

## Messages for Building up New Believers

### Chapter Eight\_Abolishing All Distinctions

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3: 27-28; Col. 3:10-11

*“We are all brothers and sisters. In Christ we are a new man. We are fellow members in the Body. In the church we have annulled all distinctions outside of Christ. Everyone stands on a new ground. Everyone is in the one new man that the Lord has established and in the one Body which the Lord has created. We must see that all of God’s children are one. We cannot look upon anyone with a special frame of mind. We must thoroughly eradicate denominationalism and sectarianism from our heart. If we do this, we will have taken another step forward.”*

#### **I. There should be no distinctions among believers who have become one in Christ**

- A. *For also in one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body, **whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free.** – 1 Cor 12:13*
- B. *For as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **There cannot be Jew nor Greek, there cannot be slave nor free man, there cannot be male and female;** for you are all one in Christ Jesus. – Gal 3:27-28*
- C. *And have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where **there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman,** but Christ is all and in all.*

#### **II. These verses indicate five different categories of things, which need to be abolished once we are in the church.**

- A. The annulling of nationality/ethnicity – There cannot be Jew nor Greek
- B. The annulling of class distinction – There cannot be slaves nor free
- C. The annulling of distinction of gender – There cannot be male nor female
- D. The annulling of cultural distinction – There cannot be barbarian nor Scythian
- E. The annulling of marks of piety in the flesh – There cannot be circumcision nor uncircumcision

#### **III. We must see that we have all been made one in Christ. Our past distinctions no longer exist among us when we are in the Lord.**

**Note:** This outline is mainly taken from *Chapter Eight, Messages for Building Up New Believers, Watchman Nee.*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ABOLISHING ALL DISTINCTIONS

**Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27-28; Col. 3:10-11**

#### I. BELIEVERS BEING ONE IN CHRIST

After a new believer has received the laying on of hands, has come into the church, and has come under the headship of Christ, he has to see the oneness of believers in the Body of Christ. In other words, he has to realize the abolishment of all distinctions. This means that there should be no distinctions among believers who have become one in Christ.

First Corinthians 12:13 says, “For also in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free.” The word *whether* signifies the removal of distinctions. There are no worldly distinctions in the Body of Christ. Verse 13 continues, “And were all given to drink one Spirit.” We were all baptized in one Spirit into one Body and were all given to drink one Spirit.

Galatians 3:27-28 says, “For as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There cannot be Jew nor Greek, there cannot be slave nor free man, there cannot be male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Here it says that in Christ we all are one. We are those who have put on Christ. The words *put on* are just one word in the original text. It does not mean “wearing” as much as it does “covering up.” We were all baptized into Christ and have all put on Christ. There cannot be Jew nor Greek, slave nor free man, male and female, for in Christ we all have become one. This means that our oneness in Christ has abolished all of our former distinctions.

Colossians 3:10-11 says, “And have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.” This passage also says that there are no more distinctions among believers. Galatians 3:28 says, “There cannot be,” and this verse also says, “There cannot be.” There cannot be distinctions because we have put on the new man. We have received and been incorporated into the new man, which was created according to the image of God. In this image there cannot be Greeks or Jews, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian or Scythian, slave or free man, for Christ is all and in all. Therefore, all the believers are one; they have become a single entity.

From these three portions of the Scripture, we see that all believers are one in Christ, and all of their distinctions have been abolished. This is the basis upon which the church is built. If we bring all our earthly distinctions into the church and into the Lord, we will corrupt the church and spoil the relationships among the brothers and sisters.

We must see that we have all been made one in Christ. Our past distinctions no longer exist among us when we are in the Lord. There are no distinctions in the new man and in the Body of Christ. At least five distinctions are spoken of in the verses above. We see five contrasting pairs, but actually there are six differences. First, there is the difference between Greek and Jew. Then there is the difference between free man and slave. Following this there are differences between male and female, barbarians and Scythians, and circumcision and uncircumcision. According to the apostle Paul, no matter what differences there are among men, we all have been made one in Christ.

In this world, the most important thing to a person is his position, that is, his status. If I am a certain kind of person, I have to live up to my position or my status. But if we are to be Christians at all, these considerations must go. If we bring our personal status and position into the new man, we will make the new man old because these distinctions belong to the old man. Therefore, when we come to the church, we must give up all these things.

