THE BUILDING WORK OF GOD

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LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

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CONTENTS

1. God's Eternal Intention Being to Build a House
2. The House Built Up by God Being the Mingling of God and Man as a Mutual Abode
3. God's Building Depending upon the Growth of Life
4. God's Building Causing Man to Be Full of Christ and Causing Christ to Be Able to Make His Home in Man's Heart
5. God Desiring All the Saints to Be Built Together
6. God's Building Being the Real Need of the Church
7. The Conditions of a Builded Church (1)
8. The Conditions of a Builded Church (2)
9. The Conditions of a Builded Church (3)
10. A Few Principles for Practicing the Building of the Church

PREFACE

This book is composed of messages given by Brother Witness Lee in Taipei, Taiwan, in the eleventh edification conference for the whole island of Taiwan held on October 26 through November 4, 1958.

CHAPTER ONE

GOD'S ETERNAL INTENTION

BEING TO BUILD A HOUSE

Scripture Reading: Gen. 2:1, 8-9; 28:18-22; Exo. 29:45-46; 40:1-2, 34-35; 2 Sam. 7:1-16; 1 Kings 6:1, 11-13; 8:10-11; 9:1-3; Isa. 66:1-2; 57:15; Psa. 90:1; 91:1; 92:12-13; 27:4; 23:6; Jer. 50:7b; John 1:14; 2:19-22; Matt. 16:16-18; 1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:20-22; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19, 17; 1 John 4:13; Rev. 21:2-3, 11-12, 14, 19, 22-23; 22:1-2

The verses listed above nearly cover from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation. All these verses are included at the beginning of this chapter because we need to see that the truths presented in this chapter are supported by the entire Bible.

THE SCRIPTURES REVEALING

BOTH GOD'S CREATION AND GOD'S BUILDING

In this book we will address God's building in a specific way. People can easily see God's creation in their reading of the Holy Scriptures. However, the Scriptures not only reveal God's creation but also God's building. In the entire Bible only the first one and a half chapters of Genesis speak about God's creation. From the second half of chapter 2 to the end of the book of Revelation, the Bible speaks about the other aspect of God's work, God's building.

Brothers and sisters, I hope that you would pay attention to these two things: God's creation and God's building. When you read the Bible, at the beginning you see God's creation, but at the end of Revelation when you have finished reading it, what you see is the building of God. At the beginning of the Scriptures we are told that "the heavens and the earth and all their host were finished" (Gen. 2:1). This was the creation of God. At the end of the Bible it says that there is a city coming down out of heaven, adorned with every precious stone (Rev. 21:2, 19a). This is the building of God. In Genesis 2 we see a garden, and in the middle of the garden is the tree of life (vv. 8-9). This garden is a flower garden, filled with plants. We all realize that a garden does

not readily convey to us the thought of building. A garden primarily shows us the created things of nature, such as flowers, grass, and trees. When we see a garden, we would say, “Oh, how beautiful are the flowers and the trees created by God!” All the scenery in a garden gives us an impression of the creation of God. However, when we come to the end of Revelation, we see that the tree of life is no longer in a garden; rather, the garden has become a city. There is no longer a nature scene comprised of flowers, grass, and plants. Instead, there is a building that has been built with precious stones.

Therefore, the picture at the beginning of the Bible is very different from the picture at the end of the Bible. At the beginning it is a creation scene, whereas at the end it is a building scene. At the beginning there is a natural garden, whereas at the end there is a builded city. At the beginning everything exhibits the beauty of creation, whereas at the end everything shows forth the glory of building. Brothers and sisters, I do not know whether you have seen these two different pictures. One picture is a natural, beautiful garden produced through creation, whereas the other picture is a glorious city produced through building. In one we cannot see any building; all we can see is creation. In the other we see that in the created universe there is a building that manifests the glory of God. Thus, the Scriptures reveal that God’s work consists not only of the work of creation but even more of the work of building. Furthermore, we see that God’s creation occupies only a little more than one chapter in the Bible, whereas God’s building occupies all the rest of Scripture. From this we can see that God’s building is a very crucial matter in the Bible. Thus, to see only God’s creation is simply not enough.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD BEING ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH THE BUILDING OF GOD

What is God’s creation? And what is God’s building? We all know that to create is to produce something out of nothing. In creation something was produced without using any materials. Building, however, is different. To build is to produce a structure by using materials that are already in existence. Before creation there were neither the heavens, the earth, nor man. God created all these things. Now here is a question: Why did God create all these things? Why did God create the heavens, the earth, and man? We should not believe that God accomplished His purpose through creation. If this were so, then it would be sufficient for the Bible to have only the first two chapters. If

God only needed the heavens, the earth, and man, then God would have accomplished His purpose after He had created all these items. Then the Bible and the story of the universe would have been very simple; everything would have been accomplished by the middle of chapter 2 of Genesis. This is not, however, what the Scriptures reveal. God's creation did not accomplish His purpose; rather, the creation of God is altogether for the next step of God's work, which is building. God's creation is for the preparation of material for God's building. It is only when God has done a further work of building on created man that He will be able to accomplish His purpose. Therefore, God's creation did not directly accomplish God's purpose; the accomplishment of God's purpose depends on God's building.

GOD'S BUILDING BEING TO OBTAIN A HOUSE

What then is God building? What is the purpose of God's building work? The Scriptures provide a clear explanation of this matter. We may not be so clear when we read the first few chapters of Genesis; however, when we come to the story of Jacob, the light shines forth, and we can see a little concerning God's building.

Although Jacob had been chosen by God, he never thought much about God when he was young. He considered only his own welfare and how to take advantage of others by his craftiness. He was altogether a selfish man. However, his craftiness caused a big problem that forced him to leave home. While fleeing from his brother, he came to a certain place in the wilderness and spent the night there, because the sun had set. He took a stone as his pillow and went to sleep (Gen. 28:11). At this time he was really a wanderer, a homeless person. In this situation of wandering, God came to him. The God whom he did not care about came. The blessings that he wanted had all fled from him, whereas the God whom he did not want came to him. That night while he was sleeping, he saw a vision in his dream. In this vision there was a ladder set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven. On the ladder the angels of God were ascending and descending (v. 12). This vision impressed him deeply. I believe that the Holy Spirit enabled him to have some understanding of the meaning of this dream, which is that the God in heaven desires to enter into man on earth so that the earth and heaven may be joined and that man and God may dwell and live together. Therefore, after Jacob awoke, he did a marvelous thing. He rose up early in the morning, took the stone that he had used as a pillow, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top

of it. Furthermore, he said that this stone, this place, was Bethel (vv. 18-19, 22). In Hebrew *el* means "God," and *beth* means "house." Therefore, what Jacob meant when he said this was, "One day this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will become a house and a temple. This place is the house of God."

The marvelous thing is that Jacob did not say, "This is my house." Instead, he said, "This is the house of God." This picture corresponds to the picture in John 4. In John 4 we see a thirsty Savior asking for water to drink and a thirsty sinner coming to draw water to drink. You see the thirst on two sides. Man is thirsty, and the incarnated God is also thirsty. Both God and man want to drink water. This is the picture in John 4. What does the picture in Genesis 28 tell us? On the surface we see a homeless man, a man wandering with no home and a man who has no resting place. When we read this chapter carefully, however, we get the feeling that there was not only a homeless man but also a homeless God. Man was not the only one who did not have a home. God also did not have a home on earth. At that time all that God and man had was a pillar of stone. Man was not able to live in it, neither could God dwell in it.

Therefore, the picture in Genesis 28 is the same as the picture in John 4. In John 4 we see that both God and man were thirsty. In Genesis 28 we see that both God and man were homeless. On earth there was a homeless man, and in heaven there was a homeless God. You could say that they both faced the same hardship and thus could have sympathy for one another. In John 4 the Lord Jesus had much feeling for the thirst of the Samaritan woman, and the Samaritan woman also could sympathize with the thirst of the Lord Jesus. Here in Genesis 28 you see that God felt for this wandering, homeless man on earth, and at the same time, this homeless man probably also could sympathize with the homeless God in heaven. Of course, I do not believe that at that time Jacob was as clear as we are today. Yet, even though he was not fully clear, under the authority of the Holy Spirit he spoke some very clear and intelligible words. He said that the stone that he had set up as a pillar would become the house of God.

I do not know how Jacob was able to speak the way that he did on that day. It is really a marvelous thing. Jacob also prayed that if God would give him bread to eat and garments to put on and would bring him back to his father's house in peace, then he would take God as his God (vv. 20-21). Actually, he was bargaining with God here. He seemed to be saying, "If You take care of

my food and clothing and if You give me peace, then I will consider You to be my God." In other words, "If You do not feed or clothe me well and if You do not guarantee peace for me, then I will not take You as my God." We may laugh at Jacob's prayer, but we must realize that today there are too many Christians who are like Jacob. Please consider: how many of your prayers are like Jacob's prayer? I am afraid that in much of your prayer you also are asking for food, clothing, and safety.

Nevertheless, it is marvelous that such a selfish Jacob, who did not care for God but only for his own interest, after making such a selfish prayer, uttered such a good word. He said that if what he had asked for would happen, then the stone, which he had used as a pillow, would become God's temple, God's house.

Often at the end of our selfish and foolish prayers, we also have one or two sentences that are very clear. We may often pray, "Lord, do this for me, and do that for me." These are foolish prayers. Yet after praying this way, we may utter a sober word, saying, "If You would do this and that for me, then I would be absolutely for You." "I would be absolutely for You" is a sober word. This is the way we often pray. Someone may pray, "Lord, if You would enable my son to graduate from college and go on to obtain a doctorate degree, then I would offer to You ten percent of whatever he earns." This is to speak foolishly at the beginning and a little more soberly at the end. One who prays this way asks for God's blessing at the beginning but somewhat touches God's intention at the end. This is a Jacob-like prayer.

That day when Jacob asked God to give him food to eat and garments to put on, he was bringing up the matter of his food and clothing. We all know that in addition to needing food and clothing, man also needs a dwelling. Yet Jacob was wandering in the wilderness and did not have a home for his rest. As a result, at night he had to lay his head on a stone. I believe that he realized his need and therefore mentioned to God the problem of a house. However, it is strange that when he brought up the matter of a house, instead of speaking about his own house, he spoke about God's house. This was a person who cared only for his own well-being and not for God. Yet after he mentioned the problems related to his well-being and expressed his desire to be properly fed and clothed, it was as if he forgot about his need for a house and instead spoke about God's house. We must believe that this is the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Jacob's last few words touched the intention of God's heart.

When God brought heaven to earth, His intention was to gain Bethel, the house of God, on earth. This is the first mention of the house of God in the Holy Bible.

We have to know that in both the Old and New Testaments, whether in Hebrew or Greek, these three words—*palace, house,* and *home*—are all related. Even in the Chinese language these words are also related. A home usually is a house, and the house in which great persons such as kings live is a palace. A palace is a home, and a home is a house, a building. The entire Bible shows that God desires to gain a home, a building, in this universe. Moreover, when God revealed His intention for the first time in the Scriptures, He revealed it to a wandering, homeless person. This is marvelous.

From this point onward, the matter of God's desiring to build a house on earth becomes clearer and more concrete. God eventually gave Jacob a great number of descendants. They are referred to as the house of Jacob and the house of Israel as well. The Scriptures reveal that God's desire was to make the house of Israel His house. After God delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt, He told them that He would dwell in their midst and be their God (Exo. 29:45). This shows that God delivered His people so that He could gain a dwelling place, a house, on earth.

When the children of Israel came to the wilderness, God charged them to set up a tabernacle for Him to dwell with them. For the setting up of the tabernacle, the most important items were the standing boards overlaid with gold. They were wooden boards, yet they were covered with gold on the outside; they were golden boards, yet they were wood on the inside. Bible readers know that in typology wood denotes humanity, whereas gold denotes divinity. Hence, wood overlaid with gold implies that divinity and humanity are mingled as one. This mingling of God with man is a building. With the tabernacle the story of the mingling of divinity with humanity is seen not only in the boards but also in other furnishings, such as the Ark, the table of the bread of the Presence, and the curtains. In fact, the whole tabernacle itself shows such a mingling. This mingling is a building, and this building is the house of God.

We have to remember that God's dwelling in the tabernacle in the midst of the children of Israel was just a sign, a figure. Actually, God did not consider the tabernacle His dwelling place; rather, He considered the people of Israel

His dwelling place. God did not just dwell in the tabernacle; He dwelt in the midst of the children of Israel. The real intention of God was to mingle Himself with the children of Israel and to mingle the children of Israel with Himself so that they might become His dwelling place. With regard to this matter, God used the tabernacle as a sign. Therefore, when the children of Israel raised up the tabernacle, the glory of God, which is God Himself, filled the tabernacle. At that point God had obtained a dwelling place on earth.

After the children of Israel entered Canaan, God repeatedly blessed them, giving them rest all around and enabling them to live in peace. At that time, considering the question of a dwelling place for God, David their king said, "I dwell in a house of cedar, but the Ark of God dwells within curtains" (2 Sam. 7:2). In light of this, he decided to build a house for God. However, God in effect told him, "Do not rush! I will first build a house for you, out of which a son will come forth, and it is he who will build a house for Me. I must first build you a house, and then you can do it for Me."

This is a great spiritual principle. No one can do things for God first. God always does things for man first, and then after this, man can do things for God. God never asks anything from you when your hands are empty. God always gives to you first, and then asks a little from you. This may be likened to a father who first gives his child a bag of candy and then asks the child for a piece of candy. Nevertheless, sometimes the father is treated very pitifully, because even though he has already given the child a bag of candy, when he asks for only one piece of candy, the child puts his hands behind his back. In this situation the father has no other way except to bring out another bag of candy and tell the child, "If you give me a piece, I will give you another bag." After some calculation, the child considers it quite a bargain to give one piece and get another bag, so he is willing to give his father a piece of candy. However, the father will have to prepare a third bag if he wants to ask the child for another piece. If the father does not have the third bag of candy, the child will not give him a second piece of candy. Likewise, there is always a similar difficulty whenever God asks us for something. However, I can tell you that if God asks you for something, He has a "second bag" already prepared for you. Furthermore, He not only has a second bag, but He has prepared an unlimited number of bags. You can be at peace because God never asks anything from you when you are empty-handed. Instead, He always gives to you before asking anything from you.

That day when David first wanted to build a house for God, even Nathan the prophet, who knew God, did not understand this principle. Therefore, he said to David, “All that is in your heart go and do, for Jehovah is with you” (v. 3). Then God came to Nathan immediately and told him, “No! Go and tell David that he cannot build Me a house. I must first build him a house, and afterward a son will come out of that house, and then that son will build Me a house.”

Eventually, when Solomon was born, he did build a temple for God, and the glory of God filled it. That temple, however, was still only a sign. Just as God did not dwell in the tabernacle, He also did not dwell in the temple. Rather, God considered the children of Israel to be His temple. When the condition of the children of Israel before God was normal, God dwelt among them, and that temple was filled with the glory of God. When the children of Israel were in desolation before God, God could no longer dwell in their midst, and the glory of God also left the temple. Therefore, the temple was only a sign, a symbol. The real temple was the children of Israel. God did not dwell in a house made of stones; instead, He dwelt among the children of Israel. Therefore, God said in Isaiah, “Heaven is My throne, / And the earth the footstool for My feet. / Where then is the house that you will build for Me, / And where is the place of My rest?... / But to this kind of man will I look, to him who is poor / And of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (66:1-2). Just as heaven is not God’s dwelling place, so the house on earth is not His dwelling place. He looks to a group of people into whom He can enter. Furthermore, God spoke through Isaiah, “Thus says the high and exalted One, / Who inhabits eternity,... / I will dwell in the high and holy place, / And with the contrite and lowly of spirit” (57:15). These words clearly reveal that the heavens and the earth are not the dwelling place of God. The dwelling place that God wants to have is a group of people. If God does not gain a group of people, then He will be a God without a home in the universe. Therefore, He longs to gain a group of people so that they can be built together to be His dwelling place.

IN GOD’S BUILDING,

GOD ALSO BEING MAN’S DWELLING PLACE

Please remember, however, that God wants us not only to be His dwelling place but also to take Him as our dwelling place. If you read carefully about

the godly people in the Old Testament, you will find out that the one thing they desired the most, the thing that gave them the most comfort and rest, was to dwell in the house of God. Every one of the godly saints of old had his own house, but none of them considered his house a place of rest. They all desired to dwell in the house of God. Therefore, they said, "One thing I have asked from Jehovah; / That do I seek: / To dwell in the house of Jehovah / All the days of my life" (Psa. 27:4). They also said, "A day in Your courts is better than a thousand; / I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God" (84:10). These verses show that God's house is our house. Please remember that this house is the issue of the mingling of God with man, and it is also the mutual abode of both God and man—God dwelling in man and man dwelling in God. God dwells in this abode, taking man as His dwelling place, and man dwells in it, taking God as his dwelling place.

Without man, God does not have a home in the universe, and without God, man also does not have a home. The Bible shows that man is the house of God, and God is the house of man. In this universe if God does not gain a group of people, He is a homeless God. Likewise, if we do not obtain God, we are homeless people. Let me ask all of you, where do you live? Someone may say that he lives on Ren Ai Road, and another one may say that he lives on Shin Yi Road. May I ask you, do you really live in those places? If you only have a house that you purchased or that you rent, you are a homeless person! If your circumstances were to change a little, or if something were to happen to you, you would not know where to go. Man's eternal dwelling place is God. Without God, man is without a home on earth. Therefore, in the Psalms a godly saint of old says, "O Lord, You have been our dwelling place / In all generations" (90:1). What this psalmist seemed to say was, "Our forefathers throughout the generations all dwelt in You, and today we also dwell in You." The earthly dwelling places are not our homes. Our eternal dwelling place is our God. The Lord Himself is our home, our resting place. When we have Him, we have real rest.

Today many people have mobile homes. Thank and praise the Lord, every one of us who has God has a "mobile home" following us all the time. When we are on a train, He follows us. When we are in an airplane, He also follows us. We are people who have God, so we are no longer homeless. Today we do not need to rest our head on a stone; rather, we can rest our whole being in God. We are His dwelling place, and He is also our habitation.

Jeremiah 50:7 says, “They [the children of Israel] have sinned against Jehovah, / The habitation of righteousness, / Even Jehovah, the hope of their fathers.” This God is the habitation of their fathers and their habitation. Do not think that the children of Israel dwelt in the land of Israel. The land of Israel was not their dwelling place. God was their dwelling place. While they were dwelling in God, they were dwelling in the land of Israel outwardly. Thus, when God left them due to their abnormal condition, He also drove them away from the land of Israel. Therefore, the land of Israel was not their dwelling place. Only God Himself was their dwelling place.

GOD’S BUILDING AS THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE ISSUING FROM THE MUTUAL ABIDING OF GOD WITH MAN

The whole universe needs a building for God to dwell in man as His abode, and man to dwell in God as his abode. God and man are a mutual abode to each other. Without man, God is a wandering God, a homeless God. In the same way, without God, man is a wandering man, a homeless man.

Therefore, God intends to have a building in this universe in which God is built into man and man is built into God so that God and man, man and God, can be a mutual abode to each other. First John 4:13 says, “In this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, that He has given to us of His Spirit.” Today God is building us into a spiritual house, the temple of God, a universal building, and a universal house so that God may have a home and man also may have a dwelling place. In this way both God and man may have rest.

The ultimate manifestation of this building is the New Jerusalem. In this city, God is in man, taking man as His dwelling place, and man is in God, having God as his habitation. This is a glorious matter. This is the work God wants to do today.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HOUSE BUILT UP BY GOD BEING THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN AS A MUTUAL ABODE

Scripture Reading: Psa. 90:1; 92:12-13; Luke 2:37; 1 Cor. 6:17, 19; 1 John 4:13; Rev. 21:2-3

In the first chapter we saw that God wants to gain a house in the universe through His work of building so that both God and man can have a resting place. We saw that after the completion of the work of creation the Bible says that God rested (Gen. 2:1-3), yet in Isaiah 66:1 God says, "Heaven is My throne, / And the earth the footstool for My feet... / Where is the place of My rest?" This word proves that although God created the heavens and the earth and has finished His work of creation, He has not obtained a resting place in the universe. Therefore, He needs to do a further work to build a resting place for Himself. The building work of God is emphasized repeatedly in the Scriptures. While the work of God's creation took only six days, after six thousand years the building work of God is still not finished. Therefore, in the universe God's work of building is a great and mysterious matter.

What then is the building work of God? And how will it be completed? In brief, the building work of God is the mingling of God and man. God mingling with man is God building Himself into man; man mingling with God is man being built into God. In God's creation heaven was heaven, earth was earth, God was God, and man was man. The two sides were never mingled together. In God's work of building, however, God wants to build Himself into man and to build man into Himself. When these two are mingled and built together, they become a building in the universe, which may be called the universal house. This building, or we may say this house, is constituted through the mingling of God and man. It is the house of God, and it is also the house of man. It is God taking man as His dwelling place, and it is also man taking God as his habitation. In other words, it is the mutual abode of God and man.

The Scriptures clearly show that all of God's work in time is for gaining such a dwelling place, such a house. Although the universe comprises both

heaven and earth, God does not take heaven as His dwelling place, neither does He consider the earth to be man's habitation. If God does not mingle Himself with man to become one with man but remains outside of man, then God does not have a dwelling place; He is a God without a home. Similarly, if man is not mingled with God to become one with God and if man continues to live outside of God, then man is a wandering, homeless man. For both God and man, the real dwelling place in the universe is neither heaven nor earth, much less any physical house; rather, it is the oneness of the mutual mingling of God and man, the oneness of God being mingled with man and man being mingled with God. This oneness is a great universal oneness, a spiritual building, and a great universal house. God's building work throughout the generations is to obtain such a dwelling place, such a house.

THE HOUSE OF GOD COMING INTO BEING ONLY THROUGH THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN

In the previous chapter we mentioned that God's building is revealed in Genesis 28. There it says that Jacob saw a ladder in his dream and heard God's promise to him. After he woke up, he took the stone, which he had used as a pillow, and set it up as a pillar. Then he poured oil on top of it, saying, "This stone...will be God's house" (v. 22).

We must pay attention to Jacob's pouring of oil upon the stone. Why did Jacob pour oil upon the stone that he had set up as a pillar? The first time the house of God is mentioned in the Scriptures is in Genesis 28. This chapter is also the first time where such a pouring of oil is mentioned. At that time Jacob was a young man who had not received any spiritual education. Moreover, he was not a person who was seeking after God, and none of his forefathers had ever poured oil upon anything. We have to admit that what Jacob did that morning was an extraordinary thing.

Immediately after God appeared to him, Jacob said, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (v. 17). For him to say this was already quite spiritual. However, what is even more amazing is that he took the stone that he had used as a pillow, set it up as a pillar, poured oil upon it, and said that this oil-covered pillar would be the house of God. What is the meaning of pouring oil upon the pillar of stone? When we come to the New Testament, we can see its meaning clearly. Bible scholars all know that in the Scriptures oil signifies the Holy Spirit and that a stone denotes a saved

person. The Lord Jesus said to Peter, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). In Greek *Peter* means "a stone." Peter himself also told us that all the saved ones are living stones being built up as a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5a). Hence, we can see that oil being poured upon a stone signifies that God is poured upon man, that God is mingled with man.

In order for there to be the house of God, there must be the mingling of God and man, as typified by the pouring of oil upon the stone. When God as the Spirit comes upon and into His redeemed people, the two are mingled together. This is the house of God, the dwelling place of God.

I wish that all the children of God could see that whenever and wherever there are people who have the Spirit of God poured upon them and who are joined with the Spirit of God, there is the temple of God, the house of God. There, God is with man and dwells in man, and man also dwells in God.

After His resurrection, when the Lord Jesus came to His disciples and breathed into them, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22), the Lord poured oil upon stones. Moreover, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured upon those people, this also was a picture of oil being poured upon stones. In both these cases oil was poured upon stones. We must remember that when oil is poured upon stones, this produces the temple of God, the house of God. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the one hundred twenty people, the Triune God came into their midst and was dwelling within them. At the same time they also were dwelling in God. They really could testify, "We know that God dwells in us, and we dwell in God; God and we are a mutual abode. We are stones, and God is the oil. The oil has been poured upon the stones to produce a temple, which is the house of God."

We see therefore that the first time the Scriptures mention the house of God, they refer allegorically to the union and mingling of God and man. This proves that without the mingling of God and man, there cannot be the universal building, the house of God. Only when there is the mingling of God and man can there be a dwelling place as the house of God.

GOD'S BUILDING IN THE OLD TESTAMENT—

THE TABERNACLE AND THE TEMPLE—

HAVING THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN AS ITS CENTER

We must ask the Lord to give us light to see that the building, the house, God wants to obtain in the universe is altogether not a physical house but a spiritual building of the mingling of God and man. It is true that the Old Testament says that God dwelt in the tabernacle and then the temple, but that was only a symbol of God's union with the children of Israel. In Isaiah, God said clearly that heaven is His throne, and the earth is His footstool and that the house that the children of Israel built for Him was not the place of His rest (66:1). His desire was to be with His people and dwell among them, taking them as His dwelling place. Therefore, strictly speaking, God dwelt neither in the material tabernacle nor in the material temple but among the children of Israel as His dwelling place. God was united with the children of Israel and became one entity with them, and this one entity was a spiritual house in which both God and the godly people in Israel dwelt.

