a full trust in the Lord for his existence. Moment by moment he existed by faith in God, and all through the years God sustained him with His gracious care and resurrection life until he died. Through such physical hardship, he experienced and enjoyed God much more than would have been possible if he had not had such an entangling and exhausting disease. The kind of divine healing Watchman Nee experienced was not merely a miraculous act of God; it was the working out of the resurrection life through the procedure of grace by the exercise of living faith in the faithful Word of God for edification and growth of life. It was not merely a miracle of divine power; it was absolutely a matter of grace and of the divine life.

## Life and Work

Whenever Watchman Nee was asked a question, his answer was always practical, to the point, clear, full of anointing, and filled with light. His manner was very normal and open, and he was easy to approach. He had a great capacity and a broad heart. In spiritual matters, he climbed to the heights and touched the depths. Concerning God's principle and purpose, he was very rich in understanding and experience. He always left a very sweet impression, yet one did not lose the sense of respect. His attitude was gentle and meek, and his words were full of anointing. In conversation with him, there was no sense of distance but a sense of being watered and supplied. The impression left by his words and manner are unforgettable. Watchman Nee saw that the important thing regarding our work is not its quantity but its quality. The real work is the outflow of life.

## Imprisonment

In February of 1949 after much prayer and consideration, Watchman Nee made the decision to remain in Shanghai because of his burden for the churches, the co-workers, and the Lord's testimony on the mainland. On the one hand, he fully trusted in the Lord's sovereignty; on the other hand, he realized the risk and was prepared to be sacrificed for the Lord's testimony. In the spring of 1952, he was arrested and imprisoned for his faith; and in the summer of 1956, after a long trial, he was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment. He was, however, never released. During his imprisonment, only his wife was allowed an occasional visit; She passed away on November 7, 1971. His wife's death was a great sorrow, and it cut

him off from any contact with the outside. Not long after her death, on May 30, 1972, Watchman Nee also came to the end of his pilgrimage on this earth and rested with Christ, whom he served at the cost of his life. He left a piece of paper under his pillow, which had several lines of big words written in a shaking hand:

“Christ is the Son of God who died for the redemption of sinners and resurrected after three days. This is the greatest truth in the universe. I die because of my belief in Christ.”

— Watchman Nee

## Other Quotes

“It is important to receive God’s arrangement in the circumstances. This arrangement is the discipline of the Holy Spirit. To escape God’s arrangement just one time is to lose an opportunity to have our capacity enlarged. A believer can never be the same after passing through suffering.”

“When I began to serve the Lord, I was somewhat anxious about the question of my livelihood. Since I was to walk in the Lord’s way, I would only rely upon Him to support me. In the years 1921 and 1922, very few preachers in China lived in sole reliance on the Lord. Yet when I looked to the Lord, He said to me, ‘If you cannot live by faith, you cannot work for Me.’ I knew that I needed living work and living faith to serve a living God. God has supplied all my needs and has not failed me once.”

# WATCHMAN NEE

## Christian Faith

Watchman Nee fully believed and taught the scriptural, fundamental faith held by all true Christians. He believed in the divine inspiration of the Bible and that the Bible is God's holy Word. He believed that God is triune—Father, Son, and Spirit—distinctly three, yet fully one, co-existing and co-inhering from eternity to eternity. He believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, even God Himself, incarnated as a man with both the human nature and the divine nature, that He died on the cross to accomplish redemption, that He rose bodily from the dead on the third day, that He ascended into heaven and was enthroned, crowned with glory, and made the Lord of all, and that He will return the second time to receive His followers, to save Israel, and to establish His millennial kingdom on the earth. He believed that every person who believes in Jesus Christ will be forgiven by God, washed by His redeeming blood, justified by faith, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and saved by grace. Such a believer is a child of God and a member of the Body of Christ. He also believed that the destiny of every believer is to be an integral part of the church, which is the Body of Christ and the house of God.

## Major Teachings

Watchman Nee was a seer of the divine revelation in the present age. In particular, he saw twelve crucial items which elaborated on the common faith. He not only taught these revelations, but also pioneered the experience and enjoyment of their contents. These twelve major items include:

1. God
2. The Eternal Plan (Economy) of God
3. The Incarnation of God
4. Christ
5. The Death of Christ
6. The Resurrection of Christ
7. The Eternal Life
8. The Spirit
9. Christ's Redemption and God's Salvation
10. The Believers
11. The Church
12. The New Jerusalem

## GOD

Watchman Nee pointed out that God is eternal, self-existing, ever-existing, having no beginning or ending, and complete and perfect in every sense. God is triune; in His Godhead, He is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The Father is the source, the Son is the expression, and the Spirit is the application. God the Son is the embodiment of God the Father, while God the Spirit is the reality of God the Son, applying the Triune God to those who believe into God the Son. God is also holy and righteous. Holiness refers to God's inward nature, while righteousness refers to God's outward acts. God is love and light. Love is the element of His inward nature, while light is the element of His outward expression. This God possesses extraordinary wisdom and accomplishes superlative works.

