

## ND2-011:Formation of Christ – Experiencing Christ

### Outline:

【Preface】 Because of "the indwelling of Christ," Christ is always with us, and Christ is our life, He is our all in all. "The indwelling of Christ" is not only an objective fact of salvation, but God also wants His children to experience and witness this great salvation subjectively. Paul especially emphasized on the truth of the indwelling Christ in the Book of Galatians. He did his best to help all the saints in Galatia to experience Christ, so that the life of Christ will keep growing, and be formed in their hearts

### A. Paul Suffered birth pains again for the Galatians and for Christ to be formed in them.

- *" I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.... As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:6-7, 9)*
- *" O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain (Galatians 3:1-4)*
- *" My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you (Galatians 4:19)*

### B. The spiritual meaning of "Christ being formed"

Although the Bible does not directly define the "formation of Christ," from the context of Galatians 4:19, it emphasizes "the new life from the indwelling of Christ" needs to grow and mature continuously. It does not stress Jewish legalism, that even after believing in the Lord, you still need to be circumcised, obey the law, or rely on works to be saved.

Romans 8: 28-30 mentioned "to be conformed to the image of His Son," it is the most appropriate explanation of "Christ to be formed." God makes everything work together for good, so that we who have received grace (individual or groups) can experience Christ in all things, gain Christ, grow continuously, be formed in the image of the Son of God, and magnify the beauty of Christ in our hearts, for us to partake in His glory.

Therefore, "Christ to be formed" has two basic spiritual meanings:

#### 1. The life with the indwelling Christ needs to grow and mature continuously

- *"we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love (holding the truth in love – DBY), may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ..."* (Ephesians 4:14-15)
- *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."* (Hebrews 5:12-14)

## 2. Forms us into the image of the Son of God

- *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.<sup>29</sup> For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.<sup>30</sup> Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."* (Romans 8:28-30)
- *"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,<sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,<sup>13</sup> till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ..."* (Ephesians 4:11-13)

## C. By "experiencing Christ," "Christ is formed"

### 1. Truly know that Christ indwelled and became our new life

(Please refer to ND2-010 "The Indwelling of Christ"- Abide in Christ)

- *"...Christ who is our life..."* (Colossians 3:4a) / *"For to me, to live is Christ"* (Philippians 1:21)
- *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."* (Galatians 2:20)
- *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."* (2 Corinthians 4:7)

### 2. Have a strong desire to pursue the growth

- *"as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious."* (1 Peter 2 :2-3)
- *"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."* (Philippians 3:12)

### 3. Beware of all obstructions that hinder the growth of life

- *"Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes."* (Songs of Solomon 2:15)
- *"We should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting."* (Ephesians 4:14)
- *"But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of [g]temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity."* (Luke 8:13-14)

#### 4. In all things, experience and gain Christ

- *"All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."* (Romans 8:28-29)
- *"Grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ"* (Ephesians 4:15b)
- *"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ. Brethren, I do not count myself to have [d]apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* (3:8, 13-14)

#### 5. Growth in the body continuously

- *"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."* (Ephesians 4:11-13)
- *"from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."* (Ephesians 4:16)

## Meditation, Practice, Discussion

### Content Review: Based on the theme verses and content of this lesson, what are some questions you may have?

1. Paul especially emphasized the truth of the indwelling Christ in the Book of Galatians. He helped the saints in Galatia to experience Christ so that the life of Christ will keep growing and be formed in their hearts. Please review the three passages mentioned in this section:

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1. Please describe briefly the two basic spiritual meanings of "Christ being formed."

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1. By "experiencing Christ," to "Christ is formed," what are the five important aspects?

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**☐ Further Reflection: The impact of this lesson on me, the revelation from the Holy Spirit, and additional insights**

1. Why was Paul suffering "labor pains again" for the Galatians? If I understand the spiritual meanings of the "formation of Christ," how would this help me in my pursuing spiritual growth? Would I be better motivated and have more concrete directions? Why so?

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2. For individuals and churches, there are five main aspects in the outline from "experiencing Christ" to fulfilling "Christ being formed." Please consider at which points do you most need to grow by God's grace? Please share with your group members and ask everyone to pray for you.

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**□ The Path to Implementation:**

1. The “indwelling of Christ” is not only an objective fact that God has already accomplished but also can be our experience and testimony subjectively, until “Christ is formed” in our heart. According to the teaching of this lesson, what specific plan do you have to carry out this practice?

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2. In the next two weeks, please focus on the meditating passages listed in the outline each day, and the true knowledge and experience of the formation of Christ. Please record your insights and practice below.

