

WHAT ARE WE?

(The following is a message released by Brother Watchman Nee in Shanghai in January 1934, during the third Overcomer Conference. It is translated from notes taken by Brother K.H. Weigh.)
Scripture Reading: John 1:22; 2 Pet. 1:12

John 1:22 - *They said then to him, **Who are you**, that we may give an answer to those who sent us?
What do you say about yourself?*

What are we?
What are we doing here?

First, we must clarify that

- we are **not** some thing.
- We are **not** a new denomination.
- **Neither** are we a new sect, a new movement, or a new organization.
- We are **not** here to join a certain sect or form our own sect.

The reason we are here is that God has given us a special calling.

❖ ESTABLISHED IN THE PRESENT TRUTH

2Pet. 1:12 - Therefore I will be ready always to remind you concerning these things, even though you know *them* and have been established in the present truth.

The “**present truth**” can also be rendered the “**up-to-date truth**.”

What is the up-to-date truth?

- all the **truths are in the Bible**
- **through** man’s foolishness, unfaithfulness, negligence, and disobedience many of the truths were **lost** and **hidden** from man
- not **until** the fullness of time did God release certain truths during **particular periods of time** and cause them to **be revealed once more**

❖ TRUTH RECOVERED

The **sixteenth century**

The age of the **Reformation**.

1517

➤ **Luther’s Reformation.**

- the recovery of the truth of **justification by faith**
- he did not make complete changes with regard to the church
- the **Lutheran denomination** became the **state religion** of Germany
- church **administration** was left unsolved

From the **sixteenth** to the **eighteenth** century

1524

➤ The **Anabaptists**, were raised up in **Germany**

- **re-baptism** after infant-sprinkling
- preached the **baptism of believers**

Before this time the Roman Catholic Church as well as the Lutheran Church sprinkled infants.

- **preached** the truth of **justification by faith**
- **baptize** the believers who were justified by faith

After the Anglican Church was established in England, these people told others that the church should not have anything to do with politics.

- For this reason they were **persecuted** and **exiled**.

1536

➤ **John Calvin**

- he faced persecution everywhere, first in Switzerland and then in Germany
- wherever he went, he was met with persecution and exile
- in Scotland he had a fresh beginning and established the **Scottish Presbyterian Church**

Between the **end of the 16th** century and the **beginning of the 17th** century

➤ The **Anglican Church** was formed in **England**.

- This was the beginning of the **state church in England**.
- it freed itself from the influence of the Roman Catholic Church,
- it found itself linked with British politics
- various dissenters rose up in England,
 - opposed the state religion
 - held opinions different from those of the state religion
 - they said that the church should not be under the state's control
 - and that **church** and **state** should have a clear **separation**
 - they themselves **did not return** fully to the teaching of the New Testament

1670

➤ God raised up **Philipp Jakob Spener**, a pastor in a **Lutheran Church** in Frankfurt **Germany**

- the Lutheran denomination had fallen into a kind of **formal religion**
- the church at his time was full of human opinions, something forbidden by God
- the believers should **return** to the teaching of the **New Testament**
- he lead others into the **practice of 1 Corinthians 14**.
- he rejected the traditional formalities and to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit
Unfortunately, **his practice did not last long**.

1732

➤ The earliest missionary body in the world was conceived, the so-called **Moravian Brethren**.
The word Moravian originates from a place called **Moravia**.

- they go throughout the entire world to **evangelize**, **became** foreign **missionaries**
- **their beginning** can be traced to a brother called **Christian David**
 - he was regenerated at the age of twenty-two

- he had traveled everywhere in search of the truth concerning **salvation**
- one day he found the way to salvation, he returned to his hometown in Moravia and began to boldly proclaim this truth
- God did a great work through him. Through this revival,
 - persecution came
 - and he was chased out of his homeland to Saxony
- there **he met Count Zinzendorf**, who as only twenty-two years of age at that time and was a member of the aristocracy in a small kingdom
- due to the persecution in Moravia, the brothers fled from their land and were received by Brother Zinzendorf in his territory.
- There they **began the Moravian Church**.
 - dwelling among the little hills of Saxony
 - they began to build up a homeland
 - gradually different kinds of Christians **moved there** from their respective places of persecution

Among these immigrants was a black man from the **West Indies** by the name of **Anthony**.