If you ponder over the picture of the tabernacle, you will sense how meaningful the tabernacle was. When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, the twelve tribes camped around the tabernacle, and inside the tabernacle was the glory of God. When the cloud was taken up and the glory of God began to move, they knew that God was moving, so the twelve tribes would set out and follow. When the glory of God set down in a certain place, they knew that God had settled there, so they also settled there and stopped moving. Their moving was altogether dependent upon God's moving in the tabernacle. Moreover, the tabernacle became the place where God met with His people. Out of the tabernacle God spoke to His people. These pictures show that God dwelt among the children of Israel through the tabernacle. The tabernacle was the house of God, in which God dwelt and into which the seekers of God entered. It was the meeting place of God and man.

After the children of Israel entered into Canaan, the tabernacle was replaced by the temple. The temple was a stable, firm tabernacle. The temple was also clearly a center. All the works of God were concentrated there, and God Himself and His glory were also there. Furthermore, the godly men, men who were of God and in oneness with God, also dwelt there. Now you can understand the passages in the Psalms that speak about the temple. The psalmists greatly longed to dwell in the temple of God because they knew that

they could be in union with God and have God dwell in them and have them dwell in God. Therefore, apparently they were desirous of dwelling in the temple of God, but in reality they longed to dwell in God as their dwelling place.

In Psalm 90:1 Moses prays, "O Lord, You have been our dwelling place / In all generations." If you were to ask Moses where he was dwelling, I believe that he would tell you that he dwelt in God, that his house, his dwelling place, was God Himself. In Psalm 91:1 the psalmist says, "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High / Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty." Then in Psalm 92:12-13 the psalmist says that the righteous man is like a tree planted in the house of Jehovah and flourishing in the courts of God.

Many love to read Psalm 23. The first part of that Psalm says, "Jehovah is my Shepherd; I will lack nothing. / He makes me lie down in green pastures; / He leads me beside waters of rest" (vv. 1-2). Many read up to this point and think it is enough. Yet the psalmist does not think it is enough. This is only the beginning. Feeding and being satisfied on the green pastures, and resting and drinking to the full beside waters of rest are experiences of a new believer. Therefore, the psalmist goes on to say that we still have to walk on the paths of righteousness that lie before us, to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and to be on the battlefield feasting at the table that God will spread before us in the presence of our adversaries (vv. 3-5). Finally, the psalmist says, "And I will dwell in the house of Jehovah / For the length of my days" (v. 6).

All those who understand the Scriptures know that the Old Testament is primarily concerned with the tabernacle and the temple. We can almost say that the history of the Old Testament is a history of the tabernacle and the temple. This is because God's work throughout the Old Testament was focused on this one point—His intention to build a dwelling place so that He can dwell with man. In reality, however, the visible tabernacle and temple were merely types. The children of Israel were the real temple, the real dwelling place of God. Therefore, when the children of Israel were in desolation, God could not dwell among them any longer, and He had no choice but to return to the heavens. At such a time God also caused the temple to be destroyed immediately. The land of Canaan in which the children of Israel dwelt was also not their habitation. Their real habitation was God Himself. Therefore, when they lost their fellowship with God and had a

problem with God, then they also could not continue to dwell in Canaan and were driven out into the nations by God.

This is a marvelous yet serious matter. When the condition of the children of Israel was normal, God was united with them, He could dwell in their midst, and they learned to live before God. The two—God and the children of Israel, the children of Israel and God—were in union, in oneness, and in their midst there was a temple, a dwelling place, which was the house of God. God could dwell in it, and they also could dwell in it. The children of Israel and God became a dwelling place to one another. However, when their condition before God became abnormal, when they had a problem with God, God had no choice but to return to the heavens. He could no longer be in union with them and dwell among them. In this situation could they be at peace and without trouble? No, they were driven into the nations by God. Since they would not be God's dwelling place, God also would not be their habitation. Thus, God became a homeless God, and He made His people a wandering, homeless people. Therefore, when the temple was destroyed, God became "the God of the heavens," which was how He was addressed in the prophetic books written after the captivity. He had no dwelling place or resting place on earth. On the other hand, the children of Israel, who rejected Him, were driven away to wander among the nations. When God loses man, God becomes a homeless God; when man loses God, man also becomes a homeless man.

Therefore, the center of the entire record of the Old Testament is the temple, which signifies the mingling of God and man. When there is the proper mingling of God and man, God has a dwelling place, and man also has a habitation. In this way there is a building in the universe, a universal house. When there is not the proper mingling of God and man, or when there is a problem with this mingling, then this building is destroyed. Thus, God does not have a home on earth, and man is also homeless and wandering from place to place.

We must see that this is what God pays attention to and desires to obtain, and this is also what Satan hates and wants to destroy. In the Old Testament the enemy Satan destroyed this temple. When people were instigated by Satan to attack the children of Israel, their ultimate goal was to tear down the temple. In the same principle, when the people of God revived, their ultimate goal was to build the temple. Therefore, the Old Testament ends with the

recovery of the temple. This signifies the restoration of the fellowship between God and man and the recovery of the mingling of God and man so that God could dwell in man, and man could dwell in God.

GOD'S BUILDING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT— THE CHURCH—ALSO HAVING THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN AS ITS CENTER

Now let us look at the New Testament. The first matter in the beginning of the New Testament is the incarnation, which is God's coming into man. This is a marvelous matter! Today's Christianity constantly pays attention to the story of Bethlehem, saying that a Savior was born there for us. Surely this is right, but it is not enough. The story of Bethlehem is not only about a Savior but also about the mingling of God and man, about God coming into man. The significance of what happened in Bethlehem is that God became flesh and entered into man to be mingled with man and to become one with man. It is a mystery that God comes into man to be God to man. Whereas formerly God was outside of man, now God has entered into man. This is not a matter of God's descending from the heavens to the earth. God's descending from the heavens to the earth is a human thought, not a divine concept. The significance of what happened in Bethlehem is not merely that God came from the heavens to the earth but that God entered into man. Incarnation is God's coming into man, entering into a union with man, and tabernacling among men.

We need to remember that the Word becoming flesh and tabernacling among men is related to building. When the Word became flesh, a substantial building, a practical building, began. God began to build Himself into man. Now there was a man who could say, "God is in Me. Outside of Me you cannot find God, and you do not have God. I am a man born of Mary, and I am a Nazarene whose name is Jesus, yet there is God in Me. Within Me is the very God. I am the tabernacle; I am the temple; I am the building of God. Have you ever seen the tabernacle? I am the tabernacle. Have you ever seen the temple? I am the temple."

One day the Jews asked Him, "What sign do You show us, seeing that You do these things?" He answered, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:18-19). He had no other signs to show them except this

one. The Jews did not understand what He meant. All they saw was the temple before their eyes, which was the temple built by King Herod. The temple in the Old Testament had three stages. The first stage was the temple built by King Solomon and destroyed by the Babylonians. The second stage was the temple rebuilt by Ezra and his companions after their return from the land of captivity. The scale of that temple was very small. The third stage was the temple reconstructed by Herod when he became the king of the Jewish people shortly before the birth of the Lord. In order to please the Jews, Herod rebuilt and enlarged the temple, spending forty-six years to complete it. This was the temple the Jews saw at that time. They said to the Lord, "This temple was built in forty-six years, and You will raise it up in three days?" This was because they did not understand that the Lord was speaking of the temple of His body (vv. 20-21). God was mingled with Him, and He was the temple of God.

Satan, however, hated this temple and wanted to get rid of it and to destroy it. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus was being judged, the Jews cried out, "Take Him away! Take Him away! Crucify Him!" (19:15). Satan thought that he could destroy the temple of God, the building of God, by destroying this man. After three days, however, the Lord resurrected. Through the Lord's resurrection the small temple became enlarged. Originally, the Lord was one grain of wheat, but now through death and resurrection He produced many grains. Formerly, the Lord alone was the temple, but after He resurrected from the dead and imparted His life into His people, they also became the temple of God. Before the Lord's resurrection, only Jesus the Nazarene was the temple. However, after the Lord's resurrection the Galileans who belonged to the Lord and all those who had received the Lord's life all became a part of this temple. This is what the Lord meant when He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Therefore, after His resurrection the Lord's physical body became His mystical Body, which includes Peter, James, and John, as well as all of us, the saved ones. After His resurrection the Lord's Body is an immense Body, an immeasurable temple. This Body, which He raised up in His resurrection, is His church. The church is His Body, His temple.

Dear brothers and sisters, we need to see clearly this matter of God's building in the New Testament age. First, the Lord as the Word became flesh to be a tabernacle, a temple. God mingled Himself with Him and dwelt within Him. At that time, however, the scale of that temple was very small. It was

limited to one man, whose name is Jesus, the Nazarene. In the entire human race the building of God was within Him alone. He alone was the tabernacle of God, the temple of God. God dwelt in Him, and He dwelt in God. Then God caused Him to go through death and resurrection so that He could impart His life into His people. In this way what happened in Bethlehem in the incarnation could also happen in them. Thus, God entered into these people and was constituted into them. They were also brought into God, and they became the temple of God. As a result, the temple has been enlarged. It is no longer limited to one person but has been enlarged to include thousands and thousands of people.

Since that day that He entered into His people, God has been building this temple. The Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church" (Matt. 16:18). What is this rock? This rock refers to the resurrected Christ. Immediately after Peter received the revelation and knew that the Lord was the Christ, the Son of the living God (v. 16), the Lord said, "Upon this rock I will build My church." The church is being built upon Christ, the Son of the living God. Since that day God's work has been to build the Body—the church as the temple of God—upon this rock as the foundation.

In this divine building the Lord Himself is not only the rock, the foundation, but also the cornerstone (Eph. 2:20; Matt. 21:42). Every stone in this house is joined to Him. Therefore, 1 Peter 2:4-5 says that the Lord is a living stone and that all the saved ones as living stones are joined to Him and are being built upon Him as a spiritual house for God and His people to dwell in.

For two thousand years God has been doing this building work in the church. The apostle Paul says that after the Lord's resurrection and ascension He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers. All these gifts are for the building up of His Body, which is the church (Eph. 4:8-13). Furthermore, he said that in Christ all of us who are saved are being built together into a dwelling place of God in spirit (2:21-22). He also said that we are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16), and that "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (6:17). Therefore, this building is the union of God and man in spirit. It is man and God becoming one spirit. This one spirit is a building, a spiritual house, which is the church. Both God and man are in this spirit and dwell in this spirit. This is God's work of building in the New Testament age.

THE CHURCH COMING INTO BEING ONLY WHEN THERE IS THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN

The church is a very particular item. The church is neither solely human nor solely divine; rather, the church is the crystallization of the mingling of God and man. If there is only humanity, of course there cannot be the church. If there is only divinity, there still cannot be the church. Only when God is mingled with man and becomes one with man can there be the church.

Let me give a little illustration. Sometimes two brothers are at odds with each other and have a grudge against each other. One has a long face when he sees the other one, and the other one frowns when he sees that one. Sometimes they even have arguments. What is this? This is man's poor situation. In this kind of situation you cannot see the church expressed. There is no church here. However, at other times you see another kind of situation. There may be two other brothers who love each other dearly. When one calls, the other responds right away. When they come together, they are all smiles. This may seem wonderful to you. But what kind of situation is this? It is still only human, and there is also no church here. When there is frowning, there is no church. Likewise, when there is a cheerful look, there is no church. With a long face, there cannot be the church; with a smiling face, there cannot be the church either. These are only human conditions. When there is human hatred, there is no church; when there is human love, there is also no church.

Then what is the church? Both of these persons, one with a long face and the other with a frown, have God in them, and both of them have a prayer life before God. When the long-faced one kneels down before God to pray, he will be conscious that his long face is not of God. Meanwhile, when the frowning one also kneels down to pray, he also will feel that his frowning is incompatible with the fact that God is within him. Therefore, both of them will confess to God and ask for forgiveness. As a result, they will genuinely touch God within them. Although they do not make a resolution to refrain from having a long face or frowning again, both of them meet God and are touched by God. Therefore, one will come to the other one and say, "Brother, I am sorry for my attitude toward you over the last few days." And the other one will say, "Brother, it is I who should be sorry for my attitude toward you." Now the condition between these two persons is neither hatred nor merely

human love but a love that is of God. As a result, these two brothers will have good fellowship and good coordination. What is this? This is the mingling of God with man. Not only is man here, but also God is here. This is the mingling of divinity with humanity. Hence, the church is here.

On the other side, the other two brothers who are so loving and are all smiles also have God in them. When they seek the Lord, God also will bother them and ask, "What kind of behavior is this? This is human love. This is the flesh. This is the corruptible honey of the Old Testament." As a result, these two brothers will also be dealt with and restricted by God and will no longer love one another loosely according to their own preference. In this way the church will also be expressed through them.

The above examples are somewhat superficial, but according to the same principle, many times the children of God are disciplined by God to the extent that neither crying nor laughing is right, neither speaking nor being silent is right, and neither being still nor moving is right. They seem to be in a quandary and in a great dilemma all the time. This is the story of God in man. This is the particular experience of a Christian. Within man, God makes it possible for man to be what man cannot be and to live a life that man cannot live. God Himself being mingled with man—this is the church. The church is such a peculiar, wonderful thing. The church is the mingling together of two natures, the union of two lives together. God is mingled with man, and man is mingled with God. Furthermore, not only one person is mingled with God, but many people are mingled with God to become one entity. This is the building of God. This is the house of God. Here God has a home, and man has a habitation. Here God has a place of rest, and man also has a place of satisfaction. This is God's building.

THE NEW JERUSALEM BEING THE ULTIMATE ISSUE OF THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN

At the very end of the New Testament all the building work of God is accomplished, and a city appears, which is the holy city, New Jerusalem. This city is produced by the union and mingling of all the saved ones throughout the generations. Therefore, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed on the twelve gates of the city, and the names of the twelve apostles are on the twelve foundations of the city (Rev. 21:12, 14). This indicates that God has built both the people of God in the Old Testament age and the people

of God in the New Testament age into this city. Furthermore, in this city there is the throne of God and of the Lamb, and God and the Lamb are the temple (22:1, 3; 21:22). The life flowing in the city is God Himself (22:1), and the light shining out of the city is also God Himself (21:23-24). Moreover, both the content of the city within and its glory without are God Himself. Therefore, the holy city, New Jerusalem, is a spiritual building as the issue of God being completely mingled with His redeemed people. Here God has an eternal dwelling place, and man also has an eternal habitation.

Thus, in this age, before that day arrives, God is building His house in every locality. This means that God intends to build His church in every locality. This is God's building today, and this is God's building in this age. God wants to build Himself into all the saints and to build all the saints into Himself. In the building the saints are not joined to Him individually; rather, all the saints are united with Him corporately. This is God's building. This is God's house. This is the dwelling place of God, and this is the habitation of all the saved ones. May we all have a share in this building.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD'S BUILDING DEPENDING UPON THE GROWTH OF LIFE

Scripture Reading: Gen. 2:8-12; 1 Cor. 3:6-12; 1 Pet. 2:2-5; Eph. 2:21-22; 4:12-13, 15-16; Col. 2:19; Rev. 22:1-2

After the first two chapters I hope that we are all clear about one thing: in this universe God desires to build Himself into man and to build man into Himself so that God and man may be mingled together to be one entity. This is the spiritual building, the house of God, which God intends to build in the universe. It is not only the habitation of God but also the dwelling place of man. God dwells in man, who is in union with God, and takes man as His dwelling place. Likewise, man dwells in God, who is in union with man, and takes God as his habitation. Therefore, this building is produced by the building of God with man to be the mutual abode of God and man. All of God's work among men for the past six thousand years is for this building.

GOD MINGLING HIMSELF WITH MAN IN THE FORM OF FOOD

Now we want to see how God accomplishes this work. In other words, we want to see how God builds this building. We have said that God's building is arrived at through the mingling of God and man. God mingles Himself with man, and He mingles man with Himself; this is building. But how does God mingle Himself with man? God mingles Himself with us and becomes one with us by coming into us in the form of food to be our life.

The best way for anything to be mingled with us is for it to be eaten by us. For example, if you want a chicken or an apple to be mingled with you and to become one with you, the best way is to eat it so that it will be digested to become your blood, bones, flesh, skin, and all the elements within you. In this way you and the food that you have eaten are mingled together and become one. Therefore, the best way for something outside of us to be mingled with us is for it to be eaten by us.

Please remember that in order to be mingled and built with us, God takes this one way—He comes in the form of food to be eaten by us. God desires that man's relationship with Him would not be characterized by man worshipping Him or doing things for Him; rather, God desires that man would take Him in as food so that He would be digested in man and become man's inner constitution. According to the Scriptures, the first time God appeared to man was not as a God for man to worship but as a tree of life for man to eat. After man was created, God put him in front of this tree of life (Gen. 2:9). God meant for man to eat Him, to receive this life as food into him.

When we first read the Bible and came to Genesis 2, we may not have understood what it meant. However, in light of the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John, it is very clear. The Gospel of John says that "in Him was life" (1:4) and that the Lord came that we may have life (10:10). The Lord Jesus Himself also told people clearly that He is the bread of life and that he who eats Him shall live because of Him (6:35, 48, 57). The Lord's word shows that just as food is daily eaten by us so that we may live by it, He also wants to be received into us in the form of food so that we may live because of Him. Therefore, the Gospel of John repeatedly uses the word *in*. For example: "You *in* Me, and I *in* you" (14:20), and "You, Father, are *in* Me and I *in* You, that they also may be *in* Us" (17:21). These *in*s reveal that the Lord wants to come into us and wants us to enter into Him so that He and we may be mingled together and become one.

THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN CAUSING THE GROWTH OF LIFE

When God mingles Himself with us in the form of food, the result is that we grow in life. This matter is not difficult to understand. All of us are about five to six feet tall. When we were born, however, we were only about one foot in length. How did we grow to be so tall now? It is altogether because we have continually been putting things into us, and these things have been mingled with us. The more there is this mingling, the more we grow. These things that are mingled with us were previously different kinds of food and were not our constituents. But after they were eaten and received into us, they were digested to become our blood, our cells, and all kinds of elements within us.

Through this process this food is completely mingled with us and causes us to grow.

The growth of our spiritual life is in accordance with the same principle. Colossians 2:19 says explicitly that we grow with the growth of God. If daily we draw near to God, enjoy God, and receive Him into us as food and drink, then He will mingle Himself with us. This mingling causes the element of God to increase in us, and in this way our spiritual life will grow more and more.

GROWTH IN LIFE AND BUILDING BEING INSEPARABLE

God's purpose in coming into us in the form of food to be mingled with us as our life and to grow in us is to build a temple, which is the house of God. Therefore, in the Scriptures we often see that growth and building are linked together.

Nearly all the verses listed at the beginning of the chapter refer to both growth and building. First Corinthians 3:9 says, "You are God's cultivated land, God's building." As God's cultivated land, we need to grow; as God's building, we need to be built up. Therefore, growth is building, and building is growth; these two things cannot be separated. Hence, Ephesians 2 says that this spiritual house, this dwelling place of God, is built up by growing (vv. 21-22), just as our body reaches its full stature by growing. Moreover, 1 Peter 2 says that having been saved and having put away sins, we need to long for the spiritual milk so that we may grow (vv. 1-2). Following this, it says that as living stones we are being built up as a spiritual house (v. 5). Ephesians 4:12-13 says, "Unto the building up of the Body of Christ, until we all arrive...at a full-grown man." Without growth, there is no building up. The more we grow, the more we are built up. When we are fully grown, then the building will be complete. Hence, God's growth and mingling in us are God's building.

THERE BEING NO BUILDING WITHOUT THE GROWTH IN LIFE

Brothers and sisters, this principle is very practical. Today many in the church are short of the building mainly because they do not have enough growth in life. Too many Christians are without adequate growth in life. We often meet some brothers and sisters who have the life of God in them, yet

there is no growth. Sometimes when we meet such a one, we even wonder if he is saved. Yet he truly has been saved. He has confessed that he is a sinner and has received the Lord Jesus as his Savior. Indeed, his sins have been forgiven, and he has the life of the Lord in him. Nevertheless, he has no growth, no progress. Today he is exactly the same as he was five years ago. We sometimes refer to someone being an "old child." What is an "old child"? A child who is one year old is not an "old child," but after ten years he still looks like a one-year-old, then he is an "old child." And after twenty years if he is still so small, then he is an "old child" even more. There are too many "old-child" Christians among the brothers and sisters! Sometimes we see a believer who looks like a newly saved one, but when we inquire a little bit, we are surprised that he has already been saved for twenty years. He is as immature as he was twenty years ago. Such a one is an "old-child" Christian.

One thing is certain—Christians who have no growth have never been built up. When you met such a one twenty years ago, he was either blaming this brother for being wrong or criticizing that sister for being improper. Today, twenty years later, when you see him again, he still has no other topic except the mistakes and defects of others. This proves that he has not grown one bit. As a result, we cannot see any building in him. Such a person who is without growth and building is surely a peculiar member in the church. You sense that he is not a stone built into the house but a stone lying beside the house. He is individualistic, secluded, and unable to be one with others. Therefore, he is a member who is detached from the Body of Christ. Furthermore, in the church he is as round, shiny, and slippery as a marble and therefore cannot be blended with others. I surely have met brothers and sisters like this.

This condition is due to the lack of growth. Experience shows that as long as you have a little growth in life, you can love the brothers and sisters and bear with them. In this way you will be able to be with others in the church. If in your eyes none of the brothers are good or lovable, this shows that you lack the element of God within you and are short of growth in life. This also shows that you have not been eating, drinking, and enjoying God for a prolonged period of time.

THE BUILDING BEING WITH THE GROWTH IN LIFE

Thank God, however, that although man has so many difficulties, God still will do His work. We may refuse to grow, but God has a way to make us grow.

For example, someone may suddenly be hit by a car and knocked to the ground while riding a bicycle. This accident may result in an injury that is not too serious but not insignificant either. As a result, while this person is lying in the hospital, he will begin to have a desire for God. At this moment spontaneously he will open his inner being a small crack to let God in. On his bed he will pray and ask for the Lord's forgiveness, thus restoring his fellowship with the Lord. He may be sorrowful and even weep while he prays, yet within he will also feel sweet. As this is happening, the element of God within him will increase a little bit. At that time, not only will he love God, but he will also love the brothers. While he is lying on the hospital bed, he will look forward to seeing the brothers and sisters. If some brothers and sisters come to visit him, instead of feeling disgusted with them, he will feel that all of them are lovable. All of them will be blended and become inseparable.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have to see, therefore, that the real building comes from growth. The more growth there is, the more building there will be. Worldly people form associations and join themselves together, but this is absolutely not what we mean by being built together. Our being built together is altogether by the life we have in common. When this life grows in you and also in me, then we grow together with one another. The more you grow in this life, the more you will love your brothers and sisters and be joined to them, even glued together with them. When you and your brothers and sisters are glued together, it will be impossible to be separated. Hence, building comes from growth.

GROWTH IN LIFE DEPENDING ON OUR GROWING UP INTO CHRIST IN ALL THINGS

In order to grow in life and be built together, we must pay attention to this one thing—growing up into Christ in all things. Concerning the building of the church, Ephesians 4:15 says that we need to grow up into Christ, the Head, in all things. We have been saved, and we are in the Lord, but we have to confess that even up to the present, in many things we have not yet grown up into the Lord. For example, many of us have not yet grown up into the Lord in the matter of speaking, although we have been saved for many years. Please look at your real situation and consider how loose your speaking is. You may refrain from speaking defiling words and insulting words, but in the matter of

speaking, your mouth and your tongue have never been restricted and regulated by God. You say things and spread words as you please.

One thing that often makes me sad is that words are spread much too quickly among the brothers and sisters. Many say that they cannot pray and read the Word properly because they are too busy. Someone may be so busy that he comes to the meetings only once a month. But the strange thing is that when the same person engages in idle talk and the spreading of rumors, this one can speak for three hours without end. Such a brother or sister does not know what it means to have a circumcised tongue. In the church much trouble is caused and much death is produced from idle talk. This means that our speech is unrestricted and has not been dealt with and that we have not grown up into Christ, the Head, in the matter of speaking.

However, if you have learned this lesson and have grown up into Christ in the matter of speaking, when you contact and speak with others, Christ will be your confinement and your restriction, and He will guard your lips. You will sense that the Lord is not only your dwelling place but also your prison. Just as Paul said that he was a prisoner in Christ (3:1; 4:1), so everyone who abides in Christ is a prisoner in Christ, and as such, he cannot act freely or speak loosely.

This one thing is certain: when a person who is restricted in his words testifies for God or offers prayers and praises to the Lord, his mouth is open and his tongue is quick. Whenever he touches the things of God and the testimony of the Lord, his mouth is enlivened. This is because he is a person who is in the Lord and is growing up into Christ, the Head, in the matter of speaking.

This is not only the case in the matter of speaking, but it should be so in every matter of our daily living. Husbands, are you in the Lord in your dealing with your wife? Wives, are you in the Lord and do you grow up into Him in the way you treat your husband at home? Children, does your attitude toward your parents show that you are in the Lord? Is it under His restriction? Masters, are you in the Lord in the way you treat your servants? The book of Ephesians shows that those who are masters must treat their servants with fairness in the Lord. In this matter, are we in the Lord in our words, in our attitude, in the tone of our voice, and in our intention and thoughts? Those of you who are government employees, how do you deal with your supervisors

and colleagues? Are you loyal to your agency and to your job? Do you go to work on time? Do you perform your tasks faithfully? Do you bear your responsibilities seriously? Do you bear the difficulties with endurance? Do you really look like a person who is in Christ? This is the big question. Dear brothers and sisters, in all things we must grow up into Christ, the Head. If in a certain matter we are not growing up into Christ, then in that matter we cannot be joined to the saints. The more we grow up in all things, the more we are being joined to the saints.