**Week One**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Insights or practice</b>
<b>M</b>	
<b>T</b>	
<b>W</b>	
<b>Th</b>	
<b>F</b>	

**Week Two**

<b>Day</b>	<b>Insights or practice</b>
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<b>M</b>	
<b>T</b>	
<b>W</b>	
<b>Th</b>	
<b>F</b>	

## SERMOM:

Brothers and sisters, peace be to you!

Today is the eleventh lecture of the New Man Discipleship. This is also the second lecture of stage two — "New Life." The "Indwelling of Christ" taught in the previous lecture is the foundation of stage two. Because of "the indwelling of Christ," Christ is always with us, and Christ is our life, He is our all in all. "The indwelling of Christ" is not only an objective fact of salvation, but God also wants His children to experience and witness this great salvation personally. Christianity is definitely not just talk; it is something we can experience in all things. If the Lord opened our eyes and helped us enter into the truth, our daily lives will be in a different state because we can all experience Him through the indwelling Christ so that Christ is formed in our hearts.

Today's topic is "The Formation of Christ," that is, for us to experience Christ in all things, so our lives will grow, form, and mature. Paul especially emphasized the truth of the indwelling Christ in the Book of Galatians. He did his best to help all the saints in Galatia to experience Christ so that the life of Christ will keep growing, and be formed in their hearts. Regardless of whether you are recently saved or have been saved for years, I hope that we will lay a good foundation concerning today's topic so we can have a true relationship with the mighty Christ daily. That will be in a different realm of relationship!

### **A. Paul Suffered birth pains again for the Galatians and for Christ to be formed in them**

Paul is willing to "*labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,*" (Galatians 4:19), for Galatians. Galatians 1: 6-9 says: "*I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.... As we have said before, so*

*now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." In 3: 1-4 also said: " O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?*

Reading these few passages, can you feel a little of Paul's heart as a father? Here, he was expressing his worry for them. He said: "I marvel that you are turning away so soon...are you so foolish?" Don't think that Paul was too harsh, as if he was accusing them. How can he say: "Foolish Galatians!?" Indeed, this is a father's heart! He was not focused on accusing but expressing his anxious heart. Just like in Genesis chapter 3 when God came to find Adam and Eve and said, "Where are you?" You may think it with a harsh tone —"Where did you go?" This judgment is similar to the police catching the thief, that God's wrath will come upon them. If you understand it as a wounded father, a wounded God, who loves His children, who created the Garden of Eden for them, and reminded them again and again, but they still sinned, then you will understand how painful he was in his heart. So, He said: "Where are you?" That is a father's heart, with a totally different feeling! Therefore, Paul accused them of being "foolish Galatians," because Paul was very worried about them, as he said: " *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another.*"

Secondly, it is about how Paul was unwilling to give them up. He said: " *Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain.*" He was not only worried about them, but also unwilling to give them up. How could they be so foolish? How could they be so deceived by the enemy? In fact, this sentiment is not just for Galatians, many Christians today suffer because we make the same mistakes as the Galatians. We confess as a doctrine people are saved not by deeds but justified by faith; however, when we enter the door, we still strive in doing good deeds to feel saved.

Thirdly, not only was Paul worrying for them, but also willing to: " *...labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you.*" (Gal. 4:19). Paul called the Galatians "My little children." This reflected Paul's heart with a father's love, which is undoubtedly expressed in this letter. He really worried about them, loved them, and was anxious for them, and he was willing to suffer the pain of "reproduction" for them again, until Christ was "formed" in their hearts. You can see from the pictures I prepared: A fetus looks very different every few days in the process of forming, becoming mature and getting closer to the appearance of a human being. At first you can't see what he was, but after fifty days, you can see the shape of the baby slowly begin to appear. As it continues to grow, in the end he becomes a very clear fetus. This is called growing into "Formation."

## **B. The spiritual meaning of "Christ being formed"**

Then, what exactly is the spiritual meaning of "Christ being formed?" What does it mean to have Christ formed in our hearts? What does it mean to suffer from laboring in birth again for them? I don't know about you but when I read about this, I was a little confused at first. Isn't the born-again-salvation once for all? Why do we have to be born again? It sounds like the first salvation was not accounted for but had a "miscarriage." Although people might think this way, in Christ, when we are truly born again and saved, God is faithful; even though we may be weak, unbelieving, complaining, or sometimes even deny Him, He would never abandon us. Therefore, if we truly repented, accepted Jesus Christ, and were born again in the Holy Spirit, after Christ has indwelt in us, we do not need to be reborn. Paul was using the expression of "birth pains" again to describe that it is a very costly and painful thing.

