

# **The Mystery of the Seven Stars**

(Revelation 1:16, 20; 2:1)

Service Conference July 2011 in Bangkok

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## Introduction

### Christ – the standard of the New Testament service

The title of last year's Service Conference (2010) was "The standard of The New Testament service." We saw that Christ is our unique standard of service. He was absolutely for God and one with God. In John 4:34 Jesus said to His disciples, „My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work." What a wonderful example for us to follow. We cannot serve God in whatever way we desire, everyone doing what is right in his own eyes (Deut. 12:8); but we must do what is right in the sight of the LORD (Deut. 12:25, 28). When someone works for a company, he cannot be presumptuous and do things his own way; if he does, he will lose his job. Now when we consider the priestly service in the Old Testament Scriptures, we can see that the priests did everything strictly according to God's instructions. They were serving the righteous, holy and glorious God. By the same token, when we serve the Lord today, we should be absolutely obedient to His word so that we can be well pleasing to Him. Paul said in Gal. 1:10, "...For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." Under the Old Covenant, God required all priestly services to be done according to His word, and His standard was very high. Do not forget what happened to the two sons of Aaron for offering strange fire in Leviticus 10:1-3; and do not just glean some doctrine out of this passage. The Bible has given us many warnings. In the last service conference, we all saw that the most complete and perfect standard of service is that of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is no wonder that God the Father declared, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!" (Matt. 3:17; 17:5). Unfortunately, due to our fallen and presumptuous nature, we often do things in our service that are not well pleasing to God and even oppose His instructions. Are you not afraid of the Lord's judgment when He returns? Brothers and sisters, may we all learn well and be exercised before Him. Remember that the first offering in Leviticus 1 which God requires

from us is the burnt offering. This offering signifies Christ as the One who is absolutely for God. He came exclusively to do God's will. He was obedient even unto the death on the cross.

### **The perfect humanity of Jesus**

Another very important factor for a person who serves God is to experience the humanity of Christ, which is typified by the meal offering. Only a handful of the meal offering is offered to God by fire; the rest are food for the priests. Why is our service not well pleasing to the Lord? It is because our humanity is fallen and full of leaven: we are very loose and presumptuous, very rough and disobedient to God, self-willed and always thinking we know it all. We do not do what He tells us to do, and yet we do many things that are against His will. Due to our fallen humanity, our service is not up to His standard. This is why a person who serves the Lord must eat the humanity of Christ. This is very basic. Do not think that just because you have much knowledge you are qualified to serve Him – this would only make you proud and puffed up. Pride will take over you so that you expect everyone to listen to you and not to God; and you become so aloof that anyone who does not agree with you would be cast out – you even shut the door on the Lord Jesus Himself! This is our fallen humanity. But look at the Lord Jesus; when He came to this world, He was not like that. In our service, we need the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ; otherwise our service will cause many problems. We have to realize that the flesh of Christians is no better than that of the unbelievers in the world. I hope that you have not forgotten our fellowship from the last Service Conference. We actually do not need such a service conference, but we just need to daily behold our Lord Jesus in the four gospels and learn from Him; and that would be good enough! May the Lord have mercy on us!

Everything recorded in the New Testament confirmed and fulfilled all things written in the Old Testament (which the Lord referred to as the Scripture). There is much repetition in the four gospels.

The same goes for the epistles: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. Why is there so much repetition? That is because we often hear; and then we forget. It goes in the left ear and out through the right. Things should be heard with both ears, but with fallen man, it goes in one ear and out the other. After we hear the Word, we do not put it into practice. Spiritual experience does not come just from hearing but is gained through exercise, practice and learning. This is why the Bible says that we should not just be hearers but be doers of the Word. I have seen many who can give good messages, but just like the Pharisees and the Scribes, they do not practice what they teach! Everyone can speak, yet not everyone puts his speaking into practice.

## **THE STARS ARE THE MESSENGERS OF THE CHURCHES**

Perhaps many of you paid much attention to the seven golden lampstands in the book of the Revelation in the past, but very few would have paid attention to the seven stars. Most of us consider the seven stars as unimportant, and most people care more about the seven golden lampstands. This is a grave error. If only the seven golden lampstands were important, why then did the Lord Jesus mention the mystery of the seven stars? And in verse 20 of chapter one, the seven stars were mentioned first, followed by the seven golden lampstands. Are the seven golden lampstands more important or the seven stars? Some years ago, I would have said that the golden lampstands are more important; but today, I have to say that the seven stars are more important than the seven golden lampstands! It is after having gone through many experiences in the past fifty some years that I make such a statement now. The stars are more important because they are the messengers of the churches.

Simply stated, the seven stars are the responsible brothers in the seven churches. Over the many years in the churches, we have seen

leading ones or elders in the churches who went the wrong way, and consequently, the whole church was led astray! In writing the epistles to the churches, the Lord Jesus did not write to the churches directly but to the messengers of the churches. He did not command John to just write “to the church in Ephesus,” but to “the angel (messenger) of the church in Ephesus...” (Rev. 2:1). Why was the epistle written to the messenger of the church? Would it not be good enough just to write to the church? You have to realize the important point here: if a church has a problem, it must be that something is wrong with the messengers – the leading ones. You only need to look at the messengers and you will know where the church is at spiritually. If the elders of a church do not grow in life and are not advancing, then there is no way for the church to go forward.