- he discussed with them the condition in the West Indies.
- the need to go and preach the gospel there.
- this was the **first foreign missionary enterprise**, around **1732**.

From that time on, **missionaries** were produced from among them, and the Moravian Church became the strongest missionary body at that time. Their believers spread to every corner of the world.

➤ At the same time there was a new discovery within the **Catholic Church**.

- The most spiritual one among them was **Miguel de Molinos**,
 - who was born in 1640 and died in 1697
 - He wrote a book called **Spiritual Guide** which taught men the way to deny themselves and die with the Lord.
 - This book affected many people at that time.
- One of his contemporaries was **Madame Guyon**.
 - She was born in 1648 and died in 1717.
 - She was even more knowledgeable in the matters of the **union with God's will** and the **denial of the self**.
 - Her autobiography is a very good spiritual book.
- In addition there was **Father Fenelon** who was a bishop at that time.
 - He was very willing to suffer for the Lord,
 - and he worked together with Madame Guyon.
 - Through these men and women, God released many spiritual messages.
- At that time men and women with the deepest **experience** of spiritual life were found in the **Catholic Church**.
- **Protestantism** was only paying attention to the **doctrine** of justification by faith.
- Along with these three persons, there was **Gottfried Arnold**.
 - He wrote many books concerning questions of the church.
 - He considered that the church at that time had deviated from the truth and that it must return to the proper ground as revealed in the New Testament before it could be built up.

- Here we can see **two flows**.
 - One came from believers like Molinos, Madame Guyon, and Fenelon were indeed a very **spiritual** person
 - The other flow came from men represented by Arnold, recovered mostly the **outward** matter—to return to the spiritual ground of the New Testament.

1700

- These **two flows** eventually **merged into one**, the **church in “Philadelphia”** was raised up. Philadelphia means **brotherly love**.
- At that time, when men read Revelation 2 and 3, they realized that **Protestantism** had indeed come out of Catholicism. However, the result was only the **church in Sardis**; there was not yet a full recovery.

1729

- At the beginning of the eighteenth century, a great revival broke out in **England**. The two **Wesley brothers** were raised up by God. They were called the **Methodists**.
 - began to preach this message everywhere, the church at that time considered that the holy Word could be proclaimed only in a holy sanctuary.
 - However, these two brothers together with **George Whitefield** began to **hold open-air meetings and bring people to the Lord** in this way.
 - The main subject of John Wesley’s messages was the doctrine of **sanctification**. The teaching of the **eradication of sin** began with him, although he also told others that **sanctification came by faith**.
- After Wesley died, the overseas missionary movement began. The first organization to be established was the **London Missionary Society**. This organization began as a non-denominational institution but later came under the direction of the Congregationalists.

1799

- The **Church Missionary Society** (C.M.S.) was formed. It belonged to the Anglican Church.
- The Methodists also expanded the scope of their mission organization and became the **Methodist Missionary Society** of today.

In conclusion,

- ✚ The **reforms** of the **sixteenth** century were **widespread**, while the reforms of the **eighteenth** century **were not**.
- ✚ The reforms of the **sixteenth** century affected the world **not only spiritually but politically and socially** as well.
- ✚ Those reforms of the **eighteenth** century exercised their influence mainly on the **spiritual side**.

Of all the movements in the eighteenth century,

- ✚ The most noteworthy was the testimony of the “Philadelphia” church. They **assimilated all** of the previous major recoveries. Among them, one can find all of the major truths.

The discovery of god's truth in the nineteenth century

1827

➤ The revival in Dublin, Ireland.

Among them were men like Edward Cronin and Anthony Norris Groves.

- they saw that many things in the church were dead, lifeless, and formal
- they rise up and meet according to the principle of 1 Corinthians 14
- they began to break bread at a brother's home
- John Nelson Darby, a former Anglican minister began to join their meeting and to expound the Bible among them
- Gradually, more and more expositors were raised up among them, such as William Kelly, C.H. Mackintosh, B.W. Newton, and J.G. Bellett.
 - see the error of denominational organizations
 - realize that there is only one Body of Christ.
 - The church should not be formed by human opinions but should be under the direct leading of the Holy Spirit.
- In God's will,
 - the church should not be under man's control
 - it should be directed only by the Holy Spirit
 - all those who belong to the Lord should learn to be led by the Holy Spirit and should not follow man's direction

These are all truths discovered by the Brethren.

