

Guidelines for the Exercise of the Lord's Day Prophesying

Message Five : Knowing the Fellowship of Christ's Sufferings and Being Conformed to His Death

I. Overview:

With Christ, the sufferings and death came first, followed by the resurrection; with us, the power of His resurrection comes first, followed by the participation in His sufferings and conformity to His death. Christ's sufferings are of two categories: those for accomplishing redemption, which were completed by Christ Himself, and those for producing and building the church, which need to be filled up by the apostles and the believers. Christ as the Lamb of God suffered for redemption; Christ as the grain of wheat suffered for reproducing and building. The way for the church to come into being and to increase is not by human glory; it is by the death of the cross. Being conformed to Christ's death indicates that His death is a mold. The power of the resurrection life of Christ in us places us into the mold of Christ's death, and now we need to be conformed to this mold. To be conformed to Christ's death is to take Christ's death as the mold of our life. Christ's death is a mold to which we are conformed in much the same way that dough is put into a cake mold and conformed to it. The only way to glorify God is to be conformed to Christ's death.

II. Truth and Enlightenment:

Day 1 —

A. Expound the conditions for knowing the power of Christ's resurrection.

If we would know the power of Christ's resurrection, we must share in His sufferings and know the fellowship of His sufferings. The participation in Christ's sufferings—"the fellowship of His sufferings" is a necessary condition for the experience of the power of His resurrection by being conformed to His death. Paul was pursuing to know and experience not only the excellency of Christ Himself but also the life power of His resurrection.

B. Explain that the more we experience Christ's sufferings, the more we shall gain Christ.

We must have the dispensing of Christ's resurrection so that we may experience His cross, His death. It is by knowing Christ's resurrection that we experience His death. The more we know His resurrection, the more we shall be put into His death to share in the fellowship of His sufferings. God gives us the cross, and the cross gives us Christ.

Day 2 —

A. Explain Christ's sufferings being of two categories.

One category is for accomplishing redemption, which were completed by Christ Himself, and the other is for producing and building the church, which need to be filled up by the apostles and the believers. We cannot participate in Christ's suffering for redemption, but we must take part in the sufferings of Christ for the producing and building up of the Body. The way for the church to come into being and to increase is by the death of the cross.

B. Expound two different kinds of sufferings.

Do not think that all the sufferings you undergo are for the building up of the Body. Supposed on your job you enjoy the power of Christ's resurrection. Because of this, your superiors may oppose you, either passing you up for a promotion or causing you to be dismissed from your job. This suffering may be counted as the suffering of Christ for the producing and building up of the Body. Thus, one category of suffering is due to our mistakes and wrongdoings, and the other results from our testimony.

Day 3 —

A. Why do we need to share in His sufferings for His Body?

As the Head, Christ's sufferings for the accomplishment of redemption are complete, but the sufferings of Christ for the producing and building up of the Body are not yet finished. In Colossians 1:24 Paul regarded his own sufferings as the filling up of what is lacking of Christ's sufferings for His Body. The sufferings of Christ for His Body are still going on, and we need to share in them.

B. Explain the difference between these two sufferings.

There is a difference between those sufferings which are for our transformation and those which are for the Body. Paul's word in Philippians 3:10 that the sufferings are those which make up the lack of Christ's afflictions for the

Body. The more we know the power of Christ's resurrection, the more we shall participate in the sufferings of Christ.

Day 4 —

A. Explain having what processes of experiencing of being conformed to His death.

On account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, we should count all things as loss in order that we may gain Christ and be found in Him. The purpose of this is that we might know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings. But Paul does not stop here; he continues by saying, "Being conformed to his death".

B. Distinguish between the death of Adam and the death of Christ.

The death of Adam is terrible; the death of Christ, however, is lovable, and we all should treasure it. According to the Bible, the wonderful death of Christ is symbolized by baptism. In the Gospels the Lord Jesus experienced two baptisms: the first at the beginning of His ministry, when He was baptized in water by John, and the second at the end of His ministry, when He was baptized on the cross. Both baptisms symbolize the lovable death of Christ.

Day 5 —

A. Expound being conformed to His death joining with the crucified living.

In Philippians 3:10, being conformed to His death indicates that Paul desired to take Christ's death as the mold of his life. Christ's death is a mold to which we are conformed in much the same way that dough is put into a cake mold and conformed to it. Paul continually lived a crucified life, a life under the cross, just as Christ did in His human living.

B. Describe the Lord's life on the earth.

Christ's death took place throughout His life on earth. As He was living, He was also dying, dying to the old creation in order to live a life in the new creation. This is the meaning of "His death" in Philippians 3:10. Being conformed to Christ's death should be our experience day by day. Daily we must put our natural life to death and not live according to it.

Day 6 —

A. Expound God's work in us.

God has put us into the mold of Christ's death, and day by day God is molding us to conform us to this death. We should be conformed to such a mold by our dying to our human life to live the divine life... In the mold of Christ's death, the natural life is killed, the old man is crucified, and the self is nullified. If we allow our circumstances to press us into this mold, our daily life will be molded into the form of Christ's death.

B. Explain in order to bear this image, we need to be conformed to Christ's death.

As we are participating in Christ's death, His death will shape us, will conform us, to the form of His death. This shaping by Christ's death will deal with our natural life, our old man, and our self. However, if we behave in our natural man, in our old man, or in the self, we do not bear the image of the death of Christ. In order to bear this image, we need to be conformed to Christ's death.

III. Conclusion:

When we lay ourselves aside and remain under the death of the cross, we will enjoy the power of resurrection. Immediately, the resurrection power will produce the body. This goal of producing and building the body provokes opposition. Satan fears this goal and stirs up opposition to resist it. The goal of building a body always provokes opposition. When opposition comes, we suffer. Thus we enter into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. Being conformed to the death of Christ is the real and practical experience of Christ. To experience Christ to the uttermost is death and to be conformed to His death. When we are conformed to the death of Christ, we experience Him in the release of His divine life. We should not be content with the mere outward increase. We must note how much life the new ones receive through our dispensing. The infusion of this life depends on our being conformed to the death of Christ. We need to be conformed to His death that the divine life within us may be released and dispensed into others.