## **II. THE ANNULING OF NATIONALITY**

### **A. There Being No Distinction between Jews and Greeks**

In the world the greatest distinction is based on nationality. The Jews and the Greeks are two very distinctive races. The Jews are very nationalistic. They are the descendants of Abraham, the chosen people of God; they are the only nation established by God on earth. They are separated from other nations and are a peculiar people unto God. But instead of humbling themselves before God and exalting Him, they are proud and boast of themselves before other races. Their pride carries their nationalism to an extreme degree. They despise all Gentile nations. In their eyes the Gentiles are animals, dogs. They do not recognize the Gentiles in any way.

This is why it is rather difficult to put a Gentile next to a Jew and ask them to be fellow Christians. A Jew may believe in the Lord Jesus and call himself a Christian, but it is very difficult to persuade him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. The book of Acts tells us that the gospel was preached first to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. Later, when the gospel reached Samaria, it was the Jews who were saved. In order to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, the Lord had to raise up Paul and charge him with the preaching. Even then, it did not immediately begin in Antioch. Peter had to make a start in Caesarea first. It was quite hard for Peter as an apostle to the Jews to go to the Gentiles. Therefore, he needed to see a vision three times and had to hear the Lord say three times, "Rise up, Peter; slay and eat!" Without this, Peter would never have dared go to the Gentiles. This was the first time the gospel was preached to the Gentiles, and it shows how reluctant the Jews were to preach to the Gentiles.

In Acts 15 a problem arose in the matter of circumcision and the keeping of the law. Some advocated that the Gentile believers needed to be circumcised and keep the law. They were, in effect, saying that in order for a Gentile to be a Christian, he had to be a Jew first. How strong was this nationalistic barrier! The Gentiles had to wait until Acts 15 before they were exempted from circumcision and from keeping the law. Peter and the others told Paul and Barnabas to go freely to the Gentiles and assured them that they would all remain in the same fellowship.

Galatians 2 tells us that Peter went to Antioch and ate with the Gentiles. But when certain people came from James, he shrank back and separated himself, fearing those of the circumcision. Paul openly rebuked Peter for not walking according to the truth of the gospel. The cross had already broken down the middle wall of partition, and there should be neither Jews nor Gentiles.

We may be a Jew or a Gentile. But may the Lord bless us to see that in Christ we all have been made one. Our nationality has been abolished and our national distinctions no longer exist. Whether one is a Chinese believer, an English believer, an Indian believer, or a Japanese believer, he has become a brother or sister in Christ. We cannot separate God's children by nationality. We cannot have Chinese Christianity. If it is Chinese then it is no longer Christ. It is either "Chinese-ity" or "Christian-ity"; there is no such thing as Chinese Christianity. These two terms contradict one another. We are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. There cannot be any national distinctions. This is quite obvious. In the Body of Christ,

in the new man, we are fully one; there are no national distinctions of any kind. Even nationalism as strong as that of the Jews has been annulled by the Lord.

### **B. The Cross Breaking Down the Middle Wall of Partition**

Ephesians tells us about a wall between the Jews and the Gentiles. The two are separated. But the cross has broken down the middle wall of partition. There is no longer any distinction or separation. If we meet someone who is in Christ, we should not say that he is Chinese; he is a person in Christ. We should not say that someone is an Englishman; we should say that he is in Christ. We have all become one in Christ.

Never think of having a Chinese church or a Chinese testimony. This is a great mistake, and the idea should not even cross our mind. Please remember that in Christ, there is no distinction between Greeks and Jews. There is no such thing. If a brother or a sister introduces such a thing among us, it means that he or she is bringing in a foreign element. The result will be corruption within. We do not have any distinction between Jews and Greeks. In Christ we are all joined together. We have to eradicate all nationalistic notions from our heart. The moment we bring such a thing into the church, the church becomes an organization of the flesh and no longer the Body of Christ.

Some people are so strong in their nationalistic feelings that they cannot be Christians in a proper way. Though we are Chinese and under the jurisdiction of our country, this relationship ceases when we are in Christ. Whenever we come before the Lord, we do not come as a Chinese person. Such a consciousness should be kept outside the door. We hope new believers will see from the very beginning that we are linked together in the life of Christ. I have received the life of Christ, and a brother in England or a brother in India or Japan has also received the same life of Christ. We are united according to the life of Christ, not according to our nationalities. We must have a very clear vision about this. In the Body, in Christ, and in the new man, nationality does not exist. That distinction has been totally abolished.