- In addition, the Brethren made many discoveries
 - concerning the millennium,
 - the question of rapture,
 - and the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation.
 - the most prominent expositors of the various types in the Old Testament.
- The commentary on the Pentateuch by C.H. Mackintosh is the authority in its category.
- The evangelist D.L. Moody highly recommended it.
- The Brethren also made a clear separation between the biblical prophecies concerning the Jews and those concerning the church.

➤ During this period, many spiritual brothers were being raised up in England.

- Charles Stanley
- George Cutting, wrote a little book called Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment.
 - It tells people that they can have the assurance of salvation.
- Robert Govett who saw the matter of Christian reward.
 - He discovered that while it is true that a man is saved by faith, he is rewarded according to his works before God.
 - Salvation is a matter of life, while reward is a matter of living.
 - the possibility that Christians will be excluded from the millennium, therefore, a believer must be faithful and diligent.
 - he taught that not all believers will be raptured before the tribulation. Only those overcoming and faithful believers will participate in this rapture.
- G.H. Pember, expositor, he wrote many commentaries.
- D.M. Panton

- **Hudson Taylor**, wrote a book **Union and Communion**, which speaks of some profound **experiences in Christ**.
- **George Müller** in England. He learned many excellent lessons
 - concerning **prayer**
 - concerning **faith in God's word**
 - he taught that man should **claim God's promises** through prayer,
 - he testified of his **way of living by faith in relation to financial needs**

➤ In the **United States** there was the **Christian and Missionary Alliance**.

- The prominent ones among them were **A.B. Simpson**,
 - emphasized that it was **not** the healing **but** the **resurrection life** that overcame the weaknesses of the flesh
 - he taught that one can triumph over sickness through knowing **Christ** as the **power** and the **Deliverer**
- **A.J. Gordon**, and others.
 - They saw that believers should return to the experience of the apostolic age when men **lived by faith**.
 - discovered the truth concerning **divine healing** and began to experience it.
- About sixty years ago, God gained a porcelain merchant by the name of **Robert Pearsall Smith**.
 - He saw that **sanctification comes through consecration**.
 - This kind of sanctification is quite different from the sanctification that Wesley spoke of. Smith's kind of **sanctification** came **through consecration and faith**.
 - The sanctification that Wesley preached was a life that one gradually attains to after consecration. Actually, both teachings are of the truth.
- After the line of Smith, there was **Mrs. Hannah Whitall Smith**
 - wrote the book **The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life**
- There were also others like **Stocknell** (?), **Evan Hopkins**, and **Andrew Murray**.
 - They continued the **line of truth concerning self-denial** preached by ones like Madame Guyon two hundred years earlier in the Catholic Church.
 - These believers began to conduct conferences in Germany, England, and other places - the beginning of what we know today as the **Keswick Convention**.
- In addition to Hopkins, there was **H.C. Trumbull**
 - released the truth on the **overcoming life** at the Keswick Convention
 - the way for believers to experience this **overcoming life in their living**
- After Hopkins, God gained another sister, **Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis**.
 - This sister was very weak physically during the early stages of her life.
 - She was **always bedridden**, she was raised up by the Lord to preach the **truth of the cross**.
- Brother **Holden**, an ex-missionary of the **China Inland Mission**,
 - came to know the meaning of the cross was one who truly bore the cross
 - many believers were attracted to pursue the truth concerning the cross
 - led many to realize that the centrality of God's work is the cross.
 - The **cross is the foundation** for all spiritual matters, without the work of the cross, a person will not know what is death and what is sin.

By the end of the nineteenth century, almost all of the truths had been recovered.

THE ADVANCE OF TRUTH IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Two great events occurred in the twentieth century.

1900

- The first was the **Chinese Boxer Rebellion**.
 - During this rebellion many Christians were **martyred**.