Truly, what exactly does it mean by "Christ being formed?" Although the Bible does not directly define the "formation of Christ," by concluding from the context of Galatians 4:19, it emphasizes that "the new life from the indwelling of Christ" needs to grow and mature continuously. It is not stressed as in Jewish legalism, that even after believing in the Lord, you still need to be circumcised, obey the law, or rely on works to be saved. This is the truth that Paul was fighting for. It is not acceptable to Paul, because people are "justified by faith."

However, we must first emphasize that Paul was not asking children of God to deny the law. Let us not be extreme in thinking that all laws are wrong, that churches should not have any requirements for people, and that every church which has requirements are considered "legalists." For example, we often hear people claim, "Why tithe? Why do you have to come and serve? Why can't we stop attending meetings?... Those are all legalists!" Therefore, let's not mistake what Paul said in Galatians in order to justify denying the law or God's commands in the Bible. Paul himself also said in 1 Timothy 1: 8: "...*the law is good if one uses it lawfully.*" And "...*the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.*" (Romans 7:12) Therefore, the law is good, and people must use it appropriately.

What Paul was fighting against was "legalism" which emphasized that people cannot rely on faith alone, they must be circumcised and obey the law. He said in Romans 3:20: "...*by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*" The law is like a mirror, which makes us look at ourselves and see that there is no good in me, I need Christ! The law is like a teacher's discipline. The law has its value, because it draws us to Christ, and to confess: "*by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight.... a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.*" (Romans 3:20; 28) God said: "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*" (Matthew 24:35), "...*unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 5:20), "*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*" (John 14:21) Therefore, to live out the requirements and obey the law of God is still the desire of God but we are not saved by this, nor justified by this.

So, how can we live out the law and obey God's commands today? Because Christ is already indwelling in us today, "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*" (Romans 10:4), He is in me and became my life, and also became my source



and ability to live out the law. Otherwise, after we are saved, no one can please God by still relying on living by the law.

Moreover, Romans 8: 28-30 mentioned "to be conformed to the image of His Son," it is the most appropriate explanation of "Christ to be formed". God makes everything work together for good, so that we who have received grace (individual or groups) can experience Christ in all things, gain Christ, grow continuously, be formed in the image of the Son of God, and magnify the beauty of Christ In our hearts, for us to partake in His glory.

Yesterday, I received a little joke sent by a college classmate: a little girl asked her grandma: "What is the difference between "growth" and "maturity?" Grandma told her, "What you didn't know before, now you know, this is called 'growth.'" She asked again, "So what is 'maturity?'" Grandma said, "You know it but you deliberately pretend not to know it. This is called "maturity." Of course. It was a negative sarcastic dialog; it was just a joke. Actually, a person pretending to know but not knowing is called "immaturity" or "fake." But when not knowing before but knew it, I learned that is "growth." For example, I have never understood what is "the indwelling of Christ." Now I know this great truth, and I also know that it is the foundation of our salvation and thanking God! This is called "growth." Then, as I became more and more aware, I confessed to the Lord that "*...he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.*" (1 Corinthians 8:2), and I deeply feel that my knowledge and experience of the truth of the indwelling Christ is too shallow, this is called "maturity." The more mature a person is, the humbler the person will be. Today, many people like to talk big when they only know superficially, or even criticize others. This reflects their shallowness and immaturity. The more a person knows the truth, and the richer his life, the humbler he would be before the Lord; and he will often admit that "*... he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.*" That's why Paul prayed for us, asking God "*...may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.*" (Ephesians 1:17) Because of what we should know, we really don't know. This kind of prayer is a mature prayer!

Therefore, "Christ to be formed" has two basic spiritual meanings:

### **1. The life with the indwelling Christ needs to grow and mature continuously**

Ephesians 4:14-15: "*we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love (holding the truth in love – DBY), may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ...*"

When a life is growing, it will definitely not stay childish. Although we need to turn back to being child-like, we don't want to be childish. "Childish" and "Child-like" are completely different things. When my life is truly growing, I will "*... no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.*"

When I went to China in 1996, someone told us a few heretics that were popular in China at that time. When I heard of "Eastern Lightning," I was really ignorant then, and I sneered and said, "How can this teaching become a popular cult? How can the children of God believe in such teaching? The Bible can disprove it with many proofs showing their faultiness." To our surprise, none would expect that every year when we went in, we heard

not minor but terrible major bad news. The rapid spread of Eastern Lightning in China was unexpected by many people. Many places were originally called the "Jesus Village," but now the whole village was overtaken by the cult. The preacher and the leader were all misled. Their arguments were drawn from the Bible, and if you are not familiar with the Bible, you can easily be deceived by them; they take things out of context, far-fetched theories, and even use force, temptation, money, and sex to draw people in. Brothers and sisters, if we are immature, we will be easily deceived by these heretical beliefs. Maybe we look mature on the outside, maybe we have believed in the Lord for a long time, maybe we are preachers and elders, but our lives may still be very childish, and can be easily disturbed and deceived by heretics and wrong teachings. All these show that we are immature.