This is the reason why the Lord did not only reveal the mystery of the seven golden lampstands but also the mystery of the seven stars! The church indeed is a mystery, just like the kingdom of the heavens in Matthew 13 is also a mystery. The word “mystery” does not only imply something hidden or difficult to understand, but it also indicates something complicated. Why is the kingdom of the heavens a mystery? It is a mystery because it not only involves God, but it also involves us. If it only involves God, then the kingdom of the heavens would definitely have no problem; but once we also get involved, it becomes complicated. On top of that, there is also the enemy Satan with the powers of darkness meddling there, so it becomes even more complicated! If the Lord Jesus were the only one sowing the seeds of the kingdom of the heavens, everything that grows would be fully heavenly, and all would have been easy; but, the Lord Jesus also mentions four kinds of soil which refer to our hearts: some are hard like the wayside; others are stony without much earth; some are thorny and choked the seed; and some are the good ground. Man’s heart is really too complicated! There is no problem with the seeds of the kingdom, but our heart has many problems. On the other hand, the devil also comes along and sows his seeds, and that complicates matters even more! Now you tell

me, is the church that simple? If it were so simple, the building of the church would not have taken over two thousand years; and it is still not completed! Since the seven golden lampstands are a mystery, then what is the key? It lies in the seven stars. I do not have the time to explain to you the entire history of the church for the past two thousand years, but why has the church fallen into such a state today? The major part of the problem lies with the unfaithfulness of the responsible brothers; and that is why the seven stars are also a mystery. In Revelation 1 there are two mysteries, and the mystery of the seven stars is mentioned first. When the Lord Jesus wrote to the churches, He wrote to the messenger of the churches and not directly to the churches. This goes to prove the importance of the messengers of the churches.

From the context of the entire New Testament, the seven stars held in the Lord's right hand should refer to the elders in the churches. The elders are set up by the Holy Spirit, to feed and to oversee the flock, to be good examples to the flock, but not as being lords over the flock. This is what the Lord reveals to us in the New Testament. This is the reason why the elders or the responsible brothers in the churches are very important. Every golden lampstand (church) is a corporate entity. By the same token, the star in every church is also a corporate entity. There is no one single elder who is in charge of the other elders, but it is an eldership comprising a group of elders. Do not think that because you are an elder, you can then make decisions on your own and influence the other elders. No! In everything, you should first ask the Lord and then have fellowship with the other elders in a good, proper spiritual way in the Lord. Only elders of a church who are built up together in Christ can constitute a star. In the church, one elder alone does not have the say, because this is against the principle in the Bible. Today, when we serve together, we need to have a vision, and we cannot afford to be loose. Only when the elders come together and coordinate in life, with the Lord as their Head, can they become a corporate star. Do not make decisions in the church on your own. The eldership needs

to lead the church with the oneness in Christ, which is the oneness of the Spirit; and not just any kind of oneness. Do not think that this is an easy job. I have seen too much in the past fifty years! May the Lord have mercy on us! Whether you are elders, responsible brothers or deacons, the principle of the service in the church is one and the same.

## **A. BEING HEAVENLY IN NATURE**

Stars are heavenly bodies, signifying that the eldership should also be heavenly; and likewise the church should also be heavenly. Our Lord Jesus is also a star. He is the bright and morning star (Rev. 22:16b). He is the man from heaven. Elders should be heavenly people. It does not depend on how capable you are, how much knowledge you have, how gifted you are, or your seniority. People in the world all look for talent, ability, power or ranking by seniority; so whoever is talented and capable should be the leader. In the past, the churches also did the same thing; but the principle in God's word is to see whether the person is heavenly in nature or earthly. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul said that the first Adam, the earthly man, is of dust and is fleshly, natural and corruptible; but the second man, Christ, is from heaven, Who is spiritual and incorruptible. What kind of persons are we today? We cannot do heavenly work if we are earthly. As elders or deacons in the churches, God does not look at your ability or how well you do on your exams; much less does He look at the certificates man may give you. God looks at how your personal life is, whether you live in the spirit and have the heavenly nature in your living, or whether you are often living in your "self" and in your flesh, holding on to your own views, being stubborn, doing whatever you please, not listening to others, quarrelsome or being consumed by pride. If the latter is the condition of the elders, then the condition of that church would indeed be very pathetic!



No matter in what capacity you brothers serve in the churches, do not think that it is good enough if you just perform some outward functions and can get things done. Actually, there should not be a single thing in the house of God that is not spiritual. Do not think that the church is merely an earthly entity. Hebrews 12:22 tells us that the church is the heavenly Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. Revelation 21:2 says she came “down out of heaven from God.” The church should be heavenly in nature. It is the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore, do not bring earthly things into the church! If you do so, it proves that you have not yet seen what the church is all about; it also goes to prove that you are not a God-fearing person and not in spirit. Remember what the Lord Jesus did when He entered the temple: He overturned the tables of the money-changers and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple. He said: “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!” (John 2:16).

Today, we have to make sure that the church of God is heavenly in nature. So if the elders are not heavenly in nature, the church will be full of problems. It is not enough if you only understand and are able to expound the Bible. Today is the age of knowledge – for the past two thousand years, volumes of books were written and an over-abundance of biblical knowledge accumulated. Did Daniel not say that knowledge will abound in the last days? Today you have the internet. Whatever you want to know, you just have to google it. All the information is at your fingertips! However, your searching on the internet will only make you more earthly. If you do not learn to be exercised to have constant, intimate and real fellowship with the Lord, it would be impossible for you to be heavenly in nature! Whether you are heavenly or not cannot be faked; and you cannot deceive others. Sooner or later you will be exposed. There are so many eyes in the church watching you, so how long can you keep up your pretence? Ezekiel chapter 1 shows us that the four living creatures are full of eyes within and without, and now I understand why it is so. There are many eyes in the churches. Do

not think that the brothers and sisters are fools! Perhaps they may not say anything in front of you because you are a leading brother, but in their hearts and behind your back, much is being said. The saints are all eyes, so you cannot fake it. Whatever we do in the church, do not do it with pretense. Many faithful brothers and sisters can sense and discern whether you are heavenly or not. How is your relationship with the Lord? Do you have fellowship with the Lord daily? Do you do what He says? Do you follow the Lamb? You should know for yourself. The elders or the responsible ones should all be shining stars. Daniel 12:3 says, “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament.” This wisdom is from above and not of this earth. It has to do with your living, and it will make you shine; and your shining will be visible to others. Do you remember how Moses’ face shone when he came down from Mount Sinai, after being up there for forty days in the presence of God?