1904

- The second event was the **great Welsh Revival**.
 - During this revival many towns saw their whole population saved **to such an extent that there were no more souls to save**.
 - Many phenomena of Pentecost were manifested among them.
 - The leader of this revival was **Evan Roberts**, a **twenty-two-year-old coal miner**.
 - He had not received much education.
 - God called such a one from among the lowly and gave him a partner, **Hastwell** (?).
 - After he was saved, Roberts often prayed earnestly in the coal mines. His only prayer was, "**Lord, bend the church to save the world**."
 - Those around him were both bewildered as well as impressed. Gradually, more people joined him in prayer, and soon the entire mine was affected. Many miners rose up to pray.
 - The revival began to spread to the entire region of southern England.
 - From them we have learned two truths:
 - **first**, the **revival work** of the Holy Spirit is brought in **through** a group of **people who are bent and subdued**.
We do not need to ask God to send us an outward revival.
We only need to ask Him **to subdue us** in a **deeper** and **fresher way**.
Then **life will spontaneously flow out from our being**.
 - **Second**, from this time on, many began to understand the work of the **evil spirits, spiritual warfare** meant.
The experience of Ephesians 6 was not thoroughly apprehended until his time.

1908

- **Mrs. Penn-Lewis**.
 - wrote the book **War on the Saints** which helped many deceived believers **become free**
 - They are truths concerning **spiritual warfare** and the **cross**.
- At the same time that this revival was going on, another new work began in Los Angeles in the **United States**.
 - From **1908** to **1909**, a number of **black believers** on Azusa Street
 - experienced the **baptism of the Holy Spirit**
 - began to **speak in tongues**.

❖ GOD'S WORK TODAY AND THE CUMULATIVE REVELATIONS OF GOD

The different discoveries of God's truths that took place before and during this century.
Now we need to ask:

What is God's work in [China] today?
What kind of work is God doing today?

1920

- Prior to 1920 it was difficult in China even to hear a message on salvation.
- After 1920 many messages were preached concerning salvation, justification, and regeneration.
- From 1926 on, we began to release many messages concerning salvation, the church, and the cross, and we testified much concerning these things.
- By 1927
 - we concentrated our attention on the subjective work of the cross.
 - We saw that concerning the cross,
 - there is not only the truth concerning Christ's death, but there is also the fact of resurrection.
 - we speak of today is resurrection as a principle of life.
 - what the Body of Christ is and where the reality of this Body is.
 - We began to realize that as there is only one life of Christ, there is only one church.
 - truths concerning the meaning of resurrection and the meaning of the church life.
- In spite of this, prior to 1928,
 - we did not mention anything concerning the central matters of God.
- By February of 1928,
 - we began to mention something concerning God's eternal purpose.
 - From that time on, we began to tell people what God's eternal purpose is.
- Despite the above revelations, it was not until 1934
 - that we realized that the centrality of everything related to God is Christ.
 - Christ is God's centrality and God's universality.
 - All of God's plan is related to Christ.
 - This is the truth that God is pleased to reveal to us in these days.
 - God's overcomers
 - are a group of people who take the lead to stand in the place of death on behalf of the whole congregation.
 - Their relationship with the church is that of Zion's relationship with Jerusalem.
- Today we believe that God's ultimate goal is to have Christ as everything.
 - God has only one work today.
 - It is the message of Colossians 1:18 which says that God desires to see Christ have the first place in all things.
 - The basis of everything is the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Christ. Other than Christ, there is no spiritual reality. This is God's "present truth."

❖ SOUNDING OUT A CALL

➤ What are we doing today?

(John 1:23). **Our work** is to sound out the call to God's children

- to return to God's central purpose,
- to take Christ as the center of all things,
- and to take His death, resurrection, and ascension as the basis of everything

This is the message of Colossians 1 and 3.

- we **know** the position of the church in the New Testament
- we **realize** that this position is lofty and spiritual
- we thank God for the help rendered to us from the Western missionaries
- Yet God is showing us today that we should **bring everything back** to God's central purpose.
- **Our work today is to return to the biblical ground of the church.**

- ✚ We should do everything we can to show people that the Lord is the Head over all things.
- ✚ We are here returning to the initial work of the apostles.
- ✚ We have to be careful about everything that we do. **Everything that is of man we must learn to reject, and everything that is of God we must strive to attain.**
- ✚ May God be gracious to us so that we do not become the castaways of the "present truth."
- ✚ May we **be watchful**, and may we **not allow the flesh to come in or the self to gain any ground.** May God's will be accomplished in us.

❖ FOUR RESPONSIBILITIES TODAY

- (1) Concerning the sinners, we have to **preach** the **gospel**.
- (2) Concerning Satan, we have to **realize** there is a **spiritual warfare**.
- (3) Concerning the church, we have to **hold fast what we see** today.
- (4) Concerning Christ, we should **testify** of the fact of **His preeminence** in all things.