After the First World War, a few brothers from England went to Germany for a conference. During the conference, a brother stood up and introduced the British brothers with the words, "The war is over, and some English brothers are here to visit us. We warmly welcome them." After this introduction, a brother from England stood up and said, "We are not English brothers; we are brothers from England." This is a marvelous word. There are no English brothers; there are only brothers from England. How can there be an English brother, an American brother, a French sister, or an Italian sister in the house of God? Thank God, there are no national distinctions in Christ.

Brothers and sisters, we are all part of the church. We have received the laying on of hands already. Now we must see that all distinctions between Greeks and Jews have been abolished. There are no longer any such distinctions in Christ. This is a glorious fact, a truly glorious truth. In the church there is only Christ. Christ is all and in all. There is nothing besides Christ.

### **III. THE ANNULING OF CLASS DISTINCTIONS**

Another intransigent relationship in human society is class distinctions. We do not experience national distinctions too much unless we meet foreigners. However, we come across the problem of class distinctions daily. The apostle tells us that there is no class distinction between the free man and the slave. In Christ, there is no free man or slave. Such distinctions no longer exist.

Our generation has probably never experienced the sharp class separation which exists between the free man and the slave. However, Paul wrote his Epistles during Roman rule when the practice of slavery was at its zenith. At the time of the Roman Empire, there was a cattle market, a sheep market, and a human market. This can be compared to the textile exchange, the commodity exchange, the stock exchange, and the gold exchange in Shanghai. At that time in Rome, there was a human exchange. The Romans fought many wars and captured many people. They put these captives in the market for sale. If a master felt that the children of a slave were eating too much, he could bring the children to the market and sell them. Such a practice was very common in Rome. Human beings were bought and sold like goods. Profitability was measured by the number of children one produced; those who produced more were sold for a better price. At that time there was a great distinction between the free man and the slave.

Although the idea of democracy came from Rome, and although civil rights, suffrage, and voting began from Rome, these rights belonged to free men only; the slaves had nothing. If one killed a slave, he merely needed to negotiate the monetary worth of the slave with the master and pay accordingly. The slave had no civil rights; he was not considered a human being. Killing a slave was like killing a cow. The most one had to do was pay for the cow; there was no need to pay for the life. Children of slaves were slaves automatically, and they belonged to their master. For their whole life, they had no freedom of their own unless their master chose to release them. If they ran away, they would be crucified.

This kind of class distinction is many times harsher than that between masters and servants, employers and employees, and bosses and subordinates of today. Such distinctions no longer exist anywhere on earth. But long before the world abolished this practice, God's Word already had abolished such class distinctions. In the three Epistles to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Colossians, Paul stated that there was no distinction between the free man and the slave. Such a distinction is abolished in Christ.

In the New Testament the book of Philemon speaks of a slave of Philemon by the name of Onesimus. Philemon was a co-worker of Paul. When Onesimus believed in the Lord, he too became a brother. When they were at home, Onesimus was the slave and Philemon was the master. But if Philemon brought Onesimus to the meeting of the church, one would call Onesimus Philemon's brother, not his slave. In the church, relationships between masters and servants cease. When they knelt down to pray together, Onesimus was Philemon's brother. But when they rose up to do their work, Onesimus was Philemon's slave. In the Lord they were one, in the new man they were one, and in the Body they were one. Please pay attention to this: In Christ the master-slave relationship does not exist, in the new man this relationship does not exist, and in the church this relationship does not exist. In Christ all class distinctions are totally abolished. There is no more class consciousness or class struggle.

Before God we must see that today we may be a servant, a subordinate, or an employee. We should take our stand in the workplace and learn to submit to our superior or master. However, when we come before God, we should not yield to someone just because he is our master or boss. In our discussion over spiritual matters, we should not consider our master or our superior to be always right or his reasoning to be always correct. There is no such thing. Whenever we kneel down to pray or discuss spiritual matters, our status is changed, and there is no class distinction between us. We cannot introduce any class relationship into the church, because such a relationship does not exist in the church.

This fact is especially important when we come to the church meetings. Recall how James condemned such a sin. He said when a rich man comes, he is given a better seat, and when a poor man comes, he is told to stand or be seated at the footstool. James condemned such an act as a sin. Whenever we come to the meeting to fellowship with God's children, we must be

clear that our standing is in Christ, in the new man, and in the Body. Our standing is not based on any class distinction.