THE REAL BUILDING DEPENDING ON THE GROWTH IN LIFE

We have to see, therefore, that the real building of the house of God depends on our growth in life. The more we grow, the more we are built up. Our growth in life is the increase of God in us. In the illustration that we gave earlier, the brother who was in the accident with the car was a saved person and had God as his life. Yet his heart was closed and hardened toward God, so God had no way to increase in him. God was put aside and had no place in him. However, after he was hit by a car and was hurt, while he was in suffering and in pain, he opened his inner being a little to let God in. When he prayed and fellowshipped with the brothers, the element of God in him increased, and he grew a little more.

Of course, this is an unusual illustration. God's desire is that our heart would be open to Him, soft toward Him, and longing for Him and that we would draw near to Him, eat Him, drink Him, enjoy Him, and digest Him inwardly so that daily we would grow with the increase of God. Furthermore, God's desire is that in all things we would learn to grow up into Christ, the Head, to submit under His authority, and to be under His ruling. If we would be serious about learning the lessons in all these matters, then God would be able to do the building work in us daily.

Let us now go back and meditate on the picture in Genesis 2. In this picture there was the tree of life in front of Adam, and there was also the river flowing. Wherever the river flowed, there was gold, pearl, and precious stones. Is this not also the scenery of the New Jerusalem? In the New Jerusalem we see the same three kinds of materials—the street is pure gold, the wall is built with precious stones, and the gates are pearls. Furthermore, a river of water of life flows in the middle of the street, and on this side and on that side of the river is the tree of life, producing and yielding its fruit each month (Rev. 22:1-2).

These two corresponding pictures show that God does not use other materials for His building. He uses only gold, pearl, and precious stones. Gold denotes the nature of God, pearl denotes the new creation regenerated in Christ, and the precious stones denote the Holy Spirit's constituting work. This means that the church must be built in the Triune God with His elements. Not only so, the two pictures also show that gold, pearl, and precious stones are related to the flow of the river of water of life. They are the issues of the flowing of the river of water of life. The constant flowing of the life of God issues in gold, pearl, and precious stones and in the building up of the eternal building of God.

May the Lord have mercy on us to show us this vision so that we may daily live in God, eat God, drink God, and enjoy God, allowing God to move in us and to become one with us. This is to allow the tree of life and the water of life to continually supply us and flow within us. As a result, the element of God will be constituted into us, and we will be transformed within into gold, pearl, and precious stones. The more the element of God increases in us, the more we will grow and also the more there will be the building. When we are full-grown and fully built up, we will manifest the glory of God and become the expression of the New Jerusalem.

CHAPTER FOUR

GOD'S BUILDING CAUSING MAN TO BE FULL OF CHRIST AND CAUSING CHRIST TO BE ABLE TO MAKE HIS HOME IN MAN'S HEART

Scripture Reading: Col. 2:19; Eph. 3:17, 19; 4:12-13

THE TWO ASPECTS OF GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

In this chapter we would like to discuss the purpose of God's building in the universe. Simply speaking, God's building is for the accomplishment of God's eternal purpose. If we read through the entire Bible, we will see that God's eternal purpose is of two aspects: to express Himself and to deal with His enemy. In our previous life-study of the Bible we pointed out that both of these aspects of God's eternal purpose are accomplished by His entering into man and being mingled with man. For His purpose God has chosen to express Himself and deal with His enemy through man. For this reason He created man. Generally, people find it very difficult to understand why there is the need for man in the universe and what is the meaning of human life. By reading the Word of God, however, we can find the answer. God created man so that He may accomplish His purpose through man. By gaining man as a vessel and putting Himself into man to be mingled with man, God can express Himself and deal with His enemy through man.

This matter is clearly revealed in the record in Genesis 1 concerning God's creation of man. There it shows that God created man in His own image (vv. 26-27). Man is a picture of God or, in modern terminology, a photograph of God. The photograph of a person is the expression, the reflection, of that person. Therefore, what is shown in Genesis 1 is that man was created to be the reflection, the expression, of God.

Furthermore, Genesis 1 says that after God created man, He gave man authority to rule over all things. This chapter says particularly that God wanted man to have dominion "over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth" (v. 26b). One of the creeping things on the

earth is the serpent, and the realm of the serpent's activity is the earth. As you read the Bible, gradually you find out that the serpent is the embodiment of God's enemy. Hence, for God to give man the authority to rule over the earth and especially over the creeping things on the earth implies that God wants to deal with His enemy through man.

At the end of the Bible when the work of God is complete, we also see that these two aspects of His purpose have been attained through man. In Revelation 21 the New Jerusalem, which signifies all the saved ones, is altogether an expression of God. God's appearance is like jasper (4:3), and when the New Jerusalem appears, it is also like jasper (21:11, 18). This means that the city is altogether the expression of the image of God. When you see that city, you see the expression of God. Moreover, the city is filled with, and even diffuses, the glory of God; the light of the city is the radiance of God (vv. 23-24a). This signifies that God is expressed through a group of people who have been redeemed by Him and have experienced His building. Hence, in this picture we see the accomplishment of the first aspect of the purpose of God's creation of man.

At its conclusion the Bible also refers to the end of the ancient serpent—Satan (Rev. 20:2-3, 10). If you read the Scriptures carefully, you will see that at the beginning there is a serpent, and until the end there is still a serpent. The story of this serpent is seen throughout the entire Bible. Revelation 12 shows that due to the rapture of the overcomers Satan will be dealt with and cast down to the earth. He will be defeated before the saints (vv. 5, 7-9). In Revelation 20 Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss (vv. 1-3); afterward, he will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (v. 10). At that point the second aspect of the purpose of God's creation of man will also be accomplished. Therefore, the purpose of God both to express Himself and to deal with His enemy will be accomplished through man.

GOD'S PURPOSE BEING ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH BUILDING

To be used by God to accomplish His eternal purpose, it is not enough for man to be created; man still needs to receive God so that God may be mingled and united with him. Therefore, after Adam was created, he was placed in front of the tree of life so that he could receive its fruit into him. I believe that now we are all clear about what the tree of life signifies. The tree of life not

only signifies God, but even more it signifies the God who desires to be mingled with man by being life to man. At that time in the garden of Eden, Adam was standing in front of the tree of life and had not received the tree of life into him. God was still outside of man, and man was also outside of God; the two had not yet been mingled together. Therefore, at that time Adam, though not fallen, could not fulfill God's purpose.

At the end of Revelation, however, the situation is altogether different. There you see that the tree of life has already entered into the holy city, the New Jerusalem. We know that the city signifies all the saved ones throughout the generations, because on the twelve foundations of its wall are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb and on its twelve gates are written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. This indicates that the city is a composition of all the saved ones in the Old Testament age, represented by the twelve tribes of Israel, and of all the saved ones in the New Testament age, represented by the twelve apostles.

There are two different pictures here. One picture is in the garden of Eden. Here man was facing the tree of life and had not yet taken it into him or been mingled with it. As a result, God's eternal purpose was not yet accomplished through man. The other picture is at the end of Revelation. Both the saved ones in the Old Testament age and the redeemed ones in the New Testament age are there, and the tree of life has entered into them. Unlike the situation in the garden of Eden, where God was in front of man, now this God has entered into man to be life to man, is enthroned in man with His kingship, and has become man's center. Therefore, in this picture the eternal purpose of God has been fully accomplished.

We can see from these two pictures that whether or not God's purpose can be accomplished totally depends on whether or not God can come into man and be mingled and united with man, thereby becoming one with man. This mingling, this union, is the building. In the garden of Eden there was no building of God at all; thus, God and man were separate. But when the New Jerusalem appears, God's building will be completed; thus, God and man will have been mingled together and will have become inseparable. At that time God Himself will be completely expressed through man, and also the enemy of God will be thoroughly dealt with. Hence, God's eternal purpose can be accomplished only through God's building.

GOD'S WORK THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS

BEING TO BUILD HIMSELF INTO MAN

If we look at the picture of the New Jerusalem and the mingling of God and man revealed in it, we will see that the New Jerusalem is the crystallization of God's building work throughout the generations. Over all these six thousand years God has been building Himself into man and building man into Himself. Today in the church age the Holy Spirit is also doing this building work in all the saved ones. All the work of the Holy Spirit today is for the building of God into us and the mingling of God with us.

Do we not have the sense that the Holy Spirit is constantly doing this kind of building work in us? A normal Christian surely has the Holy Spirit stirring, constituting, and mingling within him daily. Perhaps a brother or sister will say, "Oh, there has been no mingling of God within me for half a year already." I admit that it is possible to have such a condition. But I am convinced that even while you are in the most fallen state, while you are so far away from God, within you there is still the stirring of the Holy Spirit. While you are loving the world and lusting after sins, outwardly you may be almost like the worldly people, but inwardly you are still different from them. When they commit sins and do evil things, they are fully at ease, having no feeling within at all. But when you sin, because you are a saved one, there is a stirring within that does not allow you to have peace. You may say, "I have not prayed for more than half a year." I believe what you say, but I cannot believe that in the past half year you did not have any of God's stirring. Sometimes you might not want to pray, yet inexplicably there is always an inner stirring that urges you to pray. When you look back at your Christian experience, there has been hardly a day in which you have been able to escape the stirring and moving of the Spirit of God within you. Please remember that this stirring, this moving, is God's mingling, constituting, and building.

I often feel that to be a Christian is a marvelous thing. If you say that a Christian has peace, it is really true. However, if you say that a Christian has no peace, it is also very true. He has no peace when he loses his temper, and he also has no peace when he says something wrong. If he speaks too much, he has no peace; if he speaks too little, he also has no peace. If he does not pray, he has no peace; if he prays but not according to his inner sense, he also has no peace. He has no peace if he does not attend the meeting; he also has

no peace if he attends the meeting but hurries to leave at its dismissal. Oh, a Christian has so many situations in which he has no peace! He experiences such situations from morning till evening. Please remember that all these instances of having no peace are the stirring of God and the moving of the Holy Spirit within. The more the Holy Spirit moves in you, the more God is constituted into you. We may say that the entire living of a Christian is the story of God's moving and constituting Himself into man. However, some allow God to be constituted more deeply and solidly in them. Regrettably, however, others do not allow God to work that much in them.

THE AMOUNT OF GOD'S BUILDING DETERMINING THE EXTENT TO WHICH GOD'S PURPOSE IS FULFILLED

From our experience we can see clearly that wherever there is a group of Christians who allow God to build in them in an extensive way, immediately there are two conditions among them. God is manifested among them—God is with them, and God is expressed in many aspects of their living. Not only so, Satan is defeated, dealt with, thus having no ground in them. These two conditions show that God's purpose has been fulfilled among them. On the contrary, if in a group of Christians there is the lack of God's building, God's mingling, then when you go into their midst, you will also sense two kinds of conditions. On the one hand, the presence of God will be missing, and on the other hand, the activity of demons will be rampant.

Once I went to a certain place where there were several dozen brothers and sisters. They warmly welcomed me and provided me hospitality. But while they were taking care of me, they began to have different opinions. Some suggested giving me cold drinks, and several others suggested serving me hot meals. The two groups became unhappy with each other. As a result, although they received me warmly, I felt very uncomfortable in my spirit. I felt that Satan was there instead of God. Another time while I was visiting a certain place, some brothers and sisters came to speak with me privately. When they came to speak with me, they all made accusations against one another. One said that a certain brother was wrong, and another said that a certain sister was improper. When I touched that situation, I could not help but have a deep feeling that God was not with those brothers and sisters; instead, there were many demons among them. Because God's building was altogether absent

there, I could not see the image of God. I could only see the ruling of God's enemy.

Wherever there are some who have experienced God's building, who are one in God, who have been dealt with by the hand of God, and who have been constituted with God, then God is present and Satan is defeated in that place. In that place the gospel can be spread, and the saints can be edified. In John 17 the Lord Jesus said that when the believers are completely one in the Triune God, that is, when God and man have been built together, then the world will believe that the Lord has been sent by God (v. 21). If the children of God would really allow God to do this building work, then the gospel would be powerful, the saints would be edified, and Satan would lose his ground.

This was exactly the condition of the disciples on the day of Pentecost. On that day Peter and about one hundred and twenty brothers and sisters were mingled with God and one with God. They were also one with each other. They were there as the temple of God, the house of God. God dwelt in them, and they also dwelt in God. Therefore, when they stood up to speak, sinners were pricked in their hearts, and the hardened ones were softened. Three thousand and then another five thousand were saved. At that time, if you were to go in their midst, you would have felt that God was among them in an evident way and that the enemy, Satan, had no place at all. This is the result, as well as the goal, of God's building.

Yet what a pity that today among the children of God you can easily see those who are zealous and those who are laboring, but you can rarely see those who allow God to build in them. Many love the Lord, and many are zealously laboring for the Lord, yet at the same time, they are also full of opinions, full of their disposition, and full of naturalness. They have not experienced God's building. Therefore, God does not have much ground among them. All their activities are fleshly, and all their works are manipulations of Satan who is hidden in their self. Since this kind of zeal and labor is void of the building of God, it cannot fulfill God's intention in its two aspects and has absolutely no way to accomplish God's eternal purpose.

GOD'S BUILDING RESULTING IN MAN'S GROWING WITH THE GROWTH OF GOD

I hope that you can really see that if we intend to accomplish God's eternal purpose by expressing God Himself and dealing with His enemy, we must allow God to build in us. We already said that God's building depends on our spiritual growth, and our spiritual growth comes from the increase of God in us. Because God is constantly doing a constituting work in us, His element gradually increases in us. In this way we will have the growth in God, and this growth will be the building of God in us. Dear brothers and sisters, this is not too hard to understand. Since you have been saved for several years, you should ask yourself how much of God's element has increased in you. How much of God's element is in you today compared to three years ago? If there is no increase, you should know that you have not had much growth, and you have not experienced much building.

It is a regrettable thing that some Christians know a great many doctrines and have a good amount of Bible knowledge, yet they have only a very limited measure of the element of God in them. When you meet such a one, you sense that he is a poor person who is short of God within. Please remember that being enriched in biblical knowledge does not make you a rich person. Only the increase of God Himself in you can make you rich. A person may know the Scriptures quite well yet still be a light person. God alone is man's weightiness. God is not only the richness but also the weightiness in man. Sometimes when you meet a believer, you have the feeling that he is so poor, light, superficial, and short of God. The more he talks about biblical doctrines, the more you feel that this person is destitute and as light as a feather. This indicates that he lacks God within. On the other hand, sometimes when you meet a believer, you sense that he is rich and weighty. When he speaks, even if it is just an ordinary sentence, it is still weighty. This is because he has a good measure of the element of God. Since he has been constituted with God, you sense that his thoughts are similar to God's thoughts, and his thinking is rich, clear, and bright. You see that his will, emotion, perception, and the way he handles things are full of God. This is neither theory nor superstition. All those who have spiritual experience know that this is the spiritual reality and that God Himself is this reality.

GOD'S BUILDING RESULTING IN MAN HAVING THE MEASURE OF THE STATURE

OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

We need to see that only the increase of God in us is the real growth, as shown in Colossians 2:19, which says that we grow with the growth of God. As we grow up, eventually we will reach a certain stage and arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This statement, "until we all arrive...at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13), is rich in implication. When a person arrives at this stage, he is living before God and in God, just as Christ lives. He understands God's desire, cares for God's inward feelings, obeys God's will, and walks according to God's word.

A person with the measure of the stature of Christ does not loosely criticize or judge the church. Some brothers and sisters criticize and judge as soon as they experience something unpleasant. This is because they do not have the measure of the stature of Christ. Some brothers and sisters are unrestricted in their speaking, and their lips have never been circumcised. They constantly stir up disputes and engage in loose talk among the saints. They are just like telegram dispatchers and telephone operators. This is also because they do not have the measure of the stature of Christ.

In this matter we cannot pretend. You may be able to pretend for a brief period of time, but after a while you will be exposed. Frequently, when you meet someone, you may at first feel that he is so gentle, fine, and careful. You conclude that such a one is really a good brother or a good sister. But after you have been with him for a longer time, his condition of being short of the measure of the stature of Christ will be revealed. You will see that he is wilder than others are. He is unrestrained, like a wild horse or a wild donkey. He speaks, expresses his opinions, and does everything loosely. Then you realize that this person does not have the measure of the stature of Christ and is short of God within.

On the other hand, I have also seen someone who is very ingenuous, without any affectation, but the more you are with him, the more you feel that he is weighty. When others are unrestrained, he remains grave. When others are critical, he keeps silent. When others are arguing, saying this and that, he says, "Brothers and sisters, let us all go back to God and seek Him again." This is one who genuinely has the measure of the stature of Christ. Today in the

church we are not short of people who are zealous or well-intentioned. Very often it is zeal or good intentions which do not issue from God's building that ruin God's work and damage the church the most. What the church lacks today is a group of people who have passed through God's building work and have been constituted by God so that they have the measure of the stature of Christ. If in a locality there is a group of people who continually have the increase of the element of God as well as the increase of the measure of the stature of Christ, then God surely will have a way there. God will be able to express Himself and deal with His enemy through them.

GOD'S BUILDING RESULTING IN CHRIST BEING ABLE TO MAKE HIS HOME IN MAN

I would like to repeat again that this building is what is most needed among the children of God today. What matters is not our being zealous, our pursuing, our praying, or our paying the price. What matters is whether or not we allow God to build in us. Some may consecrate their money and time but be unwilling to let God build in them. This kind of consecration is useless. Others are zealous in preaching the gospel, and they also love to read the Scriptures and to pray, yet they are not willing to let God build in them. This kind of zeal and pursuit is of little profit.

Please remember that when you and I are truly built up by God, Christ will then be able to make His home in us. Please consider, has Christ been able to practically make His home in the church in your locality? Or is He being shut out by you and standing outside the door? In Revelation 3, in the Lord's epistle to the church in Laodicea, you can see that the Lord is groaning there. He said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (v. 20). That door is not the door of the hearts of individuals but the door of the church. The condition in Laodicea is a condition of not letting the Lord make His home there. May I ask the serving ones and responsible ones in the churches in various localities, "Does the church in your locality allow Christ to make His home there or does it shut Him out?" If you are a person with many opinions and ideas, you should ask, "If the church accepts my idea, would the result be that Christ would be able to make His home there, or would the result be to shut Him out?" This is a serious question.

This is altogether not a matter of whether your view is right or wrong, good or bad; rather, it is altogether a matter of whether your idea builds up or tears

down the church of God. It is also a matter of whether it allows Christ to make His home among us or shuts Him out of the church. All of us who take care of the church, all those who serve the church, and even all the brothers and sisters have to be careful in this matter.

May we really allow Christ to make His home among us in all things. In this way we will be filled unto all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19b). Being filled with God is based on Christ's making His home in us, and Christ's making His home in us depends on our experiencing God's building. The more we are built up, the more we let Christ make His home; and the more Christ makes His home, the more we are filled unto the fullness of God. These are all in direct proportion to each other. When the element of God increases, you have the growth. The more you grow, the more you are built up. The more you are built up, the more Christ makes His home in you. The more Christ makes His home in you, the more you are filled with the elements of God unto all the fullness of God. Such a church that has been built up and has the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ can then be filled with God to express His glory and deal with His enemy, thereby reaching God's eternal goal and accomplishing God's eternal purpose.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOD DESIRING ALL THE SAINTS TO BE BUILT TOGETHER

Scripture Reading: Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Cor. 14:4-5, 12

GOD'S BUILDING BEING TO BUILD THE SAINTS TOGETHER

In this chapter we will discuss God's building in a more specific way. We have repeatedly stated that God's building is the building of God Himself into man and man into Himself. Here, however, we need to pay attention to one thing. God does not want only to build Himself into individual Christians or just to build individual Christians into Himself; rather, God's desire is to build Himself into us as a corporate entity and to build us corporately into Himself. In addition, God intends to build all Christians together. Hence, in His building work God not only builds us together with Himself but also builds all of us together with each other.

The Scriptures clearly show that the universal building of God is a great man, a universal man. The Head of this universal man is God Himself, and the Body is composed of all the redeemed ones built up together. This is why the Bible says that the church is the Body of Christ and that Christ is the Head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). Christ and the church added together, joined together, are a complete man. The entire New Testament speaks concerning this universal man, portraying how God in His Son is the mysterious Head, how all the redeemed ones built up by Him in the Holy Spirit become the mysterious Body, and how the two are built together to be the mysterious, great man in the universe.

This universal man not only speaks forth the relationship between God and us, the saved ones; it also shows the relationship we have with one another. As members of the Body, we are mutually coordinated and built together. Not only is every member built together with the Head, but all the members are built together with each other also. Therefore, the Bible says that we are the Body of Christ, and members individually (1 Cor. 12:27). This being the case,

we cannot be alone; we have to be together. Consider the members of our physical body. None of them is alone, and none of them can be alone. Rather, each one has to be joined to the other members. Likewise, as Christians we cannot be alone; we need to be joined to other Christians. Please remember that being joined together equals being in coordination, which is what we refer to as the building.

The Scriptures also say that the church is the house being built up by God and that we are the stones used in this building (1 Pet. 2:5). Just as a house is built with many stones, so the church as a spiritual building is also built with all of us as many living stones. Therefore, this building includes not only our being joined with God but also our being joined and coordinated with one another.

Hence, in speaking of the church, the Bible always shows that God's building is not only to build each one of us individually with God but also to build all the saints together. In order to be in God's building, we must be built together with all the saints.

CHRISTIANS NOT BEING INDEPENDENT BUT BUILT TOGETHER

From our experience as saved ones, we can realize that we can be independent if we are any kind of person other than a Christian. No one can be an independent Christian. I have met some brothers and sisters who tried to be Christians by themselves and live alone before God because they were dissatisfied with the church and the other saints in their locality. Their attempts, however, always ended in complete failure. Someone once said to me, "Brother Lee, I feel it is meaningless to have fellowship with the brothers and sisters here; their condition is so pitiful. In addition, the meetings here are so miserable. I cannot get any benefit from the meetings; instead, the situation often makes my heart very sad and sometimes even causes me to despise and condemn the saints. So I feel perhaps it is better not to go to the meetings. It might be better for me to draw near to God and pray before Him alone by myself." This may sound very reasonable, but anyone who tries it eventually will discover the fact that the result of being independent is failure.

Brothers and sisters, we need to see that we cannot be Christians independently. No matter how weak and how poor the spiritual condition of

the brothers and sisters in your locality is, if you leave them, you will end up weaker and poorer than they are. In fact, you will be in utter destitution. When that day comes, you will realize that even the most miserable meeting is beneficial to you, and even the weakest and poorest brother or sister is helpful to you. You will discover that you cannot go on without the brother or sister whom you consider to be utterly useless. If you leave a brother or a sister whom you consider to be good for nothing, one day you will realize that it is you, not that brother or sister, who are good for nothing.

It is indeed a marvelous thing that the weakest meeting is still helpful to people and that a meeting that has the least to give still has something to give to people. In such a meeting you may not feel that you have received anything, but in fact you still have received something. Please remember that this is simply because Christians cannot be independent. God is not only in you but also in me and in all the other brothers. He is in all His people. You cannot be independent. Once you become independent, you lose the presence of God.

Take my hand as an example. If my hand becomes independent, it will immediately lose the presence and the supply of my body. My hand is protected, supplied, and supported because it is joined to my body. Whenever my hand is detached from my body, it cannot function because it has lost its supply, its protection, and its support. Therefore, while my hand is joined to my body, it seems that my hand is responsible for whatever it does, but actually it is my body that is responsible for whatever my hand does.

How I wish that the responsible brothers and the brothers and sisters who are co-workers in all the localities would know and appreciate the support and supply of the Body. The elders should consider what it would be like if there were only a few elders and no other brothers and sisters in the church. Would you still be able to manage the church's affairs? From this you can see that it is not you who are able to manage, but it is the saints who support you in your management. Likewise, the brothers and sisters who are co-workers are able to work in a certain place because there are brothers and sisters there who hold them up and support them in their work. Apart from this support they cannot do anything. It is because of this that I too can stand here and give a message. I always offer thanks to the Lord for this matter, saying, "Lord, I praise and thank You; if it were not for so many brothers and sisters supporting me, I would be dumb and would not be able to speak much."

Please remember that this is the principle of the Body. In the Body all the members support each other, and no one can be without others.

Let us use our legs as an example. Are our legs supporting us, or are we supporting our legs? This is hard to say. Apparently our legs bear all the weight of our body, yet little do we realize that our whole body also bears our legs. No doubt, after standing for a prolonged period of time our legs will be tired, but when we rest, is it only our legs that are resting? No. Our whole body needs to rest because our whole being is tired. This shows that when we are standing, seemingly it is our legs that are bearing our body, but actually it is our body that is supporting our legs and supplying them with the strength to bear our body.

I mention all these things in order to show you that the real building is not only a matter between you and God but also a matter between you and all the saints. You should be built not only with God but also with all the saints. One thing is certain—the more a Christian is built and joined with others, the stronger he is. The more he is separated and secluded from others, the weaker he is. Sometimes in the church certain brothers and sisters are just like drops of oil. They seem to be in the water, but actually they are only floating on the water, without being one with the water. They are in seclusion, in isolation. Please believe me, such a brother or sister will be very weak. On the other hand, there are also brothers and sisters who are always joined, coordinated, and built together with other saints. Such ones surely will be strong.