## THE ETERNAL PLAN (ECONOMY) OF GOD

He pointed out that this God who possesses extraordinary wisdom and accomplishes superlative works has a good pleasure according to His heart's desire, which is to gain a group of men who would become one with Him, sharing the same life, the same living, the same move, and the same work as His, that He may express Himself in glory through them. Therefore, in eternity past He purposed in Himself an eternal plan (economy). In this plan God the Son was to be the centrality and universality that He would have the preeminence in all things. For this reason He also created the universe, with all the myriads of items therein, in order that He might create in it a tripartite man—composed of a spirit, a soul, and a body—as a vessel to receive Him and express Him. God would enter into man's spirit as the Spirit and regenerate man, thus producing His many sons, who share His life and nature, and the many members of Christ the Son, who constitute His organic Body as His corporate expression, so that the Triune God through this expression would have an ultimate expression in fullness for eternity.

## **THE INCARNATION OF GOD**

He pointed out that at the time of creation God did not put Himself into man to let man share His life and nature. It was four thousand years later that He in God the Son, through the Spirit entering the flesh of a virgin, was conceived as a man with both the divine nature and the human nature—a God-man who is the complete God as well as the perfect man. Thus, He brought God into man, and within human flesh, He lived a human life on earth, expressing God by living out all of God's attributes through His human virtues.

## **CHRIST**

He pointed out that the Second of the Divine Trinity was made Christ by God in eternity past. This One is God's Anointed. In time, He came to accomplish the eternal plan (economy) which God had purposed for the expression of Himself. God desires that this Christ, His embodiment, be the centrality and universality in His eternal plan and that He would have the preeminence over all things in both creation and redemption, transcending all things. This Christ whom He established emptied Himself, laying aside the form of God and taking the form of a slave, and was found in fashion as a man, living a humble human life on earth. At the end of His human life, this Christ of God went to the cross, accomplished God's eternal redemption for us, the sinners, and released God's eternal life. He also resurrected from the dead and was transformed from God's only begotten Son to God's firstborn Son. Furthermore, in resurrection He became the life-giving Spirit to enter into the believers, making them God's new creation and His members, constituting His Body. He became the life, the element, and the Head of the Body. In this way the Triune God has obtained a corporate expression in this universe. In the coming kingdom He will be King and will reign with the overcoming saints over the coming world. Later, in the new heaven and new earth, He will be the centrality and universality of the New Jerusalem and will be the mutual dwelling place of God and man to be the full expression of the Triune God in eternity.

## **THE DEATH OF CHRIST**

He pointed out that the death of Christ was not a death of martyrdom, but a vicarious death on behalf of us, the sinners, which bears many significances: (1) to remove our sins, (2) to crucify the flesh for us, thus terminating the old man, (3) to destroy Satan who has the power of death, (4) to judge the world under Satan, (5) to annul the ordinances which separated us, (6) to satisfy all the requirements of righteousness, holiness, and glory which God had placed on us, the sinners, and (7) to release God's eternal life from within Himself for us.

## **THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST**

He pointed out that Christ's resurrection was a resurrection of His whole being from the dead, including His body, by God through the divine Spirit within Christ. Such a resurrection made Him, the only begotten Son of God, the firstborn Son of God with both the divine nature and the human nature. His resurrection also transformed Him into a life-giving Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the reality of life, who enters into His believers to regenerate them, to bring their humanity into divinity, to make them God's many sons, His many brothers, and His members who constitute His mysterious Body as His organism for the expression of Christ, the embodiment of the Triune God. The reality of this resurrection, which is the Holy Spirit, the reality of life, has become the overcoming power in the life of His believers and will become the infinite power which will resurrect them from the dead and will transform and redeem their bodies.

## **THE ETERNAL LIFE**

He pointed out that the eternal life described in the Bible is God's uncreated life, which is eternal both in time and in nature, perfect, and without any blemish. This eternal life of God swallows up and overcomes death and is also the indestructible life. This life of God is also the Triune God Himself as life to those who believe into His Son. By this life we become God-men, those who are joined to God and who possess both humanity and divinity.

## **THE SPIRIT**

He pointed out that the Spirit is the application of the Triune God. The Spirit reaches those who have believed into and received God the Son. The Spirit applies to them God the Father who is in God the Son. He is the Spirit of life and the reality of life; He is also the life-giving Spirit, dispensing life to those who believe into the Son. As such, He is the regenerating Spirit who regenerates the believers with the life of God the Father in God the Son, making them the children of God. He then becomes the indwelling Spirit within them as the reality of all things. He is the renewing Spirit who renews the man of the old creation into God's new creation with God's eternally new and never-aging life. He is also the sanctifying Spirit who separates and sanctifies the believers with God's sanctifying nature. He is the transforming Spirit who transforms them with the life element of Christ into His image. He is the firstfruits, the foretaste, of God as the eternal portion of those who have believed into the Son. He is the Spirit of power poured out on the believers of the Son as the authority for their work. He is the reality of the Triune God, the reality of Christ, the reality of all the truths, and the reality of the resurrection of Christ. Only by receiving Him will a man possess the Triune God, the truths, Christ, and the resurrection of Christ.

## **CHRIST'S REDEMPTION AND GOD'S SALVATION**

He pointed out that the redemption of Christ was accomplished through His vicarious and redemptive death for the sinners. When we the sinners receive this redemption, we are forgiven, cleansed, justified, and reconciled to God. Based on Christ's redemption, God in His salvation forgives, cleanses, justifies, reconciles, and regenerates us through Christ's resurrection and renews, separates, and sanctifies us through His Spirit. Furthermore, the Spirit transforms us through the life-element of the pneumatic Christ, conforming us to the image of God's firstborn Son, Christ, and finally glorifying us with the divine glory into which Christ has entered.