Only Christians can break down all class distinctions, and only they can do it thoroughly. Only Christians can hold hands together and greet each other as brothers because only they have love. Only Christians—those who are in Christ—can remove all class distinctions. A young person must realize that as long as he is a believer in Christ, his Christian boss is his brother and his Christian subordinate is also his brother. His Christian master is his brother, and his Christian slave is also his brother. The distinction between the free man and the slave is annulled entirely; this distinction no longer exists. We can only fellowship with our brothers and sisters based on the little that the Lord has given us. We are all brothers and sisters. If we do this, we will be greatly blessed by the Lord, and the church will be filled with the Lord's love.

Several Christians in Chungking once wanted to build a church for the government officials. They came and asked me for my opinion. I said, "What name are you going to give to this church? I think you should name it 'The Church of the Civil Officers.'" If it is a church of officers, surely it is not something in Christ, because there is no such thing in Christ. There is neither free man nor slave in Christ. If a free man wants to be saved, he has to receive the Lord's life. If a slave wants to be saved, he also must receive the Lord's life. There is no difference between the two. We cannot add anything to Christ or subtract anything from Christ. Man cannot build a church for officers, because there is no such thing in Christ. Everyone has to learn to be a brother or a sister.

#### **IV. THE ANNULING OF DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE**

The fourth distinction that has been abolished in Christ is that of gender, that is, the distinction between male and female. In this world the male occupies one role and the female occupies another role. In church administration the male also has his place and the female her place. Within the family the husband has his place and the wife has her place. However, in Christ and in the new man, both the man and the woman have the same stand; there is no distinction between them.

In Christ, the man does not occupy a special place, nor does the woman, because Christ is all and in all. In this respect a man is no different from a woman. Please remember that in spiritual matters there is no distinction between male and female.

We have mentioned that the sisters' place in some areas of service is different from that of the brothers. But this pertains only to the matter of authority. Today, in Christ, there is no difference between the two. A brother is saved through the life of Christ, the life of God's Son. In the same way, a sister is saved through the life of Christ, the life of God's Son. Every case in the Bible where the Chinese version translates "sons and daughters," the original word is *children*. This word does not differentiate between male or female (even though its usage is masculine). I am born a child of God and grow up to be a son of God. A son is male. Yet this description fits both the brothers as well as the sisters.

In the whole New Testament, only 2 Corinthians 6:17-18 speaks of sons and daughters. "Therefore 'come out from their midst...and I will welcome you'; 'and I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to Me.'" After we have believed in God and are delivered and separated from the world and its polluted and unclean influence, God will receive us like a Father, and we will be His sons and His daughters. This is a matter between God and an individual; it is not a matter of what a person is in Christ. This is why it says *sons and daughters*. When a person suffers for God, incurs loss for His sake, and experiences hardship because of Him, God will become a Father to such a one as an individual. If you are

male, God will receive you as a son. If you are female, God will receive you as a daughter. God will receive you as His sons and daughters. He is the all-sufficient Lord. He has everything. This is a matter of what a person is before God. It has nothing to do with what he or she is in Christ. In Christ, we are all God's children, and there is no distinction between male and female. This distinction does not exist at all.

Once I asked a certain craftsman in Shanghai, who was a brother in the Lord, "Brother, how are the brothers in your place doing?" He replied, "Are you asking about the male brothers or the female brothers?" This answer could not have been put better. It is one of the truest words ever spoken. Male brothers are brothers and female brothers are also brothers; there is no distinction in Christ. What this brother said was absolutely correct; he was simply stating the biblical truth. When we come to the Lord and touch Him, we transcend all male and female distinctions. We are beyond gender. Before the Lord and in Christ, there is no distinction between male and female.

## **V. THE ANNULING OF ETHNIC DISTINCTIONS**

In the Bible there is another distinction between Greeks and Jews. The Jews are a very religious race, whereas the Greeks are a race that embraces philosophy and wisdom. Historically, when one speaks of religion, he thinks of the Jews, and when one speaks of philosophy, he thinks of the Greeks. All branches of sciences and philosophy in their primitive form come from the Greeks. Today, all scientific terms have their root in Greek. Hence, the Greeks symbolize wisdom. If one wants to talk about science and philosophy, he has to go to the Greeks. If one wants to talk about religion, he has to go to the Jews. These are distinctions in ethnicity.