EDIFICATION AND BUILDING BEING GREATLY DIFFERENT

One of the crucial truths in the Scriptures is the building of the church. In the New Testament *building* is a very important word. Regrettably, in many instances in the Chinese translation of the Bible, the word *build* is rendered as *edify*. We should know that there is a great difference between edification and building. We may say that building includes edification, but edification may not be building. Let us use a pile of stones as an illustration. Before we can use them to build a house, we have to process them one by one. We have to knock off all the unnecessary corners and make the uneven spots smooth. Only when this is done can they be built together. This processing work on the stones is edification. Therefore, edification is for building and building includes edification.

However, there is a kind of edification that involves only edification. For instance, if a craftsman takes a rough piece of jade and works on it, carving it into a beautiful little monkey or a little horse for people to admire, this is mere edification, not building. I am afraid that for years many brothers and sisters have received only edification and not building. I am also afraid that for all these years the co-workers in all the localities have been just like craftsmen carving jade. All they have produced are some beautiful brothers and sisters for people to admire. One of these co-workers might say, "Oh, before I came to work here, these brothers and sisters did not read the Bible. They did not have spiritual fellowship with God, and even the more they did not know what it meant to be dealt with. They all had big tempers and a lot of other problems. But after being edified by me for a period of time, they are now reading the Bible, they know how to fellowship with the Lord, and they are learning to be dealt with. Oh, look at their condition now. How beautiful they are! How worthy to be praised and admired!" We must remember, however, that merely to make someone beautiful through edification does not necessarily make him useful. Little sculptured monkeys and horses surely look beautiful and are admirable, but they are altogether useless for building a house.

Once when I was in a certain place, the brothers there spoke highly about two persons among them, saying that these two persons loved the Lord so much and were very spiritual. Initially, I was not clear about their real situation since that was my first time there. After observing them a little bit during the few days that I stayed there, I felt that the condition of that brother and that sister was genuinely good and admirable. But at the same time I also felt that they were not built into the church. When you contacted them, you had the sense that they were isolated, exceptional, and that they had the flavor of being above everybody else. They loved the brothers and sisters, but they were not connected to any of them. They lived alone before God and had very little fellowship with others. They thought that this was to follow the Lord in loneliness. They even felt that their situation was just like the situation of the Lord Jesus when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane and no one was able to watch with Him in prayer. From this you can see that the spiritual condition of these two saints was questionable. Seemingly, they were very spiritual and very beautiful, but actually, they were useless in the church. Later, I said to the brothers in a humorous way, "Indeed, you have two very

beautiful saints here. I feel, however, that it is a mistake for them to be here. They should be sent to the museum for people to appreciate."

Brothers and sisters, we need to see that joining ourselves only to the Lord is not enough. That kind of joining is off-center and unbalanced. We also need to be joined to our brothers and sisters. Regardless of how spiritual you may be, you still need to coordinate together with the brothers and sisters in your locality. You need to pray with the weak ones and fellowship with the young ones. Moreover, you need to speak the same things that they speak. You need to approach and support even those who have fallen or backslidden. Only when you are joined to others can you really be spiritual, strong, and useful.

In a local church, which is part of the building of God, we are not concerned that the stones are uncomely but that they are unwilling to be built together. No matter how beautiful a stone is, it is useless unless it has been built. The local churches need the building. When a stone is built into a house, there is a stone pressing it from above, a stone supporting it from below, stones crowding it on two sides, and a stone connected to it from behind and attached to it in the front. In other words, there are stones above it, below it, and all around it—on the left, on the right, in front, and in back. These stones may not be so beautiful, but they are firmly joined together to become an inhabitable building. These stones would be worthless if they were sent to a museum, but when they are placed in the house, every one of them is indispensable and useful.

GOD CARING NOT FOR MERE EDIFICATION BUT FOR BUILDING

We need to see clearly that God does not care for mere edification; He cares only for building. God does not want some individual materials that look good; He wants a house. God's intention is not to edify Christians individually to be an exhibition for people's appreciation; rather, His intention is to build many Christians together into a spiritual house to be the mutual dwelling place of God and man in which God and man can have rest.

Therefore, Ephesians 4 says that, having ascended, the Lord gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as shepherds and teachers for the building up of the Body of Christ (vv. 8, 11-12). First Corinthians 14:12 says, "Since you are zealous of spirits, seek that you may

excel for the building up of the church." Some versions translate *spirits* into *spiritual gifts*. This also shows that the Spirit gives gifts to people in the church, not for edifying the believers so that each one of them would look beautiful but for building the scattered believers together. Paul also says that as God's fellow workers, we are building God's house (3:9-10). Thus, we see Paul's work was also a work of building.

Regrettably, today too few have seen that God wants to do this kind of work, and even fewer allow God to do this kind of work in them. In many places you can see many Christian groups with a good number of Christians, some of whom are spiritual and zealous. Yet you can hardly see a church that has been built up. Everywhere you can see many materials scattered or piled up, but you cannot see a built up building. In almost all of today's Christianity there is not one stone upon another stone (cf. Matt. 24:2).

We all must admit that God is not satisfied with today's condition of Christianity. The condition of God's children in every place altogether falls short of God's desire. What God wants today is a house, not a pile of material. Just as it is unacceptable for material that is broken, old, and uncomely merely to be in a pile, it is also unacceptable for material that is nicely carved and properly dealt with to be in a pile without being built. God wants a church that has been built up, not just some individual spiritual people. Hence, God's work today is building, not edification. And any edification that we may receive is not merely to make us individually spiritual; rather, it is to make us suitable for coordination and to enable us to be built together with others. If we see this, our concept will be radically changed. We will no longer pursue merely to be individually spiritual; instead, we will seek to be coordinated and built together with all the saints. I believe that the Holy Spirit will work to enable the brothers and sisters to see this vision more and more clearly.

BREAKING BEING A PREREQUISITE TO BUILDING

In order for the church to be built up, we have to touch the matter of being broken. If we want to be built together, we all have to be broken. If there is no breaking, there is no building. You and I can be built together only after you and I both have been broken a little. Consider a person who grows trees. When he grafts two trees together, first he has to cut both branches a little. Then he joins them together, binds them up, and after a while the two trees grow together. If they are not cut, then even if you bind them together firmly,

still they will not be able to grow together. Another example is the building of a house. For the most part, all the wood that is to be used has to be cut, sawed, planed, and trimmed before it can be nailed and connected together. Likewise, in the building of the church, every natural thing in us must be broken before we can be joined with others. Everything natural in us, whether it is our ability, our discernment, or our zeal, is unsuitable to be used for the building. We can be built only after we have been broken in our natural being.

Once I went to a certain locality, and one of the brothers there told me, "Brother Lee, I really thank and praise the Lord that there are two brothers here who are very capable. They are very clear in their minds, and they do things with great insight. They are truly promising." Whenever I hear words like this, I am usually very concerned in my heart. Sure enough, after half a year to a year, when I revisited that locality again, the brother who had previously spoken to me had changed his tone. He said, "Alas, Brother Lee, our situation here is very difficult. Did I not tell you last time that we have two brothers here who are very capable? Well, now these two have become a problem among us. They really are smart and capable, but they simply despise others and cannot be one with anyone else."

Once a brother told me, "Oh, Brother Lee, thank and praise the Lord. Recently, the Lord has raised up among us a brother who is very faithful in material offerings. Now we have no lack at all." When I heard this, I was also very concerned, and sure enough, after a year or so news came saying that in that local church that brother was the greatest problem. It is true that he offered a lot financially, but when he came, his opinions also came. When his money came, his concepts also came. Because of him the church suffered very much.

Brothers and sisters, there are many stories of this kind. In all these examples, all the difficulties are due to the fact that the saints are not broken. If our natural being remains unbroken, we will be full of opinions and ideas and will have a strong self. These things will tear down instead of build up the church.

Hence, the requirement for building is to be broken. To be built together with all the brothers and sisters in the church, you need to be broken. Even your spiritual and good points must be broken. Are you a person who prays constantly? You need to be broken even in the matter of praying. Are you a

person who reads the Word diligently? You need to be broken even in your reading of the Scriptures. Are you a person who emphasizes fellowship with the Lord? You need to be broken even in this matter of fellowshipping with the Lord. Do you stress over the matter of the dealing of the cross? You need to be broken even in this matter. I am afraid that some may promote being broken by the cross, yet they themselves are harder than anyone else. Do you promote preaching the gospel? This also has to be broken. All these spiritual things, let alone other things, have to be broken. Therefore, your opinion, your concept, your capability, your eloquence, and even your love for the Lord and your material offering all need to be broken. Only when you are broken can you be coordinated and built together with others.

In actuality, the problems in the church are not with the indifferent ones but with the zealous ones, not with the backsliding ones but with the seeking ones, and not with the nonoffering ones but with the offering ones. The problems in the church arise not from the nongifted ones but from the gifted ones and not from the incompetent speakers but from the competent preachers. If those who are zealous, seeking, loving the Lord, offering financial contributions, capable, and able to preach the gospel have not been dealt with and broken, then the more of these kinds of people there are, the more we will have problems in the church. These are the very ones who damage the church. These are the very ones who cause the church to greatly suffer. These are the very ones who bring in death. These are also the very ones who cause the church to lose the blessing.

Sometimes in a local church two brothers are able speakers, and their preaching is appealing. Since they have never been dealt with or built up, however, they use the platform to fight with each other. One brother gives a message today to attack the other brother, and the next day the other brother gives a message to fight back. They may be good speakers, but they tear down the church. Formerly, before these two brothers came along, the church did not have any good speakers. Yet the Lord's blessing and presence were there. Now, due to the two brothers' ability to preach, the church has become desolate, and the presence of the Lord has been lost.

May the Lord have mercy on us so that we may see how serious this matter is! May the Lord make us willing to learn to be severely broken in everything, including our zeal, eloquence, ability, and material offering. You will see that today if there is any operation of God in you, it is to lead you to receive His

breaking. Even all the leading the Lord gives you in your environment is for you to be broken. Only when you are broken can you be built together with other saints. Where the building is, there the blessing of God will be. Where the building is, there will the house of God be. In this house both God and man can rest.

CHAPTER SIX

GOD'S BUILDING BEING THE REAL NEED OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: 1 Cor. 1:2, 10-13; 3:3-12, 16-17; 12:18-27; 14:12

SEEING THE NEED FOR THE CHURCH TO BE BUILT UP

In the previous chapter we said that the church needs not only to be edified but also to be built up, which is a step further than being edified. In this chapter I feel that I should address this matter more emphatically. I really hope that after these messages God's children will all be able to see the need for the church to be built up and that they will have a deep feeling that no matter how much edification they have received in the past, they cannot become a dwelling place to satisfy the mutual need of God and man if they have not been built up.

Among the apostles' Epistles in the New Testament, there are two that are concerned particularly with the building of the church. These two books are Ephesians and 1 Corinthians. Several portions listed at the beginning of this chapter are taken from 1 Corinthians, a book which speaks very much about the building of the church. The same is true with respect to the book of Ephesians. The matter of building is mentioned in a particular way in chapters 2 and 4. For instance, chapter 2 speaks about our being redeemed and points out that we are being built together in the Lord into a dwelling place of God in spirit (v. 22). This indicates that the reason we were saved by God is so that He can build us into His dwelling place. Chapter 4 goes on to say that after His ascension Christ gave various gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ (vv. 8, 11-12), which is the dwelling place of God mentioned in chapter 2. With respect to Christ, the church is being built up to be His Body, because Christ has committed Himself to the Body. With respect to God, the church is being built up to be the dwelling place of God with God Himself dwelling in it. Therefore, in order to be both the Body of Christ and the dwelling place of God, the church first has to be built up. Hence, as saved ones, we all need to be built up before we can become the dwelling place of God. Moreover, all the gifted persons who work for God need to see that the gifts

given by God are all for the building up of the Body of Christ. Therefore, they must always do the work of building, not merely the work of edification.

GOD'S CHILDREN TODAY

LACKING THE VIEW OF BUILDING

However, today the children of God lack the view of building. Almost all those who zealously pursue the Lord think that they will be all right as long as they love the Lord, stay away from sin, forsake the world, have more fellowship with the Lord, and learn to live before the Lord. They also think that it is enough if they live a sanctified and victorious life to please the Lord. Please remember that this is altogether according to the concepts of individual spirituality and edification. Brothers and sisters, please consider your Christian life. Is this not your condition? You thirst after Christ, pursue Christ, and learn some amount of practical dealing. However, if you seriously check the goal of your pursuit, I am afraid that from the beginning to the end it is for your self-edification. I am afraid you never have had the view that you need to be built together with your brothers and sisters. No doubt, sometimes you may feel that you need to be humble, gentle, loving, forbearing, and considerate when you are around the brothers and sisters. But the reason that you have this kind of concept is simply because you think that if you do not behave in this way, you will have problems getting along with them. You may have never considered the need to be built together with all the saints.

Not only are God's children like this in general, even those who work for the Lord today have very little view of building. Often they think that it is good enough to preach the gospel and save some souls and do not think that they have to care about whether or not there is the building. They also think that everything is all right as long as they lead people to love the Lord and pursue after Him and that they do not have to be bothered about whether or not there is the building. Therefore, the goal of their work is merely to lead people to be saved and to be spiritual. Their only concern is how they can help people to know the Lord, to pursue spirituality, to serve the Lord, and to live for the Lord. They never consider the matter of the building of the church or God's desire to have a house among the saints. They lack the vision of building.

THE LACK OF THE BUILDED CHURCH ON EARTH TODAY

This is the condition of Christianity today. In any of the larger cities on earth you can see a number of Christian organizations and a great number of Christians. Not only are there nominal Christians, but there are also many genuinely saved Christians and even many who love the Lord and pursue after the Lord. However, if you have the vision, if you have seen what God wants to have in eternity, you will sigh and say, "Today on the earth it is hard to find a church that has been built up. It is hard to see a group of Christians who are being built up in a locality as a spiritual house in which God can dwell."

I have had this experience of sighing before, but I have to confess that my feeling then was not deep enough. Now, after traveling abroad as the Lord led me to do and after having some contact with God's children from place to place, amazingly this feeling became deeper and deeper within me. Every time I arrived at a certain place, the Holy Spirit seemed to say, "Look at the situation of Christianity here! Look at the condition of the Christians here! You see people who are saved, who love the Lord, who pursue after the Lord, who live for the Lord, and who pay attention to being spiritual, but can you see a dwelling place here in which I can rest? Is there a group of believers who have been built up into a spiritual house?" At a certain place the Holy Spirit even asked me, "Can you see two saved persons here who are truly being built together?" When I was faced with such a question within, I could only sadly answer the Lord, "No, Lord!" I also said to the Lord, "There is Christianity here, and there are Christians here. There are those who love You, those who pursue You, and those who pay attention to being spiritual, but I cannot see two persons who are built together."

Forgive me for describing to you a little bit of the situation of one place. After I arrived there, a brother invited another brother and me to dinner. While we were eating, I observed that the two of them were really humble, gentle, and loving toward each other. The host brother treated us very well and showed us much love, and the brother who was invited with me was very polite. Both of them were quite cheerful. However, after the dinner when we sat down to have some conversation, I noticed that these two persons seemed to be on the two opposite poles of the earth: one was on the North Pole, and the other was on the South Pole. They simply could not agree on anything. The one on the North Pole tried to pull me to the North Pole, whereas the one on the South Pole wanted to draw me to the South Pole. Both of them wanted me to agree with their respective opinions. I felt very awkward. Since I could not play politics with them, I just kept silent, saying nothing for or against

either side. Later, when the brother who was the guest had left, the host brother said to me, “Brother Lee, you do not know this person. You see that he seems very spiritual when he talks, but his hidden condition is very poor.” Then he went on to tell me many stories about that brother. A few days later I saw the other brother who had been the guest. As soon as he saw me, he said, “Brother Lee, the other day when the three of us were together, it was not so easy for me to speak, but now that I am with you alone, I have a few words to tell you. Oh, that person is really bad!” Then he went on to tell me many things about that brother. A few days later the second brother invited the other brother and me for dinner. When they were together, they were again so polite and gentle. One said, “I am really not good.” The other one said, “Brother Lee, this brother’s condition before the Lord is wonderful.” When I saw the situation, I felt disgusted within me. I said in my heart, “You are altogether leprous! On the previous occasion when you invited me for dinner, I did not know you and your real inner condition, so I did not feel too bad. But now the leprosy within you has become manifest. You criticize each other, and you are unhappy with each other. Yet today you put on a show for this occasion. On the surface this one commends that one, and that one compliments this one, but you both feel entirely different within. This is altogether a pretense. This is leprosy. God has absolutely no way among you, and He will not be able to have any building among you.” Therefore, since that time I have had a very deep feeling: “Where is God’s dwelling place? Where can we find two persons who are built together?”

Once someone asked me, “Brother Lee, Matthew 18 says that wherever two or three pray together in one accord, the Lord is there in their midst. Two or three of us have been praying together and meeting together here, but why is it that there is not much of the Lord’s presence among us? Why is it that we do not have much of the Lord’s blessing in our midst?” I then asked the brother, “Do you think you are truly in one accord?” When I asked this, the brother could not answer me. I think many of us know many stories like this. The saints may seem to be in one accord while they are praying, yet when they are practically serving together, it is altogether a different story; they are neither of one heart nor of one mind. For instance, when three people kneel down to pray together for the gospel, one of them prays, “O Lord! Save the sinners and manifest the power of the gospel”; then the other two both say Amen. This is genuinely a situation of one accord. But when they get up from their knees to discuss how to preach the gospel, they cannot be one. The three

of them have three opinions. One of them says, “Since the weather is so hot, I think it is better to preach the gospel at 6:30 a.m.” Another one says, “No, the most appropriate time is 7:30 p.m.” Then the third one says, “I think 4:30 p.m. is the best time.” As a result, the three of them come to a deadlock. The one who suggests 6:30 a.m. usually gets up very early in the morning. The one who suggests 7:30 p.m. always goes to bed very late at night and has difficulty getting up in the morning. And the one who suggests 4:30 p.m. does not have to work in the afternoon. Hence, the three seem to have the same heart, but they are not of the same mind. They cannot even agree on the time to preach the gospel. Sometimes brothers like this come and ask me, “Brother Lee, what do you think?” If I were asked this question about this situation, I would say, “This is hard for me. I can have only one view; I cannot have three views. Thus, in my opinion, half past midnight is the most suitable time.” It seems that I am joking, but my intention would be to give them a feeling that neither their views nor my view matters. Whenever we come together, all our individual opinions must be laid aside. It does not matter what I think but what the Lord thinks. All our “I think’s” cannot build the church.

Brothers and sisters, where can we see the building today? Let me speak a few words in a direct and simple way. Please remember that God’s presence, God’s power, God’s blessing, God’s light, and God’s grace are given to those who have been built together. Wherever there is a church that has been built together, there will be God’s presence, God’s power, God’s light, God’s rich blessing, and God’s grace. And if there is no building, there will not be any of these blessings of God.

For instance, in a certain place you may see eight to ten brothers and sisters who have been raised up by the Lord. These ones just live before the Lord. They may not seem to know anything, but they are in one accord. Although they may not be able to present the truth well or preach the gospel clearly, they are all in one accord. Therefore, they have God’s blessing and are able to bring people to the Lord. When others come into their midst, they can sense the Lord’s presence. However, in another place there may be some who are eloquent in giving messages and competent in preaching the gospel, but there is not the real one accord among them, and they are not built together. Amazingly, places with this kind of situation usually have only a few people who have been newly saved and brought to the Lord. The preaching in such places may be very appealing, but very few come to listen to it, and even fewer receive it. When you go there, you do not have the sense that the Lord is there,

and you cannot see the Lord's presence. I think that all the brothers and sisters have had this kind of experience in the past. We must see that the Lord's presence lies with our being built together.

I would like to repeat that when I went abroad this time and traveled through many places, I could not see many churches that had been built up. There were those who were saved, those who loved the Lord, and those who were zealous, but there were not those who had been built together. The thing that grieved me the most was that in those places what I mostly saw was disgruntlement, dissatisfaction, and disharmony. It was difficult to find any place with a condition of being built up.

At the same time, in various places I often met children of God who asked me, "Brother Lee, where should we go?" What they meant was, "Where should we go for meetings?" In nearly every place I was asked this question. It was difficult for me to give them an answer because I really could not see any place where there was the building. You look at one place, and there are opinions. You look at another place, and there is criticism. It is not easy to find a single place that is harmonious and built together. Therefore, it was hard for me to point out to them a place to which they should go, a place where there is God's house. If you ask me where Christianity is, almost anywhere we go, I could point out to you where there is a place of worship in Christianity or a place where Christians meet. However, if you ask me, "Since we are God's children, where is the place that is our home? Where can we go to find rest? Where is the presence of God? Where is the blessing of God?" I really cannot answer these questions. Why not? I cannot answer these questions because it is not easy to find a built-up church.

BUILDING BEING THE GREATEST NEED OF THE CHURCH TODAY

We must see that all that matters is whether or not we have been built up. It is not a question of giving messages, nor is it a question of gifts. Rather, it is a question of whether or not there is a group of people who have been built by God into a spiritual habitation in which God can dwell. When people come into the midst of such a group, they not only sense the presence of God but also feel the warmth that is there. In addition, they feel that such a place is their spiritual home, a place in which they can rest. Brothers and sisters, is this the condition of the place where you are, the place where you meet? If it

is not, then the place where you are definitely lacks building. I believe that these words are enough to show us that today what is needed most in every place is a builded church.

Today in any major city there are thousands of Christians. In addition, there are gospel activities throughout the earth and believers everywhere. However, it is difficult to find even one place where there is a group of God's children who are being built into the house of God. We must not blame others, saying that they do not want to be built up. Neither should we say that there are no workers of God who are helping them to be built up. We cannot shirk our responsibility. Every one of us is responsible for the building; every one of us needs to be built up. I tell you, brothers and sisters, your most urgent need right now is to be built up.

EDIFICATION DAMAGING THE CHURCH IF IT IS NOT FOR BUILDING

I believe that by now we are clear that building and edification are vastly different. Although building includes edification, edification is not necessarily building. We may have been edified but not built up at all. Sometimes we see brothers and sisters who have been edified very much. Yet often the result is that the more they are edified, the more independent they become; the more they are edified, the more peculiar they become; the more they are edified, the more they despise others; and the more they are edified, the more they distance themselves from others. I have seen a good number of people who are like this. The more they receive this kind of edification, the more they become secluded and divisive. Therefore, if edification is not for building, it is of no benefit to the church. On the contrary, often it even damages the church.

Hence, as those who work for the Lord, we have to be very careful. As we are ministering to the children of God, if our edifying of the believers only produces this kind of independent person, then our work is a complete failure. All the brothers and sisters who are co-workers need to seriously ask themselves what the goal and purpose of their work is. If we do not have the vision of building, I am afraid that the more we work and the more we edify people, the more the church will lack the building. For example, when a builder wants to build a house, he has a definite goal, and he also has a blueprint in his hand. He not only knows that he is building a house, but he

also knows what kind of house he is building. Only with this understanding can he work according to his goal. He knows that the house needs doors and windows, so he takes some materials, including wood and glass, and makes them into doors and windows. This may be considered his work of edification. Then he sets these doors and windows into the house. This setting is the building. Thus, we can see that all the edification is for the building. When a builder is working, he has a goal, and he works toward this goal.

Suppose there is another builder who wants to build a house, yet he is making a table. May I ask you, is his work useful for the building of the house? He may work much harder than the previous builder. He may be more meticulous and able to build the unseemly pieces of wood into a very nice table. Nonetheless, let me ask you all, can you build this table into or onto the house? You cannot put it on the foundation, neither can you place it on the roof. You cannot use it either as a door or as a window. Yet the table standing there seems to be more beautiful than everything else. It seems to be saying, "Windows, none of you are as pretty as I am; doors, none of you are prettier than I. I am stronger than any one of you." Do you see this? The table built by the builder becomes a problem to the building of the whole house. Naturally you will say that no builder would do this, but today many of those who work for the Lord are certainly like this. They are truly zealous for the work and genuinely zealous in edifying people, but they edify the brothers and sisters and make them into so many beautiful individual tables. The other brothers and sisters may be like broken doors, broken windows, broken beams, and broken pillars. Although they are unseemly, they can still somewhat be put together and built into a house as a dwelling place. However, the one who is a table, though very pretty, is all alone and is not built with others. Therefore, with respect to the building of the church, he is altogether useless. Moreover, he is often the cause of problems.

Forgive me for saying that I am afraid that for some brothers and sisters all their progress and all the edification they have received is this kind of edification. I am also afraid that many co-workers also edify people in this manner when they go forth to work. I have reiterated that if we do not have the picture of building before us and if we do not have the building of the church as our goal, then I am afraid that the work that we do will be this kind of foolish work. The more we work, the less the church is built up.

Let me illustrate this. Suppose a brother is going to a certain place to work for the Lord, and he only sees that he is going there to help the brothers and sisters to be spiritual. He says, “Oh, the people there are fleshly; I want to go and help them so that they all may become spiritual. I myself have learned the lesson of the cross in a serious way, so when I go to help them, I will also lead them to know and receive the cross. The goal of my work is to lead people to be sculptured by the cross.” Therefore, after this brother goes to that place, he speaks about the cross every day. Since he works in this manner, surely a group of people will be edified by him and will follow him to learn to take the cross every day. However, this brother never helps them to see that being dealt with by the cross is for the building of the church. Hence, although these saints learn lessons of the cross, there will be very little building of the church.