Daniel also says that those who are wise shall shine like stars, turning many to righteousness. The Lord Jesus is truly our righteousness. If you are shining in the church today, and you know this living Christ, then you will be leading people to the Lord and not to yourself. You will lead people to know the Lord and to follow Him. This is righteousness. This is turning many to righteousness. If you lead others elsewhere, or to follow your own concepts, in the end they will be following you and not the Lord. That is unrighteousness. You have to pay attention to the serving one to see whether he is shining or not, because this world is full of darkness. It is definitely not a matter of “position”. There is so much darkness in religion; and many lose their way in this darkness. The stars in heaven are in their fixed locations and are stable to guide people in the right directions. If a sailor cannot find his way in the sea at night, all he needs to do is lift up his eyes and look to the stars above to help him find his bearings, and then he will know which direction to go.

Daniel also says that those who turn many to righteousness are like the stars forever and ever. How good this is! Everybody knows that when the sun rises, the stars can no longer be seen. You cannot find a star that shines brighter than the sun. If so, then that star would definitely be in competition with the sun. Once the sun appears, the stars fade away. If you lead people to the Lord, then you should fade away and go home! Do not remain standing there to compete with the Lord. Up to this day, I still do not understand John the Baptist, because he was there to testify of the Lord that He is the Christ. Since Jesus had come, John the Baptist's testimony should have been over. He should have withdrawn himself and just followed the Lamb; but on the contrary, not only did he not withdraw himself, but he continued to lead his own disciples, who inadvertently competed with the Lord (John 3:26; Matt. 9:14; 11:2-6). He knew how to testify of the Lord's first coming, proving that Jesus was the Christ, but why then did he himself not follow the Lord as well? I hope that the Lord would have a star in His right hand in the church in every locality. May the Father open the eyes of the heart so that all the responsible brothers in the various localities may be able to see this.

In the past, the emphasis regarding the service has often been on the outward work, activities and methods. This does not mean that the outward things do not need to be done, but let everyone understand that God does not care so much for the outward work of the elders and responsible brothers. God wants them to become a star held in the Lord's right hand. This is the more important work of the Lord. Next, let us continue to see what "being heavenly in nature" means.

### **1. Not being in the self or in the flesh, but in spirit**

A heavenly person should not be living in the self or in the flesh. He must live in the spirit. I believe that you all would agree that this point is most basic. The responsible brothers must learn to live and walk in spirit and by the Holy Spirit in reality. Of course, all the

saints need to live and walk in spirit also, but particularly the elders and the responsible ones – for them this is a must! If the leading brothers live in the self or in the flesh, they would become a big problem to the church; and the church would have no way to go on. To be a heavenly elder, you have to be a person who lives and walks in spirit. This point is of utmost importance. To have the knowledge about the spirit is one thing; but to live and walk according to the spirit is another thing.

## **2. Not seeking to be great**

Seeking to be great is not a heavenly principle, but a devilish one. The gospel of Matthew shows us that even while the disciples were still with the Lord, they were already arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens. Everyone wants not only to be great, but to be the greatest. This is a common sickness in all of fallen mankind. Matthew 18:1-7 says, “At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, ‘Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’” I would not have dared to ask such a question, especially in front of the Lord. Of course, the Lord is the greatest. Who else would be greater? If you would dare to ask who the greatest is in the kingdom in the presence of the king, your head would be chopped off! The person who asks such a question probably has the ambition to be the greatest! That was the reason why the disciples were fighting among themselves. Such a question exposes the desire in the heart to be great. We all have this devilish sickness in us. This is why the Lord says, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. 16:24). Without denying the self, there is no way to follow the Lord! If you do not deny the self, perhaps you may be following outwardly, but inwardly, you are not following, even to the extent that you may be doing many things contrary to the Lord. Do not think that this would not happen. We all know ourselves the best. This is the reason why the brothers and sisters who serve in the church must learn to lay down the “self”, and to not have the ambition to be great or

to seek honor and recognition from man. But it is really difficult to deny the self! That is why this question is posed in Matthew 18 to expose our condition: Who is the greatest? If such a problem arises in a church, this church would surely have a big problem. If the elders are so conscious of their “eldership,” they are already fallen. Our Lord is very wise. In answering this question, the Lord called a little child to Him, set him in their midst and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of the heavens” (Matt. 18:3). Do not even bother to ask who is the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens, for you may not even enter in! It is not an easy thing for an adult to convert himself into a child; but the Lord Jesus said that you have to be converted, you have to repent. Today, we all need to repent. Remember the Lord’s word: “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” This is a very serious word. I have often noticed the very strange behavior that when someone is appointed to be an elder – all of a sudden, his self-esteem would rise up. He will begin to think that he is great, and that he will be an elder for life.