People living in various parts of the world often have their own ethnic characteristics. For example, those who grow up in the south are more affectionate, while those who grow up in the north are more reserved. Southerners are generally more easygoing, while Northerners are generally more serious. People living in tropical regions like to dance and sing all day long, while Northerners, especially the northern Europeans, do not like to even jump. Instead they appear reserved and conservative. But the Southerners can be Christians as much as the Northerners can. Jews can be Christians, and Greeks also can be Christians. The wise can be Christians, and the religious can be Christians also.

In Christ, there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. Some people like to reason; they want to explain everything. Other people like to talk about the conscience. Does that mean that these are two different types of Christians? According to the flesh, these two are totally different. One walks by the intellect and the mind. Another walks impulsively by feelings. But in Christ, there is no distinction between the Greeks and the Jews. Not only are national distinctions gone; even ethnic distinctions are gone. A reserved person can be just as good a Christian as a warm person. Those who walk according to the mind can be Christians, and those who walk according to feelings can also be Christians. All kinds of people can be Christians.

Since all kinds of people can be Christians, one must learn to drop ethnic characteristics when he comes into the church. There is no such thing in the church life. Many problems arise in the church today because people bring their ethnic flavor into the church; they try to bring in their own distinctive characteristics. When the non-talkative people meet, they become a non-talkative group. When the talkative people meet, they become a talkative group. When those who are reserved come together, they become a reserved group. When those who are affectionate come together, they become an affectionate group. In this way, many distinctions are built up among God's children.

Please remember that ethnicity does not exist in the church, in Christ, or in the new man. Do not condemn a person just because he has a different temperament than yours. You have to realize that others may not appreciate you that much either. You may feel that you always speak affectionately and wonder why others are so cold. But others may think you are talking too much; they may find your disposition intolerable.

Whether you are quick or quiet, cold or warm, intellectual or sentimental, as soon as you become a brother and enter the church life, you have to drop your disposition. Such things do not belong to the church. As soon as you introduce these natural elements into the church, they become standards for judgment and separation, and brothers will be divided. You will become the standard, and all those who are up to your standard will be considered good Christians, while all those who are not up to your standard will be considered poor Christians. You will become the standard. You will introduce your own nature, character, and temperament into the church. All confusion in the church issues from different human temperaments. Your silence is not necessarily good, nor is your talkativeness. Your reservation is not necessarily good, nor is your warmth. Your strong intellect may not necessarily be good, nor are your intense emotions. All these are distinctions outside of Christ. They are represented by the Greeks and the Jews. None of these natural dispositions can be brought into the church life.

A new believer must learn from the beginning to reject anything that comes from the old man. He should not say, "This is the way I was." Many brothers shamelessly speak this way. We must tell them that we do not want their old person. They should not bring in their old person. That is not something in Christ, and we cannot create distinctions based on that. Such distinctions have to be totally abolished. In Christ, in the Body, and in the new man, these distinctions are totally annulled.

No brother or sister should carry his or her natural disposition into the church. As soon as you are saved, you have to leave these things behind. If you come to the church and contact the brothers and sisters, approving only those who agree with you and are up to your standard and disapproving those who disagree with you or are not up to your standard, you will bring confusion and division into the whole church. Throughout the years, the church has suffered damage through differences in dispositions. Never bring your dispositional differences into the church. Some people have a quick disposition, and they may say, "I am quick, and I do not like anyone who is slow. God does not like those who are slow." Some people are slow by nature, and they may say, "I am steady by nature, and I do not like anyone who is quick." But neither quickness nor slowness should be in the church life to divide God's children. The moment you bring these things in, you make yourself the standard. The Greeks want the Jews to repent, and the Jews want the Greeks to repent. But God wants to set both aside. There is nothing else but Christ.

If a new believer upholds this principle from the very beginning, the church will be spared much hardship. We must never discriminate according to our character. We must reject the things that belong to the old man. We should walk in the same footsteps as all the other children of God.

## **VI. THE ANNULING OF CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS**

The book of Colossians speaks of two kinds of peoples—barbarians and Scythians. These two names have posed a problem to Bible scholars. In English a barbarian means a savage, an uncivilized person. But what is a Scythian? This word comes from the Greek word *Zema*, which became *Zecotha*, then *Zecothia*, and then *Zecothian*.