About 30 years ago, something happened in Liverpool, England, that shocked the entire United Kingdom. A mother took her child to a department store. She turned around to pick up some things, then found that her child was missing. She looked everywhere and asked the security guard, but she couldn't find him. Two days later, the child's body was found laid beside the railroad tracks. Afterwards, they discovered from the surveillance camera that it turned out to be two young boys under the age of ten. They tricked this child, who was probably only three or four years old, with goodies, and led him out. Then these two boys, imitating the violence they saw on TV, beat the kid to death by the railroad tracks. This news caused great concern in Britain at the time. People could not believe or accept such a terrible thing could happen! Today there is actually a lot of media of this kind, the brainwashing of the Internet, the influence on the children, the heroism in the movie, the violent scenes...all enter the hearts of children. It is the same way in the spiritual realm. Too many heresies and too many wrong teachings will attract lots of people. Therefore, when Paul wrote to Timothy, he instructed Timothy: "*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season...For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers.*" (2 Timothy 4:2-3) There are so many teachers on the Internet. You can find them, and no one will be there to protect you. Therefore, we should not only care for our own pursuit and growth, or care about our influence on others, but also watch out for who might have influenced us! It is our own responsibility and decision to understand what influences us. No one is forcing you. You must grow and be mature in the truth and in your life, otherwise, it is too dangerous.

Paul said: "*speaking the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15a). The focus is not merely on speaking the truth. We think that speaking the truth means telling our true opinion. For example, "Oh, look at your hair, it's permed like a bird's nest, it's ugly!" This is not what the Bible says "Speak the truth in love." I really like Brother John Darby's translation. He said: "holding the truth in love." We are holding the truth in love. then "*grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ*" (Ephesians 4:15). In other words, we should grow in all circumstances. It's not only growing in retreats, not only growing in particular things. Paul means: "grow up in all things into Christ." He is referring to "everything single thing."

This is a very, very important thing. How can we grow up in all things? During our annual retreat, we always emphasize three important meanings of the retreat, the second of which is the annual "spiritual checkpoint." Year after year, time passed quickly, more than 10 years had passed since we reminded everyone of these three things. It's too slow to check on spiritual life only once a year! Of course, We can still consider retreat as a large-scale,

detailed and thorough checkpoint. But Paul said: "Grow up in all things" (Ephesians 4:15), so it is every day that you should check whether you are really growing. This is a very big challenge.

I often encourage young brothers and sisters to form a good habit, which is to take a few minutes before bedtime every night, walking through the day before the Lord from morning to night. Let's start with the passive points: In what place was I not living like Christ? In all my encounters, was Christ in it? Then, on the positive side: Where did I really experience Christ and gain Christ? In what encounters did I really go through in Christ today? Do I really feel that I have gained Christ? Even if we experience failures, mistakes, or being disciplined, when we really go through them in Christ, these will help us grow and it will become our blessings.

I talked about this old brother before. He used to be the second richest person in his hometown. He has several stores; this was at least 70 or 80 years ago. One of his happiest moments every night was to collect all the earnings from each store, and sit on the bed with the door closed and count the bills. This was his happiest thing. He counted his money every day, enjoyed the fruits of his hard work. Later, after he accepted Jesus, his way of counting money was different. In the past, every dollar belonged to him; after believing in the Lord, as he counted half way through, sometimes the Lord said, "Stop, don't count anymore. What you just counted is yours, and the rest is mine." It is really not an easy thing for a person who loves money so much. If it were us, our blood pressure would shoot up high every time we count. We would say to God: "God, speak slowly." However, when God said, "These are enough, the rest is mine," this brother obeyed. Sometimes, God said, "You don't need to count today, it's all mine." He still obeyed. This is a great victory! Of course, I am not focusing on this, but what I mean is, do we have his mentality: Counting every night, how much did I gain Christ today? How did I experience Christ today? How much did I grow today? Did my life change? How has my relationship with God changed? Was my vision changed so that I see things differently? What I cared about before, what I counted on my gain, and what I can't let go, I stand before the Lord today, and the Lord has helped me grow... These should all be what we care about daily.

Hebrews 5:12-14 says: *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."* The author uses "though", it is similar to Paul's "I marvel". These spiritual predecessors often were surprised by the people of the generation they served: They are so surprised; how could you throw away such a good gospel and follow those false teachings? Paul often said "Don't you know" in his messages, that is to say: You should've known this, but you don't! The author of Hebrews also said the same thing here, who knows that today you are still "the ones who must need milk and not solid food."

