

BEING GROUPED TO OVERCOME DEADNESS, LUKEWARMNESS, AND BARRENNESS

- We need to see the way to overcome the three enemies that are against us today
- We need to see that barrenness is a more subtle enemy and the biggest enemy that annuls the proper church life
- We need to realize that being vitally grouped is the way to overcome

We saw that the way to be vitalized is to be stirred up in the first love for the Lord through repenting prayers, to make a thorough confession to the Lord, to have close, intimate, and thorough fellowship with the Lord and with the seeking saints, and to reconsecrate yourself to the Lord. [Now] we want to see three particular enemies that we have today. These enemies are deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness. This is why we feel desperate that we need to look to the Lord for Him to vitalize us. We need to be made living, burning, and fruitful.

These three enemies are mainly against good Christians, the brothers and sisters who are regularly attending the meetings. They are not enemies to worldly Christians, to those who live in their pleasures and entertainment. We may love the Lord and attend the meetings faithfully and regularly, but we have to realize that deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness are our habitual enemies. We may not even consider them as practical and even fatal enemies.

Death is more defiling before God than sin (Rev. 3:1; Lev. 11:24-25; Num. 6:7, 9). Furthermore, lukewarmness is an abominable thing in the eyes of the Lord. The lukewarmness of Laodicea caused the Lord to spew the Laodiceans out of His mouth (Rev. 3:16).

Barrenness is an even more subtle enemy. According to human desire, the meaning of a couple's life is to have children. If we do not bear fruit, beget some spiritual children, there is not much meaning to our church life. Without fruit-bearing, there is no practical church life. Barrenness is the biggest enemy that annuls the proper church life. We may feel that we have been enjoying the Lord every day, but a tree is known by its fruit. The real church life can be evidenced only by fruit-bearing. If we have not borne fruit for three years, for five years, or even for ten years, our enjoyment of Christ should be questioned. Something must be improper or wrong if we are not bearing fruit. If we are not bearing fruit, this is evidence that we have lost our enjoyment of

Christ. In this chapter I want us to realize that every day, day and night, these three enemies are around us: deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness.

In the previous chapter I shared that we need to get some companions, at least two or three, with whom we can labor in the gospel. We should never work by ourselves. Instead, we should work by fellowshipping with our companions. If there is no fellowship among us in our work, there cannot be the real one accord. We need to labor in oneness through thorough fellowship. Because of our unwillingness to have thorough fellowship, we are dead, lukewarm, and barren. We must get some companions and open up ourselves to fellowship with them to the uttermost.

The Deadness of Sardis—to Be Conquered in the Body Life

The first enemy is the deadness of Sardis (Rev. 3:1-2). This enemy is conquered in the Body life (Rom. 12:3-10). If you are not living in the Body, you are through. You cannot conquer deadness.

By Presenting Our Bodies a Living Sacrifice to God

Romans 12:1 says that we need to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God. Our body includes our entire person. Our spirit and our soul are within our body, so if our body is presented to the Lord, our entire being is presented to Him. We may say that we have already offered ourselves to the Lord, but we need to repeat our consecration every day and even many times throughout the day. This may be likened to eating. We cannot say that we do not need to eat today because we ate yesterday. We have to eat three meals a day every day in order to stay healthy. Consecration also is not a once-for-all matter. It should be something continuous, without ceasing. Every day and every moment in everything, we need to stand on the ground of consecration.

By Being Transformed from the Fashion of This Age by the Renewing of Our Mind

We also need to be transformed from the fashion of this age by the renewing of our mind (v. 2). To offer our body to the Lord is to deal with ourselves. To be transformed by the renewing of the mind is to deal with this age, the practical world in front of us. We need to deal with ourselves, and we need to deal with our relationship with and our concept concerning the practical world, which is today's age. We are deadened because we do not present ourselves to the Lord and

because we secretly follow this age. The age in front of us is very subtle. I have seen some of the saints unconsciously become deceived by the age to follow it. Our mind needs to be renewed so that we will not be fashioned according to this age.

The Lukewarmness of Laodicea— to Be Conquered by the Seeking of the Riches of Christ

We also need to conquer the lukewarmness of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-16). We can do this by seeking the riches of Christ (vv. 17-18, 20). We may be enjoying Christ to a certain extent, but we need to enjoy Him in a deeper, higher, broader, and richer way. We should tell the Lord that we want to have new experiences of Him. Some among us may be enjoying Christ in the same way that they did ten years ago. This means that they have become lukewarm and are self-contented.

By Not Being Slothful in Zeal

Romans 12:11a says that we should not be slothful in zeal.

By Being Burning in Spirit, Serving the Lord

Romans 12:11b says that we need to be burning in spirit, serving the Lord. We must seek the riches of Christ continuously. We should not be slothful, but we should be burning in our spirit. Then the lukewarmness will be swallowed up by the burning in our spirit.

The Barrenness of the Degenerating Believers— To Be Conquered in Desperation

This barrenness can be conquered only in desperation. Real desperation is an attitude that something is a matter of life or death.

By Fearing to Be Cut Off from the Enjoyment of Christ's Supply in This Age

We should fear to be cut off from the enjoyment of Christ's supply in this age (John 15:2a). If we are barren, we should not believe that we are continuously enjoying Christ. We may feel that we are, but actually we are not. Our enjoyment of Christ has become stale. We are enjoying Him in the same way that we were years ago with no improvement. The Lord said that if a branch does not bear fruit, the Father will cut it off. We should have some fear regarding this.

By Caring for the Discipline in the Coming Age

Matthew 25:24-30 tells clearly that the lazy, evil servant will be disciplined by the Lord in the coming age by being cast into the outer darkness. We may know this portion of the Word and yet not really have much regard for the discipline in the coming age. John 3:16 is the word of the Lord. Matthew 25:24-30 is also the word of the Lord. If John 3:16 is trustworthy, Matthew 25:24-30 should also be trustworthy. We have to bear fruit. Otherwise, we are running the risk of being cut off from the enjoyment of Christ. Also, Matthew 25 tells us that if we do not make a profit with the Lord's talent, we will be disciplined in the coming age. This is a very serious matter.

We all have to hate deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness. We must seek to be vitalized in desperation, considering this to be a matter of life or death. The practice of the vital groups will not work if we take it lightly. We must fellowship about the matter of barrenness with our companions. Then the Lord may lead us to make a decision to fast once a week. When Brother Watchman Nee was a student, he decided to fast and pray every Saturday for the next day's preaching of the gospel. We may also feel led by the Lord to fast and pray for our fruit-bearing.

We must carry out the practice of the vital groups in desperation. We should pray desperately for the Lord to give us some fruit and remove our barrenness. This should be a matter of life or death with us. If we are desperate, I believe that the fish will come to us. The Lord will send them to us. But if we are indifferent, no fish will come to us. The hardest thing is for us to be made desperate. The most crucial thing for us today is to be desperate to conquer the deadness of Sardis, the lukewarmness of Laodicea, and the barrenness dealt with by the Lord in John 15. (*The Training and the Practice of the Vital Groups*, Ch. 2)

Fellowship Questions:

1. What does it mean that, "these three enemies are mainly against good Christians, the brothers and sisters who are regularly attending the meetings?" What does it mean that, "deadness, lukewarmness, and barrenness are our habitual enemies?"
2. What are the specific ways to overcome each enemy?
3. What does it mean that barrenness is a more subtle enemy and the biggest enemy that annuls the proper church life?