For many years in the past, the problem of the churches was just because someone desired to be great and was not willing to humble himself to become like a child. The Lord Jesus continued to say, “Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4). I do not know what the disciples thought when they heard this, and perhaps they did not quite understand it at that time. Besides, it is not merely a matter of understanding, but whether you have experienced such a problem. If you have not experienced it, even if you were to understand it, it is of no avail. If you have had such an experience, in which you saw the many problems in the churches caused by someone seeking to be great, you would fear this thing. I hope that due to the past history of the churches, the serving ones among the churches would humble themselves before God and become like little children; be-

cause elders are actually not above the saints, but servants of the saints. The Lord Jesus Himself is the only one who is to be elevated above everyone. If we have truly seen and experienced this, then we would not dare to even think this in our hearts. A spiritual brother who lives in the spirit definitely would not dare to do such a thing. If someone has the ambition to be great, he should repent. Otherwise, you may treat the brothers and sisters like your servants; and in doing so, you will become a stumbling block to many saints in the church in your locality. The Lord Jesus continued to say, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (v. 6). To cause someone to fall is a serious matter; therefore you should not overlook this. To be “heavenly” does not mean to be far above everybody. The more heavenly you are, the lower you become; and the less heavenly you are, the prouder you become. If a person who serves the Lord demands respect and submission from others, then he surely is earthly and fleshly, and therefore fully disqualified to be a leading one.

Although the disciples heard what the Lord said in Matthew chapter 18, in the following chapter, when people brought little children to the Lord Jesus, the disciples immediately rebuked them. Did they take in the word the Lord spoke in chapter 18? If they had received the word, they should have said to the children, “Welcome, come draw near to the Lord Jesus.” The Lord had to repeat Himself by saying, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). I hope that the disciples felt remorseful when they heard the Lord Jesus say that! They seemed to have forgotten what the Lord had said in chapter 18. Actually, none of us are anything in the church. So what if we are very knowledgeable, capable or have a position? These things are all empty, vain! We must all learn to behold this glorious Christ. He is the greatest in the universe. He is the Head over all things to the church. Though He is the Creator of the heavens and earth, He came down to be our servant!

Evidently, this problem of wanting to be great was not over yet. In Matthew chapter 20, the mother of James and John came to Jesus, hoping that her two sons would become great in the kingdom of the heavens, one to be seated at the right hand of the Lord Jesus and the other to His left. Wouldn't that have been a great idea? She just happened to have two sons. This is a big problem which causes great damage to the church! Jesus replied, "You do not know what you ask ... You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:22, 25-28). May the Lord enlighten every one of us. We all understand the doctrine, but in order to practice this, we need to be a heavenly people. If you are fleshly and earthly, you may understand the doctrine, but you will not be able to live it out. You will still be proud and desire to be great, wanting people to listen to you and not willing to empty yourself and be a servant to all. The church is different from the world. There are kings and rulers in the world, but in the church, there are only servants. Although the Lord Jesus is the Head, He is also the servant of all the saints.

In serving God, we do not need the respect or praise of man. We are nothing but all slaves in the church. The higher your position, the lower you should be. It is a shameful thing to vie for position in the church! That is why the Lord said a serious word in Matthew chapter 23 to expose the true colors of the Pharisees and the Scribes. They liked to be respected and praised; they did things to be seen by men and were full of hypocrisy. They liked to sit in the seat of Moses, liked the highest seats in the synagogues, and liked to be called "Rabbi," etc. There is no such seat or any special title in the church for anyone. The more you get to know the Lord, the more you would reject such practices. May the Lord have mercy on us!

### **3. Not lording it over the flock of God entrusted to you**

The serving ones in the church should be like the servants in a household. They are not there to be lords or rulers. 1 Peter 5:2-3 says: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” Peter stated it very clearly here. He had learned the lesson. He was able to say such a word because he knew that this was a problem in the church. If only the serving brothers could live in spirit in a simple and humble way, then their service would not cause problems. Verse 4 goes on to say, “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” If all the serving ones would work by this principle, they will get a glorious reward when the Lord returns. If not, when the Chief Shepherd appears, they will be disciplined severely. Some may receive a crown, while others may be disciplined. This is why we need to learn well not to lord it over the brothers and sisters. We are all servants of the Lord. The word of God tells us that since we are all servants of God, we should not mistreat our companions. All the saints are servants of God, not only the serving brothers. We all have to serve with a humble spirit. In this way, the whole body will build itself up in love.

### **4. The example of Christ**

Christ is the example for our service. We are all familiar with the passage in Philippians 2:5-11, but unfortunately, many do not practice it accordingly. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross ...” This passage is very precious! This is the example Christ left for us.



Paul said it very well, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” How good would it be if there were such messengers in the churches! Why did the Lord Jesus do what He did? Because He truly loves us! If our service were not done in love for Him, our attitude would be different. How often do we consider ourselves capable, gifted, able to do all things and desire to be greatly used by the Lord, yet the love of Christ is not within us? Consequently, all that we may do will not count before God. Some responsible ones command the brothers and sisters to do certain things, as if that was to be expected of them. Then if the job was not done well, the saints would even be reprimanded. Oftentimes, you yourself did not do a good job, but did the Lord rebuke you? The Lord Jesus would still come to you and encourage you, help you and support you. Yet while serving in the church, if the brothers and sisters do not do a good job, we would even get upset and criticize them. But they are not serving us, they are serving the Lord; so we should help them and encourage them to serve better. Do not judge others, but wait for the Lord to judge. Remember Peter’s words: “Be examples to the flock.” If the brothers and sisters do not serve well, you should be a good example to them and serve together with them. This would be the best encouragement. This is how the Lord Jesus trained and helped the disciples. He Himself was their best example. If the Lord would only give them a message, the disciples would surely not be deeply touched. It would not have worked. But they saw their Lord living out such an example in His actions and His Person, His love and His compassion, His wisdom and His patience, His humility and His meekness, His washing their feet, and ultimately, His suffering and His death on the cross. They could never forget such an example in their lifetime! Although Paul was not present then, yet he was able to write down the example of Christ, because he had really touched such a reality in spirit and by the Holy Spirit.