Mr. Wescott said that *Zecothia* was the name of a place. In ancient Greek literature, Zecothians and Galatians were often mentioned together. Hence, the Zecothians were a respectable people. Like the names of many cities, the word *Zecothians* brings a certain image to mind as soon as it is mentioned. For example, when Shansi is mentioned, one thinks of those who deal with money because most of the people from Shansi are businessmen. When Shao-Shing is mentioned, one thinks of court secretaries during the Ching dynasty. The name of a place often conjures up associated images.

If you consult Greek literature, you will see that the Scythians were a respected people, while the barbarians were a despised people. This is a matter of culture. Culture creates a big distinction in the world. If you put a typical English gentleman beside an African native, the difference in culture will become very obvious. However, Paul tells us that barbarian and Scythian alike must abolish all distinctions.

This cultural distinction has brought in frustration for many people. Once I met two Jews. Because I knew both of them quite well, I asked them frankly, "Why do so many people in the world hate Jews?" One said, "Our Jewish culture does not conform to the standard of others." That was the first time I heard such an answer. I did not understand what he meant. He went on to explain, "Consider the case of an American Jew. Honestly speaking, if I were a non-Jewish American, I would not like American Jews either. I would despise the Jewish culture. If an American earns two hundred dollars a month, he spends a certain portion of it on food and rent. He polishes his shoes and changes his shirt daily. Once every two months he buys a pair of new shoes and keeps his house neat and clean. He is happy if he has ten dollars left in his pocket at the end of the month. But the Jews are different. A Jew who makes the same amount of money spends only ten dollars a month and saves the rest. He calculates how much he can save if he does not polish his shoes or buy new ones. He can tolerate a dirty shirt to save on soap. Unlike the American who is so particular about his creature comfort, the Jew is not particular about food or lodging. All he wants is an ever-growing savings account in the bank. We Jews look down on Americans because they are so poor. Americans look down on us because they think we do not care for personal grooming and living conditions." He went on to say, "We Jews are good at making money. We are good with our brains but not with fashion. We cannot get along too well with others. This is why no one likes us." That was the first time I heard such an answer.

It is difficult for a person with a polished culture to see eye to eye with one who has a seemingly unpolished culture. This is a matter not of class, intellect, or financial status, but of culture. From a Scythian's point of view, nothing about a barbarian is right. A barbarian is wrong in the way he dresses, eats, and lives. From a barbarian's point of view, a Scythian is too hedonistic. He is too particular about food and clothing. These two persons have two totally different perspectives. If both of them come to the church, each will bring his own opinion along and consider the other wrong. When they come together, there is bound to be a clash. They can never be one with each other.

The Chinese eat with chopsticks, while the Indians eat with their fingers. Put them together at the same table for a few meals and both will feel uneasy at heart. They may not say much. But leave them together for two days and they will not be able to stand each other; they will start to quarrel. One may feel that chopsticks should be used because it is unsightly to eat with one's fingers, and the other may feel that eating with chopsticks is merely for show and that one can truly enjoy his meal when he eats with his fingers. One will say that the other is wrong and vice versa. This is a difference in culture. Such cultural differences present a real barrier. But even this is abolished in Christ. Those who are in Christ should be the most accommodating persons. They can tolerate all kinds of human differences. A man in Christ does not set up a standard and demand that everyone else to come up to his standard. He does not respect only those who come up to his standard and despise those who do not. This is not

how a person in Christ should behave. This kind of behavior does not belong in the church or in the new man. Suppose some brothers among us come from India or Africa. Their cultures are different from ours. But we should ask only one question: Are they in the Lord or not? They should ask us the same question: Are we in the Lord or not? If we are in Christ, all problems will be settled immediately. When we contact each other in Christ and love one another in Christ, there is nothing that cannot be tolerated. We should not allow anything to come between God's children, to differentiate the brothers and sisters in Christ from one another.

We cannot group the sophisticated brothers and sisters together to form a church. We cannot group the unsophisticated ones together to form another church. That would not be the church. Such things are not in the church. They belong outside the church, outside the Body, and outside the new man. We must never bring such problems into the church. All cultural differences have been abolished in the church.