After a while this brother may go to another place, and another co-worker will come to this place. This newly-arrived one will say, “No one among you has learned the lesson of having fellowship with the Lord, and no one here knows how to live before the Lord. Now that I am here with you, I will help you in the matter of having fellowship with the Lord.” Therefore, the first message he gives is on fellowship, and the second message is still on fellowship; every message is on fellowship. On the platform he tells people that besides fellowship everything is useless. Regardless of the kind of merchandise you sell, there always will be some customers. Therefore, after he has stayed there for a period of time, some brothers and sisters will be helped by him to live daily before the Lord. Then those who previously received the dealing of the cross will say, “How can you have proper fellowship if you only have fellowship but have not been broken?” And those who have just learned the matter of fellowship will say, “How can you be broken without learning the matter of fellowship?” Therefore, everyone will have a problem within. Those who learned to fellowship with the Lord will not respect those who received the dealing of the cross, and those who received the dealing of the cross will have no admiration for those who learned to fellowship with the Lord. Perhaps you would say that it is not possible for those who have truly been broken to show disrespect toward others. In theory this is correct, but in actuality it is quite common for those who have been broken by the cross to not respect others.

Then after another period of time a brother who specializes in “knowing Christ” will come to this place. He will say, “Oh, merely speaking about fellowship or about the cross will not do, you must know Christ. Only Christ is

all and in all. Therefore, we must let Christ have the preeminence in all things." Hence, he specifically does the work of "knowing Christ." From the beginning to the end everything is Christ. Eating is Christ. Drinking is Christ. Praying is Christ. Reading the Bible is Christ. Everything is Christ. I say again, regardless of what you sell, some people will buy it. No matter what kind of message you preach, some people will receive it, especially if you speak about a subject as precious as the glorious Christ. Therefore, eventually there will be a third group of people in that place. They will be the ones who receive the messages on knowing Christ. With them, every day is Christ, every moment is Christ, every matter is Christ, and everywhere is Christ, Christ, Christ! However, those who learned the cross will be bothered when they hear about "knowing Christ," and those who learned the matter of fellowship also will be uncomfortable when they hear about "knowing Christ." The first group will then criticize them and say, "You have to be dealt with by the cross before you can live out Christ." The second group will say, "You need to live in fellowship with the Lord, and then you can touch Christ. How can you know Christ outside of fellowship with Him?" Those who pay attention to knowing Christ will then refute these words and say, "The goal of the cross is to gain Christ, and fellowship is also for us to gain Christ. Therefore, Christ is the unique goal of everything. Christ is all!"

Here you see how problems arise. I would like to tell you, before these three co-worker brothers went to that locality, the brothers and sisters there were not so clear about many things. They did not know the cross, know the fellowship with the Lord, or know Christ. All they knew was to serve together. Nevertheless, their serving in ignorance was in harmony, and there was also the Lord's presence. When you went into their midst, there was warmth, and you felt that the Lord was among them. However, since those three persons with special gifts went there to work for a period of time, that place has three groups of people who have been edified: one in the matter of the cross, a second in the matter of fellowship, and the third in the matter of knowing Christ. However, now when you go into their midst, you have a feeling that it is winter there—everything is cold and withered. While they are breaking the bread, someone who has learned the matter of fellowship stands up to pray, "Lord, now we are having fellowship with You before this table." But those who have learned the cross do not say Amen, neither do those who have learned Christ. After a while one who emphasizes knowing Christ rises to pray, "Lord, here we see that You are everything. You are the bread, and You are the

cup. When we enjoy these things, we enjoy You." Yet those who have learned fellowship and those who have received the cross neither appreciate this nor say Amen. A moment later one of the ones who take the cross also stands up to pray, "O Lord! Here we see Your death. This is an all-inclusive death. We have all died together in You." However, those who have learned Christ do not say Amen, and neither do those who have learned the matter of fellowship. Deadness and coldness are all that you touch there.

Do not think that my illustration is an exaggeration. It is true that some of the co-workers who go out to work have genuinely edified others, but at the same time they have also damaged the church. You may have carved out a little horse or a beautiful little monkey, or you may have produced a few tables and chairs of various sizes, but the house is gone. Originally, the materials that you used were beams, doors, windows, and part of the foundation of the house, but you thought that they were too rough and unseemly, so you wanted to give them a little edification. Eventually, while it seems that you have edified the saints, you have also torn down the entire house. You have edified many individual saints, but through your edifying work you have caused the entire church to collapse.

This matter is very serious. I ask you all, did the edification you receive have the building in view or was it merely for your individual spirituality? This is a big question. I also would like to ask the brothers and sisters who are co-workers, when you help people by edifying them, is it for their individual spirituality or for the building of the church? This is also a big question.

THE ENTIRE BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS BEING ON THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH

Today many speak on 1 Corinthians, using it to present the matter of edification. However, I would like to ask God's children, when the apostle wrote 1 Corinthians, was it written for the edification of individuals? No! The apostle's emphasis was not on the edification of individuals but on the building of the church. At the time the Epistle was written, the most shameful thing in the church in Corinth was that the believers there had allowed Satan to do a work of tearing down among them. Satan caused them to not speak the same thing, to not be of the same mind, and to strive with one another. They said, "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos," "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ" (1:10-12). Consequently, they were divided, and there were strifes

among them. This was altogether the result of the wiles of Satan. Therefore, the apostle wrote a letter to deal severely with their abnormal situation. The apostle seemed to be saying, "Today the Lord does not care for the spirituality of individual saints but for the building up of the whole church. Your condition is altogether fleshly! As God's fellow workers, we come here to work among you, not to edify you so that you may be spiritual individually, but to help you to be built together to be an inhabitable house. We help you to know the cross and to know Christ, not for your individual spirituality but altogether for the building up of the church."

Moreover, the apostle says that as a wise master builder he had laid a foundation, which is Jesus Christ, and that another would build upon it. He says, however, that every man should take heed how they would build upon it. Would they build with gold, silver, and precious stones? Or would they build with wood, grass, and stubble (3:10-12)? The goal of the apostles' work was absolutely not for individuals to become spiritual but for the church to be built up into a house, a dwelling place.

In 1 Corinthians 3 the apostle also says, "You are the temple of God" (v. 16). Unlike in 6:19 where Paul says that our body is a temple of God, in this verse the temple does not refer to our body individually. Rather, it denotes the church as the house of God. Therefore, in 3:17 he goes on to say, "If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him." This means that if anyone destroys the house, the church, of God, God will destroy him. When some in the church in Corinth said, "I am of Paul," "I am of Apollos," "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ," they were tearing down the temple of God and destroying the house of God. In response to this, the apostle said that he and his fellow workers went out to work for the building up of the church. Hence, 1 Corinthians was written not merely for the edification of individuals but even more for the building up of the church. Therefore, in chapter 12 the apostle seemed to be saying, "You are the Body of Christ. Even though the body is one, it has many members; no one member can be without the other members. The eye cannot say that it does not need the hand, nor can the head say that it does not need the foot. Even the weakest member has its function, and even the most uncomely member has its place. In the Body of Christ you are members one of another, and all the gifts you have received are for the building up of the Body. It is a pity that although there is an abundance of gifts among you and you are not behind in any gift, those gifts cause you to

have divisions and contentions. Consequently, there is no building up but tearing down."

In chapter 13 the apostle seemed to say, "All these gifts of yours, as sounding brass and clanging cymbals, neither edify others nor build up the church. I would rather that you did not have these things. My desire is that you would have love, because only love can join others to you. Only love builds. Gifts divide you, whereas love joins you." Then in chapter 14 he says that if the Corinthian believers would like to have spiritual gifts, they should seek to excel for the building up of the church (v. 12). Therefore, we can see clearly that the apostle's emphasis in writing this Epistle was not on individual spirituality but on God's building. The apostle's work was altogether based on the blueprint laid out before him, that is, the dwelling place of God. It was with this as his goal that he led people to know the cross and to be spiritual. He did not merely lead people to take the cross, neither did he only lead them to be spiritual. All his work had the building as its goal. What a pity it is, however, that today many use 1 Corinthians merely for their personal spirituality or for helping others to be spiritual. I say again, what causes me the greatest pain is that all who receive this kind of help only seem to become individually spiritual and cause the church to suffer and be torn down. If you take a closer look, you can see that many who pay attention to individual spirituality eventually lose God's presence and blessing. If there are many people in a locality who continually pay attention to personal spirituality, eventually that church will be divided and torn apart.

EDIFICATION NEEDING TO BE FOR BUILDING

May the Lord be merciful to us so that we may see that today what He needs is not for individuals to be spiritual but for the church to be built up. Please do not misunderstand my words. I absolutely acknowledge that personal spirituality has its value before God. Each one of us must learn to live before the Lord and to be broken by the cross that we may all arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. But please remember that personal spirituality should not be for individuals; rather, it should be for the building of the church. The problem today is that many people pay attention to and care for personal spirituality only; they do not care for the building of the church at all. This is really the deceit of the enemy. Once we focus on our personal spirituality, our self will come in and will have the ground. Once we come to this stage, seemingly we are most spiritual; actually we are full of self.

We seem to be persons who receive the breaking of the cross the most, but actually we are the most difficult to be broken. In any group of Christians the person who is most difficult to be broken is the one who pays the most attention to personal spirituality. Such a one hopes to be personally spiritual and to help others to be spiritual as well, but instead the result is that he is the one who is the most difficult to be broken. Although he continually talks about the breaking of the cross, he is the hardest person to be broken by the cross. May the Lord be merciful to us and grant us to see that we do not need mere edification; instead, we need building. We do not need individual spirituality; instead, we need the building of the church. Any spirituality that we may need must also be for the building of the church.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CONDITIONS OF A BUILDED CHURCH

(1)

Scripture Reading: Rev. 21:1-3, 9-26; 22:1-2

I would like to call your attention to a few things from the portions of the Word that are listed above. (1) In Revelation 21:11 we see that the glory in the holy city, New Jerusalem, is the glory of God and that the light of the city is like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone. (2) In Revelation 21 jasper is mentioned three times: the first time is in verse 11, which says that the light of the city is like a jasper stone; the second time is in verse 18, which says that the building work of the wall of the city is jasper; and the third time is in verse 19, which says that among the twelve foundations of the wall, the first foundation is jasper. This shows that jasper is very important. (3) The twelve foundations (v. 14) with twelve precious stones in different colors (vv. 19-20) give the appearance of a rainbow. (4) In verse 15 we see that the city is of three parts: the city proper, its gates, and its wall. Then verse 21 mentions "the street of the city." *Street* is in singular number in the original language, showing that there is only one street in the city. (5) Verse 22 says, "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." In the Old Testament there was a temple in the city of Jerusalem; in the New Jerusalem, however, there is no temple, because God and the Lamb are the temple. (6) Verse 23 especially refers to the matter of illumination. (7) In Revelation 22:1 we see that *street* is still in singular number, showing again that there is only one street. In the middle of the street is a river of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. This shows that in the city there is a throne of God and of the Lamb. In Greek, *throne* is also singular. Because God and the Lamb are one, the throne is one. (8) Revelation 22:2 mentions the tree of life. At the very beginning of the Bible the tree of life was mentioned with reference to man's relationship with God. Here in Revelation 22 the Bible concludes with the tree of life. The Scriptures begin with the tree of life and also end with the tree of life. God is the Alpha and the Omega; He is the Beginning and the End (v. 13). God finishes in the same way that He began.

GOD NOT INTENDING TO GAIN INDIVIDUALS BUT A GROUP OF BUILDED PEOPLE

In this chapter we will look at the building of God in a more detailed way. I believe that we already have been deeply impressed with the fact that God's intention is to obtain a building in the universe. God does not intend to obtain individual persons but a group of people who are built together with Him. Therefore, in this universe God is not merely edifying individual people but building all the saved ones into Himself to be one entity. In other words, God's goal is not the edification of individuals but the building up of the church. God has no intention to edify us in order to make us proper individuals; rather, God's intention is to build all of us into a house. God's desire is not to produce individual vessels by edification; rather, His desire is to produce a corporate vessel by building.

We must let the Lord shine this vision into us. If we read the Scriptures from the beginning to the end, we will see that this vision runs through the entire Bible. If we read only a certain portion, a certain verse, or a certain sentence, it seems that we may be able to find some basis to say that God's intention is to edify individuals. However, if we read the entire Bible from the beginning to the end, we will see that the ultimate consummation of God's work in the universe is not many scattered persons but a city, the New Jerusalem. When the word *city* is mentioned, we know that it denotes a building. A building is not something with many individual stones piled together, scattered around, or displayed neatly in rows; rather, it is an entity with many stones built together through a process of construction.

If we look at this city, the New Jerusalem, we can see that inscribed on its gates are the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, while on the foundations of its wall are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (21:14). This implies that all the redeemed saints of the Old Testament age, represented by the twelve tribes, and all the redeemed saints of the New Testament age, represented by the twelve apostles, are in this city. You see then that all these redeemed ones are not scattered but have been completely built together. Peter as a stone, John as a stone, and James as a stone are all built together there. They are not scattered individual stones. This shows that what God wants to gain throughout the ages is not a crowd of separated, scattered

individuals. What God wants to gain is a corporate entity, a city built up with all the redeemed ones. This is an exceedingly great and important principle.

I would like to make note of one thing. In the Old Testament we cannot see the tabernacle of God in any one individual, neither can we see the temple of God in any one home. Only in the midst of all the children of Israel can we see the tabernacle and the temple. This also shows that God does not take individuals as His goal; rather, God takes a corporate Body as His goal. God's intention is not to gain many separate temples but to obtain one builded temple. Just as in the Old Testament the temple was neither in any single person nor in any single house, so in the New Testament the church is also neither in any individual person nor in any individual house. An individual saint can never become the church. The church is a corporate entity built with all the saints in each locality.

Time does not allow us to say too much here. However, I beg you to be impressed that God does not want scattered individuals; God wants a building that is built up with all the saints. God does not want individual stones carved separately into objects for appreciation; rather, God wants many stones built together into a city for a habitation. Therefore, there is no room for either individual spirituality or personal beauty. We must be coordinated and built together with others.

Even the twelve apostles were not individualistic. As the foundations of the New Jerusalem, they are not individualistic but are joined to one another. Not only so, in their work they always joined all the saints to themselves for the building of the church. I am concerned that today some co-workers are doing an individualistic work. You may be quite successful in your work yet not be joined to anyone else. If this is the case, then it is as if you are the foundation all by yourself. Others not only cannot be connected to you; they cannot even continue your work after you. After you have worked in a certain place for a period of time, others will have no way to work there anymore. You have laid an individualistic foundation, and you are doing an individualistic work. Your work may look beautiful, and it may also appear spiritual, but you have to admit that there is a serious problem with it. Brothers and sisters, I repeat that regardless of how much we work on the stones to make each one look pretty, God does not want individual stones; God only wants a city. God's only desire is to have a builded city, a city which has been constructed. This picture

should be very clear to us. If we still have not seen it, then we really need the mercy of God.

BEING BUILT TOGETHER WITH OTHERS IN THE CHURCH AND ABSOLUTELY NOT BEING INDIVIDUALISTIC

We should not think that as long as we are spiritual and as long as we pursue God individually, we will be all right. This is not right. We need to see that we must be built together with the brothers and sisters; we must be builded stones. Regardless of where we are, we must not be single stones; rather, we must be built together with at least two or three brothers and sisters. In the church we must be harmonious, united, and joined with others.

I have seen some brothers and sisters who are humble and gentle. They are truly lovable, just like beautifully carved precious stones. Nonetheless, someone who is like this may not be built together with others. Individually, he may not hurt, harm, offend, or stumble others. On the contrary, he may conduct himself properly in all things. He may be really good. But if we observe his relationship with others, we will notice that he is not connected to anyone. When someone mentions another brother to him, although he does not say anything outwardly, he shakes his head inwardly. When someone mentions a certain sister, he gives no opinion outwardly, but inwardly it is another story. He is altogether a self-centered person who is not attached to anyone. He is truly like a marble that nothing can stick to. This kind of condition is very abnormal. Such a brother or sister is useless in the church.

Such a believer may be likened to a childless old woman. People who are very old and have no children are often very neat. Please forgive me for saying that in particular, old, single females are often so neat that they become peculiar. They can be neat to the extent that they are not attached to anyone; no one dares to be attached to them. The self-centered brothers and sisters are also the same. They care only about being clean and without a speck of dust before God; they do not care whether others live or die. Therefore, spiritually, they are old people who do not have spiritual descendants. There is no blessing of God upon them.

However, there is often another group of people in the church. These ones seemingly are not very spiritual. They are common in every way, without anything special. Yet you can see that there is building among them and that

they can be attached to anyone, including the weak and the backsliding ones. They are full of the blessings of God, and many are helped and supplied by them. Therefore, what matters is building. If there is building, there is usefulness; if there is building, there is blessing.

AS BOTH THE DWELLING PLACE AND THE BRIDE, THE CHURCH NEEDING TO BE BUILT UP

We must see that what God ultimately will obtain is a city, not many scattered stones. This city, this building, is on the one hand, the dwelling place, the house of God, and on the other hand, the bride of the Lamb and the counterpart of Christ. Being a counterpart is more advanced than being a dwelling place. We know that everyone needs a home, but in order to have a proper home, there is the need of a spouse. If there is no spouse, there cannot be a proper home. Therefore, the Chinese refer to marriage as the establishing of a home. If a man is not married, he does not have a home. After a man is married and has a spouse, then he has a home. The Scriptures show that God and man are counterparts to each other. God is the Husband, and man is the wife. Without man, God is single; without God, man is alone. Both are without a home. Only when the two, God and man, are united will there be a universal home in which man has a place to dwell, and God has a place of rest.

As both a dwelling place and a counterpart, the church is corporate. God's counterpart is not an individual believer but the church corporately. I hope that God will enable us to see this. No matter how spiritual we are, as long as we are individualistic, we damage the dwelling place of God, the house of God, as well as the counterpart of God. Therefore, Christians should by no means be individualistic. They must be built together with the brothers and sisters in the church.

A BUILDED CHURCH HAVING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Now we will go on to see how we can know that a church has been built up. In other words, what is the condition of a built-up church? I would like to point out several things from the last two chapters of Revelation.

First, a built-up church has God's presence. Revelation 21:22 says that there is no temple in the New Jerusalem, for God and the Lamb are its temple. We know that during the Old Testament times the temple was the center of

Jerusalem. Therefore, that God and the Lamb are the temple means that God and the Lamb themselves become the center of the city. In other words, God is with the city, and the city has the presence of God.

This shows that where there is building, there is the presence of God. God's presence follows His building. Does not our experience also tell us that whenever we are built together with all the saints, we have God's presence, and whenever we are individualistic, we immediately lose the sense of God's presence? In the previous chapter I used an illustration of three persons who were discussing when to have a gospel meeting. One of them suggested having it in the evening, another one suggested having it in the afternoon, and the third one suggested having it in the morning. Eventually, they came to a deadlock. I believe many of us would ask, since there are three different opinions, which one should be accepted? At which of the suggested times should the gospel be preached? My reply is that the gospel should be preached at the time when there is God's presence. This means that when three people are discussing such a matter, the first one should ask, "While I am insisting on having the meeting at 7:30 p.m., do I have God's presence?" The second one should also ask, "While I am fighting to have the meeting at 4:30 P.M. in the afternoon, do I have the presence of God?" And the third one should also ask, "While I am suggesting 6:30 a.m., do I have God's presence?" Therefore, the time of the meeting should be decided altogether according to God's presence. If there is the presence of God, then any time is proper, regardless of whether it is in the morning, in the afternoon, or in the evening. But if there is not the presence of God, then no time is suitable.

If we know this principle and live in it, we will never contend with the brothers and sisters while we are serving God in the church. We know that whenever we argue with them, the presence of God is lost. God's presence is like a dove that cannot stand any disturbance. Once we argue, it will fly away. Recently while I was abroad, in many places, whether it was in the park or even on the street, I saw many doves flying around. These doves were not afraid of people. While we were sitting in the park, a group of doves came in front of us. If we talked loudly, they would all fly away, but if we just sat there and talked gently, one by one the doves would come near us again. Brothers and sisters, it is the same with the presence of God when we are serving the Lord together. Perhaps your reasoning is right, and your suggestion is the best, but because we argue, the Holy Spirit as a dove flies away.

Therefore, we must hold on to this principle: God's presence is the criterion for every matter. Regardless of what we do, we must pay attention to whether or not we have God's presence. Do we have God's presence while we are expressing our opinions? Do we have God's presence while we are saying certain things or taking a certain attitude? Is God's presence in our suggestion or proposal? If we touch the presence of God in all things, we will see that God will be there as the temple, and the building of God will be with us. When we argue with each other, we all may be for the Lord, and our insisting may be quite justifiable. However, due to our arguing we do not have God as the temple—the presence of God. Instead, we have torn down the city.

One thing that grieves me very much is that in all the places that I visit it is rare not to hear the brothers and sisters judging and criticizing one another. In nearly every place I visit, I meet some brothers and sisters who speak to me with words of criticism and judgment. If they are not unhappy with the responsible ones, then they are blaming the workers, or they are dissatisfied with the church. One thing is certain: the brothers and sisters who criticize are the first ones to lose the presence of God, regardless of whether they are right or wrong in their criticism or judgment. They do not have God's presence, and they do not have God as the temple. Among these ones there is no building.

We must see that in the church reasoning does not matter. What matters is the presence of God. The church is not a law court where it is advantageous to present your reasons adequately. This is not the case. In the church the more you reason, the more God stays away from you. Even if your reasoning is one hundred percent correct and all the good reasons are on your side, the more you argue, the further away from God you will be.

Let me tell you more about doves. Doves do not care whether or not your arguments are convincing. They care only whether or not you have a loud voice and whether or not you have a fierce look. You cannot deceive them. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Scriptures say that the doves' eyes are the fairest. Through careful observation I have found that a dove's eyes are its keenest part. Humans cannot cheat them. That day while I was in the park, I tried various ways to lure one of the doves to come to me. However, when my hand moved, even just a little, the dove quickly ran away. When I rested my hand, it came back again. Brothers and sisters, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us is also like this. The Spirit does not care about how right you are. He

cares only about your attitude, your intention, and your condition. In the law court the louder a person argues, the greater his advantage is. In the church, however, the louder a person argues, the greater his loss is. The more we reason, the more we lose God's presence. Please remember that the temple in the New Jerusalem is God Himself. God's presence is the center of the city. Therefore, in the church we must have the presence of God; we must have God as the temple. Then we will be built up to have the condition of the New Jerusalem.

THE BUILDED CHURCH HAVING THE RULING OF GOD

Second, if the church is built up, it will have the throne of God, the ruling of God. In the New Jerusalem there is the throne of God. This throne is not only a matter of God's presence but also a matter of God's ruling. In this building there is the presence of God, and there is also the dominion of God. Because the throne of God is established, God can exercise His authority. If we want to know whether a certain church is being built up, we need to see whether there is God's throne and God's dominion among them.

Sometimes when you go to a certain place and meet some brothers and sisters there, you can sense that among them there is not the throne of God but the throne of man. When you attend their service meeting, you notice they speak as if they are sitting on a throne. Whoever speaks is on the throne. Before one finishes speaking, another one speaks over him. He seems to be saying, "Come down from the throne now and let me get up onto it." Although he does not say this plainly, this is the impression he gives by his attitude and demeanor. After this one finishes, another sister would say, "Brother So-and-so, what you have said is not correct." While she speaks, her voice may sound very gentle, but the impression is the same: "Come down from the throne." This is not my imagination. Many times while I was sitting together with God's children, I saw this kind of situation. This means that the throne of God, the dominion of God, is not there. Rather, everyone is sitting on his own throne. Please remember that once there is such a situation, the presence of the Holy Spirit is definitely not there. This proves that in such a place God's children have not yet been built up.

Although there are numerous Christian groups today, where is the throne of God? In many places you cannot see any building. On the contrary, you see human skills and organization everywhere. People use all kinds of ways to

facilitate communication among church members and to win believers over. We have to admit that this kind of communication and winning over is not building; instead, it is man's organizing work. Therefore, there is no presence of God, and even more there is no throne of God. I hope that we all will remember that wherever we are, if we also depend on these ways of facilitating communication and winning people over, then the building of God no longer will be among us. The church cannot depend on these ways; the church has to be built up in God.

In the New Jerusalem, God Himself is the temple, and the throne of God is there. Therefore, if we want to know whether a certain church has been built up, we have to see whether the presence of God, the throne of God, and the dominion of God are among them. This is the condition of a built-up church. Let me tell you a real story. A brother once gave me his testimony. He said, "Brother Lee, I was saved two or three years ago, and I was meeting with the brothers in the church. However, when the brothers came together, they were very cold. This was especially the case with the responsible brothers. They did not greet people before the meeting, neither did they go to the door to shake hands with people after the meeting. Therefore, I was unhappy inwardly. At that time a certain pastor came to visit me. He was very warm toward me and showed great concern for me. This really touched me. Hence, I decided to go to his place for Sunday worship. When I went, as soon as I reached the entrance to the chapel, the pastor came forward to greet me and to shake hands with me. After the service the pastor went quickly to the door and shook hands with every attendant. I really felt that this was very good. Therefore, I decided to go there regularly. But one thing was very strange. After I went to this place for a period of time, although I did not know why, I felt that I had lost God's presence within me. Although I felt very comfortable outwardly, inwardly I felt as if I had lost something. Therefore, subsequently, I went back to be among the brothers. Strangely, when I went back, the presence of God, which I had lost, was recovered immediately. Another amazing thing is that when I am in any other Christian gathering, it seems that I can speak things loosely, but when I am with the brothers, although they do not prohibit me from doing so, there is something within me that restrains me and does not allow me to utter anything loosely."