## B. SHINING

Daniel said, “Those who are wise shall shine ... like the stars forever and ever” (Dan. 12:3). All the serving brothers and sisters in the church, and the elders in particular, have to shine like stars! In the previous section, it was said that the responsible ones must be heavenly people. Here it says that the heavenly people will shine like stars. In order to shine like stars, you must be wise ones. However, heavenly wisdom differs from earthly cleverness. The Lord Jesus had a very special prayer in Matthew 11:25-26: “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight.” In God’s eyes the wisdom of the world is foolishness. The wisdom we are talking about here is the wisdom which comes from God. In order to gain this wisdom, you need His revelation, and you also need to be pure and simple like a babe.

### 1. Being a person with heavenly vision

Paul had the same thought in his prayer in Colossians 1:9, “... that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” The elders who lead the church must have “the wisdom from above” in order to be filled with the knowledge of His will. This kind of knowledge is totally different from merely understanding doctrines. James said in 3:17, “But wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” From this you can see that heavenly wisdom does affect our daily living and it has much to do with how we live. It teaches us to gain Christ and to live Him out. Only in this way would we be able to shine. On the contrary: “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, de-

monic. For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there” (James 3:14-16).

## **2. The living God himself is our method**

We serve the Lord not by any way or method, but by knowing this living God. Today, man is looking for methods and ways to do things; but we cannot find any methods in the Bible. I have seen many methods and man’s ways in the past – changing from an old way to a new way, and then back to the old way again. All in all, it is still man’s way. We should come before the Lord and before His word to seek Him. If you were to ask me what methods I have, I will tell you I have no method. The only method is the living Christ, who is the fulfillment of the living word of God. We just have to do whatever He says in the Spirit and in His word. If He speaks to us, then we have the way, because He is the way. (I don’t know if this counts as a method or not.) If the Father does not give us revelation, but hides His heart’s desire from us, then we have no light and therefore no way.

Our focus is not on knowledge or doctrines, but on gaining the reality. The elders and all the serving ones in the church must be like heavenly stars. You should know in your heart whether you are a star or not. You yourself should also know whether you are heavenly or earthly. You need to examine yourself to see if you are shining brightly. Everyone has knowledge and may know many doctrines, but becoming a “star” is not a matter of doctrines and knowledge; it has to come from experiencing Christ in reality.

For many years, we have gone through quite a number of different kinds of “trainings” and have all witnessed what the end result was: the saints became obedient to man and not to the Lord. There were also movements to stir up the young people to rebel against the elders. All this caused a lot of damage to the testimony of the church. We are not here to give some kind of training, but we are all broth-

ers and sisters learning together and helping each other to practice the pure word of the living God. Some people falsely accused us of stirring up the young people against the elders, which is definitely not true. If the elders only demand obedience and respect from the saints because of their “position,” but they behaved badly, shamefully and hypocritically; then it is no wonder that the faithful saints (young or old) have lost their respect for them and their confidence in them.

The messengers of the churches should be stars. On a clear night, when you look into the sky, you will see stars. Even little children know the stars when they see them and need no explanation. Whether or not you are a star in the church, the saints can surely tell! The darker the night, the brighter the stars will shine, so if you do not shine and show forth the light of life, are you still a star? There is no need for discussion: you are what you are. You may claim to be a star, and yet what good is it if you are not shining? It is unfortunate and shameful that in many churches, many saints look upon the eldership as a position and consequently submit to the elders even if they were opposing the Lord and the truth.

### **3. Having a living fellowship with the Father and His Son**

How can we shine? According to the Bible, what kind of a person shines? If a person does not spend time in fellowship with the Father and the Lord Jesus, and if he does not enter into the holy of holies and remains there for some time, he definitely cannot shine! John said: “Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ,” and that “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:3, 5). God is light. If you live in His presence, then you will surely shine. One does not shine just because he is knowledgeable in teachings. If that were the case, would not the ones who have been in the church life longer and have gathered much knowledge shine much more? But it is not like this. Remember how Moses was when he came down from Mount Sinai after having

face to face fellowship with God for forty days? The skin of his face shone (Exodus 34:29)! This does not mean that if you read the Bible for forty days, your face will shine. To shine requires that you are living in the presence of God. Besides, this kind of shining does not last forever. Do not think that after Moses came down from the mountain, his face continued to shine forever. That was not the case – the shining faded. However, each time after he entered into the tabernacle and had face to face fellowship with God, his face shone when he came out (Exodus 34:34-35). It is just like a fully charged battery that makes a lamp shine brightly. With time the light dims and the battery needs to be recharged over and over again. It is only by living constantly in the fellowship with the Father that we would shine. The longer the fellowship, the brighter you shine. If you do not spend time to have fellowship with the Lord, and God neither appears to you nor speaks to you, then you would definitely not be shining. You will be walking in darkness.

#### **4. Gaining Christ and living out Christ**

We have to learn from Paul's example. He said two things that are very precious: "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21) and "to gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). He was living Christ out moment by moment and wanted to gain Christ all the time. When I was young, I was seeking for Bible knowledge; but after I gained some knowledge, I discovered that I did not have the strength to act upon it. This is just like the Jews who merely knew the law of God, yet did not have the life to abide by the law. The Pharisees and Scribes had more knowledge than all the others, but not only were they not shining, on the contrary, they were living in darkness and death. Perhaps as knowledge increased in them, so did the darkness. Remember: the letter kills (2 Cor. 3:6)! Today, everyone loves knowledge, but few are willing to gain and live Christ. Our Lord is living, and for this reason we need to know this living Christ. He lives in us as the Spirit; and He wants us to live Him out in our daily life. It is only in

this way that we can manifest the light. For this we need to exercise to be in constant fellowship with the Lord.