This salvation which God accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection and through the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration, renewing, separation, sanctification, transformation, conformation, and glorification is different from the reward which God will give to the believers at the time of Christ's coming. God's salvation is based on grace, which is different from the law, and is not based on man's works according to the law. God's reward is based on the overcoming life which believers in Christ live out after they are redeemed and saved, and this reward is through faith, by Christ's resurrection life, and by the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit. This reward is also based on the work, in Christ and by the Holy Spirit, of the building up of the church, the Body of Christ, which accomplishes God's eternal plan (economy). God's salvation is eternal; it includes saving us from our past sins, our present bondage of sin, and our temptations and failures into the ultimate enjoyment and full taste of the Triune God with all His riches in the New Jerusalem in the new heaven and the new earth. God's reward is dispensational and is limited to our reigning and obtaining glory together with Christ in the millennial kingdom during the manifestation of the kingdom.

## **THE BELIEVERS**

He pointed out that the believers in Christ were created by the Triune God according to His image as tripartite men with a spirit, a soul, and a body to be God's vessel for containing Him, expressing Him, representing Him, and reigning for Him over all creation. At the time of creation, God did not put His life and nature into man; He only created a spirit in man so that man could receive with his spirit the pneumatic God into him as life. But man fell under Satan's temptation. He did not obey God's commandment; rather, he was corrupted by Satan, bearing Satan's evil nature and being constituted a sinner. Because of this, God Himself became a man and put on the flesh of fallen man. This man's name was Jesus Christ, who in His flesh died for man and redeemed man from his sins, thus terminating the sinner himself together with Satan, the world, and the old creation. After His death, His whole being was resurrected, and in resurrection He was transformed into a life-giving Spirit. As such, He enters into the sinners who believe in and receive Him and becomes one with them, thus regenerating them to become God's children and His members, making them one with Himself, and constituting them His organic Body, which is the church, His fullness as His corporate expression.

These sinners who believe into Jesus Christ are called the Christians, the followers of Christ, those related to Christ. They were of God's old creation but have become God's new creation through regeneration by believing into Christ, possessing God's life and nature, walking by God's life and His Spirit, and living and working for God. They are being built up together in spirit to become the church of God, which is God's house, the Body of Christ and the fullness of Christ, and are waiting for Christ's return, at which time He will rapture them, transform them, and receive them into His glory to be with Him forever. Those among them who after their salvation are willing to live an overcoming life by the overcoming life of Christ and by the resurrection power in the Holy Spirit, who will participate in the work of accomplishing God's plan (economy), and who will ripen first before His coming again, will receive His reward to enter into the millennium, to be co-kings with Him, and to rule over the world. Those among them who are not ripened in this way will receive His discipline in the millennial kingdom so that they will ripen. Hence, they will be constituted elements of the New Jerusalem, and after the millennium in the new heaven and new earth, they will participate together with those believers who ripened first in the ultimate blessing and enjoyment of God's salvation in the New Jerusalem for eternity.

## **THE CHURCH**

He pointed out that the church is constituted of all those who believe into Christ and who belong to Christ. On the one hand, this church is universal, and on the other hand, it is local. On the universal side, the church is both God's house and the Body of Christ in the universe. On the local side, the church is the local manifestation of the house of God and the Body of Christ. These local manifestations are the many local churches which together form the one unique church in the universe.

This church as God's house is also God's household and God's habitation, which affords God the satisfaction and joy of a Father with His children; it is also God's dwelling place, which affords Him full and satisfying rest. In this way, He can freely express all that He is, has, and can do in this house.

This church as the Body of Christ is an organism by which Christ moves and walks among mankind and through which He lives out His all-inclusive self. This Body is also the bride of Christ, the counterpart of Christ; it is out of Christ, unto Christ, and for the satisfaction of Christ's love. This Body is also a new man created by Christ in Himself, being constituted with His life and element for the fulfillment of the eternal plan (economy) of God.

In order to exist among mankind, this church is scattered over all the earth to become the many separate local churches. Each one has its elders for administration and its deacons for service. In business affairs the churches are independent and separate, but in life and nature they are still one universal Body, receiving the same apostles' teaching, maintaining the one apostles' fellowship, and bearing the one testimony for Christ for the accomplishment of God's one plan (economy).

Such a church is composed outwardly of the many saints called out by God from the world, but inwardly it is the result of the Triune God working Himself into and growing out of the believers in Christ. Hence, it is a living organism; it is absolutely not a religious organization in the society, much less a lifeless material building.

This church is also the kingdom of God today, in which God reigns and rules over everything.