Both of the above two passages say that we need to grow up and mature. Whether it is Paul or the author of Hebrews, they are all emphasizing one thing in common, that is: a mature person must have spiritual discernment. Of course, there are many manifestations of maturity, but both of these two passages mentioned one thing in common: When you are

immature, it manifests in you not knowing what is right and wrong? What is truth and what is heretical belief?

## **2. Formed us into the image of the Son of God**

**First of all**, what is emphasized here is that through "*all things work together for good*", God works on his children, each individually. This principle applies to each one of us. Although our encounters are different, God allows this encounter to happen to you, or allows that encounter to happen to me, with the same purpose and principle, which is to "form us into the image of the Son of God." God's work is unique and specific to each person. Therefore, we must not envy others; we must cherish and bravely embrace the situation God has set for us. In each situation wherever we are, we all come to experience Christ, receive Christ, and be overcomers. This is what we must do. "*He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*" (Romans 8:29) We learn to be disciples in Christ's school, our teacher is the trinity God, God himself teaches us and no other god is with us; Christ calls us to be His disciples; the Holy Spirit (Lord's anointing) teaches us in all things. Our teacher is the Lord of the universe, the trinity God. Our curriculums are our daily lives. All is working together for good. Whether we like the environment or not, whether we think it is a major or trivial matter, in the eyes of God, everything is His teaching material.

When my son was little, he went to Chinese school, came home, and recited his lesson to us in his ABC's Mandarin: "Nature is our best textbook..." Indeed, our daily environment is our best textbook. God uses these teaching materials to teach us personally, help us to soar, help us to grow to maturity!

Secondly, With the help of the body of Christ, the whole body must grow up and mature together. Ephesians 4:11-13: "*He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;*" Here it talks about becoming the image of the Son of God. On one hand, in all of our personal encounters, I was shaped by God to make me grow up toward maturity; on the other hand, it talks about the group concept. God not only wants us to grow up and mature individually, but the church must also grow up and mature; the entire church must become full of Christ's stature. God put us in the house of God, and let us be partners to help each other; we support and serve each other to grow. We support each other and grow together. As we live in the body, this is the most important thing!

## **C. By "experiencing Christ", "Christ is formed"**

I'll use five different angles to explain this, which are for us to practice. Not only should we know that Christ is indwelling in us, we should also know that God is working in us continuously, to form us into the image of the Son of God, until one day Christ will lead all his sons into glory. Therefore, how can we experience Christ to fulfill that "Christ is formed in us"? Each of the following five aspects is very important.

### **1. Truly know that Christ indwelled and became our new life**

(Please refer to ND2-010 "The Indwelling of Christ"- Abide in Christ)

Without "the indwelling of Christ," there can be no "formation of Christ." Because of the indwelling of Christ and because Christ became our lives, Paul was able to say: "*For to me, to live is Christ*" (Philippians 1:21), "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*" (Gal. 2:20).

I believe everyone should be overjoyed when they read these scriptures. Because the more we know of our own corruption and the beauty of Christ, the more we realize how precious the treasure we have! Christ lives in me, and his magnificent life has become my life, which we can experience daily. How can we still be downcast, weak or depressed? "2 Corinthians 4: 8-9 says: "*We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.*" Here Paul uses four "but not" to tell us: When we are in Christ, this great life can turn around all of our situations — things should be this way, but it turns out the other way. This is called "the indwelling of Christ." We must really know it; we must also be reminded and enter into the truth, led by the Holy Spirit. This is a truth that we should never ignore, but emphasize again and again. Once I was so weak that I couldn't even pray and didn't want to serve anymore. While driving, the Holy Spirit reminded me to "praise the indwelling of Christ." When I started praising, I immediately experienced a completely different realm! God is real, and the indwelling life of Christ is also real, it can be experienced, and should be experienced daily.

## **2. Have a strong desire to pursue the growth**

If you were scoring your desire to grow spiritually, how would you rate yourself? If we ourselves don't have the desire to grow, or not have a strong desire to grow, we will not grow, and may be washed away, be compromised, or settled easily. I hope that God will put this strong desire in our hearts today. Peter advises the saints: "*as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow...*" (1 Peter 2 :2) Everyone who has raised a child knows that if the baby is hungry, then there's no rest or peace. Imagine this: If a three-month-old baby did not eat for three days, then the parents couldn't sleep or do anything for three days, because the baby would cry until you gave in and met his needs! He expressed his needs to you by crying. If you don't come, he will cry loudly; if you are still not coming, he will cry louder. He will fully express his inner need. In fact, God is eager to see that we have such a desire and expression for Him.