### **5. Magnifying Christ**

Philippians 1:20-21 says: “according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ...” This is the longing of a person who lives Christ. Paul had such a longing within him, that Christ be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death. Such a person is surely one who shines, one who lives out Christ. For Paul, not to live Christ is a shameful thing. He was not only a person who could share the truth, but was also one who lived out Christ. It is easy to give a message and argue a point, but it is not as easy to live Christ out!

All those who serve the Lord should have such a life of living Christ with an earnest desire to magnify Him. Actually, in the church life, it is not a matter of how to do things; because one way may work with you but not with me. By the same token, my methods may not work with you. This is because methods also depend on the person doing it. Perhaps we may hold different views on methods, but even this is not a problem. Paul had the correct view in Philippians 3, others may not. But Paul said in Philippians 3:15, “Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.” The problem is whether or not we live out Christ. If we do not live Him out, no matter how well we do a certain thing, it has absolutely no spiritual value! If all the responsible brothers and all the serving ones in the church live Christ out, then they would definitely be shining, and there would be no problem.

Paul not only wanted to live Christ, but he also aimed to magnify Christ in his body. How often do we magnify ourselves, show off

our talent and cleverness and do not magnify Christ. We lack the reality of magnifying Christ! Paul said: “as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body.” Paul says ‘as always’, and not occasionally, not when we happen to think of it. For Paul, magnifying Christ was his habit. How is it with us? Not magnifying Christ seems to be our habitual practice. As a result, we find it difficult to magnify Christ. Isn’t this the case with you? It was Paul’s habit to magnify Christ. It would be so wonderful if we could cultivate such a habit as well! How sad it is that we find it normal not to live Christ; and when we occasionally do live out Christ, we feel so elated about it. May the Lord have mercy on us! If we want to shine, we must make living Christ and magnifying Him our habit.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says that we are like a mirror reflecting the glory of the Lord. On the one hand we need the life of Christ, but on the other hand, we need to be like a mirror, reflecting the glory of the Lord Jesus. For this reason we all have to behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled face. This is very practical and wonderful! So when we read the Bible, if we only glean some knowledge and doctrine out of it, we would not be reflecting the glory of the Lord. Especially the messengers of the churches and all the serving ones have to reflect the glory of Christ. It is useless if you can only give a message to the saints, but you need to also reflect the glorious light of Christ. It is only in this way that we can become a star held in the Lord’s right hand. In order to reflect the glory of the Lord, you must first remove all the veils, turn your heart to the Lord and behold the glory of the Lord with unveiled face. That would cause us to be transformed into the image of the Lord. And this transformation is from glory to glory, as it is the result of the transforming work of the Lord Spirit. If we read the Lord’s word and only gain the knowledge without seeing the glory of the Lord, then we have read the Bible in vain! If you are veiled, you will be like the Israelites, who only saw the law and not the glory of Christ. No wonder some thought we are going back to the law when we read Leviticus. They only see the law in Leviticus, but we see the glory of the Lord.

## 6. Forgetting the past and pressing onward

After so many years in the church life, today our desire is not only to understand the Bible and to gain knowledge from it. Our innermost desire is to gain the reality of Christ. Christ is living; He is unlimited. There are much more of His unsearchable riches that we have yet to see and experience. Paul was always forgetting the past; he forgot both the good and bad experiences. If a company wants to improve, then it must constantly forget what was behind, because there are too many new things waiting to be discovered and developed. Experiencing the riches of Christ would bring us from glory to glory. There was glory in the past, now it is more glorious, and the future will be the most glorious. The two thousand years in the history of Christianity show us that many groups are still living in the past history and traditions. They remain the same year after year, and may even be on the decline. I do not want to be living in our past experiences and traditions, but I want to experience living in the newness of life daily. I also seek to enter into the greater glory that is to come, which is from glory to glory! Our understanding and experience of the Lord today should be richer than yesterday. The things in this world are all progressing. In the past there were horse carriages, then the model T-Ford; today, we see all kinds of cars, hybrid and electric vehicles, even driverless cars. Who knows what tomorrow will bring! Do you not believe that God has more to reveal to us today concerning His Christ and the church? Do you not believe that He has something new and fresh to show us concerning His up-to-date work? Paul said, “if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Cor. 8:2). There is still so much more for us to discover concerning Christ and the church and what He is doing today!

The shining is the glory. People should be able to see the glory of Christ in us. If they do not see this, then something is very wrong. When the Lord Jesus was on this earth, He said: “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). The Lord fully reflected the



glory of the Father in both His living, His words and His actions; He expressed the invisible God. John said, “We beheld His glory ... full of grace and truth (reality)” (John 1:14. This is the best way to serve. The light which was in Christ is God, and if we can live out Christ today, like a mirror reflecting the glory of the Lord, then our service would not cause any disputes, fighting for position or fame, etc.; and only such service could accomplish the Father’s will and satisfy Him! We all should pray earnestly to the Lord: “O Lord, make me a shining star in the church.”