This shows the experience of God's presence and of God's ruling. Therefore, to determine whether or not a church has been built up, we should not look at whether they have communication and warmth among them; instead, we

should see whether or not they have God's presence and God's throne among them.

A BUILDED CHURCH HAVING THE FLOW AND SUPPLY OF LIFE

Third, a builded church has the flow and supply of life. The Scriptures show us that there is a river of water of life proceeding out of the throne, and on both sides of the river there is the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, and yielding its fruits each month (Rev. 22:1-2). This indicates that in God's presence and God's reigning there is the flow of life. Here there is the water of life which quenches people's thirst and causes people to be watered. Here there are also the fruits of the tree of life which enable the hungry people to be satisfied. Everyone who comes here can obtain the supply he needs.

A church which has truly been built up surely has this kind of condition. In a built up church you will touch the flow as well as the moving of God's life. Whoever goes there will receive the supply. I believe that we all have this kind of experience. In some places the brothers and sisters who rise up to serve the Lord do not know many doctrines, but they are one and harmonious in the Lord. When you go to their meeting, you can sense the presence of the Lord, the authority of the Lord, and the moving of the water of life. When a brother rises up to speak a few words, you sense the watering of the living water which quenches your thirst. When another brother gives a testimony, or a sister offers a short prayer, you also sense that the testimony and prayer are spiritual food which bring you satisfaction. In this place you see a church which has been built up.

After a period of time, however, two able preachers are raised up among them. Both of them are eloquent, and both seem to have much light and to be quite gifted. However, due to the raising up of these two brothers, the church is filled with death because these two brothers are in discord and against each other. If one of them gives a message on the Lord's Day morning, the following Lord's Day when it is the other brother's turn to speak, he gives a message to refute the other one's message. Then the following Lord's Day morning the first brother speaks again and gives a message against the other brother. Their voices are loud and clear, their words are flowing, their utterances are excellent, and their stories, illustrations, and quotations from the Scriptures are very suitable and proper. Their messages are truly appealing, but the pitiful thing is that there is neither living water nor living

food. All those who have consciousness in their spirit will tell you that neither the presence of God nor the blessing of God is there. This is because there is no building there.

If a church has experienced the building and there is harmony among the saints, then surely that place will have the flow of the water of life as well as the supply of the food of life. When people go into the midst of these believers, they may not hear a good message, but surely they will touch the living water and food, and they will also sense God's presence and God's ruling. They will be watered, they will be satisfied, and they will have rest.

A BUILDED CHURCH HAVING LIGHT

Fourth, a builded church has light. In the New Jerusalem there is light (Rev. 21:23). This light is not natural light, neither is it the light of the sun or of the moon; this light is God Himself. God is the light while Christ is the lamp. God shines forth His glory in Christ, and this glory is the light of the city. That the city has no need of the sun or of the moon means that in this building there is no need of natural light. The God who is manifested in their midst in Christ is the light. Or we may say that God in Christ expressed through them is the light. Therefore, when you go into the midst of a group of people like this, you feel that it is bright there. This is just like the situation in a meeting hall filled with light. The electricity that shines forth is expressed through fluorescent lamps to become light. Hence, when you walk into a room like this, everything is clear: you can see chairs, people sitting down, the entrance, and the hallway. You can see everything clearly.

Very often when you are in the midst of a builded church, you also will sense that there is light and that it is bright there. You may have some private problems that you do not know how to deal with although you have prayed, read the Scriptures, and sought the will of God. But when you go to a meeting of a built up church and sit among them, you will feel enlightened. Sometimes just by listening to a prayer you are filled with light within. Sometimes by their singing a hymn, or by someone standing up to read a verse from the Scriptures, or even just by the atmosphere of their meeting, you become clear and enlightened. This is because there is light there, and the glory of God is expressed. This kind of situation tells us that that church has been built up.

The manifestation of God is altogether due to the presence of God, and God's presence is altogether due to the oneness and harmony among the saints. This oneness and harmony are the building. If among the brothers and sisters there is friction, opinion, disharmony, and discord, then when you go into their midst, you will sense darkness instead of light. Their messages might be very good, and their prayers might be very loud, but you cannot sense any light there. This is because there is no building of God among them.

If a church has been built up, that church surely will have these four conditions: first, it will have God as the temple—God's presence; second, it will have God's throne—God's ruling; third, it will have the flow and supply of God's life; and fourth, it will have God's light. If we have these conditions, this proves that we have been built up because only in the building can we have all these blessings of God.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE CONDITIONS OF A BUILDED CHURCH

(2)

Scripture Reading: Rev. 21:2, 9b-14, 16-19, 21

In the previous chapter we saw the four conditions of the New Jerusalem. The city has God Himself and the Lamb as its temple, the throne of God and of the Lamb, and the river of water of life proceeding out of the throne with the tree of life yielding the fruits of life abundantly. Moreover, the glory of God is fully expressed in the city as its illumination.

These four points reveal the four conditions of a builded church. If the church has been built up by God, first of all it will have God's presence—God will be in our midst as the temple. Second, there will be the throne of God and of the Lamb—God's ruling will be among us. Third, God's life will flow among us to be our supply so that the thirsty ones may be satisfied and the hungry ones may be filled. Fourth, there will be the expression of God's glory as the illumination among us.

If we have these conditions among us, this proves that we have been built up, that we have God's building among us. It also proves that we are in harmony and in oneness because anything that is built up will be harmonious and one. For example, this meeting hall was built with numerous materials, but since all these materials have been joined together, they are in harmony and in oneness. This harmony, this oneness, shows that they have been built together. Likewise, regardless of where we may be, as those who are serving God we must have this harmony. This harmony comes from our being built together. Whenever we come together, if we have not experienced the building work of the Holy Spirit and are still only a pile of material, we will not have the genuine harmony and oneness. In this condition it will be difficult to detect the presence of God and the throne of God among us, and it will also be difficult for people to receive the supply of life and to see God's light. However, wherever there is a group of saints who have passed through the building work of the Holy Spirit so that they have become one, you will sense the presence of God and the throne of God among them. Moreover, you

will be able to touch the moving of the Holy Spirit as the living water, as well as receive the supply of the bread of life among them. Not only so, you will be able to touch God's light and sense that everyone is full of light. All these conditions are proof that they have been built up. We can see that these are the conditions of a builded church based on the contents of the New Jerusalem.

A BUILDED CHURCH NEEDING TO HAVE THE MINGLING OF GOD AND MAN AND TO PASS THROUGH DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The New Jerusalem has gates (Rev. 21:12-13), and anyone who wants to enter the city and participate in the building of God has to pass through these gates.

First of all, we need to see that this city has a total of twelve gates. There are gates on all four sides: three on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. This implies that it is very convenient for people to enter into the city; there is no difficulty at all. In addition, the number twelve has a spiritual meaning. The numbers used in the Scriptures all have spiritual meanings. Notice that in the New Jerusalem the number twelve appears frequently. Furthermore, in this case the number twelve is derived from multiplying four (four sides—east, north, south, and west) by three (three gates on each side). The number three denotes the Triune God, the God who came in resurrection to be man's life. The Triune God came to have a relationship with man and to be man's life through incarnation, death, and resurrection. In other words, it is through the Father's entering into the Son, the Son's entering into the Spirit, and the Spirit's entering into man. By passing through these three steps, the Triune God came to be man's life. All these things are implied in the number three. In the Scriptures the number four denotes the creatures; for example, Revelation 4:6 refers to the four living creatures. Therefore, three times four implies the mingling of God with man. The complete mingling of God and man becomes twelve. Twelve is the number of eternal completion, the number of the completion of God's building. Anything built up by God should be the issue of the mingling of God with man. The number that we use to signify this is twelve.

Therefore, now it is easy to understand what it means for the city to have twelve gates. For the city to have twelve gates signifies that the entrance to this building is produced out of the mingling of God and man. If there is only man or if there is only God, there cannot be the gates. Only when God is mingled with man can there be the gates.

In addition, each one of the twelve gates is a pearl (21:21a). Pearls also have an important spiritual significance. We must recognize that the city has three kinds of materials: gold, pearls, and precious stones. The gates are pearls, the wall is built with precious stones, and the city proper with its street is pure gold. We recall that Genesis 2 says that a river went forth from Eden and that there were gold, bdellium (pearl), and onyx stone (a precious stone). These are the same three kinds of materials found in the New Jerusalem. Hence, the three materials in Genesis 2 appear again in the New Jerusalem. This shows that these three materials are of great significance to the building of God.

The record in this portion of the Word is symbolic or allegorical. Like a picture, it looks very simple on the surface, but its intrinsic significance is profound. If you read the Scriptures, you will find that each one of these three kinds of materials—pure gold, precious stones, and pearls—has its definite significance. If we would like to know the building up of the church, the building work of God throughout the ages, we need to understand the meanings of these materials in the Scriptures.

Let us first look at the pearls, which are a very special kind of material. Pearls are produced by oysters, which grow in the sea. When an oyster is wounded by a grain of sand, it is stimulated to secrete a substance onto the grain of sand that gradually makes it into a pearl. Therefore, in the spiritual sense, the pearl denotes how we were regenerated to become a new creation in the wound of Christ. While in the world as the sea, the Lord Jesus as the oyster was wounded by us. As earthly people, every one of us may be likened to a grain of sand. As grains of sands, we wounded Christ, and in His wound we experienced a transformation in life. By receiving the Lord's death, we become a new creation through regeneration with the life that came out of Him. In this life both death and resurrection are included. In the wound of the Lord we died with Him, resurrected together with Him, and also live together with Him in the new creation. This is the significance of pearls, which are formed by the mingling of the sand and the oyster. This

corresponds with the principle of three times four, the principle of the mingling of God with man.

Therefore, that the gates of the city are pearls indicates that whoever does not correspond with the nature of the pearl cannot enter into the city to participate in it. Anyone who enters into the city through the gate has to be the product of three times four—the issue of the mingling of God with man, and a new creation in Christ through death and resurrection. You cannot bring anything natural, anything of the earth, into this building. Every grain of sand must be changed by entering into the oyster's wound. Every earthy person must pass through death and resurrection through the cross of Christ. All natural beings and all natural elements must become a new creation—pearl—through the dealing of the cross. Only then can they enter through the gates.

After reading this, you may understand it in theory, but you still may not be clear about the application. Therefore, let me give you an illustration. For example, let us consider a person who is well educated. His mind is clear, and he is eloquent in speaking and competent in debating. Suppose that this person gets saved into the church in Taipei and loves the Lord fervently. As a result, within two months all his good qualities will be manifested. When the responsible brothers see his condition, they will likely say, "Oh, this brother is a mouthpiece; let us ask him to stand on the platform and give messages." I want to tell you, brothers and sisters, that if this happens, those responsible brothers will be making a big mistake. Since this brother has been saved for only a short amount of time, his eloquence, his mind, his education, and his way of thinking are all natural, sandy, and earthy. They are not of resurrection or pearly. None of his qualities can enter through the gates into the building of God. Therefore, if the responsible brothers invite him to give a message, he may speak with great eloquence and present all the points in good order, and everyone may shower praises on him. However, after he has been speaking for two or three months, I am afraid that the church will collapse because all his speaking will have been natural and earthy instead of pearl. His natural abilities have not yet touched the wound of Christ, have not yet been dealt with by the cross, and have not yet passed through death and resurrection. Therefore, instead of building the church, they tear it down.

In this situation there is the need for a pearl gate. This gate shuts out all the naturalness of man. If a person wants to enter through the gate, all that he

has must be changed in nature. If this brother really desires to serve in the church for its building up, then his education, his mind, his way of thinking, his eloquence, and his debating skills all need to pass through the breaking of the cross. For an extended period of time he must practice to condemn all these things that are good in man's eyes, bringing them to the cross to be dealt with and then resurrected. After this he can bring them through the gate into the building of the church. Then when he rises to speak for the Lord, his speaking will bear spiritual weight and will be useful for the building up of the church.

I hope that we all will have a strong feeling about this matter. We have to see that it is truly a terrible thing for our natural being to touch the service of the church without first being dealt with. Sometimes in a certain local church I have watched the responsible brothers discussing the affairs of the church. While they were expressing their opinions one by one, I said to myself, "My goodness! All their opinions are just their natural insights, their human perceptions, and their worldly views. Their opinions have not been dealt with by the cross and have not passed through death and resurrection; they are all sand and not pearls. If the responsible brothers oversee the church with these opinions and ideas, the saints in this locality will not be built up, and the church will collapse."

One time I went to a certain place to make preparations for holding a conference there. The responsible brothers were discussing putting a big advertisement in the newspapers for the occasion. During their discussion I was also present. At that time I thought in my heart, "I wish there were a big ax here. Then I could use it to smash all their opinions one by one." I also thought to myself, "What kind of mentality is this? This is an unregenerated mentality. This is a sandy mentality, not a pearly mentality. This kind of sandy mentality has not entered into the oyster's wound, has not passed through the cross, and has not been resurrected; it is altogether natural." After they had finished their discussion, they turned to me and asked, "Brother Lee, what do you think about this?" I frowned and answered, "I think this is the ugliest thing. Brothers, we need to see what the Lord wants us to do today. If we were engaged in the things of the world, we could print big advertisements. However, since we intend to build up the church here today, we absolutely cannot use such methods." For the building up of the church, we must use the things that have passed through death and resurrection. Do not think that the church will be built up if we have big advertisements to

draw a multitude of people. I tell you, the bigger the advertisement you print and the more people come, the faster the church will collapse. Hence, I earnestly begged them not to do it.

Another time, while I was in another place, it so happened that the responsible brothers were having a meeting among themselves. At that time, due to a big financial need, they were discussing how to raise funds to meet the need. Someone there also had a sandy mentality with fantastic notions. This particular responsible brother proposed, "We can prepare some donation slips with each brother or sister's name preprinted on each slip and then distribute the slips to the brothers and sisters, asking them to return their donation with the slips. In this way we will know which ones have donated and which ones have not yet donated, and which ones have given more and which ones have given less. If we distribute the slips to them, they will have no way to avoid donating their money." While they were discussing this matter with great delight, the more I listened, the more I was troubled. I was so grieved in my heart. Then they turned to me and asked, "Brother Lee, what do you think about this?" I said, "You must never do this kind of thing. I beg you not to do it at all." They asked, "Then what about the funds we need?" I said, "You have to kneel down and pray. When you have no way out, then God has a way out. You cannot solve the problem, but God can. What is impossible with man is possible with God."

There is no need to give more of these kinds of stories. Please remember that whenever you bring in something natural, something of human effort, something "ingenious," something resulting from human schemes and methods, or something that has not passed through the cross, then you have not come to your end, and therefore God cannot provide you with a way out. All these things are sand and not pearls since they have not passed through death. Hence, you should never bring them into the building of God. If you do, you will damage God's building and hinder the church from being built up. In the church, in God's building, there cannot be sand or dust; there can only be pearls. In the building up of the church, everything must pass through the cross, must be in Christ, and must be the mingling of God and man. This is the entrance into the New Jerusalem, the entrance into the church. Only that which corresponds with the nature of this entrance can be brought into the building of God.

Therefore, I repeat, we must not bring our views, abilities, and all manner of natural things into the church. With many workers of God and many who take care of the church, their ways, schemes, perception, and wisdom are still altogether sandy and earthy. They have never been transformed or dealt with by God. We should know that these things cannot build up the church; they can only destroy God's building. If we continually use our natural abilities in dealing with everything, we may be very good in dealing with people and in handling situations, but we will never be people who build up the church. On the contrary, we will be damaging ones in the church and a frustration to the brothers and sisters.

We should not take these words as doctrines, thinking that they cannot help us at all. Only a vision can rescue us. You and I have to learn to bring all our natural thoughts, discernment, schemes, abilities, and strength to the cross to be dealt with. After all these items have been broken, have passed through death and resurrection, and have become pearls, then they can be brought into the building of God.

A BUILDED CHURCH

NEEDING TO BE FULL OF GOD'S NATURE

The New Jerusalem also has a street (Rev. 21:21b). This street is joined to the city proper, and the two cannot be separated. Therefore, the Bible says that the city is pure gold (v. 18) and that the street is pure gold (v. 21). The street is just the city proper.

After entering in through a gate, we need to walk, but to do so we need streets. In the New Jerusalem, although there are twelve gates, there is only one street. When I was young, I pondered over this portion of the Word again and again, but I just could not understand it. My mind simply could not comprehend it. I thought, "How can people enter in through twelve gates yet walk on one street? Furthermore, since all twelve gates lead to the throne in the center of the city, shouldn't there be twelve streets leading from the twelve gates to the throne?" Moreover, when I studied the Greek text, I found out that the word *street* is singular in number, further indicating that there is only one street. Therefore, I was really perplexed. Later, I became clear after someone showed me a simple drawing. Then I realized that the street is not straight but spiraling. In the first circle the street goes around the twelve gates, then as it turns inward, the circles become smaller and smaller until finally it

reaches the throne. Thus, the street is not complicated at all. No matter which gate you enter in, you are on the one street. You can never get lost here. Ultimately, this street will take you to the center, to the throne.

Later, you will see that this city is a cube. It has not only length and breadth but also height; furthermore, its length, its breadth, and its height are equal (v. 16). It is a cubical city built upon a mountain. This corresponds with what is revealed throughout the Scriptures, that is, that the cities built by God are all built on mountains. In former days the city of Jerusalem was built on Mount Zion. Now this New Jerusalem is also built upon a mountain. Because the city is a cube, its street is a spiral. Moreover, the street does not spiral on a flat plane; it spirals upward, going up higher and higher towards the center. I cannot speak too much concerning these things.

Another thing we need to keep in mind is that the street is pure gold. You cannot find a grain of sand in it. It is all pure gold. In the Scriptures gold denotes the nature of God. This indicates that the city is filled with God and the nature of God. There is absolutely no earthy element. The street is altogether simple and pure. The street is also one—without any complication, and it is pure gold—without any mixture.

The principle revealed here is also very practical for the building up of the church. A few days ago I met several brothers who were discussing a certain matter. Some of them said to do it one way, whereas the others said to do it another way. Eventually, they came to an impasse. Thus, you can see that there were two streets among them. We all know that when we walk, it is better to have just one street. When we come to a fork in the road, we are often in a dilemma, not knowing which way is the right way. Likewise, if there are two ways existing at the same time in the church service, it will not be possible for the saints to be built together. Thank God, however, that in the New Jerusalem there will always be only one street of pure gold; there will never be two streets. Thus, it is not hard to walk in the New Jerusalem. This shows that when we come together with the brothers, whether it is for the Lord's work, for overseeing the church, or for taking the lead in the meeting, we must have only one street, which is the nature of God. If we turn away from the nature of God and pay attention to other things, then it is very likely that you will have a suggestion, I will have another suggestion, and a third brother will have still another suggestion. Everyone's suggestion is a street, so eventually we will not know whose suggestion to follow.

Perhaps you would ask me, “This being the case, how do we know which way matches God’s nature? How can we tell whose suggestion is right?” Please be reminded of what we said earlier. A person who wants to enter in through the gate must first have all the sand in him transformed into pearl. With such transformation it will be easy to touch the nature of God. A brother once said it best when he said, “If there is no cross, there is no church. There is a cross erected at the entrance of the church, and everyone who wants to come in must first be hanged upon it.”

At the pearl gates all natural things that have not already passed through the cross are shut out. Everything brought through the gates is pearl. Furthermore, the pearl gates and the golden street are linked to one another. Therefore, if you have truly entered in through the pearl gates, you can easily find the golden street. As we are coordinating and serving with the brothers and sisters in the church, if in every matter we would seriously learn the lesson of putting our self, our view, our opinions, and our natural being outside the pearl gates by hanging them on the cross, then we will easily find the street of God’s nature and know God’s way of doing things. We all must learn this serious lesson. We do not do things according to his opinion, your opinion, or my opinion. All our opinions, including his, yours, and mine, must be shut outside the pearl gates. Inside the gates there are no earthy feelings, ideas, or elements. Outside the pearl gates there is sand and earth, but inside the gates everything is pure gold. On one side of the cross, there is man’s opinion, viewpoint, ability, and idea. On the other side of the cross, none of these things exist. There is only God’s nature, and everything is pure gold.

The street of pure gold is always connected to the gates of pearl. Without the gates of pearl it would be difficult to find the street of pure gold. Let me give some simple illustrations. When the brothers serve together, the most difficult thing is that they have different dispositions and feelings. We know that no one is without a disposition and without some feeling. Moreover, each one’s disposition and feeling are usually different from the others’ disposition and feeling. Some have a quick disposition, whereas others have a slow disposition. Some have a disposition that prefers things to be big, whereas others have a disposition that prefers things to be small. Some like to make a show, whereas others like to be hidden. Some are extroverts, whereas others are introverts. Since we have many differences in our dispositions, we have different feelings accordingly. Those with a quick disposition feel that everything must be done quickly, whereas those with a slow disposition feel

that everything has to be carried out slowly. Because of different feelings, there are different opinions. Our view, our way, and our opinion cannot be separated from our feeling, and our feeling cannot be separated from our disposition. All these different human dispositions, human feelings, and human opinions become problems in the building of the church. Each one has his own disposition, each one has his own feeling, and each one has his own idea. It is difficult for the saints to be built together if they all have different ideas.

Therefore, the Word of God shows that if we want to be part of the building of the church, we have to enter in through the pearl gates; that is, we need to pass through the cross and be dealt with by God. This means that in the church we need to deny our feeling and our disposition. If you are a quick person, you must deny your quickness. If you are a slow person, you must deny your slowness. If you are one who likes everything to be big, you have to deny this desire for bigness. If you are one who likes everything to be small, you must deny this desire for smallness. If you deny your disposition and reject your feeling, God's nature will spontaneously be manifested. If all the responsible brothers in the church would practice this whenever they discuss matters in their administration of the church, God's nature will spontaneously be manifested among them, and whatever they decide and do will all be transparent and full of God's nature.

I say again, never employ human methods and human schemes in the church. All natural abilities, wisdom, and power and all human ingenuity have to be broken. We all have to learn this crucial lesson of absolutely denying ourselves. We must learn to deny our disposition, our feeling, our inclination, our preference, our discernment, and our emotions, including joy, anger, sorrow, and delight. The more intense our denying is, the more the pure gold will be manifested. The more thorough the breaking is, the more God will gain His ground. Then the church that we are in will be full of God's nature and become a city of the pure gold of God. Not only so, we will walk on the street of God's nature. The Scriptures say that the city is pure gold and that the street is also pure gold. This signifies that God Himself is the building itself and that He is also the street. Thus, the city and the street are not only joined together; they are one entity. If you have the city, you have the street. If you have the street, you also have the city.

I believe that we all understand what this means. The building is the street. The work you and I are doing is this street. The church you and I are building is this street. Whenever we completely deny ourselves and live in the nature of God, our service will not only issue in the building of the church but also lead people to the way of God when they come into our midst.

Regrettably, however, many of those who work for God and those who oversee the church have not been broken in their disposition, preferences, desires, and inclinations. As a result, their service has very little element of the building. For the church to be built up, the natural element must decrease, and the element of God must increase. Not only so, we should arrive at a state where the natural element is reduced to zero, while God's element becomes everything. Then, whatever remains will be pure gold, the nature of God, God Himself. This is the building itself and the street as well. It is here that God's children have a way to walk. When someone comes into our midst, no matter who he is, including even the most foolish person, he will be able to touch the way. He will not sense natural wisdom, intelligence, feeling, or disposition. He will sense that only God is among us and that only Christ is here. From beginning to end everything is God Himself. In such a situation you have to worship God, because here there is the building of God, and God has gained all the ground. This is the proper way for the church to take.

Moreover, the Scriptures also say that the street of pure gold is as clear as transparent glass. It is a marvelous thing that every section of the street in the New Jerusalem is transparent. The same is true in a church that has been built up. Sometimes when you attend a service meeting of a certain church, you see that the brothers and sisters are submissive to each other and are in great harmony. During the discussion of certain matters each one of them spontaneously expresses the feeling that they have before God. While you are in the meeting, you feel crystal clear within. You sense that there is not only a street, but there is also transparency. However, when you attend a service meeting in another locality, you may see the opposite situation. When the brothers and sisters begin to discuss a certain matter, one of them will suggest one thing, and another one will propose another thing. The amazing thing is that the more suggestions and proposals they have, the more you sense darkness and confusion. It seems that you are confined in a room with walls of brass and iron in which there is total darkness. I believe that we all have had this kind of experience. What kind of situation is this? This situation

indicates the absence of a transparent street. We can use this to test whether or not there is building among us.

Now I would like to add another point. In the middle of the street of pure gold is a river of water of life, and on the two sides of the river grows the tree of life (Rev. 22:1-2). In my youth whenever I read this portion, I was perplexed. I thought that since the tree of life grows on both sides of the river, there must be many trees. But when I read the Greek text, it said that there was one tree. I simply could not understand how one tree could be growing on two sides of the river. Later on, I realized that the one tree follows the one river, and it also follows the one street. The street is a spiral, and the river also spirals along with the street. The river does not flow upward from the twelve gates; rather, it flows down from the throne. Moreover, in the river grows a tree. This tree also does not grow upward; rather, it is like a vine spreading from the top downward. It spreads and spirals to the two sides, covering both sides of the river. Therefore, this city has one street, one river, and one tree.