### THE NEW JERUSALEM

Finally, he also pointed out that the ultimate revelation of the Bible, the New Jerusalem, is constituted of all the redeemed ones in the Old and the New Testament. It is the tabernacle of the Triune God, the habitation of God with man in eternity. It is also the bride of Christ who is the embodiment of the Triune God, His beloved spouse in eternity. This holy city is also God's Holy of Holies, with the same one dimension in height, length, and breadth. It is constituted of God and the Lamb to be the serving place and dwelling of all God's redeemed. It is constituted of: (1) God the Father, the source of the Triune God, as its essence, like the transparent pure gold; (2) God the Son, the expression of the Triune God, as its entrance in His redeeming death and His life-dispensing resurrection, like the beautiful pearl; and (3) God the Spirit, the application of the Triune God, as her walls and foundations, through the Spirit's transformation in the believers, like the glorious precious stones. She is thus constituted by the Triune God to be the ultimate consummation of God with the redeemed, regenerated, and transformed tripartite man, in which He and man become one as His corporate expression and manifestation in eternity. In this city the Lamb is the lamp, shining forth God's glory, and in the midst of this city there is the throne of administration of God and the Lamb, from which flows a river of water of life, clear as crystal. This river flows in the middle of a spiral street, which encircles the whole city and reaches the twelve gates at the circumference of the city, nourishing the entire city. On either side of this river grows the tree of life, with new fruits every month, supplying the entire city. In this way, the holy city, the New Jerusalem, is the culmination of the union between the Triune God and His redeemed tripartite man; it is filled with the glory of the Triune God and expresses His fullness in eternity. It is also full of the supply of the Triune God to His redeemed in His redemption, so that they can have a full enjoyment and a full taste of all that the redeeming Triune God is, has done, and has attained.

Source: *The Collected Works of Watchman Nee*, Volume 1, "A Short Introduction in Memory of Brother Watchman Nee", by Witness Lee, pp. xxviii-xxxvi.

### Other Crucial Scriptural Teachings

In addition to the [major teachings](#), Watchman Nee received further clear revelation from the Lord concerning fifty-three other scriptural teachings crucial to the full understanding and practice of the Christian faith. (Some of the [major teachings](#) are repeated in this subsection.)

1. The Assurance of Salvation
2. The Distinction between Grace and Law
3. The Difference between Salvation and Victory
4. The Difference between Salvation and Reward
5. The Difference between the Kingdom of the Heavens and Eternal Life
6. The Kingdom Truths
7. Rapture
8. The Deviation of Christianity
9. The Church, the Ecclesia, the Body of Christ
10. The Two Aspects of the Church
11. Denominationalism
12. The Clergy System and Hierarchy
13. The Universal Priesthood
14. The Presbytery, the Proper Eldership
15. The Difference between Office and Gift
16. Baptism and the Lord's Table
17. Head Covering and the Laying On of Hand
18. Living by Faith in God
19. Divine Healing

20. The Death and Resurrection of Christ
21. The Ascension of Christ
22. The Coming of Christ
23. The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit
24. The Teaching of the Anointing
25. The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit
26. The Tripartite Man
27. Sanctification by Faith
28. Christ as Life
29. The Law of the Spirit of Life
30. The Law of Sin and Death
31. A Better Covenant
32. The Overcoming Life of Christ
33. The Calling of the Overcomers
34. Spiritual Warfare
35. The Boundary of the Local Church
36. The Centrality and Universality of Christ
37. The Ground of the Local Church
38. Migration
39. The Practicality of the Church Life
40. The Reality of the Church
41. The Oneness of the Church
42. Seeing the Body
43. The Authority of the Holy Spirit in the Body
44. The Reality of the Holy Spirit
45. The Authority of the Church
46. The Building of the Church
47. Coordination in the Church Life
48. The Body and the Spiritual Warfare
49. The Discipline of the Holy Spirit
50. The Breaking of the Outer Man and the Release of the Spirit
51. Using the Spirit
52. The Region of the Work
53. Handing Over All Things

### **THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION**

One of the first basic items which the Lord revealed to Watchman Nee was the believers' assurance of salvation. Throughout all of China in those days, the scriptural teaching of the assurance of salvation was seldom taught by any Christian group. Watchman Nee, however, became exceedingly clear concerning this matter and preached the gospel to Christians to help them realize that they were saved. He was able to show from the written Word that the believer can be absolutely assured of his salvation. He would help the doubtful to take a Bible verse like John 3:16 and digest it until it became a definite word to them that they could never perish. He also pointed out to them that the Spirit of God dwells in them and witnesses with their spirit that they are God's children (Rom. 8:16). A further evidence of the assurance of salvation was given by Watchman Nee from 1 John 3:14: "We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers."

### **THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN GRACE AND LAW**

Most Christians in those days did not have the assurance of salvation, because they did not know the distinction between grace and law. Watchman Nee received the Lord's clear revelation that salvation is by grace alone, not by works of law. If salvation were a matter of law, it would depend upon our own works. But salvation is of the Lord's grace, depending only upon what He is and what He has done for us.

### **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SALVATION AND VICTORY**

Some Christians did not know the difference between salvation and victory. This was another cause of uncertainty regarding their salvation. At the moment we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, our salvation is secured. Victory, however, is a matter of overcoming sin, the world, the flesh, the self, and all other negative things in our daily living. Our eternal destiny as children of God is forever secured by simple faith in Jesus Christ for our salvation. But victory is a matter of our daily life and is related to dispensational reward.

## **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SALVATION AND REWARD**

Any Christian who is not clear about the difference between salvation and reward will have difficulty being assured of his salvation. This distinction was fully revealed to Watchman Nee. Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), whereas reward is the result of working according to the Lord's will (Matt. 16:27; 1 Cor. 3:14).