David said: "*My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times.*" (Psalm 119:20). We fall short greatly from David. May God help us! Peter said: "*if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*" (1 Peter 2:3) After reading these, we know we are far from the strong inner desires. May we taste more of the Lord's grace. If we really taste it, we will definitely cherish it, because it is not just a little bit, but it is more and more. Don't stay in the blessings that God has given us in the past, but let our thirst continue to deepen, grace upon grace, strength upon strength, more and more.

Philippians 3:12, Paul said: "*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.*" Or translate it as "What I have laid hold of." How much did Paul attain? The revelation of the third heaven, every good and perfect gift, the eloquence of preaching, the uncompromising

missions...He is so good in all aspects. I believe that he had attained that surpassed all the saints in the past, few can compare with him. But he said, " *Not that I have already attained.*" Because he knew that what God wanted to give him was far more than what he had already gained. Just as Augustine when he was on the seashore, facing the vast ocean, he felt that what he had attained and understood were just like a few drops of the seawater in a clam shell. God is too great that we cannot have a complete knowledge and experience of Him in our lifetime. Brothers and sisters, therefore, Paul is saying that I have only one thing, which is to "press on in pursuit."

Once, Socrates pressed a young man into the water, and he was unable to breathe. The young man struggled to free himself. When he got up, he asked Socrates, "Why are you doing this to me?" Socrates replied, "Didn't you ask me, how can you be wise? If you pursue wisdom, like you were in the water pursuing to breathe, you should already be a wise man today!"

What Paul said here, "press on", in the original text is "Use all your strength." Paul hopes that we can all pursue Christ with all our strength. May God help us! I hope that after the meeting today, we will be able to increase our rating on our spiritual growth. At least we will want to know more about the Lord and experience Him first-hand. Our faith is definitely not just talk, not being helpless, or being lukewarm, or just looking and hoping dreamingly; it is through each moment in each day, that we can experience and attain Christ. Through this serious practice, our lives can grow, form, and mature.

### **3. Beware of all obstructions that hinder the growth of life**

In Isaiah chapter 13, when describing the Messiah, it says: "He... *as a root out of dry ground...*" (Isaiah 53:2). On one hand, it describes that he has no comeliness or beauty, like a root from dry land; on the other hand, it is also expressing that he has overcome all the obstructions that hinder his growth. "Dry land" is full of death, threatening, and preventing growth. Although in an extremely dry situation, He emerges from the ground, as if the roots were in dry land. Although the Lord Jesus did not have a comeliness appearance on the earth, He overcame all the obstacles brought to Him by the enemies, and magnified the beauty of God on the earth.

The Book of Songs of Solomon (Song of Songs, the name in NKJV vs NIV) 2:15 says: "*Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes.*"

Brothers and sisters, if we talk about ferocious, roaring lions or cunning, mature foxes, we will all be afraid and on guard to avoid them. But the little fox seems like a puppy, and is so cute that some people may even want to take it as a pet (ppt slides: comparison of two pictures). However, the author of "Song of Songs" warned us to "catch the little fox that spoils the vines", "because our vines have tender grapes." When the grapes were in blossom, these little foxes ran around in the garden and destroyed all the flowers, making it impossible to harvest the fruit in the future.

We will make mistakes and sins, and some of the mistakes and sins have irreversible consequences. Just like a vine, if all the flowers were lost, no matter how you water and fertilize it, it will not bear fruit anymore. It has been destroyed completely. Today we must be careful in front of the Lord. The big lion and the big fox, we may be on guard, but the little

fox is often unwatched and we might even like it. We must not underestimate the harm that these little foxes may bring. So, what are our "little foxes"? Be sure to know and capture your little foxes! For example: it may be our iPhone. Mobile phones can be a good tool, work for us, and even a tool for us to spread and battle for the gospel. We use it to search for information, to be able to read the Bible... It can help us to do many good things. However, it may also become our little fox, destroyed the blooming we have: wasting so much time looking at so many things that shouldn't be looked at, that left us with no time to adore the pure spiritual milk; Our spiritual appetite was destroyed by these junk foods, so we can't grow... we don't even want to listen to the sermon, or don't want to come to church. Therefore, we must be careful!

Ephesians 4 says: "*we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.*" (Ephesians 4 :14), we have to learn to guard our garden. Isaiah" 27:3 says: "*I, the Lord, keep it, I water it every moment; Lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day.*" God treats his garden, his house, and his people in the way that He "waters it every moment, and keeps it day and night so that no one is harmed." I don't know how we are treating our lives, our hearts and minds, our thoughts, our spiritual growth before the Lord... are we also watering and watching it day and night? We must protect it so that it can continue to grow, and prevent anything that would destroy the growth.