## **C. BEING HELD IN THE RIGHT HAND OF THE SON OF MAN**

(Revelation 1:16a; 2:1; 3:1)

“In the right hand of the Son of Man” is the only place to be if you are a star. Any other place would not be good, because the stars can only be in the Lord’s right hand. The responsible brothers in the churches all need to be held in the Lord’s right hand. If you fall into man’s hands, then you have to listen to man and be under man’s control. I have seen many serving ones succumb by man’s control; so do not fall into man’s hands. The elders in the church should not fall into any man’s hands, but you should let the Lord hold you, control you, and even discipline you. Elders should submit to the Lord’s authority and not be self-willed. I do not mean that the brothers should not be submitting one to another – I do not submit to you, and you do not submit to me – this is not what I mean. But we should first of all submit to the living God! The book of Revelation shows us clearly that the seven stars are held in His right hand. This is too important. Do not overlook this; otherwise, by and by the whole church would end up not listening to God’s word, but listening to man’s word. God’s word would gradually be replaced by man’s word! Elders have no authority in themselves. They could express the Lord’s authority only if they are in the Lord’s right

hand. It is not the position of eldership that gives them the spiritual authority, but only if they are being held by the Lord's right hand.

### **1. The right hand of God's authority**

After the Lord Jesus ascended to the heavens, He was seated at the "right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69; Hebrews 1:3); that is why He said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). For the Lord Jesus to be exalted and seated at the right hand of God not only denotes His glorious position, but it also indicates His authority. However, the stars being held in the Lord's right hand does not indicate that the elders have high positions and everybody needs to respect and listen to them. This is definitely not what it means. It only indicates that the messengers should fully be subject to the Lord's authority and absolutely obey Him. Should the responsible brothers fall into the hand of a certain person, then they would have to listen to that particular person and be controlled by him. In such a case, the entire church would then be under the manipulation of that person. Who should be ruling over the church? The Lord Jesus – He alone is the head of the body! But if the elders in the church are not being held in the Lord's right hand, then they will be lording over the church. In such a case, the saints should exercise to overcome and choose to listen to the speaking of the Spirit and not to the command of the elders. In the church, we are not for democracy or human rights like the people in the world. The church belongs to the Lord Jesus – He is the Head; and He is our King David. If a responsible one is not held in the Lord's right hand, then he is no longer qualified to lead; he has already lost the authority vested upon him by the Lord. All the elders need to subject themselves to the Lord's authority, and not dare to rule on their own. Do not merely call Him "Lord" and disobey what He says. The Lord Jesus said in Luke 6:46, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" With your mouth you call Him "Lord," but in your heart, you think you are the lord and act like the Lord. Are you not deceiving God? I have

seen people lording over the churches in the past. It did not matter to them if the saints did not listen to the Lord; but if the saints did not listen to them, they would be quarantined, kicked out and even cut off from the fellowship of the churches. No elder can replace the Lord as the Head of the church! The mystery of the “seven stars in the Lord’s right hand” is not that simple. We all have to learn to fully obey the Lord’s speaking and fully submit ourselves under the Lord’s authority.

## **2. The sovereign hand of God**

(Prov. 21:1; 16:1-2, 9, 25, 33)

Proverbs 21:1 says, “The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.” The rivers flow wherever the Lord wants them to flow. This is the hand of the Lord – this is God’s sovereignty. He is sovereign because only He knows all things beforehand. Proverbs also says, “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits” and also “A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (Prov. 16:2, 9). Fallen man always thought that their own way was right, but discovered later (and too late) that they were wrong (Prov. 16:25). The leading ones should never think that they know everything. Learn to “commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established” by God (Prov. 16:3). No service in the church should be according to man’s ideas. The responsible brothers have to learn to allow the Lord to make the decisions in all things. Trust in the Lord’s sovereignty in all things, and He shall direct your paths (Prov. 3:6). This is only possible if we have a humble heart with a close relationship with Him. Then He could reveal His will and His ways to us. If the elders for any reason are not clear about God’s will, then they should humble themselves and learn to listen to those who know His will. In Deuteronomy 12:8, God warned His people through Moses: “You shall not at all do as we are doing here today – every man doing whatever *is* right in his own eyes.”

### 3. The disciplining and judging hand of God

The Lord's hand is also a disciplining and judging hand. Do not think that we can be presumptuous in the church and do things as we please. All the serving ones, the elders in particular, need to realize that the Lord's hand is also a disciplining and judging hand. The Bible tells us that He disciplines us not only because of our wrongdoings, but much more because of His love towards us. Revelation 3:19 says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." We all make mistakes because we are not perfect; and because the Father loves us, He arranges many circumstances to discipline us (Heb. 12:5-11). This is the disciplining hand of the Lord. We need to thank Him for it. It is not a good sign for one who serves God not to be disciplined by Him. If God lets a serving one do things as he pleases, I am afraid this one is no longer in the Lord's right hand. When we see things happening in the church that do not seem right, we tend to immediately intervene and take the matter into our own hands. We become the disciplining ones, replacing God – resulting in more troubles. Besides, man's "disciplining hand" is often either too severe or unrighteous. Now as we are getting older, when we see something that is not right, we can only shake our head and sigh, because it is not easy for anyone to take correction, especially the leading ones. We have no other way but to turn to our Father God and tell Him about it. He is the only one Who can save the situation and discipline His children. He alone has the wisdom and the proper way to deal with all the situations.

A person who truly knows God would not dare to discipline the saints or speak loosely. If you are a person who is being held in the Lord's right hand, you would let the Lord do it, because you know the disciplining hand of the Lord. If a person is not willing to take the Lord's discipline, then the Lord's judgment will come upon him. If someone is way out of line and goes too far, God will judge him. I hope we will not receive judgment but be willing to accept the Lord's discipline. He disciplines us because He loves us.

#### **4. The mighty and powerful hand of God**

(Exodus 15:6)

Isaiah said, “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save ...” (Is. 59:1). God’s arm is not too short that He could not help us; it is our hands that are very short and limited, without power or strength and incapable to help. The more we try to help, the worse the situation becomes. I have seen that too many times. Only God’s hand is mighty and powerful. It is only natural for us not to be able solve people’s difficulties and problems. Thank the Lord, for He said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).