## **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE KINGDOM OF THE HEAVENS AND ETERNAL LIFE**

Some Christians hesitated to say that they were saved, because the difference between having eternal life and entering into the kingdom of the heavens was not clear to them. When a person believes in the Lord Jesus for his salvation, he receives eternal life. But to enter into the kingdom of the heavens, one must live his daily life under heaven's rule. Such a living is an exercise in this church age and qualifies us to participate in the Lord's millennial rule in the kingdom age. Such participation is a reward for living a life under the heavenly rule and is not a matter of eternal salvation. Watchman Nee received a thorough and clear revelation concerning this matter.

## **THE KINGDOM TRUTHS**

Watchman Nee also saw the New Testament truth of the kingdom in its full scope. He saw that the New Testament distinguishes between the kingdom of the heavens and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God includes the entire reign of God from eternity in the past to eternity in the future. But the kingdom of the heavens is a smaller sphere within the kingdom of God; it is the heavenly ruling among the believers in the present church age (Matt. 5:3, 10) and a reward in the coming kingdom age (Matt. 5:20; 7:21). All regenerated believers are in the kingdom of God (John 3:5), but only those who live a life under the heavenly rule will inherit the kingdom age as a reward. The kingdom of God is related to salvation, whereas the kingdom of the heavens is related to reward.

## **RAPTURE**

Along with the revelation of the kingdom, the Lord also gave Watchman Nee revelation concerning rapture. According to current fundamental theology, Christians are told that as long as they are saved, at the Lord's return they will all participate together in a general rapture with the whole church before the tribulation. But Watchman Nee came to see that not all believers will be raptured at the same time. Some believers will become matured overcomers before the tribulation; therefore, they will be raptured first. The majority of the believers, however, will mature later, so they will be raptured later. The kingdom is a matter of reward, and rapture is a matter of maturity. The rapture can be compared to a harvest. A crop is not harvested and taken into the barn when it is still green. It must first ripen into maturity. All Christians must ripen in life. When they are ripe, the Lord will harvest them and bring them into the heavenly barn. These two points must be kept clearly in mind: 1) the kingdom is a reward to the overcoming believers, and 2) rapture requires the maturity of the overcomers.

## **THE DEVIATION OF CHRISTIANITY**

Not long after they were saved, Watchman Nee and some other young believers who were still students began to realize, by studying the Bible, how abnormal Christianity is today. The Lord showed them that Christianity as it is practiced today has deviated in almost every point from the way God ordained in His holy Word.

## **THE CHURCH, THE ECCLESIA, THE BODY OF CHRIST**

The Lord gave Watchman Nee a clear revelation of His church. Brother Nee preached and taught that the church is not a building, an organization, or a Christian mission. The church, rather, is an organism. It is a living body. In another sense, it is the ecclesia, the gathering together of the called-out ones.

## **THE TWO ASPECTS OF THE CHURCH**

Watchman Nee saw that the church is both universal and local. In the entire universe there is only one church, the church of God (1 Cor. 10:32). This unique church is expressed in many localities on earth, and in each locality it is a local church. The universal church is composed of all the local churches, and the local churches are the practical expression of the universal church. In Matthew 16:18, the universal church is revealed, whereas in Matthew 18:17, we see the local church. Without the local churches, there is no way to participate in the universal church, and there is no way to have a practical church life. In the book of Acts, in the Epistles, and in Revelation, the church is expressed as local churches, i.e., the church in Jerusalem, the church in Antioch, the church in Ephesus, etc. The government of the church is not universal but local.

## **DENOMINATIONALISM**

At the same time he received revelation concerning the church, Watchman Nee also saw the error of denominationalism. Denominations divide the Body of Christ into many organizations. This is condemned in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 1:11-13).

### **THE CLERGY SYSTEM AND HIERARCHY**

Watchman Nee also received light concerning the clergy-laity system. This system includes hierarchy, rank, and position in a form of Christianity which is reduced to human organization. The Roman Catholic Church has priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and the pope. The Church of England has priests, bishops, archbishops, with the headship vested in the reigning sovereign. The Protestant churches have their pastors. This kind of clergy system is clearly contrary to the revelation of the New Testament and annuls the function of the members of the Body of Christ. Denominationalism cuts the Body of Christ into pieces, and the clergy destroys the function of all its members.

### **THE UNIVERSAL PRIESTHOOD**

The universal priesthood was another truth revealed to Watchman Nee. He saw that the priesthood in the New Testament is different from that in the Old Testament. The priesthood in the Old Testament was eventually vested in the children of Aaron, resulting in a clerical class different from that of laymen. But the New Testament priesthood is granted to all believers (Rev. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). In the New Testament there are no clergy and no laymen; all are priests.

### **THE PRESBYTERY, THE PROPER ELDERSHIP**

Watchman Nee received the clear revelation from the Scriptures that the church should be governed by a presbytery of elders. Every local church needs a group of experienced brothers to take the lead and to exercise oversight over the church's activities. In the Bible this group of men is called the presbyters, the elders, the bishops, the overseers.

### **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OFFICE AND GIFT**

From the Bible, Watchman Nee saw that the offices of the church are different from gifts. The church offices include elders and deacons, who are local (Phil. 1:1); whereas gifts include prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers, who are universal (Eph. 4:11).