The contents of Revelation 21 and 22 are exceedingly rich; we cannot finish speaking about them. However, the few points that we have just mentioned can be summarized as follows. First, this city has twelve gates, and the twelve gates are twelve pearls. The gates are a powerful filter, filtering out all that is of the natural being and leaving it outside the gates. This means that everything natural must be brought to the cross of Christ to be dealt with by passing through death and resurrection. Only then can anything be brought through the gates to participate in this building.

Following the pearl gates is the street of pure gold. After we have rejected all our natural disposition and natural feeling, all that is left in this building is God's nature. In this city everything is the nature of God; everything is of God. The nature of God is the one street.

Then in the middle of this street is the river of water of life. This river of water of life, after proceeding out of the throne of God, keeps on flowing along the street of pure gold. Therefore, in this street there is the flow of life. Furthermore, strictly speaking, the life and the way are one. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way...and the life" (John 14:6). Hence, where there is the way of God, there also is the life of God. At the same time, on the two sides of this river of water of life grows the tree of life. This indicates that there is not only the flow of the water of life but also the supply of the food of life. Here the

thirsty ones are watered, and the hungry ones are filled. All the needy ones can receive the supply of life. I hope that we would bring all these things before the Lord to have adequate prayer and meditation. May the Lord give us a clear feeling so that we may know the building of the church more and more.

Finally, I repeat that in this building all that is natural and all that is human needs to be broken, dealt with, and left outside. Once we touch the matter of taking care of the affairs of the church and the things pertaining to the building of the church, immediately we have to see that all the things of man must be transformed through death and resurrection. Then all that remains will be that which is out from God and of God and that which is of the Spirit and of resurrection. Then there will be the gates and the street. The nature of the street is the nature of the city. Here everything is the nature of God, and everything is transparent. At the same time, there is the full supply of life for people to be watered and satisfied. May the Lord have mercy on us so that we may know the proper conditions of the church today. If the churches everywhere are to be built up, they must have all these conditions.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CONDITIONS OF A BUILDED CHURCH

(3)

Scripture Reading: Rev. 4:2-3; 21:11-12, 14-15, 18-20

In the previous chapter we saw that the gates of the New Jerusalem are pearls. After entering the gates, the street is pure gold, and the city proper is also pure gold. Thus, the city proper and the street are one. In the middle of the street is the river of water of life, and in the river is the tree of life, which spreads its branches onto the two sides of the river and yields its fruits of life continually. We have already said that all these things are exceedingly rich in spiritual significance. They show that anyone who wants to enter this city and participate in this building must be mingled with God. Furthermore, one can enter in through the gate only after his natural being has been dealt with and resurrected in Christ. After entering the gate, one touches the pure gold, which is the nature of God. This nature of God is the building itself, and it is also the one street. In this one street there is the river of water of life, and there is also the tree of life. In other words, this street of God's nature is filled with the supply of God's life. Not only so, this street leads to the throne of God. Thus, after a person enters in through the pearl gate, he can reach the throne of God through the golden street. All these items have a spiritual meaning. We need to have the Triune God mingled with us, and we also need to pass through death and resurrection so that we may enter the gate to touch the things in this building. If we enter the gate in this way, we will touch God's nature, which is the way upon which we can walk. At the same time, this way of God's nature is filled with the supply of life, and it also leads to the throne of God. God is also the temple here, indicating that His presence is here. God also reigns here, and out of His reigning flows His life. This life is the light; thus, this city is also full of God's light. These conditions, which we see in the final building of God, should also be the conditions of the church as the building of God today.

THE BUILDED CHURCH NEEDING THE BOUNDARY OF THE EXPRESSION OF GOD'S IMAGE

Another crucial point concerning the New Jerusalem is the wall. We know that for a city to be a city it must have a wall. If a city does not have a wall, it cannot be considered a city. The seven items we saw in the previous two chapters were all related to the gates of the city and the city proper. However, we have not yet mentioned the wall. Therefore, in this chapter we would like to consider the wall specifically.

GOD'S BUILDING BEING GOD'S EXPRESSION

Before we consider the wall, we have to mention the vision in Revelation 4. In this chapter the apostle John, who was in spirit, saw a throne set in heaven. The One sitting upon the throne was God Himself as the sovereign Lord of the universe. He who was sitting on the throne was like a jasper stone, and there was a rainbow around the throne (vv. 2-3). We recall that the rainbow did not come into existence until after the beginning of the second world. Due to the excessive wickedness of mankind, the first world created by God was destroyed with a flood, and only the eight persons of Noah's household were left. After the flood water receded, the second world began. God told Noah that He would use the rainbow as a sign of the covenant He established with the living things of the earth, and when He would look upon the rainbow, He would not destroy the earth by flood again (Gen. 9:8-17). Thus, in Revelation 4, the fact that God appears with a rainbow around His throne implies that He is not only the God of the first world but also the God who preserves the second world. Moreover, it also implies that the reason God created the first world and preserves the second world is that He wants to build the New Jerusalem. Here you see a vision: there is a throne, the God who is on the throne is like a jasper stone in appearance, and there is a rainbow around the throne.

Now let us look at the wall of the New Jerusalem. Revelation 21 clearly says that the wall of the city is jasper (v. 18) and that the light of the city is also like a jasper stone (v. 11). Do we see this? The expression of the city is exactly the same as the expression of God. Just as the God who is on the throne is like jasper, so also the city is like jasper. God appears in the universe as jasper, and the city also appears as jasper. Thus, the appearance of this city is the appearance of God.

In addition, Revelation 21 says that the wall of the city has twelve foundations (vv. 14, 19-20). Someone once arranged the colors of the twelve

precious stones of the foundation in sequence according to their names in Greek, and the result was a picture resembling a rainbow. Therefore, here we can see two very similar pictures. In the picture at the beginning of Revelation there is a throne with God sitting upon it as jasper and a rainbow around it. In the picture at the end of Revelation there is a city that also has a throne at its center. The One on the throne is also the same God. In addition, the city looks like jasper all around, and the foundations under the wall of jasper also appear like a rainbow. When you compare these two pictures, you see that in the former there is a throne, and in the latter there is also a throne. In the former the appearance is like jasper, and in the latter the appearance is also like jasper. In the former there is a rainbow around the throne, and in the latter there is also a rainbow around the throne. Thus, in principle, these two pictures are exactly the same. The transparent city is altogether the same as God on the throne in Revelation 4. However, in chapter 4 the appearance of jasper is smaller, whereas in chapter 21 the appearance of jasper has been enlarged. The appearance of jasper in chapter 4 is the expression of God in Himself, whereas the appearance of jasper in chapter 21 is the expression of God in all those who have been redeemed and built up throughout the ages.

Now let us consider the shape of the city. The city lies square, and its length and breadth both are twelve thousand stadia (Rev. 21:16). The area surrounding the city, calculated by multiplying twelve thousand by twelve thousand, is one hundred and forty-four million stadia. In the Scriptures twelve is the most perfect number. That the area surrounding the city is twelve thousand times twelve thousand means that the city is infinitely perfect. The height of this city is also twelve thousand stadia. These numbers together indicate that in this city the expression of God is limitless. It is the fullness of fullness. Previously, on the throne God was not fully expressed, but now in the city He is expressed in full.

Revelation 21 includes everything in the Scriptures; it is the crystallization of the entire Bible. The issue of God's work in the human race for six thousand years is the New Jerusalem. All the positive things in the Scriptures are consummated in her. Therefore, what this city includes is exceedingly rich.

Simply speaking, the story of the New Jerusalem is the story of the enlargement of God in man. I believe that this statement best describes the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is the enlargement and full expression of

God in man. In principle, this enlargement, this full manifestation, is the same as God Himself. God's appearance is like jasper, and the appearance of the city is also like jasper. The two are exactly alike without any difference. Eventually, the first picture in Revelation 4 is included in the second picture in Revelation 21. When the city in Revelation 21 comes into being, the throne in Revelation 4 is included in the city. Therefore, this city is the expression of God Himself.

I believe that after reading these chapters, we should be able to easily recall the story in Genesis 1. We should remember that in the beginning God created man in His image. Then at the end of Revelation we see the manifestation of the New Jerusalem as the crystallized product of God's work throughout the ages. Everything in the city expresses God, and the entire city itself expresses the image of God. Therefore, at the end of Revelation the goal of God's creation of man is reached. Man has completely become the expression of God and is full of the image of God. Moreover, the light of this city is like jasper, indicating that its shining is altogether the expression of the image of God. People can both touch God and see God. We should all remember that this should be the condition of a church that has been built up by God.

If a church has really been built up, it will not only have the presence of God, the throne of God, the flowing and supply of the life of God, and the shining of the light of God, it will also have the expression of God. Look at the church at the time of Pentecost. One hundred and twenty people had genuinely been built together by God and were in harmony and one accord. If you were to touch them, you would have sensed that God was with them. Among them there was an expression, which was the shining of God. They were the jasper city. Like transparent crystals, they shone forth the jasper God who was within them.

Conversely, if you go into the midst of the saints in a church that has not been built up by God, you cannot see the expression of God. Rather, what you meet or see will be either fallen people or wicked Satan. They will express man and Satan instead of God. The church in Corinth was a very obvious example of this. The apostle Paul said that the Corinthians were fleshly, that they walked according to the manner of the fashion of the world, and that there were strifes and divisions among them. Thus, what they manifested was the flesh of man. The image of God was completely covered up by them.

NEEDING TO BE CONSTITUTED AS PRECIOUS STONES

Furthermore, the wall of the city is altogether built with precious stones (Rev. 21:18a). This is also a matter with great spiritual significance. A precious stone is not created originally by God; rather, it is formed from something created that has passed through years of constitution by being pressed underneath the earth. If we want to be truly built up, we not only need to be broken by God, but we also need to allow God to do a constituting work in us. We need to be under God's constituting work for many years before we can become precious stones to shine forth God's light.

Every descendant of Adam is originally a piece of clay. God created Adam, using a piece of clay taken from the earth as material. Therefore, all of us today who have been born of Adam are also clay. However, since we have been saved with God's life, in God's eyes we are no longer clay but stones. Immediately after Simon Peter confessed that the Lord was the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord said to him, "You are Peter" (Matt. 16:16-18). *Peter* is a translated word that means "a stone." Likewise, every saved person is a "Peter," a stone, used by God for the building of this city.

However, in the New Jerusalem the materials used by God for building are not merely ordinary stones but precious stones. Hence, it is not enough that we were saved and became stones; we still need to become precious stones. This requires us to put ourselves in the hands of God so that He can do the work of constitution.

All the brothers and sisters should consider whether they are an ordinary stone or a precious stone. I believe that many of us can say, "Formerly, as a piece of clay, I was really vile. But praise and thank God! Because He has cleansed and regenerated me, now I am a piece of stone." I believe that we all can say this by faith, but I still would like to ask, what kind of stone are you? Not all stones are the same. Are you a precious stone, or are you an ordinary stone? This time on my return trip from abroad I went to Jerusalem and its surrounding regions for a visit. The deepest impression I received is that there are stones throughout the land. There are big stones as well as small stones; everywhere there are stones. One day the driver of our car said to me, "If all the stones here could be changed into bread, we would be rich." Therefore, mere stones are not precious.

Are you merely a stone, or are you a precious stone? This is a big question. The precious stones on the wall of the city are not only precious but also transparent. Sometimes when you meet a brother, you can sense that he is not only a stone but that he is also truly a precious stone. He is transparent within. On the contrary, there are times when you meet someone, and not only do you sense that he is not a precious stone, but you feel that he is not even like a stone. You feel that he is a lump of clay. His living is muddled, he does things loosely, he speaks freely, and nothing is solid in him.

Those who know about precious stones know that a piece of precious stone is formed through much pressure. This pressure causes a precious stone to become very solid in nature. A lump of earth is loose. If you shake it in your hand, it falls apart right away. However, it is not so with a precious stone. It will not break even if you dash it on the ground. Some brothers and sisters are really solid and strong like precious stones, but there are also some brothers and sisters who are loose like a lump of earth. When you meet them, their words flow out of them very easily. It is as if it is easier for them to speak than to do anything else. They do not know what it means to be restricted. They are not precious stones even in the smallest amount. It should be no wonder to us that they cannot participate in the building.

Experts say that precious stones are formed not only by pressure, but that during the process of formation they also need to be burned by fire. Pressure, burning, and constitution are necessary for the transformation into precious stones. In the New Jerusalem there is nothing loose; rather, it is all precious stones, and it is all pure gold. Everything has been pressed, constituted, and burned; hence, it is solid and transparent. Likewise, for the building up of the church every brother and sister must experience the work of pressure and the work of heat. Often brothers and sisters ask me, “Brother Lee, we heard that you are going to such and such a place next week, is it true?” I tell them, “I do not know. Even I myself do not yet know when I am going, how do you know?” You can tell how loose many people are by the loose situation of the spreading of rumors among the brothers and sisters. In the face of this you can only sigh and say, “In the church few people are solid; few have been pressed, burned, and constituted. Hence, few have been built up.”

HAVING A BOUNDARY AFTER BUILDING

Now let us look at another point. The wall not only is like God and expresses God, it is also a boundary. Everything inside this wall is the New Jerusalem, and everything outside this wall is not the New Jerusalem. In other words, everything inside this wall is God's building, and everything outside this wall is not God's building. Please remember that the church has a boundary. This boundary of the church comes as a result of the children of God being constituted. The more you allow God to constitute you, the more you will have the wall, the boundary, in you. The wall is not there originally; it has to be built up. This building up is God's constituting. Therefore, the more God builds and constitutes in you, the more you have the separation, the boundary.

One time a brother said to me, "Brother Lee, someone said that among us there is a wall, that we are always separated from others." I said, "Brother, do you consider this a strange thing? I am not afraid that others say that we have a wall; rather, I am afraid that our wall is not high enough." Do you know how high the wall of the New Jerusalem is? The Bible says that its height is one hundred and forty-four cubits. One cubit is about one and a half feet, so one hundred and forty-four cubits is about two hundred and twenty feet high. Brothers and sisters, what the enemy hates the most is our wall. When Nehemiah returned from the captivity to rebuild the holy city, the thing that the enemy tried his utmost to destroy was the wall of the city. What a pity that today many Christians do not have a wall. The same is true even with many churches. A wall is a boundary. To have a boundary is to have a separation. If in the church a great number of the saints have been built together, there will be a high wall, and there will be a clear boundary between the church and the world. In the church it will be easy to distinguish what belongs to God from what belongs to man, what is heavenly from what is earthly, and what is of the new creation from what is of the old creation. Moreover, these things are not distinguished by teaching but by building. I believe that you understand these words. If you want God to have the building in the church, you need to see that there is a boundary here, and this boundary comes out of God's mingling and constituting. If God is mingled with us and constituted into us, immediately, we will have a boundary for separation.

Let me use watching movies as an illustration. I know that many brothers and sisters cannot overcome in this matter. It is a topic for debate among many Christians in many places in the world. Those who are in favor would say, "What is wrong with going to the movies? There are many good films.

These films not only increase our knowledge and broaden our views, but they are also full of educational significance and are helpful in building up human virtues. Therefore, watching movies is not necessarily bad." However, we have to see that being a Christian is not simply a question of distinguishing between good and bad. Being a Christian is a question of whether or not God's boundary is drawn in us, and this boundary is absolutely not drawn by teaching and regulation. If we post several commandments at the entrance of the meeting hall, and one of them says that we may not watch movies, this does not mean that we then have a boundary. We know that this kind of regulation is useless. Regulation cannot cause a person to be separated. But one thing is certain: after you are saved, if you allow God to do some building work in you, and if you allow the Holy Spirit to do some constituting work in you, then a wall will be built up as a separating line in you, and you will instantly see that movies are separated from you forever. Today you may argue with me by giving me many reasons, but one day when God puts a little pressure on you, and when He does a small amount of constituting work in you, squeezing you a couple of times, then from that day onward, movies will be separated from you.

Therefore, this is altogether not a question of good or bad; it is a question of nature. We must ask, "Is this of the New Jerusalem? Or is it of Babylon?" Today with some Christians the movie theater and the meeting hall are about the same. Such a Christian comes to the meeting hall in the morning and then goes to the movie theater in the afternoon. With this kind of brother or sister surely there is no wall, no boundary. You may argue, "I did not watch a bad film. I watched a film that admonishes people to honor their parents, and I felt that it was quite helpful." There is no need, however, to argue about this. When the Holy Spirit presses and constitutes you a little within, and when He pierces you a couple of times, immediately you will have a wall, a boundary. You will know what is of the lake of fire and what is of the New Jerusalem. Everything that is of Babylon and everything that is of corruption will be kept from coming into you.

This is not only true with individual believers; it is also true with the church as a whole. On many occasions brothers and sisters try to introduce the things of the world into the church. Like the worldly people, they may think that these things are quite good. But according to the same principle, in the church it is not a question of good or bad; it is a question of nature, a question of whether or not God is in something. I would like to ask you, when you went to

watch even the best movie, could you say that God was in you, that God was with you, and that He was sitting there with you? Certainly, you would not be able to say this. Not only so, frankly speaking, if you watch a movie, you will not be able to have proper prayer for at least a week. I know what I am talking about. Check with your experience. After you watch a movie, can you pray as usual? It will take at least seven days before some of the impression in you can be washed away. I am not even referring to a bad movie. If you watch a bad movie, you will not be able to wash it away for your entire life. That dirty impression will be stamped into your mind continually, and it will always reappear whenever you pray.

I repeat, this is not a question of good or bad; rather, it is a question of whether or not God is in it, a question of whether or not God is mingled in it. My brothers and sisters, may we all be those who have a wall. Both the saints individually and the church corporately must be serious to accept God's building work so that we may have a high, solid, and transparent wall.

BEING BUILT UPON AN INDESTRUCTIBLE FOUNDATION

We still have to address the twelve foundations of the wall. We already mentioned that when the twelve layers of the foundation are drawn in their sequence according to the colors of the precious stones, they have the appearance of a rainbow. The situation of the foundation is altogether the same as that of the rainbow surrounding the throne in Revelation 4. This rainbow is the sign of God's covenant. Therefore, for God to be expressed in the rainbow reveals that God is the covenant-keeping God, the faithful God. That the foundations of the wall have the appearance of a rainbow also reveals that this city, which is built upon the faithfulness of God, can never be destroyed. Man cannot destroy it; even God Himself cannot destroy it. God has to keep the covenant signified by the rainbow. Therefore, this city is built upon a foundation that is eternally indestructible.

BEING BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES

The Bible says that on the foundations are the twelve names of the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:14). This indicates that the apostles are the foundations of this city. Therefore, today we have to read the biographies, the experiences of life, and the teachings of the apostles. We must take the apostles as the foundation. Whether in our personal life or in the services of the church, the

wall, the boundary, cannot be according to our discernment or view. Neither can it be according to public opinion or the ideology of this age. It must be according to the lives and teachings of the apostles. They are the foundation of everything, a foundation which cannot be destroyed. Not only the enemy cannot destroy it; even the almighty God cannot destroy it.

THE BUILDING BEING PERFECTLY FULL AND HEAVENLY

Finally, the area of this city is twelve thousand stadia times twelve thousand stadia. The height of the wall is one hundred and forty-four cubits, which is also twelve times twelve. In the Bible twelve times twelve means the perfection of perfection, the fullness of fullness. Therefore, not only is this wall constituted with precious stones, not only does it have a foundation, and not only is it transparent, but it is also full. The Bible says that this is the measure of a man, that is, of an angel (v. 17). Man is earthly, and angels are heavenly. Therefore, this means that these people who were previously earthly now have a heavenly measure. May the Lord show us that this is His building, and this is the work that He intends to carry out in the saints.

To summarize, the gates of the New Jerusalem are pearls, the street and the city proper are pure gold, the wall is jasper, and the foundations are twelve kinds of precious stones. This means that if you want to enter in through the gate to participate in this building, you need to contact the Lord who died and resurrected so that you may be regenerated to become a new creation and be mingled with God, thereby having His divine nature. Then you still need to remain in the nature of God and to live in the nature of God. Only then will you have a way to walk and the supply of life as well. Moreover, you will touch the presence of God, the throne of God, and also see the light of God. At the same time, because God is doing a work of pressure, a work of purification by fire, and a work of constituting within you, the wall of precious stones will be manifested in you. If all of us have been worked on by God, then we will be built together to become the building of God. In our midst will be God's presence as the temple, God's throne reigning, God's life flowing as the supply, and God's glory being expressed. This is God's building. May the Lord have mercy on us so that the churches everywhere may manifest all these conditions of being built up!

CHAPTER TEN

A FEW PRINCIPLES FOR PRACTICING THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH

Scripture Reading: Acts 9:31; Eph. 4:11, 16; 6:10-11; Neh. 4

Although there is still much to cover concerning God's building, we will conclude with this chapter. In doing so, we would like to mention several important points that serve as principles for us to keep in the practical building up of the church.

THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH BEING CARRIED OUT LOCALLY

First, we would like to see how the building of God proceeds in the church age. In the previous chapters we saw the various conditions of the New Jerusalem in brief. This city, revealed at the very end of the New Testament, is the ultimate issue of all the building of God throughout the generations. The revelation of the New Testament is complete; it is a complete book. Hence, if we want to see the building of God in the church, we have to come to the New Testament.

In the New Testament the first time the building of the church is mentioned is in Matthew 16. There for the first time the Lord clearly said that He would build His church (v. 18). However, He spoke in a general way, without revealing the details of how He would build the church. It was not until the book of Acts that the Lord clearly and specifically spoke concerning the way to practice the building of the church. Here it indicates that in His building of the church, the Lord intends to build all His believers together locality by locality. When the believers in a locality are built up, they become the church in that locality. For instance, in the early days, as the believers in Jerusalem were built up, they became the church in Jerusalem. It was also the same in all the places in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Later, in Antioch a group of believers were built up together to be the church in Antioch. Therefore, in Acts 9:31 we have a precious verse saying that the churches in all the places throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up, and that

going on in the fear of the Lord, they were multiplied. This shows clearly that the Lord's intention is to build up His church one locality after another.

Here I would like to point out a crucial matter. In Christianity people often talk about building the universal church. This concept is not so accurate. It is true that in the Bible there is a word saying that the Lord will build the church, but we cannot find any statements that refer to the building of the universal church. In the entire book of Acts we see that when the apostles were commissioned and sent by the Lord to go forth and work, what they did was to build the local churches. They built up the church in locality after locality. They were not building the universal church directly as most people think today.

Practically speaking, the universal church is very mysterious to us; we cannot touch it. In the early days the apostles built up the local churches. We cannot see them building the so-called universal church. They were building local churches in one locality after another. Only this kind of building is practical.

Furthermore, every one of the Epistles written by the apostles to the churches was written to the church in a particular locality. The Epistle to the Romans was written to the church in Rome. The Epistles to the Corinthians were written to the church in Corinth. Even the Epistle to the Ephesians, a book which seemingly speaks about the universal church, was written to the church in Ephesus. The Epistle to the Philippians was written to the church in Philippi. The Epistles to the Thessalonians were written to the church in Thessalonica. And even the final seven epistles in Revelation were written to seven local churches in Asia respectively.

Therefore, the divine revelation in the New Testament clearly reveals that today, in the church age before the manifestation of the New Jerusalem as the eternal habitation of God and man, God wants to build up the local churches, one by one in various localities. He wants each local church to be His house on a small scale in each locality and a miniature of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem may be likened to a big hen, and the local churches in various places may be likened to small chickens. They may differ in size, yet they are the same in nature, principle, and content. The nature, principle, and content of the New Jerusalem are also the nature, principle, and content of the local churches.

This is the reason that we have been looking at the specific characteristics of the New Jerusalem. The condition of the New Jerusalem should be the condition of the builded churches in all the localities. Although the fullness of the time is not yet come, the ultimate plan of God is not yet accomplished, and the New Jerusalem is not yet fully manifested, God desires that in the church age there be churches in various localities that manifest the condition of the New Jerusalem. God's desire is that in locality after locality the local churches will become miniatures of the house of God so that He may have a resting place in which He can freely do His will and thereby express Himself. Please remember that this is what God intends to do in the church age. God's intention today is to build all the believers in each locality together in His Son to be the local expression of the church in each locality.

History shows, however, that God's enemy, Satan, comes in to undermine God's work in many ways. The most obvious way is to bring in divisions in the church. Today no matter where we are, we see that the church is divided. No matter where we are, we see that there are many Christian sects. This is the undermining work of the enemy. According to God's intention, there should be only one church in each locality. In the early days in Jerusalem, although many thousands of people were saved and were meeting separately in numerous homes, there was only one church. Similarly, in Antioch there was one church, and this was also the case in Rome. In Ephesus there was one church, as well as in Corinth. It is true that due to their being fleshly, the believers in Corinth were divided into parties. They said that they were of Paul, of Apollos, of Cephas, or of Christ. Nevertheless, they were still one church; they were not divided into four churches. At that time there were not four churches in Corinth.

However, after the apostles passed away, Satan gradually began to do an undermining work in the church by dividing the church in each locality into many sects and denominations. Consider Taipei as an example. How many "churches" are here? There is a "church" here, and there is another "church" there. I do not like to speak about such things; however, I would like God's children to see that God's desire in the church age is to build up His church in each locality. Since the church is uniquely one in the universe, its appearance in each locality should also be one. In every locality God has only one house; He cannot have two houses in one locality. In each locality God can have only one church. Therefore, today God's building of His church is altogether in the principle of one church for one locality.