Matthew chapter 13, Mark chapter 4, and Luke chapter 8, all talk about the parable of the Sower, which listed four different attitudes toward God's Word. Christians fall into two of them easily. One is the "stony ground." The Bible tells us that it reveals that its life is shallow and has no roots. The Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Mark say: "*when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away*" (Matt. 13:6, Mark 4:6) The Gospel of Luke says that "*as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture.*" (Luke 8:6). All this talks about our lives and our attitudes toward the words of God are shallow and not deep enough. It can sprout quickly; people may kneel before the Lord, cry and say, "Lord, I am completely dedicated to You, and I love You with all my heart!" However, as soon as he returned home, when he was persecuted, he fell "immediately." "Sun" is necessary for plants to grow. It allows plants to have photosynthesis and grow healthily. Similarly, because all things work together for good, clearly, when the environment should be beneficial for us, but because we had no roots, our lives lacked moisture, we cannot grow normally. All these "sun" encounters made us dry and fruitless instead.

The other downfall is "thorns." Luke 8 says: "*Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.*" (Luke 8:14) I think many good Christians fall into this situation. Our lives were not without growth or fruits, but they "cannot bring fruit to maturity." There is no crop to be put into the barn and to be used by God. There was no blessing to others, God and man cannot be blessed or enjoy the crop. What a pity!

These are hindrances that prevent us from growing. We have stones in us, it cannot take roots in us. We have places in us that are disobedience to God, like stones, so it cannot take roots. Moreover, we may not be willing to spend time devotedly, so life lacks of moisture, any situation may cause us to deny our devotions we had yesterday. Same truth about thorns is that it choke us, so we were unable to yield crop. In today's generation, for

you who are willing to sit quietly and listen to these sermons, I thank God for you! There are many people who don't want to listen at all. They are too busy, too stressful, need to relax and enjoy life... they need this and that, which had become the "thorns" for them, they *"are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life."* (Luke 8:14); And Mark 4:19 says that these thorns are *" the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things,"* they choked the word, and become unfruitful, or bring no fruit to maturity. When others see us, they may still praise us, because at least we have grown seeds. Unlike those that were devoured by birds, or unlike those that were withered away, we not only grow up, but also bear fruit, but we can't bring the fruit to maturity. What a pity! Brothers and sisters, these words are very real. Don't stop willingly in growing, we must grow, and we must remove all the obstructions that can hinder our growth!

Jeremiah 4:3: *" For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns."* On one hand, this is God's calling, but it is also God's warning. This sentence includes the two scenarios. Break up your fallow ground, don't let it be shallow and rocky, don't let it be always dry, hard ground, not loosened and not watered; at the same time, don't sow in thorns, don't spend our time, spirit, and strength in the thorns and be wasted.

#### **4. In all things, experience and gain Christ**

*"All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."* (Romans 8:28) In other words, in all our experiences, we must have "the Lord's ending." Regarding this good, we have already made it very clear, it is for our lives to be changed, to become more like Jesus; the relationship with God will also change so that we can "be closer to the Lord and love the Lord deeper." If this encounter did not allow me to experience Christ, did not allow me to gain Christ, and did not make my relationship with the Lord deeper and closer, that means we are not reaching the ending that the Lord has intended for me. We should not be settled, or not accept suffering in vain. One may ask: Why is this person against me? Why did this person wrong me? Why is my boss been unfair to me lately? Why is my health failing lately? ...Brothers and sisters, if we are always asking why, we would never grow. We should ask the Lord: "Lord, what do you want me to learn? How do you want me to experience you in this matter? Lord, what is your will?" In all circumstances, we can all come to experience Christ and gain Christ. Just like the example of the brother who was counting his money I mentioned earlier, you should come to the Lord seriously every night and count your spiritual gains each day.

Here Paul tells us: *"grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ "* (Ephesians 4:15) In other words, we can experience this in everything. Therefore, Paul:

a. Have the wisest choice—*"for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord "*

*" Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ."* (Philippians 3:8)

b. Have the most dedicated pursuit—"Only one thing I do..."



" Brethren, I do not count myself to have [d]apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14)

Our time, money, power, feelings...all of which are limited, and how we use these limited resources are based on our priority, and our priority is based on our value system. These three are closely linked: how I use my resources is based on my priority; how I arrange my priority is based on my value system. If I think my family is the most important thing, more than my friends, more than watching TV, I will be willing to spend more time with my family. It all depends on our decision.

Paul made the wisest choice, and he made the most specific pursuit: everything is for growing, for experiencing Christ, and everything is to gain Christ. I have given an example before: if we use two ways to deposit money, the first way is to deposit one cent on the first day; double it on the second day for two cents; and double it on the third day to deposit 4 cents; double the deposit for 8 cents on the fourth day..., doubling the deposit each day for 31 days. The second method is to deposit every other day, deposit 1 cent on the first day, not deposit on the second day, deposit 2 cents on the third day, not deposit on the fourth day, and deposit 4 cents on the fifth day...so double the deposit every other day for 31 days. The second method can save about three hundred and twenty dollars; but the first method can save up to 10 million, which is a world of difference! The point of this example is to remind us: if we do it earnestly and focus, the results will be very different.