### **BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S TABLE**

The Lord revealed to Watchman Nee that the proper mode of water baptism is by immersion. The Lord also showed him the scriptural way to practice the Lord's table. Baptism is the believer's testimony that his old life has been terminated and that he has been separated from the world to the Lord and His Body. The Lord's table is a remembrance of the Lord and a testimony concerning the oneness and the fellowship of His Body.

### **HEAD COVERING AND THE LAYING ON OF HAND**

Watchman Nee also saw the scriptural meaning of head covering and the real practice of the laying on of hands. Head covering is an expression of submission and obedience to the headship of Christ in the church. The laying on of hands is an act of identification, indicating that what is being done is an impartation of something which is within the Body to other members of the Body. By the laying on of hands, spiritual gifts are imparted to the members, and fellowship is realized between the members of the Body of Christ.

### **LIVING BY FAITH IN GOD**

Watchman Nee saw that the real servant of God must live by faith in God and not be hired as the employee of a religious organization. The practice of living by faith was practically unknown in China in the early years of Watchman Nee's ministry. The Brethren assemblies do not hire the Lord's servants among them, but when the Brethren went to China, they thought it was impossible to teach the Chinese believers to live by faith in God. To live by faith was simply not in the Chinese Christian's concept; however, Watchman Nee both taught this way and practiced it himself.

### **DIVINE HEALING**

Watchman Nee not only believed in divine healing from the Scriptures; he experienced it himself. To him it was not merely an outward, miraculous gift, but an inward experience, producing the building up in life.

### **THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST**

The Lord gave Watchman Nee specific revelation concerning the death and resurrection of Christ. He saw that Christ's death has two aspects: the objective aspect, which dealt with our sin, sins, the world, Satan, and the powers of darkness; and the subjective aspect, which dealt with our flesh, our self, and our old man. He also saw that in the death of Christ the old creation was terminated. This was the negative side of the cross. On the positive side, the divine life of Christ was released to germinate the new creation. In our Lord's resurrection, His divine life was released to regenerate the believers and make them members of the Body of Christ. From His resurrection the church came into existence, and also in His resurrection the Body of Christ is being built up. It is also in the power of His resurrection that believers are able to bear the cross and, in the fellowship of His sufferings, be conformed to His death (Phil. 3:10). While enjoying the resurrection life of Christ, the Lord's people are empowered to live a holy

and heavenly life while they are walking on this earth. This resurrection is just the resurrected Christ Himself, and the Spirit of Christ is its reality.

### **THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST**

Watchman Nee saw that Christ has ascended into the heavens far above all. Neither the gravity of the earth, the demons, the prince of the power of the air, nor all the powers of darkness could either frustrate or detain Him. These are all now under His feet. By His ascension He has been made Lord of all (Acts 2:36), and also by His ascension all His followers have been brought into the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). His position, His ministry, and His life are now all heavenly. He is now engaged in the work of ministering the heavenly life and the very heavens themselves into His people to make them the heavenly people, living a heavenly life on earth.

### **THE COMING OF CHRIST**

Watchman Nee acquired a clear and thorough view concerning the coming of Christ. He saw that the Lord's coming (Gk., *parousia*) has a secret aspect and an open aspect. To the watchful ones, who have been seeking Him and awaiting His return, He will come secretly as a thief (Matt. 24:43; Rev. 3:3) from the heavens to the air before the great tribulation. But to those engrossed in the world, He will come as a flash of lightning (Matt. 24:27, 30) from the air to the earth after the great tribulation. In His secret coming, believers will be raptured to the air; whereas, His open coming will bring judgment to the world on the earth.

### **THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ is now indwelling the spirits of His people as the Spirit of life, making Christ real to them. This indwelling Spirit of Christ is both the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of God. The main function of the divine Spirit is to impart the divine life into God's people, regenerating them, anointing them, sanctifying and transforming them by saturating them with the very element of God. Watchman Nee ministered on this matter extensively.

### **THE TEACHING OF THE ANOINTING**

Along with the revelation he received concerning the Holy Spirit, Watchman Nee also received light concerning the teaching of the anointing. The anointing is the moving and working of the Holy Spirit within our spirit. The anointing teaches us everything from within (1 John 2:27). The law of life replaces the Old Testament law, and the teaching of the anointing replaces the Old Testament prophets. It is by the teaching of the anointing that we abide in the Lord.

### **THE OUTPOURING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Watchman Nee saw two aspects regarding the Holy Spirit: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for life and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for power. On the day the Lord rose from the dead, He breathed into the disciples the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). At that time the Holy Spirit entered into the disciples and indwelt them for the purpose of imparting life. But on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples (Acts 2:4, 33). This pouring out of the Spirit was for the purpose of distributing power to the disciples. This second experience of the Spirit is what the Bible calls the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Most Christians do not see the difference between these two aspects of the Spirit. Watchman Nee, however, received a clear revelation concerning this distinction. Although he never spoke in tongues, he received repeated experiences of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

### **THE TRIPARTITE MAN**

In the early years of his Christian life, Watchman Nee came to see that man is composed of three parts: spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23). He came to see that the soul is the personality of man; the body is the outward part of man for contacting the physical world; and the spirit is the inmost part of man for contacting the spiritual world. Since God is Spirit, we must worship and serve Him in our spirit (Rom. 1:9; John 4:24). Believers are regenerated by the Spirit of God in their spirit, the Spirit of God witnesses with their spirit (Rom. 8:16), the Lord Jesus is with their spirit (2 Tim. 4:22), and they are one spirit with the Lord (1 Cor. 6:17). The spirit must be divided from the soul (Heb. 4:12) so that believers can walk, live, and work in their spirit (Gal. 5:16, 25) and be spiritual men (1 Cor. 2:14-15).