Since the church is already in such a state of desolation and confusion, what should we do as the children of God? Simply speaking, we need to have a certain amount of discernment. We need to discern according to God's intention and God's ordination. In this time of confusion we need to find the proper way and put ourselves into it.

Due to the present confusion it is not easy for Christians to have proper discernment concerning the church. Therefore, some Christians simply refuse to talk about the matter of the church. They would rather just talk about personal spirituality. This is not a proper attitude. We should not be wandering Christians. I have heard someone say that So-and-so is a "guerrilla" believer. Such a one does not belong to this "church" or that "church." Since he does not belong to any "church," he can go and meet with any "church." Hence, he is a "guerrilla" believer. I was amazed when I heard this. This is really a new invention. There is no such thing in the Bible. Neither the divisive situation nor the "guerrilla" believers can be found in the Scriptures.

Someone else once told me, "I am 'transdenominational.'" He meant that he was transcendent and did not belong to any denomination or sect. However, Christians cannot be without the church. We should not be floating Christians; we must be firmly established in the church.

As the children of God, we must allow Him to open our eyes to see that in the church age the building that God desires is the building of His church in every locality. Although the church today is desolate and divided, the proper way ordained by God for the church is clearly set forth in the Word of God. We cannot take care of the many divisions and confusions. We should care solely for the intent of God's heart. We want to see from the Word of God what God's intention and ordination really are. We must take the way of recovery according to this ordained will of God. Thus, we are unable to take care of so many people who are in divisions. This is the same as the situation in the Old Testament. After God's people were carried away to Babylon, a small number of people who cared for God's intention and knew that according to His ordination the temple had to be built in Jerusalem rose up and returned to Jerusalem. Although the majority of God's people remained in Babylon, not caring for God's desire, a small number of God's people were willing to return to Jerusalem with Ezra and Nehemiah. They returned to the original foundation on which they would build the holy temple and holy city according to the determination of God's desire. The majority of the Jews still

sojourned in confusion in a Gentile land. However, a small number of people represented the entire people of God and returned to Jerusalem for the building of the temple of God.

This is a type of the present recovery of the building of God among us. Today the church is in desolation. The children of God are in captivity and have lost their original position. Although the majority of them are in confusion, we cannot neglect the intent of God's heart just because the situation is this way. Like the small number of the children of Israel, we should rise up and return to the original ground to raise up the testimony of God in every locality according to what God has determined in His heart. Regardless of how confusing the situation is among today's Christians, we must act according to the intention of God by building the church in every locality.

In the midst of so many sects and denominations we need to discern the way ordained by God according to His heart's intention. It is only according to this way that we can be joined to the believers in our locality in order to be built together with them. We should not continue to remain in the confusion of the sects and denominations. Neither should we be individualistic, caring only for our own interests as a "guerrilla" believer or a "transcendent" believer.

At this point in history we surely have to thank the Lord. Over the past thirty years He has truly granted us grace and has led us into the way that is according to His heart, enabling us to bear His testimony in each locality in a pure way. The senior brothers and sisters have already fought many difficult battles for us. They have also received clear revelation from the Lord concerning many things. Therefore, today we just need to go on positively by allowing God to build us together in each locality.

What we need to do now is to get ourselves fixed in a locality so that we can be built together with the brothers and sisters there. Are you in Kaohsiung? Then you must be built together with those who love the Lord with a pure heart in Kaohsiung. Are you in Tainan? Then you have to be built together with those who pursue the Lord in Tainan. Wherever you are, you must be built together with the believers who pursue the Lord there.

Today, however, because we have not received sufficient dealings from the Lord, such a condition in which the believers are being built together is not so manifest. On the contrary, there are some abnormal situations. For example, there is a person in Taipei who wants to be built with those who are in Kaohsiung. He says, "I cannot get along with certain brothers in Taipei, but if I go to Kaohsiung, I will be able to be built together with the brothers there." I would like to tell you that if you cannot be built up in Taipei, you will not be able to be built up when you go to Kaohsiung. If you have problems with the brothers in a certain locality, then no matter where you go, you will also have problems there. Dear brothers and sisters, we have to acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty. You drifted here and there, yet you were not saved until you came to Taipei. Previously, you always refused to receive the gospel when you heard it in other places. However, when you came to Taipei, as soon as you heard the gospel, you were touched and were saved. That was God's sovereign arrangement. Likewise, now when you meet brothers and sisters in Taipei who make things difficult for you, you must also acknowledge that this is according to the sovereignty of God. You may expect that everyone here will be pleasant and relaxed. But regrettably, it so happens that the brothers and sisters you are with are dull and cold. As a result, you become unhappy about the situation. Then you hear that the church in Kaohsiung is quite good and that the brothers and sisters there are very warm and loving. Therefore, you think that if you could be there, then you would surely be able to be joined with the brothers there. But please remember that this is just idealistic thinking. If in fact you went to Kaohsiung, you would discover that there are some brothers and sisters there who would make things even more difficult for you. Therefore, the problem is not with others but with you. You have to accept the sovereignty of God. Wherever the Lord has arranged for you to be, you have to learn to be built together with the brothers there. I like the words in the Bible concerning Priscilla and Aquila. When they were in Rome, they were in the church in Rome; when they went to Ephesus, they were in the church in Ephesus. Wherever they went, they were coordinated and built together with the brothers and sisters in that locality.

We must see, therefore, that God is not building His saints in a universal way. All the building of God is local. The brothers in Kaohsiung must be built together in Kaohsiung, while the brothers in New York have to be built together in New York. The building of God is always local. This causes our flesh to be tested and our disposition to be broken. Those who are relaxed and

easygoing often find that the church in their locality is very rigid. Those who are cheerful and carefree often find the church in their locality to be very cold. All these arrangements are for us to be tried and dealt with. We can be built together only when we have been broken by God.

I would like to relate to you a story that happened many years ago in the church in Shanghai. A brother came to the leading brothers and asked us to transfer him so that he could serve in another hall. His reason was that in the hall he was in there was a brother whom he could not stand, and there was also a sister whom he could not bear. He said to me, "Brother Lee, I really have no way to serve with them, and I do not want to quarrel with them." So he went on to ask us to assign him to another hall. We asked, "Then which hall do you think is the most suitable?" He said, "I think that such-and-such a hall would be the most suitable one, because the responsible brother in that hall is slow, and the responsible sister is gentle. I am a slow person, so when others are fast, I cannot catch up. Therefore, I can get along only with those who are slow." After listening to him, we had no choice but to transfer him according to his request. But in less than half a year he came to us again and said, "Brothers, I have no way to go on. Please transfer me to another place." We asked him, "What is the reason?" He said, "Oh, that responsible brother is too slow; he is ten times slower than me. Therefore, I cannot take it. This time please transfer me to a hall that is neither too quick nor too slow."

We can see that this brother did not learn the lesson. He thought that whenever there was a problem in the church service, a transfer to another place would solve the problem. Little did he know that actually the problem was not with others but with him. Therefore, we have to see that transferring to another place is not the solution. If we have a problem with the brothers and sisters in the church, the only solution is to be broken. We should never consider transferring, neither should we think about escaping. We have to trust in God's arrangement. Since God has arranged for us to be in a certain place, we have to remain there in submission and learn to be broken there. Do not think, "I cannot be built up in this place, but if I go to another place, I will be able to be built up there." There is no such thing. God's sovereignty and God's arrangement cannot be wrong. You cannot be a choosing person or a jumping person, jumping from the east to the west or from the north to the south. You must quiet yourself down and be a fixed person. Since God has arranged for your home, your job, and you yourself to be in this place, then you must wholeheartedly establish yourself here according to God's

arrangement. Since God's intention is to build His church in all the localities, and He has arranged for you to be here, then you have to place yourself among the brothers and sisters and be built together with them. If you cannot be properly built with the brothers and sisters in a certain locality, there will be no way for you to be built up no matter where you go.

Regrettably, however, almost every one of us has a common sickness; that is, we prefer other localities to our own locality. Usually those who live in Taipei prefer to be in Tainan, but when they are in Tainan, they prefer Taichung. Even in our families we often have this problem. In particular, the sisters have this weakness. I know that many sisters who are wives often tell their husbands how good other husbands are. Let us suppose that there is a sister like this named Sister Hwang. She would say to Brother Hwang, "Look at how good Brother Liu is. He is so considerate and helpful to his wife." However, if you go and listen to Sister Liu, you will also hear her giving her husband a hard time, saying, "Look at how good Brother Hwang is. See how diligent he is at home and how much he cares for the children." Almost all the wives think that others' husbands are better than their own. The brothers also have the same problem; they easily notice the good points of others' wives. It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit says in Ephesians, "Wives, be subject to your *own* husbands" (5:22).

Similarly, in the church we also feel that other localities are better than our locality. Those in Tainan think that Taipei is better, whereas those in Taipei think that Taichung is better. Almost everyone is like this. This is proof that neither our flesh nor our disposition has been dealt with. If we have been broken and have been built up by God in a locality, we will be satisfied with God's arrangement. When God puts you in Taipei, you will be built up in Taipei. When God puts you in Tainan, you will be joined in coordination with the brothers in Tainan.

Therefore, we need to see that God wants us to be built up in each locality. Locality is a restriction as well as a protection. At the same time, it is also a test to expose our real situation. Do we have a preference? Do we have a choice? Locality is a severe test. If we have truly been broken, we will have nothing to say wherever we may be, and we will be able to accept God's arrangement. As a result, we will be able to be built up by God in the local churches.

THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH REQUIRING THE FUNCTIONING OF ALL THE MEMBERS

Second, everyone who is being built up in a local church must learn to exercise his function. Colossians 2:19 shows that in the Body some are joints, and others are sinews. Joints are for supply, whereas sinews are for knitting together. The supplying joints and the knitting sinews are necessary for the building up of the Body. These two kinds of members are big members. Besides these, there are many small members. In the church every one of the brothers and sisters is a member of the Body. Hence, under normal circumstances each one, whether big or small, has a function.

Moreover, Ephesians 4:16 says, "All the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." Therefore, each member should function according to his own measure. If in a local church all the saints were like this—you performed your function, I fulfilled my duty, he carried out his charge, and each one operated according to his own measure and manifested his particular function—then the church there would be built up.

There can only be two reasons for the function of a member not to be manifested. One reason is that there is no growth, and the other reason is that a problem has developed. Although a newborn baby has hands and feet, he cannot use them. After he grows a little, however, his hands and feet have some movement. Then after he grows a little bit more, his hands will be able to do things, and his feet will be able to walk. If there is no growth, however, the functions cannot be manifested. Sometimes a grown-up person may have a sickness in a certain part of his body; if so, the function of that part cannot be manifested either.

If you love the Lord, but your function is still not manifested, then you must believe that surely it is either because you are short of growth or because you have a problem, a sickness. In addition, all our problems and troubles are due to our not having been broken. Dear brothers and sisters, please believe my word. As soon as you receive the breaking, your function will be manifested. There was once a person who, due to his loose talk, did not have any function in the church. Then one day he was broken by God by being dealt with in his speaking. Immediately, his function was manifested. Perhaps you would ask

me, “What can I do? What is my function?” I believe that you have already seen enough in these years. There are many areas of service in the church. We all can participate in these services for the manifestation of our function. Some of us should intercede for others. Some should go out frequently to visit others. Some can help others in particular problems. Some can supply others in the meeting. Some can minister the word. Some can engage in taking care of general affairs. For example, someone can do cleaning and supply life to others. If we all carry out our respective functions, the church will be built up.

For instance, in a big church, where three hundred to five hundred people are baptized at the same time, we cannot expect the responsible brothers to render proper care to all of them. In actuality, the responsible brothers often are unable even to become acquainted with all the newly baptized ones, not to mention to take care of them. Then who is going to take care of the new ones? This is the responsibility of all the brothers and sisters. Every brother and every sister should pick up the burden to take care of several new ones and bear them all the time. Perhaps you would say, “I do not know how to do this.” But please remember that at least you can get them to come to the meetings. When it is time for the meeting, you can go and invite them to the meeting. In addition, you can continually remember them in your prayers. These are functions.

I am speaking from the minimum perspective. I believe that many of us have functions that are greater than what I just described. Your real function does not come from the arrangement of others; rather, it comes out of your direct dealing with the Lord. If you pursue the Lord, receive His breaking, and are willing to be built up, your function will be manifested. We should not have the wrong concept that all the areas of service in the church are the responsibility of the pastors and preachers. We need to see that the service in the local churches is the responsibility of every believer. In the New Testament age all the saved ones are priests, and they are also members one of another. Hence, in the church we all need to exercise our function according to our measure for the building up of the Body of Christ.

THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH

NEEDING THE WORKERS TO PERFECT THE SAINTS

INSTEAD OF REPLACING THEM

Third, the co-workers and responsible ones have to see a great principle in Ephesians 4. In the building of the church the gifted persons are meant to perfect the saints so that they will become useful ones. They are not meant to take the place of the saints in serving the Lord; rather, they are meant to perfect the saints so that they can serve the Lord together. There is a big difference here. It is very easy for those of us who are co-workers or responsible ones to fall into the danger of replacing the saints in the matter of service. Often, the more we work, the more the responsibility of service falls upon us. The more we work, the more the brothers and sisters let things fall out of their hands. As a result, they only come to the meetings to hear messages. If this is the case, we are not perfecting them but replacing them in the service.

All those who have seen the light concerning the building of the church must guard against this. In the church we may be doing a very important work, but our work should never replace the service of the saints. Instead, our work must be to perfect the saints to serve. The normal situation should be that the more we work, the greater will be the number of those who are perfected by us to serve. The number should increase to the point that all the services are in the hands of the saints. This is what it means to perfect the saints to carry out their respective functions for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Of course, having all the saints fulfilling their functions is the responsibility not only of the co-workers and responsible ones but also of all the brothers and sisters. In general, the brothers and sisters often have this kind of feeling: "The co-workers and responsible ones can do a much better job than we can in the services in the church, so we should just let them do everything." On the other hand, some brothers and sisters do not serve because they simply prefer to be at ease. These ones may say, "Since we have these co-workers and responsible ones to do everything, let us relax and enjoy. During the day we have already been so busy working in our offices, teaching in schools, and taking care of our homes. It is not easy even for us to come to the meeting in the evening. Therefore, let us just leave the service to the co-workers and the responsible ones." Please remember that if this is the case, then all the gifts of the saints will be buried, all their functions will be annulled, and all their responsibilities will be neglected.

Sometimes after the meetings we divide into groups for fellowship. I would like to go to visit these groups to have some fellowship with the brothers, but I am afraid to go. The reason is that no matter which group I go to, the brothers in that group stop their fellowship. Immediately they say, “Brother Lee is here. Let us ask him to speak.” The group leaders say, “Brother Lee, we have a difficult question. How would you explain this?” This forces me to pick up my Bible and leave. If I leave, they will do their job. If I stay, they will not do it. They say that I can do a good job while they cannot. But I do not believe that, because from what I hear, they actually do a better job than I.

Therefore, on the one hand, the co-workers and the responsible brothers must believe that the brothers and sisters are able to serve and must give them the opportunity to serve. On the other hand, the brothers and sisters ought not to let the co-workers and the responsible brothers do everything. They are not angels; they are human beings like everybody else. You have to believe that sometimes you can do a better job than they can. If every one of us would stand in our own position to fulfill our function, then not only a small number but all the brothers and sisters in the church would be serving. This would build up the Body. I hope that everyone who works for the Lord or bears responsibility in the church will firmly grasp this principle. We are perfecting others so that they may all participate in the service. We should not replace others in the service. We should not act as pastors and preachers, replacing others.

One time a brother came to invite me to his home to preach the gospel. I asked him, “Why do you invite me and not the other brothers?” He replied, “They cannot speak as well as you can.” I said, “Your word is not accurate. I know that there are brothers who speak much better than I do. I beg you to believe me, but even if you do not believe me, I am not going. You just have to ask someone else.” Eventually, he had no choice but to ask another brother. Thank the Lord, He proved that what I said was true. Later, the brother who had invited me said to me, “Thank and praise the Lord, that day the other brother’s speaking was really good.” I said, “Among the brothers there are still many more who can speak even better than he can, so do not invite him only.” He asked, “Who is better than he is?” I answered, “Everyone else is better than he is; go and invite them.” This sounds like a joke, but I know what I am talking about.

If we believe that only a few persons are able to serve and therefore always depend on them, then the church can never be built up. All the wise parents know that to train their children to do a certain thing, the best way is to let them do it and to believe that they are able to do it. For instance, if you want to train your children to cook rice, you just step back and let them cook. Even if the rice they make is uncooked, you should still let them cook. I tell you, after they have cooked rice five times, the rice will no longer be uncooked. By doing it again and again, eventually, they will know how to do it. In the same way, in the church we must believe that the brothers and sisters have the Spirit of God and the life of God in them. We have to believe that this Spirit gives gifts and that this life has functions. Hence, we have to give them sufficient opportunities. At the same time, every brother and sister should have this conviction: "I am a saved person. I have the Holy Spirit, and I also have the Lord's life. Hence, I surely have a gift, and I surely have a function." We should not be proud, because self-pride is an accursed thing. However, we also should not keep saying humbly that we cannot do anything. We need to learn in humility to fulfill our function. This is not to have confidence in ourselves but to trust in the Lord's Spirit and the Lord's life. In this way we will see that our function is manifested.

I hope that those who work for the Lord and the brothers and sisters who are serving together would continually learn this matter. We have to constantly provide opportunities for the brothers and sisters to serve. We need to guide, perfect, and instruct them in all things, turning over our responsibilities to them so that they may rise up and serve. If this is the case, surely the church will be built up.

ALL MINISTRIES BEING FOR THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH, AND THE CHURCH NOT BEING REQUIRED TO BE FOR ANY MINISTRY

Fourth, all ministries should be for the building up of the church locally, but the church should not be required to be for any ministry. We always stress that as mentioned in Ephesians 4, the work of those who have a ministry, of those who are especially gifted, is to perfect the saints for the building up of the Body of Christ. The goal of their work is not to build up their ministry but

to build up the churches locally. This was what the early apostles did. They went from one locality to another locality in the whole of Judea and various places in the Gentile world to carry out their ministry for the building up of the churches. Therefore, although they did a great deal of work in various places, the result of their work ultimately belonged to the local churches and was for the building up of the churches in all the localities. Corinth is an example of this. Paul was the first one to go there. He established the church in Corinth after he had been working there for a while, and a group of people were saved. After a time Apollos went there. Since he was very competent in expounding the Word, a group of people were edified. When he left, he turned over these ones to the church in Corinth. Then after another period of time Peter also came to Corinth. Since he was a great apostle of the Lord, many more received help from him. However, when he left, all the fruit of his work was turned over to the church in Corinth. It is true that in the church in Corinth there were four groups of people and that there were divisions among them. But this was altogether due to the fleshly behavior of the Corinthian believers. It was not due to any impropriety in the work of Paul or the other apostles. Therefore, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians Paul severely rebuked them, saying, "What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Ministers through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to each one of them" (3:5). He also said, "All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas...all are yours" (vv. 21-22). This means that all the work of those who have a ministry belongs to and is given to the local churches.

Regrettably, however, today those who have a ministry are not like this. Often their ministry is not for the local churches; instead, they want the local churches to be for them. As a result, the local churches will be divided instead of built up. Why are there so many denominations and sects in Christianity today? Honestly speaking, the problem is not with the brothers and sisters in general but with those who have a ministry. These people who have a ministry and who are especially gifted do a great deal of work after they are raised up by God. They bring many to salvation and edify them, but they do not give these believers to the local churches. On the contrary, they attach these believers to themselves and form an independent organization. Consequently, although in various localities there may be some who are saved, who love the Lord, and even who become spiritual; nevertheless, the churches in these localities are torn down.

This matter is very important. If the Lord grants us grace, in the coming days He may raise up among us certain ones who have a ministry. These ones may be able to edify others and help others to be spiritual. However, if we do not see this principle, I am afraid that after these persons are raised up, the churches in various localities will be torn down. Therefore, I hope that all those who work for the Lord and those who are the responsible ones in every locality would have a strong feeling concerning this matter. We have to see that every ministry must be for the building up of the churches locally and that the churches should not be asked to be for any ministry. Although the apostle John's ministry was strong, and although most of the seven churches in Asia were in a poor condition, the Lord's desire was to build up those churches, not to build up the ministry of John. The Lord wanted John to build up those churches with his ministry, rather than asking those churches to be for his ministry.

THE BUILDING OF THE CHURCH REQUIRING SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Finally, we need fighting prayer. Please remember that once we touch the building, the enemy will come to attack and frustrate. Therefore, there is the need of fighting. We need to have fighting prayer for the building. I do not need to speak too much concerning this matter, because the words in Nehemiah 4 are very clear. The enemy despised and mocked the children of Israel when they returned from their captivity to rebuild the holy city. Furthermore, the enemy tried a thousand schemes to frustrate and falsely incriminate them so that their hands might be weakened. When Nehemiah saw the situation, he immediately went to pray before God. As soon as he prayed, he became clear inwardly. He knew that this was the strategy of the enemy, so he guarded against it right away. He and his brothers carried out the rebuilding work with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon (v. 17). This is to build on the one hand and to fight on the other.

In Ephesians, a book on the building of the church, the matter of spiritual warfare is also emphatically mentioned. Ephesians chapter four speaks about building, and chapter six speaks about warfare. We cannot merely have the building; we must also have the warfare to guard against the attack of the enemy.

From the book of Nehemiah we can see that there are three aspects of the attack of the enemy. The first aspect is the enemy's mocking. This is his stratagem from the outside. The enemy said, "What are these feeble Jews doing?" (4:2). "Even their stone wall that they are building, if a fox were to go up on it, he would breach it" (v. 3). This kind of mocking may cause us to despise the work that we ought to do. The second aspect of the enemy's attack is to set up plots. The enemy sent word to Nehemiah, saying, "Come; let us meet together" (6:2). If Nehemiah had gone, however, the work would have been delayed, and he would have fallen into their trap. The third aspect of the enemy's attack is to cause there to be weakness among the children of Israel and to cause some to speak discouraging words.

We also have encountered these situations. Nearly thirty years ago when we were first raised up by the Lord in northern China, we were very weak, but we also had the Lord's presence with us. At that time there were people from the outside saying, "They are just children playing; after a few days they will be finished. Do not pay any attention to them." These words were the same as those in the book of Nehemiah: "They are feeble; even their stone wall that they are building, if a fox were to go up on it, he would breach it." When I heard those words, I also went before the Lord to pray, asking Him to vindicate us. We deeply realized that it was the Lord who had raised us up. What we were doing was not a small thing; it was not children playing but a testimony raised up by the Lord Himself. I still remember very clearly that at that time I read Nehemiah chapter four to the Lord.

Also, sometimes the enemy's stratagem was to have people ask us to go to meetings and discussions. This was also just like what Nehemiah encountered in his time. We altogether refused these invitations. We ignored the mocking words and rejected the enticing schemes. We could not cease doing the work entrusted to us by the Lord.

We also encountered internal difficulties. When the brothers and sisters were serving together, frequently problems arose from within our midst. Sometimes for no reason at all, a brother would feel that the expression on another brother's face was not good. In addition, the other brother would feel that there was a problem with that brother's tone of voice. Then these two would begin to be suspicious of each other. The more the suspicions increased, the more the problem grew. We all know this kind of situation, so I do not have to speak too much about this. Satan worked among us by stirring up bad

feelings and creating difficulties. Thus, he caused us to be in discord and to be suspicious of each other.

Moreover, sometimes we had problems within, causing us to be discouraged, to be weakened, and to become sick spiritually. As a result, we could not go forward in the matter of building.

We all have to guard against all these attacks of Satan. Hence, we must have fighting prayer. Whenever we encounter a problem, we have to come back to pray before the Lord. When people say that what we are doing is of no significance, we have to bring this word before the Lord and tell Him about it. If people try to harm us with some scheme, we must bring this scheme before the Lord. If the brothers and sisters are suspicious of each other, and if they are jealous of each other, we also have to bring this before the Lord. Even when we are weak in ourselves, we have to bring it to the Lord as well. We always have to deal with these matters by means of prayer. We must reject these things and deal with them by our fighting prayer.

If the brothers and sisters in a locality all exercise their functions, if the co-workers and responsible brothers and sisters do not replace the saints but rather perfect them to serve together with them, if all those with a ministry are for the building of the church, and if all the saints are holding weapons, fighting a spiritual warfare by their fighting prayers while doing the building work together, then you will see a glorious church being built up in that locality. You will also see that a miniature of the New Jerusalem will be manifested to be a resting place for God and a home for all His children. God's presence, God's throne, and God's life will all be there. God's power and God's light will also be there. The gospel will spread out from there, the saved ones will be built up there, and God will be glorified there. Whenever people come among them, they will sense that God is there. They will say, "This is the house of God, this is the gate of heaven, this is Bethel, and this is oil poured upon stone." This is a glorious thing; this is what the Lord desires to gain in every place in this age. May the Lord have mercy upon us that we would not take these matters merely as doctrines for our studying. May the Lord impress this vision deeply into us. By His mercy we want to be built up and to build up others in each locality so that the glorious house of the Lord may be manifested in all the localities on earth for God and man to have a habitation.