Since He can do all things, why do we not let Him take over? Whatever He does is always the best. The Lord’s working hand is mighty and marvelous. The responsible brothers must realize this and “humble themselves under the mighty hand of God” (1 Pet. 5:6). It is only then that you can see the mighty work of His hands. David said, “I meditate on all Your works: I muse on the work of Your hands” (Ps. 143:5). The works of His hands are too wonderful! He created the entire universe. Besides Him, who else can create the heavens and the earth? Only God alone has such great hands! What can we do? Psalm 127:1 says particularly regarding the building of the temple of the Lord, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” But many people do not think so, they still persist in trying to do it all by themselves. Do not forget the word in Zechariah 4:6 concerning the building of the temple, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts.” You must also remember Psalm 121:1-2, “I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

### **5. The leading hand of God**

David said, “Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me” (Psalm 139:10). If we are being held tightly in His right hand, we shall not be afraid, because He will lead us, hold us, protect us and help us. In this way, our service will not be so difficult, and we will not be sweating away. If you feel that your service is hard, then it is a sign that you are the one doing the work. Stop your work and allow the Holy Spirit within you to work. His hand will help you, lead you, protect you and hold you. Outwardly, it looks as if you are doing the work, but actually, it is He who is doing the work within you. It is He who will carry you through. If your service is not in His hand, then it is you who are doing the work; and in the end, He will even reject your work. But this does not mean that you do nothing. No, you must cooperate and labor together with Him. Paul said, “... but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).

## **D. BEING WISE AND FAITHFUL SERVANTS**

The most important point in being a servant is that one has to be “faithful”. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:2: “Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” What does it mean to be faithful? A faithful servant must fully understand the will of the master and also do exactly what the master says. A faithful servant would definitely not dare to be presumptuous! David said it well in Psalm 19:13: “Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression.”

## **1. Keeping the word of God**

One who serves God must do things fully according to God's instructions. Moses may be considered as the most faithful servant in the Bible. Hebrews 3 tells us that "Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant." God gave all the instructions to Moses on the mountain, and also told him specifically to build the tabernacle exactly according to the pattern that was shown him. Moses fully obeyed God in every detail. This goes to show how Moses was a faithful and wise servant. A faithful servant should also be a wise servant, otherwise, how would he know what God wants to do? How could a person be faithful if he is self-conceited and does not seek after God, does not often fellowship with Him and does not live in spirit? Could a person be a faithful servant if he does not fully know the will of God and just acts according to his own will? Definitely not. That is the reason why the Lord shows us, that a servant should both be faithful and wise.

## **2. Jesus Christ – the faithful Witness**

(1 Tim. 6:13; Rev. 1:5a; 3:14)

When the Lord Jesus was on this earth, He did everything according to the will of the Father, and He never did anything of His own accord. His whole life fulfilled God's word. In Hebrews 10:7, He says, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." Besides, it was the Father in Him who was doing the work in all that the Lord Jesus said and did. He was sent by God to accomplish the things God had entrusted Him with, yet He said it was the Father in Him who does the works. Whatever the Father did, He did; whatever the Father did not do, He did not do. Today, our service should also be like this. If you do not know what to do, do not do anything; and only go ahead when you know what God wants. If God does not speak, we do not speak, nor do we take any action. Besides knowing what He wants to do, we also have to allow Him to do it in us. Do not go ahead to do things on your own. Therefore, in order to be a faithful

and wise servant, one must be in continual fellowship with God to know what the will of God is.

### **3. Providing food in due season for God's household**

(Matt. 24:45)

God is living, and He is also a speaking God; and His living speaking (His words) is spiritual food for the saints in His household. Remember the Lord Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 in Matthew 4:4: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" In order for a servant to provide food in due season to God's household, he definitely must know what the Lord is speaking NOW to the church. Note what the Lord Jesus wrote to the seven churches in the book of Revelation 2-3: seven times He said, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The most important thing in a servant is to hear what the master says. The "stars" are the messengers of the churches, and they are there to convey the Lord's word to the churches. The message they convey should not be that of their own but the Lord's message. If a messenger would alter the Lord's word a bit and then deliver it to the church, then that is no longer the Lord's word, and neither is that servant a messenger anymore. The word of the Lord is living; it is Spirit and life for the nourishment of His church. Man's word is dead, and it is without the Spirit and void of life. If a messenger is not faithful to the Lord's word, and adds his own ideas to it, or even worse opposes the word, then there is no way for him to be one "whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season" (Matthew 24:45). The elders must clearly know the timely word that the Lord wants to speak to the church. That is why they must be persons who live continuously in the presence of God. Only such a person would be trusted by the Lord and the Lord can also entrust him with His household.



#### **4. Taking heed to yourselves**

(Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 3:10; 10:12; 1 Tim. 4:16)

Paul gave the elders from Ephesus a very serious warning before his departure: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). Do not just learn some outward methods or ways of doing things. Learning something outward is easy, but doing God’s work and obeying Him absolutely is not that simple. Don’t you believe it? Just wait another ten or twenty years, and look at what your work or what the churches have become. Do not think that the church will not change from good to bad. Please take a look at the seven churches in Asia Minor. They all had problems, and all the problems arose from the unfaithfulness of the messengers. If you would only discover it after twenty years, that would be too late! This is why we began our fellowship at this conference with the mystery of the seven stars. May the Lord have mercy, for we all need to take heed and be the faithful and wise servants. I hope that the vision of “the seven stars held in the Lord’s right hand” will be a help to all the serving brothers and sisters.

*John So*