### **SANCTIFICATION BY FAITH**

Some time prior to 1925, Watchman Nee came to see the matter of sanctification by faith. He received light concerning the holiness teaching of John Wesley and said that what Wesley taught was not really holiness but sinless perfection. Through his study he came to realize that the Brethren surpassed Wesley in their vision of holiness. Yet while their teaching on holiness was accurate, it was too objective and consisted merely of a sort of positional change. The Brethren taught that gold in the world was common, while gold built into the temple was sanctified. As a further example, the Brethren taught that sheep and cattle in flocks and herds were common, but when offered upon the altar, they were sanctified (Matt. 23:17, 19). In addition, the Brethren illustrated sanctification by pointing out that food in the market is common, but food on the table of Christians becomes sanctified with prayer. Watchman Nee pointed out that all these examples refer to an outward change of position, but none involves an inward dispositional change. He taught that sanctification is not merely a positional change, but that it must also be dispositional (Rom. 6:19, 22).

## **CHRIST AS LIFE**

To His believing ones Christ is life (Col. 3:4), and this life is the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2) in their spirit. Whatever the believer does must be done out of this inner life. Every believer should live by this divine life within (Gal. 2:20).

## **THE LAW OF THE SPIRIT OF LIFE**

The divine life that believers receive from the Lord is in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2). This divine life has its own law and characteristics, and its function is to regulate and supply us with God's divine element. This is not the mere outward letter of the law but the law of life (Heb. 8:10) enforced by the Spirit of God within us. Watchman Nee received a full revelation concerning this inner law. It is by this inner law, called the law of life, that we are freed from the law of sin and death and are able to live a righteous and holy life.

## **THE LAW OF SIN AND DEATH**

Watchman Nee saw from the Scriptures that to sin and die is a law (Rom. 8:2). This law is in the members of our body (Rom. 7:23) and is derived from the evil life of Satan. Every fallen man is under its power. But the law of the Spirit of life is more powerful than the law of sin and death and is able to free us from it.

## **A BETTER COVENANT**

The new covenant which the Lord Jesus enacted for us with His blood is better than the old covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6). The old covenant is according to the Old Testament law, with a priesthood according to the law of a fleshly commandment; whereas, the new covenant is according to the law of life, with a priesthood according to the power of an indestructible life (Heb. 8:10; 7:16).

## **THE OVERCOMING LIFE OF CHRIST**

Because Christ has overcome Satan and every negative thing in the universe, His life is an overcoming life. If we live by Christ, His life overcomes every negative thing for us.

## **THE CALLING OF THE OVERCOMERS**

Watchman Nee received revelation concerning the calling of the overcomers. Because the whole church has become defeated, failing to meet the Lord's purpose, the Lord has come in to call some of His believers to be overcomers. This is clearly revealed in the seven epistles in Revelation 2 and 3. Because the whole church has missed the mark, the Lord has sounded His call to those who love Him to overcome the degraded church.

## **SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

By 1925 Watchman Nee had seen the matter of spiritual warfare. He saw that for the accomplishment of God's divine purpose in this universe, there is a consummate battle shaping up between God and His enemy, Satan. This battle involves all of God's children. If they take sides with Satan, they are rebelling against God; if they take sides with God, they are fighting against Satan. All the overcoming believers must realize that they are on the battlefield; they are fighting for God's divine purpose. To fight in this spiritual warfare requires the believer to see his heavenly position. Ephesians 2 makes it clear that we are seated in the heavenly places, and Ephesians 6 indicates that we are fighting against the powers in the heavenlies. The believers must keep their heavenly position so that they can defeat God's enemies in the heavenly places. If the believers' position is on the earth, they are under the enemy, and they lose the position to overcome.

## **THE BOUNDARY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH**

In the years 1933 and 1934, Watchman Nee saw that the boundary of the local church is the boundary of the city where the church is. He pointed out that within the boundary of a city there should not be more than one church. This spontaneously eliminates division.

## **THE CENTRALITY AND UNIVERSALITY OF CHRIST**

In 1933 and 1934, Watchman Nee also saw the centrality and universality of Christ in God's eternal purpose. He saw that both in the universe and in the Christian life Christ should have the preeminence (Col. 1:18); he also saw that Christ is all and in all in the new man, which is the church (Col. 3:10-11).

## **THE GROUND OF THE LOCAL CHURCH**

In 1937 Watchman Nee began to see the ground of the local church. This is a further step beyond the boundary of locality and indicates that believers should not be divided by anything. The ground of the church is the ground of oneness. Wherever we go and wherever we are, we should be one with the believers in that place. A city should have only one church. The church is not the church in a home, the church in a factory, the church on a campus, the church on a certain street, or the church with any other kind of designation. The local church is a church in the city. If there is more than one church in a locality, the believers in that locality will be divided.

## **MIGRATION**

Watchman Nee saw clearly from the book of Acts that there were two ways to spread the gospel: one by the sending out of the apostles, and the other by the migration of the believers (Acts 8:4). Under his ministry both methods were employed to spread the gospel.