Paul said, "One thing I do..." (Philippians 3:13) Look at how many things we have? The Lord Jesus said: "*But one thing is needed*" (Luke 10:42a). To you, everything can't be missed: can't miss breakfast, can't miss bath, exercise, and family time, TV time, work hours... almost nothing can be skipped, except daily devotion, or come to God, that can be skipped or forgotten. No wonder we have problems in our lives, no wonder we stumble easily, no wonder we are overwhelmed by heresies, no wonder Christ cannot be formed in us...

Therefore, every day, everything is to experience Christ, go through each with Christ, enjoy His presence, enjoy Him, He is all to me, and let me gain Christ at the end. This is really a great gospel, a joyful thing, and the most valuable life. We really should thank God in all things! What a big difference between this kind of life and the kind of life that only grows in our annual Labor Day Conference (LDC), great differences between the two!

## **5. Growth in the body continuously**

Ephesians 4 talks about God has giving various gifts to the church and to the saints: "*for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*" (Ephesians 4:12-13) The church must never stop growing, not quantitatively, nor qualitatively; because the church needs to grow, and it needs to be full of the stature of Christ. Eph. 4:16 says: "*from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*" This once again let us see the importance of spiritual partners.

There were thousands or tens of thousands of years of human history, there are so many different countries, there are so many populations in the world, why does God choose for us to be born into this generation? Why did God make us Chinese? Why did God bring us all to California, all came to Silicon Valley, all into the same church? Definitely, there is God's sovereignty behind this. God put us together, and we have a responsibility to be each other's blessings. I often quote the words of a pastor in Thailand: "We are not perfect, but we are sincere." We are indeed not perfect, no one can stand under close look. However, if someone criticizes all the time in the church, we should stay away from such a person, because he doesn't know himself at all. Who can stand to be looked at closely in a fish bowl? I too am corrupted, have many problems, have many defects, and have unacceptable personalities to you...you probably don't like my looks, my preaching, my voice, and my personality.... We can all list a lot of reasons why we don't like others. However, although we are not perfect, we all treat each other sincerely, and we are all to be real. This is the church. We all need spiritual partners to support each other and help us grow together.

Half Moon Bay holds a pumpkin contest on Halloween every year. The first competition was held more than 30 years ago, the first prize pumpkin was 135 pounds; then around the year 2000, the pumpkin champion reached more than 900 pounds. This is really a big jump! But in 2016, the first prize was from Belgium, and it weighed more than 2,600 pounds, nearly 1,200 kilograms! This example tells us that there are always a huge room and potential to grow!

I often say, "The leader determines the height of the church's growth, and the partner determines the speed of our growth." On one hand, we thank God, Christ is our head and our leader. There is no limit for our growth upwardly. We can always grow, and it never ends. However, we must also be reminded: As a leader of God's house, you must never stop growing. Because once we stop growing, we definitely will encounter times when we are defeated by the enemy in our ministry, we will encounter the time when we cannot be the blessing of God's house; and these may eventually become the cause of our dryness and burnout. Moreover, when church leaders stop growing, this will also become a bottleneck of church growth, because "the quality of leaders determines the measure of blessing in the house of God, and the measure of how usable by God." We are placed in his house by God, and we must serve God. We should pray for the leaders of the family that they will take the lead to grow in the presence of the Lord, and they must not stop growing; their growth must be true and obvious, so that the entire family of God can grow well in the presence of the Lord! Similarly, partners are also very important. We are all partners in Christ today, we are each other's blessing, and will impact the speed of each other's growth. Thank God for putting us together and letting us be here. Christ is the center, who is our life and who lives in us. In Christ, we must experience Him more and gain Him. Let Christ be formed in our hearts, so that we can be mature, and make us a blessing to others!

#### **PRAYERS:**

Lord Jesus, we thank you again, all salvation comes from you. Lord, we often neglect that we have received such a great salvation. Pray for the Holy Spirit to enlighten us and help us, let us not only understand, not only merely know, but also let us experience this great Christ indwelling life, first-hand and truthfully. So that Christ can grow in us and mature in us. Let us not take each day lightly. Any situation, any encounters, every big and small thing,

likes or dislikes, all have your good purposes, and the good endings you have intended for us, so that we can experience Christ through all these, and be formed into the image of sons of God. Lord. Thank you for the great truth, thank you that we can partake in this; such a great blessing and we live in it. Help each one of us, help the whole church, to stand up and have Christ been formed in us. Pray and thank in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, amen!