However, we must learn to "live as Romans among Romans" and be under the law among those who are under the law. Whatever kind of culture we are in, we do as others do. If some African brothers come to China, and they have the knowledge of God, they should use chopsticks. If we go to Africa, we may have to eat with our hands. We do not want to come into conflict with the local brothers and sisters. When we go to them, we must learn to live among them. When they come to us, they must learn to live among us. When we go to England, we must learn to behave like the Englishmen, and when an Englishman comes to China, he must learn to behave like the Chinese. If we do not do this, we will stumble others, and they will not be won to Christ. If God's children have a good start in this matter, they will avoid much trouble later on.

## **VII. THE ANNULING OF MARKS OF PIETY IN THE FLESH**

The last distinction spoken of in Colossians is the distinction between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. This speaks of the distinction of outward marks of piety. We know that the Jews are circumcised with a mark on their bodies, indicating that they belong to God, that they fear God, and that they deny the flesh. In doing so they put themselves under God's covenant and become a part of God's covenant.

Many people (specifically the Jews) love circumcision. They think that only those who are circumcised are under God's covenant, while those who are not circumcised are not under His covenant. A Jew cannot marry an uncircumcised person. Acts 15 says that even the believing Gentiles were forced to be circumcised. The Jews paid much attention to this mark of piety in the flesh.

Today we can fall into the same pitfall as the Jews, paying too much attention to external signs. For example, I may be baptized by immersion while a certain brother may be sprinkled instead of immersed. God's Word tells us that we should be baptized by immersion. It is true that a brother should be baptized by immersion. However, if I consider myself to be better than my brother, who is not baptized by immersion, then I have made baptism by immersion a mark of piety. I have, in effect, claimed that in one thing in the flesh I am better than my brother. If I consider my brother wrong in the eyes of the Lord because he has not gone through an outward immersion, I have made baptism by immersion a cause of separation.

Head covering carries a spiritual significance to the sisters. However, it can become a mark in the flesh. The breaking of bread has a spiritual significance. But it can also become a mark in the flesh. The laying on of hands has a spiritual significance, but it can become a mark in the flesh as well. These things indeed carry much spiritual significance. But if they are used to

separate God's children, they will lose their spiritual significance and become mere marks of the flesh. In reality they will become something similar to circumcision.

Please do not try to misunderstand me. Instead, try to understand what I am saying. Do not think that we disagree with baptism by immersion, the breaking of bread, the head covering, or the laying on of hands. I am trying to show you that once you separate God's children by these things, you are making distinctions according to the flesh. In Christ there is no circumcision and uncircumcision. Physical symbols must not be used to separate God's children. In Christ we are one. The life that is in Christ is one. It is good for something with spiritual reality to have a physical symbol as well. However, if a person has the spiritual reality of something but is unconcerned about its physical symbol, we should not isolate him because of this. In short, God's children should not allow physical symbols to damage the oneness that they have in Christ.

It is true that some of God's children do not have an accurate view concerning certain things. But as long as they have the spiritual reality, we should be satisfied with our spiritual oneness and should not insist on the symbols. For example, a sister may be very submissive before the Lord and before the brothers; she knows where she stands before the Lord and before the brothers. If she is short only of a sign on her head, we should not ostracize her. The moment we separate God's children, we damage the oneness.

Paul stated quite clearly that circumcision is not for the purification of fleshly blemishes but for the removal of fleshly activities. In the eyes of God, what counts is the inward reality, not the outward things. If the inward revelation is the same, one should not make separations based on outward differences. If a person has neither the inward reality nor the outward sign, that is not our concern. If a sister does not take the place of submission, or if a brother's baptism is not a separation from the world or a burial and resurrection with the Lord, he or she is too far off from the truth. In such cases the responsibility does not rest on us. But if a person sees baptism as one's burial and resurrection with Christ, yet holds a slightly different view in the matter of the outward signs, we cannot damage the oneness because of this slight difference. You cannot set yourselves apart from others just because you are obedient to the Lord with respect to certain physical symbols. It is wrong to separate God's children according to these things.

We are all brothers and sisters. In Christ we are a new man. We are fellow members in the Body. In the church we have annulled all distinctions outside of Christ. Everyone stands on a new ground. Everyone is in the one new man that the Lord has established and in the one Body which the Lord has created. We must see that all of God's children are one. We cannot look upon anyone with a special frame of mind. We must thoroughly eradicate denominationalism and sectarianism from our heart. If we do this, we will have taken another step forward.