## **THE PRACTICALITY OF THE CHURCH LIFE**

In 1939 Watchman Nee received further light regarding the church, this time concerning the practicality of the church life. He received clear light from the New Testament about how elders should carry out their eldership practically and how deacons and deaconesses should serve the saints and the church. He also helped all the members of the church to participate in the affairs of the church.

## **THE REALITY OF THE CHURCH**

Along with the practical aspect of the church, Watchman Nee saw the reality of the church. He stressed that the content of the church must be Christ living in and being lived out through all the members. Anything that is not Christ is not the church. Practically speaking, the church is Christ. Christ, therefore, is the reality of the church, and the church should be the expression of Christ.

## **THE ONENESS OF THE CHURCH**

The genuine oneness of the church is the oneness of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3). Real oneness is not the oneness of doctrines, opinions, or certain practices; real oneness is the Spirit Himself. Even though we may be one in doctrine and in the way we do things, if we are not in the Spirit, we do not have genuine oneness.

## **SEEING THE BODY**

In the years 1939 to 1942, Watchman Nee was consistently burdened concerning the revelation of the Body of Christ. He was burdened to help Christians see the Body, not in a doctrinal way but in a practical way. He continually stressed that seeing the Body makes it impossible to be individualistic. Once one sees the Body, he behaves and acts in a corporate way.

## **THE AUTHORITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE BODY**

Watchman Nee saw that since the Body of Christ is an organism, the Holy Spirit must have authority over everything in every part. All the activity of the Body must be under the authority and direction of the Holy Spirit.

## **THE REALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The Holy Spirit is the reality of all spiritual things. The term spiritual things is vain and empty unless the Holy Spirit Himself is the content and reality of every spiritual thing. The Holy Spirit is the reality of the Christians' life and also the reality of their living. Whatever they are and do must have the Holy Spirit as the reality.

## **THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH**

For the practice of the practical church life, Watchman Nee saw the necessity of authority. The authority that Christ as the Head imparts to certain members of His Body is called deputy authority. The local churches must be under this kind of deputy authority in a marvelous order. This authority is crucial for the building up of the local church. By this means the church becomes a vertical vessel. For this, submission is necessary.

## **THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH**

The Lord has revealed through Watchman Nee that believers must be practically built up with others in the local churches under the authority of the church. This kind of building is a test to genuine spirituality. If one cannot be built up with others in a local church, his spirituality is questionable.

## **COORDINATION IN THE CHURCH LIFE**

Another revelation received by Watchman Nee, which is closely related to authority and building, was the revelation concerning coordination in the church. All the members in the local church need not only to be built up with others but also to coordinate with others. The service of the church cannot be carried out individually. All the members must serve in a coordinated way.

## **THE BODY AND THE SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

In the early years of his ministry, Watchman Nee saw the spiritual warfare as a personal matter. However, from 1939 on, he saw that it was not just a personal matter, but a matter of the Body. The warrior in Ephesians 6 is not an individual believer but the Body. Watchman Nee stressed strongly that if believers are individualistic, it will be difficult for them to fight against the powers in the heavenlies. To fight the enemy we need the Body. We need to be not only in the heavenlies but also in the Body.

### **THE DISCIPLINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The period from 1942 to 1948 was a period of longsuffering for Watchman Nee. During this time he learned to see the need of the Holy Spirit's discipline for the reconstitution of our being and for the breaking of the outer man. He saw that God sovereignly arranges our environment to work good for us through the discipline of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit arranges our environment and disciplines us through our environment in order to reconstitute us within with the divine element.

### **THE BREAKING OF THE OUTER MAN AND THE RELEASE OF THE SPIRIT**

While he was undergoing his longsuffering from 1942 to 1948, Watchman Nee saw the breaking of the outer man and the release of the human spirit. The Spirit of Christ dwells in our spirit. If our outer man is not broken, our spirit with the Spirit of Christ is confined in the shell of our outer man. For this reason, there is a crucial need for our outer man to be broken in order that our spirit with the Spirit of Christ may be released to impart life to others. The discipline of the Holy Spirit is both to tear down some aspects of our natural life and to break our outer man.

### **USING THE SPIRIT**

Along with the light he received concerning the release of the spirit, Watchman Nee also saw that the believer must learn how to use his human spirit. In ministering the Word, in preaching the gospel, in contacting people, and even in matters of daily living, believers must use their spirit first, not their mind, emotion, or knowledge. The spirit must always be ahead of these. By our spirit we can touch another's spirit. Only by his spirit can the believer convey the Spirit of life and impart life into others.

### **THE REGION OF THE WORK**

In 1948 Watchman Nee received revelation that while the church is local, the work is regional. The church is a matter of locality, but the work is a matter of region or district. The churches under Peter's work were in respective localities, but Peter's work was in a district which comprised all these localities. It was the same with Paul's work and the churches raised up through his work.

### **HANDING OVER ALL THINGS**

In order for the work to accomplish its purpose and for the local churches to be built up practically, Watchman Nee saw the necessity for all the believers in the Lord's recovery to hand over not only themselves but all their possessions to the work. By this means the believers are delivered from being selfish and individualistic. This also helps believers to submit to the Lord's authority. It even affords the Lord an opportunity to use their possessions for His purpose and to grant them more physical blessings.

Source: *Watchman Nee—A Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age*, by Witness Lee, pp. 151-167